

WELLINGTON.

SIR,— Department of Labour (Women's Branch), Wellington, 18th April, 1912.

I beg to report on the work of the above branch during the year just completed.

There has been an increase in the number of persons assisted during the year under review as compared with 1910-11. In the latter period 595 were assisted, whilst in 1911-12 the total reached 636, an increase of 41. During the four years this branch has been established the total number of persons assisted from year to year is as follows: 1908-9 (nine months), 630; 1909-10, 748; 1910-11, 595; 1911-12, 636: total, 2,609. Of this total, 795 were married and 1,814 single women.

Although the results show that there has been a slight increase over the previous year, it will be noted that the total for 1909-10 still stands as a record, and if there is no change in policy in the conduct of the work of the office I feel sure that it is exceedingly unlikely that the numbers dealt with by the Department will exceed the 1909-10 returns—at all events, for some years to come. This branch's functions are now well known to the public, and almost every girl in domestic service in the city and district is aware that the office has engagements offering at all times, and that every assistance will be given her without any cost whatsoever. The applications from employers for domestics steadily increase from year to year; during the last twelve months there were from 200 to 250 vacancies available each month for women workers, whilst the number of applicants averaged 61 each month, or, in other words, there were four positions open for each applicant.

I have so often stressed the hardships inflicted upon many households, and the great social dangers involved by the lack of competent labour, that I feel it to be hardly necessary to emphasize it again. The figures quoted in this report speak for themselves, but if the workers were available at reasonable remuneration the demand for their services would be quadrupled. Those employers able to pay £1 and more per week are meeting with some measure of success; those with limited incomes and able to pay only from 10s. to 15s. per week have, perforce, to go without help. It is in these latter homes—the homes of our "middle-class" folk—that the assistance of a general hand is in most urgent need. As far as I can see, remedial measures cannot come from within the Dominion itself, as the workers are not available, and the younger girls are not being specially trained for domestic service. The immigrants are not coming in sufficient numbers to make any appreciable difference in the demand, and employment in factory, shop, and office seems to have greater attractions for both them and the local girls, owing to the hours, wages, and holidays being defined.

The tendency to employ "day-workers" is increasing, and fairly regular employment is found by the Department for many mothers supporting families and for widows. In face of the fact that servants cannot be secured, householders find it both economical and convenient to engage a woman to do the heavier household work, the practice being to devote one day to washing clothes and another for general house-cleaning. Some of the Department's applicants have already obtained regular work in this way for from three to five days per week. The Department assists from 20 to 50 charwomen monthly, whilst the applications from employers for such workers range from 30 to 60. The pay for such work is from 5s. to 6s. per day, with meals.

During the year the oversea vessels have been regularly met, and all information and advice have been given to women and girls arriving in the Dominion. In addition to the offers to find work for those in need of it, I have at times rendered other assistance in helping wives and children to reach their husbands, who had come to the Dominion by previous vessels, and in many other ways have tried to make the women passengers feel that the Department is desirous of giving them real assistance.

I have, &c.,

E. R. BREMNER,

Officer in Charge.

The Secretary of Labour, Wellington.

NELSON.

SIR,— Department of Labour (Women's Branch), Nelson, 24th April, 1912.

I have the honour to submit my report on the working of this branch of the Department for the year ending the 31st March, 1912.

The difficulty of obtaining women workers has in no way diminished during the year. The occupations for women workers are perhaps more varied in this district than in any other part of the Dominion. Outside the various trades and domestic work, large numbers of workers find employment at pea, fruit, and hop picking. This class of work is healthy, not arduous, and very remunerative.

Domestic work: Girls evince more and more a strong prejudice against domestic work as a means of livelihood, not so much because of a dislike to domestic work as on account of its being regarded as of lower social status than work in other occupations, and the indefiniteness as to duties and hours. A number of inquiries has been made during the year as to the necessary procedure to obtain girls from Great Britain.

Dressmaking and tailoring: These trades are much hampered owing to the scarcity of women workers. Employers complain that the scarcity encourages incompetency, as girls can so easily find employment that the ambition to be thorough is lacking.

Fruit-preserving and biscuit and confectionery trades: Employers in these trades have continually to curtail orders on account of the shortage of women workers. In this direction there is no improvement on last year.

Four hundred and thirty-five applications have been received from employers for assistants, and 103 from workers seeking employment. Of the latter, 90 were placed in suitable employment.

I have, &c.,

M. EMERSON.

Officer in Charge.

The Secretary of Labour, Wellington.