

# The Immigrant Maid

## Petition to Parliament—Scarcity of Domestic Help

By Dog Toby.

### The Decreasing Supply.

FROM all parts of the Dominion comes the cry of the scarcity of domestic help, and a monster petition is to be presented to Parliament from the women of New Zealand asking for a system of free immigration for single young women suitable for domestic service. From some totally unexplained cause girls seem to prefer any sort of work to house work, and they are willing to work in a factory for half the wages they would receive in a private house. The demand for domestic workers has of late years steadily increased, whilst the supply of girls and young women offering for such work has just as steadily diminished. The consequence is that although people living in the towns are not quite so badly off as those in the country, yet both in town and country there are numerous families quite unable to obtain any help, and the tired wife and mother has to do all her own work and drag along as best she can. Sometimes the husband helps a bit, and the men are getting quite adepts at cooking and washing up, but a man who is working all day cannot be expected to do more than get breakfast and polish the stove in the morning and wash up the day's dishes at night.

### The Woman's Burden.

It is on the women folk that the main burden of colonial life must fall. A young girl gets married and just at first finds a pleasure in looking after her new home. But with the years come increasing cares, and the young mother cannot look after her house and care for her bairns unaided without her health suffering. She is married, perhaps, to a man in the professional walks of life and she has certain social duties to perform. (Dolls must be paid and received, the claims of society must be met, and there are two or three little nites at home to be washed and fed and dressed. It is not merely the cooking and keeping the house and the children tidy, there is always the spectre of "Black Monday" when the family washing and ironing has to be done. And the brave little woman tackles it all, and always wears a smile and gives a welcome to her friends, and tries to hide from her husband how tired she feels. It is only when she is alone, and her back is aching and her head swimming, that she will sit down before her pile of dishes and pots, or her stack of linen waiting to be ironed, and she will have what she would call a good cry. And the man never knows or never thinks, he gives her all the reward she needs if he praises her cooking or approves her neatness. If he does know, or if he does think, he curses the day when he came to a country where women, gently born and bred, are condemned to marriage to a life of household drudgery and toil.

### The Effect on Health.

But there is another aspect of the case that is yet more serious. It is a well-known fact that the health of women in this country is often seriously affected by the hardships to which they are subjected. Any medical man will bear out the assertion that certain kinds of female ailments are more common here than at home. This cannot but affect the birth-rate and the physique of succeeding generations. The question is not merely one that concerns the comfort of the well-to-do classes; it is a national question, and concerns the whole community. Some married couples, in despair at getting any household help, give up housekeeping and take to living in boarding-houses; others neglect their children; often a wife will break down under the strain, and become a chronic invalid. The woman who is constantly worried by the double tie of motherhood and housework is apt to develop a querulous temper, and the whole home suffers in consequence.

### Need for Immigration.

Whatever may be said as regards immigration for other classes of workers,

there can be no doubt as to the demand that exists for domestic helps. Any registry office in the Dominion could find places for double the number of those who apply. If settlers live away from the main centres of population, no amount of money will tempt girls to enter their service. Each of our four large towns could absorb over a hundred domestic immigrants a month, and still leave many vacancies unfilled. The country districts could absorb a still larger number. But the girls are not to be had. Surely a Government which desires to see the country settled should not only spend money on roads and bridges, but should also be willing to bring to our shores young women, who as domestic helps first and wives and mothers afterwards will do more than any road or any bridge to promote the comfort and welfare of our homes and the consequent settlement of our land.

### A Hindrance to Settlement.

For many a young fellow hesitates to go on the land because he knows what it means for his young wife. Away from the varied recreation of city life, she is further isolated by not being able to secure any help in her household duties. She is left absolutely alone all day whilst her husband is at work, and in good health and bad health she has to struggle through her day's work absolutely unaided. For no matter how kind the mistress, no matter how healthy the district, no matter how high the wages offered, girls absolutely will not go to places in the country. And the men, knowing this, prefer to take positions near town, where there is some chance of help for their wives, to taking up land where their wives will be doomed to perpetual isolation and unending drudgery.

### Sign the Petition.

It behoves everybody to assist by all means in their power those who are trying to get the Government to move in this matter. The petition, a copy of which is subjoined, should be signed by every woman in the Dominion who has the welfare of her native land at heart. It is not a petition from any one class; it is not a petition that seeks to lower wages. It is a matter that concerns our homes, our wives, our little ones. It is, above all, a matter that concerns our national well-being, for the nation ultimately rests on motherhood, and motherhood rests on health and strength. There are, of course, other ways of remedying in some small measure the scarcity of domestic help, but of these I must treat next week. The main remedy at present lies in doing all in our power to attract to our shores immigrants able and willing to undertake domestic duties.

### The Petition.

The petition runs as follows:—  
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives in Parliament Assembled.

The Petition of the undersigned, women of the Dominion of New Zealand, humbly sheweth:—

1. That your Petitioners are women of the Dominion of New Zealand over the age of twenty-one years.
2. That your petitioners desire to bring under the notice of Parliament the fact that there has been for some years past a great decrease in the number of girls and single young women offering themselves for domestic service consequent upon a disinclination on their part to follow such avocation, and this condition of things has been rendered more acute owing to the increasing demand for women workers in our manufacturing industries as a result of the coming into operation of the Preferential Tariff.
3. That though for some time past there has also been an increasing demand for domestic workers, there has, owing to the facts above mentioned, been an ever decreasing supply of girls and young women offering for such work.
4. That your petitioners are of opinion that never in the history of New Zealand has the want of strong, able and willing

domestic workers been so pronounced as at the present time.

5. That by reason of the promised numbers of women and mothers of the Dominion are daily called upon to bear burdens almost too heavy to be borne.

6. That your petitioners are of opinion that if the condition of things complained of continues unremedied, a serious menace to the health of the women of our land will be occasioned, a further decline in the birth-rate of the Dominion may result, and the physique and upbringing of succeeding generations may be detrimentally affected.

7. That not only is the health of the women of the Dominion and their children affected or threatened by reason of the conditions obtainable, but in many cases the peace and happiness of the home are seriously affected, and your petitioners are aware of numbers who have already given up housekeeping by reason of the matters complained of, and they view with apprehension the future of the home life of the country.

8. Your petitioners would point out that it is not the wealthy or well-to-do classes who suffer the most acutely by reason of the dearth of domestic workers as the members of such class can by reason of their position obtain domestic workers by holding out inducements of increased salary and other privileges and conditions which the majority of the housewives of the country find it impossible to concede.

9. Your petitioners strongly disavow any intention of objecting to the present standard of wages for domestic workers, or of suggesting the adoption of any measure which might directly or indirectly have the effect of reducing such wages which your petitioners regard as one of the chief attractions to the immigrant.

10. Your petitioners are aware that settlers even slightly removed from centres of population find it in numerous cases impossible to procure that help which is essential in the case of a mother with a young family.

11. Your petitioners would also emphasize the fact disclosed by the Registrar-General's returns that there were on the 31st March, 1908, 81,000 more males than females in the Dominion.

12. Your petitioners are of opinion that the grievances under which so many of the Women of the Dominion labour could be remedied, if not entirely removed, by the Government adopting for a time a system of free immigration for single young women suitable for domestic service.

13. Your petitioners are also of the opinion that the free immigration of strong, willing and able single women of good character, even if without previous experience in domestic service, would at once prove of great benefit to numbers of over-worked mothers and women of the Dominion, while such a movement, by reason of the girls ultimately marrying and settling in the country must make for the closer settlement and future prosperity of our land.

Your petitioners therefore humbly pray—

(a) That the grievances under which your petitioners labour may receive the careful consideration of the Honourable Members of the House of Representatives.

(b) That steps may immediately be taken by the Government of the Dominion to establish a system of free immigration from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for single young women of good health and character, who are suitable for and willing to follow the calling of domestic service.

(c) That with the view of obtaining a class of single young women suitable to the requirements of the Dominion, the Government establish bureaux, and that such be placed under women of experience, intimately acquainted with the condition of things here obtaining, and with a proper knowledge of the description of the future colonist required.

(d) That such young women, when selected, be placed under suitable and efficient matrons immediately prior to embarkation, and remain under such supervision during the voyage and after arrival in the Dominion, until such time as suitable positions have been found for them.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

Continuation sheets for signature in connection with the above can be obtained on application to "The Editor, the 'Graphic,' Auckland." The petition may also be seen at J. H. Upton and Co., booksellers, or Milne and Choyce, Queen's street, Auckland.

unpleasant incidents," nor are they anxious to see in print the "fusilades of silly interjections" with which different members strive to enliven the proceedings. In ancient times the greatest reverence was paid the statues and images which were reported by the priests to have opened their mouths and uttered oracles. The oracular decision was alone made public. Similarly, members of the Council will be reported to have moved their lips, and their oracular pronouncements will be given to the world minus the little unpleasant incidents and fusilades of silly interjections that detract so much from the weight and dignity of the Delphic utterance. A reporter from a special Labour paper will be allowed to attend the meetings, and we presume his report will be rigorously censored before it is allowed to see the light of day.

### The Price of Bread.

The Napier Master Bakers' Association tried to establish the coupon system, but after a short trial decided to abandon it. It was unfortunate for them that they started the new system at a time when it was necessary to increase the price. Customers had been paying 3½d a loaf, and the coupons were issued at 3s. 0d. a dozen. Naturally, people objected to paying more for a dozen coupons than they had been paying for the single loaf. The price of bread has now been reduced again to 3½d, and those who purchased the coupons at the higher rate are to be given a compensating allowance. The coupon system does not seem to have met with general acceptance. Many people had been dealing with the same tradesmen for years on monthly accounts, and they resented the idea that they must pay for their bread in advance. Some bakers abandoned the coupon system after the first couple of days, alleging that the time occupied in first selling and then getting back the coupons caused considerable delay, and involved overtime, for which the employers had to pay. It certainly seems that if customers are expected to pay in advance some substantial concession in price should be made, but it is doubtful if the coupon system could ever be universally accepted owing to the dislike most people have to paying for a thing before they get it.

### An Indian Problem.

There are few questions that cause greater perplexity to our rulers and statesmen in India than the best way of dealing with barbarous native customs that are woven in with the Hindu religion. Child-marriage and child-widows present problems that have hitherto baffled all efforts of legislators to solve. According to the code of Manu, eight years of age is the minimum and twelve years of age is the minimum and two years for a high-caste girl. The early marriages naturally lead to much widowhood, and it is calculated that there are 25 millions of widows in India. A widow is looked upon as an "inauspicious" thing, and her life is rendered intolerable in every possible way. It was with a view of doing something to minister to these child-widows that the Mukti Mission was started. Over 1800 widows are supported and cared for at the mission at a cost of nearly £600 a month, and an association has been formed in New Zealand for the purpose of assisting in this humane work. Mrs George Mackenzie, of Queenstown, the general secretary of the New Zealand Auxiliary of the Mukti Mission, has recently returned from visiting India and England and the principal places en route, and she has secured a choice selection of Indian and Oriental goods. These are to be sold for the benefit of the Mission. The "Indian and Oriental Bazaar," as it is called, attracted great attention in Dunedin, and a similar bazaar will be held in Auckland on Thursday, Friday and Saturday of this week. Not only is the object a thoroughly deserving one, but a unique opportunity is presented of acquiring rare and valuable Eastern curio.