

To Sir E. O. Gibbes, Secretary, Education Department, Wellington.—DEAR SIR,—It is with much reluctance I address you upon this matter, but having applied to the Matron without success for a modification of my duties, I feel that I must appeal to you. The facts briefly are that last July I was offered and accepted the position of clerk in the above institution, at a remuneration of £52 per year for the first six months, with an increase of £8 per year at the end of that period. At the time of being engaged the Matron asked if I would be willing to do a little relieving occasionally. This I readily agreed to, and concluded it would be during my office-hours, but within a very short time I had full attendant's work, morning and night, in addition to my office-work. Even on my return last October from two weeks in a private hospital, from pneumonia, I had to get up at 6.30 and do attendant's work, although requested to be relieved. My working-hours are from 6.30 a.m. till 8.30 p.m., with half an hour for meals. I do not think the Department would expect a clerk in any of their institutions to do attendant's work in the morning before 9 o'clock and till 8.30 at night. Under the strain the quality of the office-work would be bound to suffer. At present there is increased work, it being the end of the year; returns have to be made out, licenses renewed, &c. Had I been engaged as clerk-attendant the position would have been very different, and one I would not have accepted, but I was engaged to do clerking work, that I have been at for the past ten years. Apologising for troubling you, and knowing this will receive your careful consideration.—Yours obediently, E. HOWDEN."

46. At the same time that this letter went up the statements made by the girls also went up?—Yes.

47. Did Mrs. Branting send this letter at the same time: "4th January, 1908.—The Secretary for Education, Wellington.—SIR,—Enclosed please find a communication from Miss Howden complaining of overwork. When I engaged Miss Howden I thought I made her duties quite clear: in the mornings, alternate weeks, to take with Miss Hunt the supervision of the girls who milk and feed the fowls. She made not the slightest objection to this till Tuesday last, when she asked to be relieved of relieving Miss Hunt. I, in course of conversation, said I hoped we three should all work happily together, and that when the new wing was up there would be more girls, and that there would be a readjustment of the staff, and she would not be required to do anything but clerical work. I hoped the building would be up in about six months, and when the building was open I would ask that her salary be then £60 per year. I told Miss Howden on Tuesday, the 31st December, 1907, that I was not prepared to make any alteration until the new wing was up, and that if she was not satisfied she had better send in her resignation; that Miss Hunt had done the work and much more for a long time previous to her taking it over, and had not found it excessive. She said she did not wish to leave, but wished only to do office-work. She wished to place the matter before you. Hence this.—E. T. BRANTING. P.S.—I should like to state that I always take the girls for an hour in the evening unless there is a class. In any case all the staff but one get that hour as leisure"—Yes.

48. I think in answer to that a memorandum came down from the Department asking Miss Howden to send in her resignation, which she refused to do, and therefore she was dismissed?—Yes.

49. Did you ever have any complaints from Miss Howden when you were here?—No.

50. Did Miss Howden also send this letter: "Federal Coffee Palace, Christchurch, 4th February, 1908.—The Minister of Education, Wellington.—SIR,—I have to strongly protest against my dismissal from the clerkship of the Te Oranga Home on the report of some of the inmates without being given an opportunity to be heard in my own defence, and the charge made against me is utterly without foundation, and if you will grant me an interview I am sure I can prove this to your satisfaction. It is a very serious thing for a person in my position to leave the service under such circumstances as these I have been forced into, and I most respectfully request your early attention to my case.—Yours obediently, E. HOWDEN"—Yes. I replied acknowledging the letter, and stating the matter was under consideration.

51. Then this Commission came along?—Yes. I should like to say there was never any intention on the part of the Department that Miss Howden should be anything else but clerk-attendant. There was not the work here to keep a clerk going. That was distinctly stated in the memorandum to the Matron when Miss Howden was engaged. She was to be clerk-attendant at a salary of £52.

52. The Matron had that memo. from the Department?—Yes.

53. It was not likely, in the face of that memo., the Matron would go and engage a person as clerk only?—I think it is exceedingly unlikely.

54. In how many cases has hair-cutting been resorted to as a punishment in any of these reformatory institutions?—We have only had two cases of hair-cutting as a punishment in connection with our industrial schools—these two girls at Te Oranga who had their hair cut last November. There was a little girl here a short time ago who was very much addicted to absconding. She came here with her hair short, and the Matron was authorised to keep it short. The Department for the last six or seven years has always been averse to hair-cutting. We have on three separate occasions declined to allow the Matron to cut girls' hair as a punishment. It was only in the case of these two girls, when we considered something very drastic should be done, that we agreed to it.

55. Were these cases considered by the Minister himself?—Yes.

56. And the authorisation was by the Minister?—Yes.

57. Then, so far as the Matron is concerned, this hair-cutting was under the direct authority of the Minister?—Yes.

58. Is this the correspondence which took place on the subject: "4th November, 1907. The Secretary for Education, Wellington.—Re H— M—.—SIR,—I have to report that on Saturday this girl was the ringleader of an attempt to abscond on the part of four girls. I returned from town by the ten past 1 o'clock tram, and was informed that H— M— had absconded at noon, taking G— J— with her. I joined the searchers in the lupins; came in after a time to find E— S— and M— H— had absconded. Fortunately, they ran into Miss