

During the year four owners were proceeded against for breaches of the Act, convictions being recorded in each case.

Fifty-nine accidents were reported and inquired into, the majority (with few exceptions) being of a very trifling nature. Unfortunately, in one instance loss of life occurred, where a man working in a firewood-yard got entangled with the fly-wheel of a gas-engine.

The Factory Act is working without the least friction, and is recognised on all sides as having been very desirable, and I am pleased to state that in the majority of cases where there is a diversity of opinion between employers and employes *re* provisions of the Act both parties are willing to refer to the Inspector, and act on his advice.

In my last year's report I particularised some very necessary amendments in certain clauses, which I would again beg to bring under your notice, and also a few improvements in the machinery for working the Act, which I have mentioned in my correspondence, and which I am aware is now under your consideration.

#### SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

On the whole, this Act is working fairly well, and, instead of opposition by shopkeepers, as when it first came into force, it is now looked upon as a boon to all, with the reservation that it should be equally applied, and the half-holiday made more general by eliminating exemptions from the Act. As long as these exemptions are allowed, and the power of choosing a particular day is left to a certain class of shopkeepers, the Act will not be perfect, nor give the general satisfaction that it otherwise would. As a matter of fact, I am aware that a number of exempted shopkeepers would prefer coming under the general closing, and it is a small minority that keep up the irritation.

During the year twenty-three charges were brought against nine shopkeepers, with the result that convictions were obtained in all cases but one, in which the Magistrate ruled that the evidence did not prove that the goods were sold on the half-holiday by any one in authority; hence the deduction that they were sold by some person outside.

#### SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

Under this Act there are twenty offices registered, being a decrease of three on last year. A few complaints were made *re* overcharging in the authorised scale of fees; but, when inquired into, did not amount to a breach of the Act. One conviction against a person for carrying on an unregistered office was obtained.

I would recommend that in each office a receipt-book be kept, and a receipt be given to each person who pays a fee, such person to sign his or her name in the corresponding block.

I have, &c.,

H. FERGUSON, Inspector of Factories.

E. Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories.

#### CHRISTCHURCH.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Christchurch, 31st March, 1898.

I have the honour to submit a short report of the work done by this office of the department for the year now ended.

#### LABOUR.

The condition of the labour-market, with the exception of the boot trade, has been of a very satisfactory character; the continuation of good prices for grain and other farm produce has had a beneficial effect upon our local industries. The engineering and iron trades during the period under review have continued their activity, and a large number of hands have found fairly steady employment. The building trade has had an exceptionally good year. The City Surveyor informs me that new buildings to the value of £61,750 have been erected during the year. A few of these properties are not quite finished, but are nearing completion. I have not been able to ascertain the values of the new buildings which have gone up in the suburbs, but from observation I should say that the adjoining boroughs have progressed at an equal ratio. Only a very few bricklayers, carpenters, and others engaged in these trades have had to apply to me for work this year. The employes in the boot trade have been much less fortunate; irregular time has been made, and the earnings of this class of artisans have seriously diminished. I am credibly informed that there have been less boots manufactured this year than last. This fact, coupled with the mild winter we experienced, and the introduction of machinery which turns out work quicker and with fewer hands, largely accounts for the depression. Ten boot-finishers who were displaced by the introduction of finishing-machines were sent by the Government on to the Midland Railway co-operative works at Jackson's, West Coast.

The local tanneries have been fairly busy all through the year, and an increased number of hands have steady employment. This is not due so much to local demands, but to the great increase in the exportation of pelts. The tailoring, clothing, and dressmaking factories have had a fairly good year, but, as these industries vary so much with every change of season, a good deal of overtime has been made, to compensate them for the dullness between the seasons.

The unskilled-labour market has not shown much change, except that I have not had anything like the number of applicants for work as in previous years. One very unsatisfactory feature of this branch of the department's work is the increasing appearance of the same applicants, who, immediately they return to Christchurch after finishing their co-operative contracts, come straight back to this office and make a fresh application, in many instances before they can possibly have