

The office connected with this Department has been of great benefit to the domestic servants and mistresses of the colony, and is much appreciated by them.

I have, &c.,

Edward Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories.

MARGARET SCOTT HAWTHORNE.

Inspector of Factories.

Department of Labour, Women's Branch, Wellington,
31st March, 1902.

SIR,—

I have the honour to report that my branch of the Department has assisted 219 women and girls during the year just ended—31st March, 1902. Of this number 81 women were assisted on several occasions to casual work, such as a day's or half-day's washing, ironing, house-cleaning, and other domestic duties, whilst the remainder were sent to domestic service—viz., as lady helps, cooks, laundresses, housemaids, parlourmaids, waitresses, children's nurses, &c. The number of applications from employers for servants was 631. The 81 women assisted to casual work were composed mainly of elderly women who were unable to undertake domestic service, some having children to support, and the others from various causes—precarious health, or a sick husband or relative to see after. These women live a hand-to-mouth existence, most of them hire a small room at from 3s. to 6s. per week, and many weeks, if the weather is bad, they do not earn sufficient to pay their rent, so life with them is a continual struggle.

The scarcity of trained capable domestic workers is remarkable. They can demand almost any wages in reason, and usually get what they ask. Most of the competent workers get employed in hotels and boardinghouses. They like the very high wages given and the defined hours of labour, and they usually manage to get a few hours of leisure every day for recreation or rest. Many also take service in gentlemen's houses where several servants are kept, and girls who are not able to get into such places go into one or other of the factories, especially if their homes are in Wellington. Few Wellington girls go to service—we have to depend almost entirely on other parts of the colony. A small number come from Melbourne, Sydney, and even Queensland, and occasionally a few come from the Old Country, and, without exception, all get places within a few days of arrival here. I have much trouble in filling general servants' places. Girls seem to have discovered that the work required to be done by them is too arduous, the hours are too long, and they say the time to begin work is 6 a.m. to 6.30 a.m., and if late dinner is the rule in the house they rarely get their work finished before 8.30 p.m. to 9 p.m. In some cases they are working even later. I am of opinion that, if mistresses who employ only one maid gave help and encouraged them more, a better understanding would be the result, for some of the girls are most crude in their knowledge how important a part good cooking, cleanliness, and well-done domestic duties take with regard to maintaining good health. I hope in time to come to see instruction in domestic duties a special feature in the training of young girls of all classes. I am sure it would bring about a better understanding between mistress and maid, there would be fewer changes, and girls would prize the approval of their employers and recognise in them their best friends.

I am, &c.,

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

HELEN STAVELEY.

CHRISTCHURCH.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Christchurch, 31st March, 1902.

I have the honour to submit a report of the work of this branch of the Department during the year just ended.

GENERAL.

The year has been marked as one of actual progress in most of the skilled trades; the boot and shoe trade was almost the solitary exception; yet in this trade, on the whole, better and more regular time has been worked than in previous years. At the same time the condition of this important industry is far from satisfactory. The manufacturers are finding it more and more difficult every year to compete with the imported article. How to overcome this difficulty is a problem which only time and experience can solve.

The engineering and iron trades have had a fairly good year. During the last few months, however, they have been much quieter. The future prospects are not quite so assuring as they have been; still there is nothing to cause undue alarm.

The building trades have continued fairly active throughout the year. There has been no lack of employment for really competent tradesmen, either amongst carpenters, joiners, masons, or bricklayers, and at present the prospects in this industry are highly satisfactory.

The furniture trades have been exceptionally busy, and, notwithstanding that a considerable amount of overtime has been worked, I am credibly informed that they have not been able to overtake their orders.

The tailoring, clothing, and dressmaking trades have had a remarkably busy year. At the special seasons of the year nearly all these trades have worked all the overtime permitted under the Factories Act.

Tanneries, fellmongeries, and woolscouring-works have also had a steady year's work. The intermittent nature of these works prevents them from ranking with the other trades in making good time, because the employment is not so uniform.

Woollen-mills have had a very full year's work, and have still some difficulty in overtaking the demands for their goods.