

A factory has been started for the manufacture of oleomargarine, a substitute for butter. If the high price of butter continues this substitute will certainly be appreciated, for cooking purposes at least.

THE FACTORIES ACT.

The enforcement of this Act undoubtedly meets the least resistance of any of the labour laws in the statute-book. Its provisions are well defined, and accepted generally, which makes compliance therewith so much the easier.

The inspection of all factories has been completed, every factory in the district being visited, and where females are employed the lady Inspector (Miss Bremner) has also exercised supervision.

Particular attention has been given to bakehouses and other factories manufacturing articles of food for human consumption. Two bakehouses were condemned, and in several others considerable improvements were carried out on requisition.

I consider that such places as sugar-boiling and confectionery establishments (in fact, all places where foodstuffs are made) should be included in the interpretation of a "factory," no matter what the number of persons employed.

The suggestion made last year to the Architects' Association that plans of new factories or of intended alterations be first submitted to the Inspector has been acted upon with advantage to all concerned.

With regard to means of fire-escape, an important amendment has been made to the Municipal Corporations Act, which makes it incumbent upon the local authority to see that proper means of escape in case of fire are provided in any building over one storey in height which is used for "office" or any other purpose. This is a great assistance to ourselves, and particularly the factory occupiers, who often had to provide a fire-escape for a building occupied by many tenants which obviously should have been provided by the owner. This new measure will put the responsibility upon the proper person—the owner.

The limit of time (section 61) for taking proceedings for offences under sections 32, 38, and 54 should, I respectfully submit, be extended to at least six months.

The shortage of boy and girl labour, quoted previously, is a matter requiring grave consideration.

The higher standard of education required for exemption from attending school, the more advanced age at which many leave school, the increased facilities for secondary education creating a tendency for clerical work, and the desire of many boys and girls to get the highest wage at the beginning are obvious causes of the shortage in skilled trades. The Director of the Technical School quotes the following figures showing how the various classes were attended last year: Arts and crafts, 275; building, 15; painting and decoration, 11; carpentry, 34; plumbing, 116; engineering, 134; wool-classing, 42; science, 204; domestic economy, 71; commercial subjects, 636.

When it is considered that a large number of pupils attending secondary schools probably acquire a grounding in commercial subjects which does not necessitate further attendance at the technical schools, it will be readily seen that there is a marked tendency on the part of young persons to secure clerical and other light work, and trades requiring manual workers must suffer thereby.

During the year 1,177 factories were registered. This is an increase of 79.

Certificates of fitness to young persons under sixteen years of age to work in factories were issued to 414 persons—163 boys and 251 girls. This is an increase of but 21 on the number issued last year.

During the year 2,064 boys and women worked 58,871 hours, an increase of 54 persons and of 3,969 hours' overtime worked. My remarks respecting the shortage of labour in the clothing trades will indicate the cause of this increase.

In Chinese laundries the overtime has not been excessive, 23 males working 263 hours' overtime. The work in Chinese laundries is mainly restricted to shirts and collars, and the decadence of the starched shirt has so decreased their business that little overtime is now necessary.

There were 141 accidents reported. This is an increase of 34 on the number reported last year. One was fatal—a man at the gasworks fell from the top of a retort bench down the well of the staircase. Ten were of a serious nature, and the balance (130) slight. The severe injuries were: Loss of a leg, an arm amputated, and in 8 cases joints of fingers were severed. In every case the person injured was advised regarding compensation, and the scene of the accident visited to see whether any alterations could be made to prevent recurrence.

Prosecutions.—No breach of a sufficiently serious nature to warrant prosecution occurred during the year. Any omission has been made good, and all defects remedied immediately upon requisition.

A sum of £7 ls. 1d. was recovered and disbursed to the workers concerned.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

During the year 1,576 shops were registered. This includes hotels and restaurants, which are now "shops" within the meaning of the Act.

Inspection was complete, each shop being visited. Very few adjustments were found necessary, conditions on the whole being very satisfactory. The City Council is bringing in a set of regulations requiring certain conditions for butchers' shops. This is a step in the right direction, and I would like to see it extended to establish model lines for bakers' shops; in fact, it would be advisable to have such regulations put in force under this Act and the Factories Act.

The absence of any provision in this Act for enforcing fire-escapes from shops is now obviated by the amendment to the Municipal Corporations Act.