

appliances in remote parts of the country. Other trades, such as the dressmaking and clothing trades, and the printing and stationery, have had a very prosperous year, and from all appearances are likely to maintain the same condition for some time to come. The exception I allude to above is the bootmaking trade. The operatives are suffering from loss of employment consequent upon the introduction of wonderfully perfected wage-saving machinery. This has had a very disastrous effect on those concerned, and in one factory alone has led to a large number of employes being permanently dispensed with. Competition in prices will compel all manufacturers who can afford the first cost to adopt the same class of machinery, and that will accentuate the matter to such an extent as to practically depose the present-day bootmaker. In the printing trade, linotype machines have just been introduced by one company in Dunedin, and it is anticipated that each machine will displace five skilled compositors. This points to the throwing out of work of a class of workmen to whom the ordinary avenues of employment are closed.

FACTORIES.

The machinery of the Factory Act is working more smoothly as it becomes better understood and appreciated. The number of factories registered is 539 for 1898, as against 513 for 1897, with a corresponding increase in the number of persons employed; the figures for the respective years being 6,029 for 1896-97 and 6,549 for 1897-98, an increase of 520 individuals employed. (These figures do not include 292 men employed in the railway workshops.)

The amount of overtime worked is an increasing quantity every year. Permits have been issued covering a grand total of 33,381 hours worked by 1,196 persons. No employer has yet exceeded the statutory amount permitted by the Act, but several have reached the limit, and have had to be refused permits in consequence. I again beg to draw your attention to this most important subject—the enormous increase shown in the overtime worked. While it is an undoubted criterion of the expansion of trade, it does not necessarily improve the position of the unemployed, as no cases have yet come under my notice where others than those employed as steady hands in the factories have benefited from the increased work.

I am pleased to report that accidents resulting to injuries to employes are few, and those which have occurred are, comparatively speaking, of a slight nature. There were twenty-two cases reported to me during the year, this number being two in excess of the number last year. These reports are invariably promptly communicated to me by the employers, and every facility afforded by them to investigate the circumstances. None of the accidents reported were attributable to negligence or to machinery being unprotected, &c., but were simply cases that no provision could very well guard against.

Complaints still continue to reach me from employes regarding that portion of the Act permitting employers to work the full forty-eight hours per week. This system is now becoming more general, and the further it is extended the more dissatisfaction it creates.

Owners of factories are realising the necessity of improving the condition of their workrooms, and wherever practicable alterations to this end are being made. Generally speaking, the workrooms in Dunedin are kept in a very fair condition. There are, however, still a few much in need of complete renovation, but as these are leased premises the occupier can hardly be expected to expend large sums on the improvement of other people's property. But as these leases expire those occupiers understand that they will either have to remove to more suitable places or have the premises now in occupation thoroughly renovated.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS.

There is still a certain amount of friction experienced in the working of these Acts, owing to the exemption of 1895 leaving it optional to certain shopkeepers to adopt any day in the week as the closing-day. While the Act is permitted to remain in its present state this friction will continue, and considerable difficulty will always be experienced in efficiently administering its provisions. It would, in my opinion, be more satisfactory to the bulk of the shopkeepers themselves if no exemption were permitted, and all were compelled to observe the statutory closing-day fixed by the local authorities; and it would certainly be more conducive to the better administration of the Act, for as matters now stand it necessitates too large a share of the Inspector's time being given to this particular matter.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES.

There has been no alteration in the number of servants' registry offices in this district, there being fifteen registered. Very few complaints have been made of any evasions of the Act regarding overcharge of fees, &c. There have been no prosecutions during the year, which may be taken as an indication that those concerned are observing the regulations laid down for their guidance.

EMPLOYERS' LIABILITY.

Complaints are still rife regarding the reductions made from wages to provide payment of premiums for accident insurance. The principal grounds of complaint are that the employe is never consulted in the matter, and invariably has no knowledge of the terms of the policy. He has also to suffer the deduction to be made, being powerless to object, and has to accept any terms in the shape of recompense the insurance company choose to give him.

I have, &c.,

H. MAXWELL, Inspector of Factories.

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