

is neglecting his duty. The very lengthy hours worked by this class is particularly remarkable in Auckland.

Also, I should like to call your attention to the great number of elderly women in the colony who are too old to go out as domestics, and who cannot get enough casual employment to enable them to live. Usually these women are in receipt of charitable aid in some form or other, but the allowance is so small that it is scarcely sufficient to keep life in the body. Certainly, this may seem more a question for the Charitable Aid Board; but it is constantly being brought before me, and I call your attention to it with the hope that some suggestion may be made which will result favourably for these poor unfortunates.

The cry of inefficiency on the part of our young girls who go out as domestic servants is still as loud as ever, and I feel more and more every day how very essential it is that there should be a good domestic training-school, established by the Government, through which our young girls should be compelled to pass, just as they are now compelled to pass certain standards in our public schools before they can obtain employment in a factory. If this were done I am sure it would prove a real blessing to many homes in this colony, both rich and poor. The poor man would then be able to economise, and the rich man's home would be rendered much more comfortable.

I would strongly recommend that a clause be introduced into the Factories Act empowering the inspection of the accommodation for domestics in hotels, restaurants, &c. I am sure it would add greatly to the comfort of this class.

I notice with much surprise the number of very young girls—in fact, children they should be called—who have taken up the calling of newspaper-runners. Of course, this new line of business for our young girls is quite beyond the provisions of any Act administered by this department; but it is, in my opinion, one which deserves careful consideration. It must, indeed, be a very distressing state of affairs when mothers will allow their young daughters to take it up. Hoping for your earnest consideration of the matter,

E. Tregear, Esq.

I have, &c.,

MARGARET SCOTT, Inspector of Factories.

Department of Labour, Women's Branch,

Customhouse Quay, 31st March, 1897.

SIR,—

I have the honour to submit to you my report for the year ended the 31st March, 1897.

The number of women and girls who have applied at my office for work was 459; number of employers, 485; women and girls suited with employment, 279.

I desire to state that I am much troubled on account of being unable to find work for a large number of respectable women, either middle-aged or old almost to infirmity, who appear to be unable to secure employment in the ordinary labour-market. They keep on applying to me, though I am quite unable to do anything of a satisfactory nature in their case. These poor people are willing to do any kind of work, no matter how small the pay; many of them would be glad to secure employment for the mere sake of food and shelter, so important it is to them to secure a home for themselves. If they rent a room all their scant earnings go in paying for the shelter, no matter how poor or undesirable a locality. They then have nothing left for food, firing, or clothes. I really cannot tell what I am to do to help these unfortunate people. I have tried my utmost to induce employers to accept the services of these women—to give them a trial as servants, for I am certain their experience in household duties, when they are not too old or infirm, would render them preferable to many younger women, some of whom are flighty and unreliable.

In reference to the question of domestic service, and the difficulty experienced by employers in securing girls and young women who would prove satisfactory, I am compelled, from observation, to state that the very long hours they are required to work prevents many excellent young women from entering upon these duties. Some of the girls who have tried the life assure me positively that they are expected to get up at 6 a.m., begin the round of household duties, and frequently are not permitted to cease from their labours until 10.30 p.m. The consequence of this system of slavery—for it can be called by no other name—is that the best and smartest women refuse to accept service. Then, again, often the common comforts of life are denied them, and the girls have to continually complain to obtain any redress of their grievances. These are some of the reasons why all those who can do so go into factories. There the hours of labour are clearly defined. Service in hotels, either in the capacity of housemaids or waitresses, find more favour than that in private households. The girls know that they have a certain round of duties to perform, and that when they are concluded their time is their own, both for recreation and rest. I find the majority of employers are willing to pay a fair wage to competent and reliable servants, but, owing to the causes I have mentioned, few indeed are to be found willing to accept ordinary domestic service. There are, unfortunately, many incompetent servant-girls who are willing enough to accept service, but these do not meet the approval of employers, and great dissatisfaction exists in consequence. I cannot blame these young women. It is not their fault that they have not had the necessary training. They get nothing but detrimental experience in their own homes. I could wish that there existed some means whereby these girls could obtain the necessary instruction to qualify them for suitable situations, for then a number of so-called unsympathetic mistresses—of whom we hear so much—would speedily become an unknown quantity.

In conclusion, may I be permitted to point out a danger which but few mothers are aware of in connection with the employment of nursemaids for their children. There is a great necessity, if mothers would but realise it, for their employing only the nicest and best-tempered girls. The influence exerted by these girls over the young lives and future dispositions of their charges for good or evil will be patent to those who have given this most important subject the least thought.

I am, &c.,

E. Tregear, Esq.

HELEN STAVELEY, Officer in Charge.