

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

This Act and its amendments have worked very satisfactorily during the year. Employers seem now thoroughly conversant with its requirements, and are quite willing to comply in every way. Even in Wellington there is little or no trouble experienced in getting the Chinese dealers to observe these laws.

The necessity for a regular uniform closing-hour is still much felt.

The question of the provision of proper sanitary conveniences in connection with small shops is a difficult one for Inspectors to deal with. Property-owners should not be allowed to erect a row of shops without the slightest consideration for this necessary convenience.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

This Act has worked well during the year. I have received a few complaints from servants about office-keepers charging them excessive fees, but as soon as I mentioned the matter to the office-keeper the money has been refunded. The condition of the domestic servant in New Zealand has very much improved within the last few years. Wages have gone up very considerably, and mistresses take a more kindly interest in their assistants.

I have, &c.,

MARGARET HAWTHORNE,

Edward Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories.

Inspector of Factories.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 31st March, 1903.

I have the honour to report to you that my branch of the Department has assisted 418 women and girls during the year ended the 31st March, 1903.

Out of these, 70 went out as charwomen, laundresses, &c., the remainder being sent to domestic service—viz., governesses, housekeepers, children's nurses, and general servants. The scarcity of competent servants of all classes still continues. Good servants seldom change their places except to leave the home of their employer to go to one of their own, and in many cases they still retain the friendship and respect of their former employers. The class of girls who most often change their places are girls who have tried factory-work and get tired of it. They enter domestic service, of which they know absolutely nothing, and they resent being instructed by their employers how to perform household duties properly, so frequent change is the result.

Gentlemen's houses, where several servants are kept, hotels, tea-rooms, and business-places still absorb the best class of domestic workers. The pay is good, and the hours of labour are so clearly defined that there is always time for recreation and rest.

A half-holiday once a week is given to the girls working in private houses—it has been the rule in hotels and business-places for a long time past. It is a privilege much valued by the girls, and, I am sure, of great benefit to them physically. Change is necessary if household work is to be properly performed, as it becomes monotonous if some variety is not introduced into the daily life. This concession by the employers to the workers is a gain to themselves by having their work more cheerfully and diligently done.

The rate of wages paid for domestic work has increased in every branch. Hotel cooks get from £1 5s. to £1 15s. per week; private-house cooks get 16s. to £1 per week; house parlourmaids, 14s. to 16s. per week; waitresses in hotels get 15s. to £1 per week. The wages of general servants are regulated by their proficiency in cooking, laundry-work, &c. Young girls to assist, who formerly were paid 5s. to 7s. per week, now get 8s. to 12s. per week. In the majority of cases domestic workers, in addition to their wages, have board and lodging with their employer.

Few Wellington girls go to domestic service; their homes being here they prefer factory-work. They contribute their share towards the household expenses, and after working-hours are free to spend their leisure time as they please. There is constant demand for South Island girls, who, as a rule, are excellent servants, and get places immediately on their arrival here. During the last few months some servants have arrived from Australia. Their coming has proved a boon to mistresses who have been waiting in vain for help for months past.

I feel sure that in time to come domestic duties will form a bond of union between mistress and maid, which will cause a happier state of affairs in domestic life generally, for it cannot be denied that much of the comfort of the people they serve depends on the way in which the maids perform their daily work. Most mothers, no matter to what class of society they belong, are now beginning to see how essential it is for their daughters to be instructed in housekeeping and the details of domestic work, for what is more essential for the maintenance of good health than properly cooked food, cleanliness, order, &c.?

I have been able through the kindness of patrons of this office to help some poor women from the city to their friends even as far as Australia; through illness they could not earn sufficient to maintain themselves. In all cases to which I have called the attention of the Benevolent Trustees they have been assisted. The number of elderly women who used to constantly hang round this office have all disappeared, owing, I suppose, to their having got the old-age pension. I am very glad, for I frequently had difficulty in getting people to employ them, as all employers prefer young women.

I remain, &c.,

Edward Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories.

HELEN STAVELY.