

WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT BRANCHES.

These branches, whilst not showing the same result as to the number of persons assisted last year, continue to do very useful work.

For the twelve months just ended, 2,244 women and girls have been assisted to employment—mostly in domestic service. This total represents a decrease of 547 persons assisted over those for the year ending 31st March, 1910, and is to be accounted for solely by the fact that applicants for employment were not offering. The difficulty in securing domestic workers grows more acute from day to day, although the conditions of employment continue to improve, both in regard to wages paid and hours worked. Competent domestics can easily command positions at from 15s. to £1 per week and found, in addition to obtaining holiday-leave weekly. As pointed out in almost the whole of the reports of officers in charge of these branches, this dearth of domestic workers entails great hardship upon family life, especially upon those parents having young children to bring up and the ordinary housework to attend to. The position is put very clearly by Miss Bremner (in charge of the Wellington office). The fact that such high wages can now be secured by girls prevents any families, where the income is only moderate, obtaining the assistance of an extra hand. I cannot emphasize too strongly how greatly this must affect the health of mothers and, incidentally, the birth-rate.

Of the total number of women assisted (2,244), 417 were married, and 1,827 were single or widows; 255 came from Great Britain and 70 from the Commonwealth of Australia, the balance hailing from either the North or South Island of New Zealand.

" SEDGWICK " BOYS.

At the end of January last there arrived in the Dominion a party of 50 boys who had been selected in England to take up work on New Zealand farms.

The inaugurator of the scheme, Mr. T. E. Sedgwick, chose the boys, and the High Commissioner for New Zealand passed them as being suitable for the work they were to undertake in New Zealand. The party comprised 25 lads from Liverpool and 25 from London, and their ages ranged from sixteen to nineteen years. Each boy was required, previous to selection, to pass a strict medical examination, and to produce two certificates as to character.

On the arrival of the lads, they were met on the vessel, and the impression the boys made was very favourable. Positions were already secured for all of the boys, and the work of arranging for their transit to their respective employers was undertaken immediately after they landed. The majority of the party were sent away to their destinations within twenty-four hours of arrival, and although some of the boys travelled as far as Whangarei in the North, and to beyond Invercargill in the South, there was no hitch in the arrangements, and all the boys were at work within a few days after leaving the ship.

The Department instituted a new procedure with regard to the future of these lads. In order to equip them to take up agricultural work as a livelihood, an agreement was entered into between the farmers, the Department, and the employees, in which it was agreed as follows:—

(1.) The term of engagement (generally three years, but varying with age of employee); at certain wages weekly; and for payment of pocket-money.

(2.) For the employer to teach the business of sheep, agricultural, general farming, &c.; to maintain the employee with proper food, clothes, &c., and for proper treatment; and to afford opportunity at least once every Sunday to attend place of divine worship, if such place is within three miles of residence.

(3.) For the employee to serve truly and faithfully during term, to conform to orders, be honest, upright, and diligent.

(4.) For the employer to pay wages (except pocket-money) to the Secretary of Labour or his appointee, who will keep in trust for employee, and after any debts are paid hand over balance to employee, on his reaching twenty-one years of age (or earlier, at discretion of Secretary).

(5.) For the employer to have right, if employee guilty of misconduct, or for other reason approved by Secretary, to dismiss employee, fourteen clear days' previous notice in writing to be given to Secretary; if conduct justifies instant dismissal, notice to be given by employer to Secretary within three days.

(6.) Secretary to have power to appoint visitor to employer's farm at reasonable times, to inquire into treatment of employee, and as to whether employer and employee are abiding by agreement. Secretary to have power to terminate the agreement if employer is not abiding by terms of agreement, employer to have no redress or remedy for such withdrawal or loss of service.