

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

This Act as it now stands has worked fairly well during the year. Any abuses which are now imposed on servants by office-keepers are done in such a way that the law cannot touch them. The duplicate receipt-book, which has been so often recommended by Inspectors, is still very necessary. Complaints frequently come to me of mistresses stopping the wages of servants, sometimes as much as three or six weeks, even when the servant has given more than one week's notice. A most pathetic case came under my notice recently, when a mistress stopped three weeks' wages, amounting to £1 10s. The girl sued her mistress, and when her lawyer's expenses, &c., were paid she received about 5s. out of it. A clause should be introduced into the Factories Act empowering Inspectors to protect this class, at least so far as their wages are concerned. The very fact of the department having such power would at once reduce the evil, so that the cost would not be great, and a large section of the community would be benefited.

I have, &c.,

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

MARGARET SCOTT HAWTHORNE.

Department of Labour, Women's Branch,

Wellington, 31st March, 1899.

SIR,—

I have the honour to submit to you my report for the year ended the 31st March, 1899.

The number of women and girls suited with employment was 426, and those suited with casual work 70. The number of employers is greatly in excess of the number of fairly competent servants who apply here for work. A large number of girls of a most useless type come—girls who are absolutely useless as domestic servants. It would be most unfair to any employer to send such people, knowing how useless they are. The reason is this: When the girls leave school it is so necessary for them to contribute what they can to help to keep the home together that they are sent to work at a factory. They stay at factory-work for two years, or perhaps longer, and then leave, often much impaired in health, or they get tired of the work there, and think they will try domestic service, of which they have no knowledge whatever, for their home training in no way fits them for the duties required of them as domestic servants. Of plain cooking, laundry-work, house-cleaning, personal neatness, and the value of time (all of which are necessary in the most ordinary general servant), they know nothing. Servants who know their work are in great demand, and so highly are their services valued by their employers that I think they are often made too much of. The incompetent servant usually asks high wages, and mistresses often give what they ask, so anxious are they to get help; but when they have to teach them everything pertaining to housework they get tired, and continual changing of places is the result. The best servants find places in houses where two or more are kept, and when they can go as housemaids or waitresses in hotels they do so, as they like the defined hours for working that they get in hotels.

A large number of respectable married women with families come here to look for work. They tell me that their husbands cannot get work, or often if they are fortunate enough to get work they are too ill to do it, and the poor woman has to find bread for the family as best she can. I may be able to get her a day's work now and again, but the moment she gets her scanty earnings it goes to pay the all-absorbing rent, which is usually due or in arrears, no matter how much firing and wood are needed.

I also have a number of women come to me whose husbands have deserted them, and they are much to be pitied. I fear they themselves are often to blame for such a state of things by their want of knowledge in making a comfortable home: they cannot cook or make the most of the little they have. The husbands get into the habit of looking for comfort outside of their homes, and eventually drift away, no one knows where. Then these poor wives and mothers have to apply for benevolent aid for themselves and their children, and I find it hard to induce employers to engage these women to do daily work—washing, &c.—as they are obliged to take one or more of the children (who are too young to be left alone) with them during the time they are doing their work. I am of opinion that many of the troubles of working-women, after they settle in homes of their own, could be avoided if it were compulsory for every girl over twelve or fourteen years of age to have a term's tuition in domestic work, especially plain cooking and personal tidiness.

I beg to state that during the year I have brought under the notice of the Benevolent Trustees many cases requiring temporary aid, which was granted in every case after the usual inquiries were made. I must take this opportunity of expressing my thanks to them for the cordial manner in which they received me when I approached them on matters concerning the poor.

In conclusion, I respectfully beg to call your attention to the great necessity of all girls being given an opportunity of learning domestic work, as I feel sure it would be the means of lessening the number of deserted wives, unhappy homes, and neglected children, and also the unsympathetic employers and the bad servants that we hear so much about.

I remain, &c.,

The Secretary, Labour Department, Wellington.

HELEN STAVELEY.

AUCKLAND.

Department of Labour, Auckland, 31st March, 1899.

SIR,—

I beg to forward for your information the annual report on the working of the various departments under my charge for the past year.

LABOUR.

During the year 374 men have been assisted to work, of whom 248 were married, with 938 dependent on them, and 126 single. Of the above, 289 were sent to Government and eighty-five to