

Fourth Standard. An unsatisfactory feature is that frequently the child cannot be compelled to return to school, on account of having reached the exemption-age, and, though refused a permit to work in a factory, may be employed in a shop without any restriction whatever.

Prosecutions.—As usual, there has been very little friction in the administration of this Act, the number of cases taken before the Court being only 12. In all cases convictions were obtained and fines inflicted. Numerous other cases were discovered in which the circumstances did not warrant a prosecution, but warnings were given, and matters adjusted by payment of back wages, &c. One of the cases taken to Court is worthy of note: A girl had been employed in a factory for a period of six years. At the commencement of her employment she was paid a higher rate of 3s. or 4s. per week beyond the minimum rate fixed by the Act, but during the last two years had been paid 3s. per week less than the Act provided. The action was defended, it being contended that the total wages paid during the six years was more than would have been paid if the minimum under the Act had been adhered to, and that therefore no breach of the Act had been committed. The Magistrate ruled against this contention, holding that not less than the minimum could be paid during any period. It was also contended that the action must be limited to a period of two months previous to date of the commencement of proceedings (*vide* section 61 (a)), but the Magistrate ruled against this also, and fined the defendant £2 and costs.

Accidents.—The total number of accidents during the year was 94; most of them occurred in the engineering and woodworking trades: Engineering 36 accidents. The most serious of these was the loss of the second and third fingers through a ram (which was being erected) falling on the hand. Most of the accidents were such as crushed fingers, burns, &c., and in no case could it be attributed to insufficiently guarded machinery. Woodworking trades, 16 accidents. None was of a serious character. One was traceable to want of a guard on a "buzzer planer"; it has since been erected. One fatal accident occurred in a brickyard through a fall of clay. One serious accident occurred to a girl employed at a box-shaping machine in wax-vesta factory. This girl was cleaning the machine, when she thoughtlessly put her foot on the lever which controls the machine, thus putting it in motion, and resulted in her losing portion of the two fingers and thumb of the left hand. The remainder of the accidents occurred in various other trades, but none were of a serious character, nor due to want of guards to machinery.

General.—The important amendments made to this Act during the year in regard to the payment of wages to boys and girls under eighteen years of age for all time excepting that lost through their own default, or while the factory is closed for cleaning, or repairs to machinery, has tended to more regular employment. Holidays which were previously given are now refused, throwing the onus on the worker of taking a holiday and losing the payment therefor. It is not yet possible to state whether the amendment will accomplish what was intended, as in the event of a slack season there is usually nothing to prevent an employer from dismissing his hands.

I have to express my thanks to the officers of the Health Department *re* sanitation of work-rooms, and to the Superintendent of the Fire Brigade Station *re* fire-escapes, for their assistance readily given when asked for.

All factories have been visited during the year, and all alterations suggested have been readily carried out by the employers. The Inspectors carrying out this work have invariably received the utmost courtesy and consideration from both employers and employees.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

The administration of this Act caused very little friction until towards the end of the year, when the amendment made during the 1910 session was put into operation. The principal cause of the trouble was the repeal of the provisions which make the hours of employment in a shop subject to the award of the Court of Arbitration. This amendment reduced the hours in the butchering trade by four per week, and for a time matters were somewhat disorganized, but the employers displayed a sincere desire to observe the law, and soon made the necessary alteration in working-hours.

In respect to the extension of the Act to licensed hotels, private hotels, and restaurants, all concerned have shown commendable anxiety to comply with the law, with the result that it is now in fair working-order. These remarks may also be applied to the provisions as to registering every shop in the name of one person as occupier.

One thousand two hundred and fifty-eight shops have been registered.

Overtime.—201 males and 266 females, a total of 467 shop-assistants, have worked 5,041 hours overtime during the year. This has not been excessive considering the number of workers engaged in shops.

General.—The provisions of the Act generally are well observed, which is evident from the fact that only 5 cases were taken before the Court during the year. Fines were inflicted in 4 instances, and the other was struck out through the information not being laid within one month. Very few complaints have been received, and most of them were of a trivial nature.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

There are 13 offices registered under this Act, and very little trouble has been experienced in administration, most of the occupiers being fully acquainted with the provisions of the Act. The same number of offices was registered last year.

SCAFFOLDING INSPECTION ACT.

The work in connection with this Act has covered the Otago and Southland Districts. There has been little or no friction, as will be seen from the separate report submitted by the Inspector (Mr. Barton).