

In 1926 over 323,000 women were engaged in home duties, but not wage-earning, over 26,000 were wage-earning in private homes as domestic helpers, and nearly 8,700 were employed in restaurants, hotels, and boardinghouses, as wage-earners, a total of nearly 358,000 women over fourteen years of age. Of this number, over 32,000 were between sixteen and twenty-one years of age—i.e., about 6,400 in each year, of whom about 1,800 were wage-earners, over 1,400 in private homes, and nearly 400 in restaurants, boardinghouses, and hotels.

As the average number of girls in each year between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one was about 12,000, somewhat more than half were engaged in home duties and should have been trained for such duties. Between the ages of forty-five and fifty-five, about 6,000 out of 7,000 on the average in each year were occupied in home duties, and this proportion should therefore have received training.

The numbers at the present time are no doubt similar, yet we find that only 2,458 girls in post-primary schools were taking a full-time home-science course in the year 1936, or about 1,200 in each year. About the same number in addition were receiving a partial training in cookery, dressmaking, or other home-life subjects.

Thus, out of approximately 12,000 girls turned out yearly, 10 per cent. get a suitable preliminary training in home arts and an additional 10 per cent. some teaching in one or two subjects, whereas six in seven ultimately need training, and at least 1,800 per annum should be turned out trained for wage-earning.

The annual cost of training, including maintenance, in the training-hostels suggested by various women's associations would be approximately £100 for each trainee. In order that even a low professional status should be reached by each trainee, at least two years' training after a suitable post-primary school course would be necessary. Thus the cost of each trainee would be about £200, and an output of 1,800 per annum would entail an annual expenditure for training alone of some £360,000. Even if each trainee received only six months' training, which would certainly not enable her to speak with any authority on domestic matters, the annual cost of training those only who would be needed for paid positions would be £90,000 per annum.

Considering that, in addition to the 1,800 girls going annually into domestic service in private homes, or in restaurants, boardinghouses, and hotels, there are about 4,800 going into domestic work as dependants in their own homes, and that these also equally need training for home life, the problem is obviously one that cannot be solved by establishing two or three training-hostels, each turning out ten to thirty trained students annually.

The experiment, if made, could not be expected to have any appreciable effect on the supply or on the average quality of the domestic assistants in the Dominion, though it might give some information as to the practicability of the wholesale training of women in such institutions for home occupations. These institutions would be largely trade schools with a professional side, and their functions could not be satisfactorily performed unless the "trade" side were organized and conducted on the lines of a proper trade school, working under trade conditions.

For this reason some women's associations have suggested training-hostels in which the trainees should act as domestic assistants running the hostel for themselves, the teaching staff and other paying boarders, who might be themselves graduated home assistants, not "living-in," but working as day girls, either under the aegis of the State or as independent practitioners.

It has been pointed out that there are roughly three classes of domestic service,—

First, service with necessitous mothers of small children ;

Second, service with elderly people or invalids, where conditions may be disagreeable but wages good ;

Third, service in comfortable homes where conditions are good.

The second and third of these classes are those ordinarily requiring, and able to pay for, home assistance. The first class is usually unable to pay for help, although needing it more than the third and at least as much as the second class. For this class of needy mothers with babies, it has been suggested that a State trained and supported corps of domestic assistants should be maintained, and that these should live in the training-hostels when working in city homes as day assistants. Such domestic assistants, in so far as they were supported by the State, would be additional to the body of domestic assistants at present employed.

The whole question is one of much greater difficulty than that of training apprentices for trade and industry, owing to the close personal relations which must exist between mistress and maid, and to the fact that if the State enters into the business of training home assistants it must consider the claims to assistance of many who are unable to pay for the service which, as mothers with infants, they both need and deserve in the interests of the State no less than for the benefit of themselves and their families.

The problem is one which demands a local solution suitable to local conditions, though some aspects of it may be considered in the light of what has been done in other countries towards resolving similar difficulties.

EXAMINATIONS.

Teachers' Handicraft Examinations, 1936.

At the August examinations for the teachers' handicraft certificates there were ten candidates, of whom two were successful in qualifying for the award of certificates. Of the remaining eight candidates, one completed the examination except for practical final woodwork, while seven failed to improve their position.