

SERVANTS' REGISTRY ACT.

Generally, this Act is working well and without friction. It was much needed, and affords protection to a class of women and girls that was sometimes formerly exploited unmercifully by unscrupulous persons. Servants can now apply to registry offices whose regular and legitimate business has not to suffer from unfair competition. When legislative amendment takes place it would be an improvement to insert a section in the Act making it compulsory for registry-office keepers to give written receipts for any fees, &c., received. It has been found by experience that, although the amount entered in the ledger as received from a certain person is the fee prescribed by law, that amount is less than the cash actually paid over.

DOMESTIC SERVANTS.

The reports, printed herewith, of Miss Scott, Inspector of Factories, and Mrs. Staveley, officer in charge of the Women's Branch of the Labour Department in Wellington, are worthy of the attention of those interested in the social and economic position of women in the colony. I beg particularly to call attention to the suggestion as to the establishment of training-schools for domestic service, or, better still, for imparting domestic knowledge whether for service or superintendence. There is not only a growing difficulty in obtaining good servants, but with the spread of education and the growth of manufactories there will be an ever-increasing impediment to the present haphazard system being carried on. This impediment will not only render more difficult daily the possibility of procuring servants for wealthy persons or for overworked mothers, but will interfere with the education of housewives as mates for working-men. It appears absurd that, while a boy who wishes to become a mechanic or an artisan has years of training and apprenticeship to pass through before he is qualified to be a journeyman, a girl is supposed to be able at one leap, and without tuition, to enter on the infinitely various duties that fall within the work of a capable general servant. There is often in the home she leaves no possibility of a girl learning the branches of her business as it is expected to be performed in a well-to-do family. The cooking, the furniture, the habits, the hours, the neatness, &c., are not of the character to which she has been accustomed, and to expect any human being to fulfil such obligations without preliminary training or experience is to expect an impossibility. It is little wonder, then, that the incessant (often justifiable) fault-finding of a mistress, the deprivation of society of her own class and of the other sex except in an almost surreptitious manner, the eccentricity of the orders given in many houses, the constant reminder of a supposed inferiority of position, the long hours, &c.,—all these, or any of these, tend to make young women prefer the life of the factory or the shop to that of domestic service. So long as they can get shorter and more regular hours of labour in a factory than in a house, can get men to direct them instead of women, can have their evenings to themselves and live with their families or friends, the girls of the colony will feel a steady attraction to industrial instead of to domestic life. This is to be regarded as a misfortune, because, although the growth of manufactories and the expansion of new channels of industry are signs of the vitality of a people, yet the absorption of too large a proportion of the female population into factories and workshops is fatal to our future domestic comfort. A woman who has from the age of fourteen years closely applied herself to some particular branch of manufacture cannot acquire the experience necessary for a housewife, nor be able to manage a home with satisfactory results to her husband or safety to the health of little children. Especially is this the case should her knowledge of a handicraft induce or compel her to persevere in working at it after marriage.

The only remedy is one of slow application. It is the continual inculcation, in public and in private, of the doctrine that a woman who is wife and mother belongs to the most valuable class of citizens in the State. It is she only who makes the survival of the State possible. If the abnormal (and, I hope, transient) conditions of life in the nineteenth century make it imperative that many women must earn their own bread, either in the professional or manufacturing classes, the fact should only be regarded as a necessary evil. Great as is the admiration due to the independent-minded and often unselfish women and girls who have ventured out into the fierce current of competition and struggle in the working world, we must remember that the "higher education" of some women and the business skill and mechanical capability of others should not be allowed to overshadow the fact that the woman who is house-wife and house-mother occupies, or ought to occupy, the position of honour in the heart of a nation. If at universities the highest degrees for women were reserved for those who passed in physiology, domestic hygiene, practical chemistry, &c., rather than in mere bookish examinations in higher mathematics, dead languages, &c., the result for the better would be almost incalculable, and there would be no fear lest at some future day a dyspeptic and sour-minded race might turn and rend to pieces the national education system.

When this is thoroughly understood there will be no sneer at the "inferiority" of a girl who in accepting domestic service is preparing herself for being a helpmeet, and looking forward to having some day a comfortable home. As a practical step the institution of technical schools where domestic duties would be taught should be one well worth the attention of all, but particularly of those able women who now pay much attention to public affairs, and seem earnestly desirous of helping their sex without being able to find any useful way of doing so. If, after reaching the Fourth Standard in the public schools, the children (the youngsters of marked genius excepted) could be sent to technical schools for a year or two, the boys to be instructed in farming, carpentry, boatbuilding, &c., the girls to learn how to cook, scrub, lay tables, make their own clothes, &c., the outlook would be more hopeful than it now is. The male larrikins and the corrupted girl-children who are at present the sores of our social body are, many of them, the products of ill-kept and miserable homes, wherein poverty is not so noticeable as mismanagement and waste. If this evil supply could be intercepted, its outcome, of grown-up loafer and shameless harridan, the despair of the reformer and the charitable, would disappear from our midst.

EDWARD TREGGAR.