

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Women's Branch, Wellington, 31st March, 1898.

I have the honour to submit to you my report for the year ended the 31st March, 1898.

The number of women and girls who have applied at my office for work was 695, and the number of employers 675. The number of girls suited with employment was 296.

I desire to state that I have not been able to get many of the elderly people placed in situations; employers prefer young people, as they adapt themselves more readily to whatever work they are put to. Servants of a reliable class are scarce. The greater part of them is absorbed by the hotels and large boarding-houses, where they can get high wages and more defined hours of labour. A large number of the best girls, who have homes and parents here, get into factories, for the reason that they can get home at night, and have Sunday and their half-holiday. I am much troubled with a large number of untrained, flighty young women who come here to get situations. They take a place and remain there a week or two and then disappear for a time, no one knows where. They come in again, and want to get a situation immediately, promising to do their very best to give satisfaction to their employer in future. I am sorry, however, to say they do not keep their promises, but behave in exactly the same way again, if not worse. If there could only be some place where they could get even an outline of the duties of cooks, housemaids, general servants, &c., I feel sure there would be a great change for the better in domestic service. If the girls knew more about the work required of them, doing it well would come easy, and they would see that they could make themselves indispensable to their employers, and we should see a more satisfactory state of things between mistress and maid.

I would also call attention to the matter of suitable lodgings for servants out of employment. The class of people they usually board with have only small resources, and cannot afford to keep penniless girls, who thus have to leave respectable lodgings, and run great risks to both health and morals. A servants' home would do away with the present state of things, and servants, by paying a small amount, would have respectable lodgings, good food, and a thorough rest, to prepare themselves for going to a new situation. I have known a great deal of harm done to servants in situations by the persons with whom they formerly boarded calling and asking if they are really there. Employers inquire at once if the girl is not trustworthy, and become suspicious of them. I have known of several such cases lately; the practice is very detrimental to the servants, and disheartens them too.

In conclusion, I hope that something will be done to help these people to a knowledge of their duties, and also that means be given them, under proper conditions and supervision, to lodge respectably and safely until they enter upon another situation. A large number of women come here who are deserted by their husbands. Some of these women have not the least idea of their duty as housekeepers, and domestic economy is unknown to them; they cannot cook, and personal tidiness is a thing only to be thought of or practised when they go into the street. What wonder is it that the husband goes elsewhere to look for comfort? The women should have been taught the necessity of these habits when they were girls, and employers and others would not have to deplore their incompetency now.

I remain, &c.,

The Secretary, Labour Department, Wellington.

HELEN STAVELEY.

AUCKLAND.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Auckland, 31st March, 1898.

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

LABOUR.

During the year 156 men have been assisted to work, of whom sixty-nine were married, with 328 dependent upon them, and eighty-seven were single. Of these, 113 were sent to Government works, and forty-three to private employment. Owing to the large influx of workers consequent upon the recent gold-mining boom, and the subsequent falling-off of this industry, the supply has exceeded the demand. In all instances where workmen have been forwarded by the department satisfaction appears to have been given.

FACTORIES.

During the year 752 factories have been registered, employing 6,893 hands—4,863 males and 2,030 females—being an increase on last year of ninety-nine factories and 758 employés. The time of the year when the returns are collected being what is known as the slack season in many trades, the returns must be considered as the minimum.

Overtime.—The section under which the privilege to work overtime is granted has been fully taken advantage of by many trades. This is particularly the case approaching holiday-time, when all hands are fully employed, and, consequently, is not the cause of depriving others from work. In all instances I stipulate for payment which would make it prohibitive for any employer to ask for this overtime unless in very urgent cases. I am personally in a position to state that it is very satisfactory to employés concerned. The existing anomaly, however, is that persons working in a factory other than those specified in the Act can be worked at any and all times without any remuneration. It may be said that such persons can protect themselves under the Conciliation and Arbitration Act, but I am of opinion that, if an eight-hour-per-day Act were in force, and a specified scale and a limit to overtime, it would give general satisfaction.

Three hundred and eighty-five permits have been granted to 231 boys and 154 girls under sixteen years of age to go to work.