

The reduction of the fee to 1s. for small factories has helped to remove some discontent amongst the occupiers, who hitherto seemed to consider the Act a means of extorting taxes rather than a provision for the supervision and regulation of all factories in accordance with recognised sanitary principles. Further reduction on a sliding scale up to the first limit of eight employes might perhaps be effected with advantage.

The principal discontent in respect of the Factories Act arises from the widespread misconception that prevails, even amongst well-informed employers—and shared in, I believe, from some cases I have experienced, by some Inspectors of Factories—that the Act places equal restriction in respect of hours of labour, closing of factories, holidays, wages, and overtime, upon adult male employes and upon all females and boys under eighteen years. I have succeeded, with much satisfaction to many who considered themselves needlessly hampered by the provisions of the Act, in dispelling this erroneous notion. These remarks apply equally to the adjacent district of Stratford, where I was stationed up to the end of last year.

The absence of tramps or swaggers in search of labour from the Stratford and Hawera districts during the year was remarkable. I have had no applications for assistance to obtain employment.

I have, &c.,

JOHN O'DONOVAN, Inspector of Factories.

The Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.

WANGANUI.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wanganui, 5th May, 1898.

I have the honour to make the following report on the working of the Factories and Shop-assistants Acts for the time—about five months—I have held the position of Inspector.

FACTORIES ACT.

The Factories Act, so far as I can learn, gives general satisfaction. Most of the factories here are clean and comfortable, and I believe the employes are treated fairly. The young persons are generally healthy and well cared for. I am informed that nearly full time is made by the factory hands. I have had two cases for infringement of the Act, obtaining a conviction in each.

SHOP AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

From inquiries I have made, I find the Act, with very few exceptions, gives general satisfaction. One of the exceptions referred to is the right employers have to work their employes at any time up to 12 o'clock at night, supposing they have not worked the nine hours and a half during the day, to make up the time. One firm here has had their employes of both sexes back to work from 7.30 to 9 o'clock on sixteen occasions that I know of, and I presume many times besides. I think something should be done to prevent this.

I have had six cases against shopkeepers for infringing the Act, obtaining convictions in five.

I have, &c.,

W. G. BLAKE, Inspector of Factories.

Edward Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories.

PALMERSTON NORTH.

SIR,—

Labour Office, Palmerston North, 31st March, 1898.

I have to report for your information that trade in general has been fairly good in this district during the year; much better than former years.

LABOUR.

Quite a number of men have been employed draining, stumping, road-making, &c., and earning very good wages. Very few young men are met on the roads carrying their swags. Four men have been assisted to other districts, where they were in hopes of getting employment to suit their age. Nine men were sent or employed on co-operative works during the year, and two sent to private employment. So far, on the whole, things seem to have taken a complete turn as far as the working-man is concerned.

FACTORIES ACT.

Up to date I have registered sixty-one factories, the same number as last year. 425 persons are employed—337 males of all ages, and eighty-eight females. Three accidents took place during the year; none of a serious nature. Inquiry showed that the employers were not to blame. A new industry has been added to the many now existing in the district—viz., that of curing and preparing sheepskins for the London market. Permits and overtime have been worked in a good number of the factories. No prosecutions have taken place during the year, a sure sign that the provisions of the Act have been observed. I have inspected the shearers' accommodation—ten sheds, employing, on an average, from four to eight shearers. With one or two exceptions the accommodation was fairly good. I pointed out what was required, and without any trouble it was attended to. I might state that the Act works very well so far in this district.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

Respecting this Act, it works fairly well. No prosecutions have taken place during the year. I might mention that a prosecution is pending against a shopkeeper for keeping his shop open after the hour of closing on the half-holiday by the holding of an auction-sale.