

## LABOUR.

The period under review has, on the whole, been fairly satisfactory. Trade has been well maintained, and there has been little or no distress in consequence of scarcity of employment. Still, there has been no "rush" of any kind, and strangers coming here have generally found it difficult to procure employment, except perhaps for about two months of the wool season, when work appeared to be more plentiful. During the early part of the year a large number of men, principally labourers, arrived here from other parts of the colony, expecting to find plenty of work repairing the damage caused by the flood which had just previously occurred. These, however, were disappointed, as the immediate effect of the flood did not increase but rather reduced the chances of obtaining employment for some time—in fact, it was several months before the local bodies affected were enabled to properly undertake the work of repairing the damage that had been done.

Employment was rather scarce here during the months of June and July, and two "unemployed" meetings were held here. Resolutions were passed calling on the Government to provide work for those requiring it. A petition was also circulated, and reported to be very numerously signed. However, I think subsequent events proved that the whole affair had been greatly exaggerated, as I had considerable difficulty in getting eighteen men for roadwork, and about a third of those that did undertake the work returned to town again within a week of leaving it.

At different periods of the year sixty-six men have been provided with employment through this office. This number includes the eighteen men above referred to.

## THE FACTORIES ACT.

This year 121 factories and workrooms have been registered, employing 931 persons—i.e., 751 males and 180 females. This is a slight decrease in the number of factories as compared with last year's returns, though there is an increase of thirty-five in the number of persons employed.

Permits to work 963 hours' overtime were granted during the year. This was principally in the dressmaking and tailoring trade.

Shearers' accommodation: Shortly before the last shearing season I visited nearly fifty sheep-stations in this district. On some of the stations I found the accommodation both for shearers and other station-hands everything that could reasonably be expected, and it was evident even at a casual glance that the comfort of the men was a consideration with the employer. On other stations, however, the opposite of what I have just described could be readily detected. I served nineteen notices on different station-owners requesting them to repair, alter, and in some cases to build accommodation as required by the Act. This section would be greatly improved if the word "shearer" was defined to read as "any person employed on a sheep-station." An Inspector's duty becomes anything but pleasant when he sees the permanent men on a station badly housed and he has absolutely no power to alter it, though he has power to enforce the owner to provide suitable accommodation for the shearers, who are rarely on the stations for more than six or eight weeks in the year.

## THE SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

This Act works well here, and I have very little trouble with it now. Though sections 18 and 19, together with their amendments, are supposed to regulate the hours of clerks in banks and offices, they are for all practical purposes next to useless—in fact, a clerk is in a far worse position than a shop-assistant, as the shop-assistant is entitled to one half-day's holiday in each week, while the clerk can be worked three hours on any day after the ordinary closing-hours on ten days in each month.

## THE SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICE ACT.

There are three licensed registry offices in this district. These are in good hands, and I have no trouble with them.

## PROSECUTIONS.

To enforce the provisions of the Acts under my charge it has been necessary to enter prosecutions in several cases, but in no case has any person been prosecuted without first receiving fair warning. Convictions were recorded in seven cases. Four were withdrawn with the consent of the Court, in two of which the defendants paid expenses. The charges laid were for breaches of the working-hours; giving girls who had worked in a factory all day work to do in their own homes at night; for working a boy under fourteen years of age in a small factory without the consent of the Inspector; working a boy under sixteen years of age without a permit; failing to give a shop-assistant a half-holiday; and for insufficient water-closet accommodation in retail shops.

I have, &c.,

L. D. BROWETT, Inspector of Factories.

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

## HASTINGS.

SIR,—

Police-station, Hastings, 7th April, 1898.

I have the honour to forward labour report for the year ended 31st ultimo, and I will confine my remarks to similar headings of my report of last year.

## THE FACTORIES ACT.

Forty-six factories have been registered, in comparison to thirty-one for the previous year. Three hundred and fifty-three persons are employed, thirty-two of the number being females.