

All through, the demand for workers has exceeded the supply, and a study of the number of applications received from the employers shows that from month to month over 100 per cent. of places remained unfilled owing to the scarcity of hands. Most employers wanted "generals." It often happened that 70 places were available during a month, and only from 20 to 30 applications were received. There is no doubt that hundreds of good places are available for domestics, for, quite apart from the city itself, urgent letters have been received for girls from employers all over the district. How the demand is to be met is a problem that I commend to your earnest consideration. The employers who can afford to pay the highest wages are generally successful in getting servants, and in this connection it should be noted that a steady increase in wages has been growing from year to year. A few years ago servants could be procured at a wage of from 8s. to 12s. per week, whilst to-day very few girls will accept less than 15s. and often demand £1, and get it. There is a marked tendency also for the domestics to favour employment in hotels and other large institutions rather than in private homes. This preference is undoubtedly due to the fact that the conditions of employment have been fixed by an award of the Arbitration Court, and the girls know exactly what hours, holidays, and pay they are entitled to receive; whilst in private houses, unless a mutual agreement is come to prior to engagement between mistress and maid, the conditions are not clearly defined, and are often irksome and unfair. However, emphasis should be made of the fact that employers are generally most reasonably inclined towards their servants, and the demand for hands is so great that there is absolutely no necessity for girls to remain in homes where the conditions of work are harsh and the pay low when employment on a better basis can be obtained elsewhere.

The oversea steamers have been met regularly, and information as to prospects of employment has been given to the women immigrants. I regret to say that, although scores of servants have been assisted by the Government to the Dominion, very few have sought the agency of the Department for assistance in finding work; this is probably explained by the fact that the majority of the girls are nominated by friends already in the Dominion, who have found places for them either just before or immediately after arrival. A very large amount of correspondence was received from mistresses asking for the services of these girls, and it must have been as disappointing to them as it was to the Department itself to find that so few were available.

Appreciatory letters have been received by me commending the action of the Government in establishing the office, and for the work done on behalf of mistresses and maids.

From the returns sent in, you will have noticed that the work is gradually growing from month to month as the branch becomes better known, and I look forward to the incoming year for even better returns than the period now under review.

I have, &c.,

E. R. BREMNER,
Officer in Charge.

The Secretary, Department of Labour, Wellington.

CHRISTCHURCH.

SIR,—

Department of Labour (Women's Branch), Christchurch, 5th April, 1909.

I have the honour to report on the work in this branch for the year ending 31st March.

The branch was opened on the 1st June, 1908, and from the very first it has been a complete success. There was just a little difficulty in the beginning, the girls being under the impression that they had to belong to a union, and they could not comprehend the idea of procuring situations gratuitously. However, when we pointed out the great privilege the Government had granted them, they were not slow in accepting the advantages the branch offers; in fact, many of them now look upon it as the proper place to get suitable employment.

We had a similar difficulty with employers. They thought because it was a Government office and no fee charged, that sufficient care would not be taken in sending domestics. They soon recognised that the utmost care was taken to send only suitable girls, with the result that now the branch is looked upon with great favour.

There is a class that it will always be a difficulty to find employment for—namely, the persons whose demands are rather exacting, and who, when employment is found for them, invariably break their engagements; and yet they usually cry out that no work is to be found.

There is absolutely no difficulty in getting employment for women. "Generals"—experienced, or even inexperienced—are those we require most. We cannot nearly meet the demand for this class of help. Employers are offering from 12s. to £1 per week, and in some cases cannot even get a girl to assist.

It is almost impossible to get girls at all for the country. At present we have a large number of places waiting that we cannot possibly find girls for. Although all classes of domestics are scarce, it is the good "general" that is wanted, as a good "general" can always be promoted to be cook, housemaid, laundress, or to any other branch of domestic work.

We have had a good many new arrivals, and with one or two exceptions they are giving complete satisfaction. In fact, employers were so delighted in several cases that their friends are waiting for us to procure for them similar helps when they arrive, but, unfortunately, there are not enough coming to meet the demand.

We have been successful in placing a good many married couples, amongst them a number of new arrivals, who have given entire satisfaction to their employers, and some have written expressing their gratitude to the Department for the employment found. Most married couples newly arriving seek positions together, as for one thing they can earn more money that way than any other, as high wages are offered for good married couples. Some of them, however, are quite unused to this class of work, and thereby cause themselves disappointment, and annoyance to their employers.