

or drinking cold water when heated. But she did send obedient Sir Thomas, then asleep in a great chair in the library, to the pit, in hopes to reclaim her truant falcon.

Sir Thomas came back when the sun was rising in the heavens. He had not met with any signal success in his mission, and was, indeed, but a half-hearted envoy. "If I had been as young as you are!" he had blundered out more than once in the midst of his prudent

speeches, and indeed he was sorely tempted, in spite of years and infirmities, to pull off his dark blue coat and clutch an unaccustomed pickaxe in his bewildered fingers. But he brought word that Percy, though tired, was full of courage and confidence, and that hopes were waxing high, should the poisonous gases within the gallery but leave life in the forms of those shut in.

END OF CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD.

## NEW EMPLOYMENTS FOR WOMEN.



WE hear a very considerable amount, in general society, of what the Americans call "tall talking" on the subject of strong-minded women. There is scarcely one man in a hundred who would own to liking the class; and the majority of men and

women alike argue, with a fair show of reason, that it is above all things advisable that the sex should retain their femininity, and strive to gild the rough side of life with grace, gentleness, and sympathy, as opposed to self-assertion and the pushing of themselves forward in any public or prominent position.

Without doubt, a woman's proper position and happiest destiny lies in the retired paths of domestic life, abounding as they do with duties. The "shrieking sisterhood," though they may bring about some salutary reforms, and lighten some heavy burdens, are often displeasing and unpopular mediums, through whom sometimes good and sometimes harm is wrought. In nine cases out of ten, a quiet, womanly woman, wise enough not to seem too clever, is twice as successful in bringing about what she desires, whether for the private or the public good.

But there are two sides to every question, and stern necessity wages determined and successful war against sentiment. In our modern days the number of women dependent on their own exertions for maintenance is continually increasing; and how they are to obtain work to enable them to earn enough to live on, is a great social problem. A constant endeavour is being made to open out new fields for them. It certainly behoves those on whom the training of young people devolves, to bring the rising generation up with a thoroughness of education, and habits of order and business exactness, which, should occasion arise, would enable them to enter with success on some

useful field of labour—the want of thoroughness and of exactness being among the great drawbacks to the more general employment of the sex. Experience shows them to be hard-working, patient, and trustworthy. As yet they cannot command equal wages with men, so economy is one of the incentives for their employment. But, on the other hand, they are not able to bear the pressure of work that a man can; and in the telegraphic offices where they are employed it has been found that, on occasions when there was more than usual to be done in haste, they were apt to lose their tempers, and give way to hysterical crying, which generally led to their claiming sick-leave for a day or two afterwards. Still, both in the telegraph offices and in the post offices their employment has worked well, which is best proved by the fact that their field of usefulness widens, and that the formation of a class of female clerks in the Savings Bank was a suggestion emanating from the Postmaster-General himself. Here, although the standard of acquirements, in arithmetic at least, is high, a majority of the female candidates succeeded in passing the examination.

Encouraged by the example set by Government, our railway companies are—at all events, some of them—about to employ female clerks; and in a few of the country stations on the main lines they are already installed, replacing the boys who formerly aided the rural station-masters in office work. They receive the same wages, and are more trustworthy. For the present, at all events, it seems probable that the plan will only be adopted in the country. The appointments on the metropolitan railways are scarcely suitable for women. In some of the London ticket-offices there is but one clerk, and at the very largest only three: the labour, consequently, at certain times of the day is most arduous. The hours of duty are about nine daily, and on Sunday, when there is an increase rather than diminution of traffic, they amount to sixteen or seventeen hours two Sundays out of every three, in order to insure a holiday on the third—that is, without deducting the two hours' rest during morning service. Besides this, at certain periods the rush is excessive, as on Saturday nights, when some 700 people journey to the Meat Market for Sunday's dinner, and many of the metropolitan stations are so crowded that it is difficult to find standing-room. Every morning and evening, also, hundreds of workmen take advantage of the cheap tickets specially issued for them. These have to be given out in an incredibly short

time: indeed, were not a certain number stamped beforehand, it could not be done. All this would be somewhat too great a strain on most women's powers; and it yet remains to be proved whether they would be sufficiently quick in calculating, on the instant, the exact price of tickets for the intermediate stations.

There are booking clerks, parcel clerks, outward goods clerks, inward goods clerks, transfer and corresponding clerks employed on railways, but it is as booking clerks chiefly that it is proposed to employ women. The usual salary for a clerk at the ticket-office of these railways begins at one pound weekly, and security is generally required as a guarantee of honesty; for, although every precaution is taken, the temptations are so strong that derelictions are not infrequent; and this fact is an inducement to give women a trial.

Each ticket furnished to the clerk is numbered. Tickets are then arranged in different divisions or tubes, labelled according to the class and station, with the price of each appended. A slight pressure sends the ticket out as required, and it is then dated in a press ready at hand. The transaction has to be subsequently entered in the train-book, which is usually done when the train has left, and before another is due—often while the public are tapping impatiently at the closed window. The clerk is aided in making up his accounts by a piece of slate above each tube, where is registered on the instant the number of tickets subtracted. There is nothing in this actual labour which any woman might not undertake: indeed, in matters of physical endurance the sex are not found wanting: it is the mental strain—the trial of nerves combined with physical exertion—which appears to tell unfavourably upon them.

To prove how much women are capable of, it must be borne in mind that though the law now has stepped in to forbid some of the hardest labour they used to undergo, unfitted to their sex (for many years they worked in coal-pits, doing just as much work as the men), they may still be seen in the Black Country, at the pit's mouth, sorting coal, and carrying on their heads heavy loads of coal and dross from the iron—so heavy, indeed, the marvel is how they ever raise them, much more carry them for a mile or so. Hundreds of women are employed in making iron chains, colouring and hand-polishing fire-arms, as well as cast-iron hollow ware, as it is called—viz., pots, saucepans, and kettles, the varnishing, painting, sorting, and packing of which fall to women's lot. In nail-making, though much is done by machinery, girls of nine are employed; and in Staffordshire, families of female blacksmiths face the forge fourteen hours a day. Round about Rowley and Bromsgrove, women may be seen hammering the nail-ends with huge, unwieldy hammers. Few men could do more than this.

Abroad in many places, female clerks occupy the railway ticket-offices; but they are there pretty well

hidden from public view, the aperture through which the tickets are passed being only large enough for their hands to be seen. On the Continent people do not seem to be in such hot haste as in England: the trains are slower, and matters are conducted with more deliberation; but even under that régime there are numerous complaints as to the slowness with which the women do their work.

Although the directors of some of the principal English companies have had the question of the employment of female clerks under consideration for some time, approving of the scheme generally, the arrangements for carrying it into extended operation have not yet been perfected. In the meanwhile, it would be well if women who are anxious for such employment would set about fitting themselves for the posts. Most people interested in the question of the employment of women find that it is not the situations which are wanting, but competent, well-trained candidates, really fitted for the posts.

Every year fresh fields of remunerative usefulness are opening out for women. In one or two firms in the north of England, a woman overseer has been appointed to supervise the staff of female *employées*, with a liberal salary. This is a step in the right direction, and much may be hoped the more the sex are able to impress a sense of their trustworthy dependability on employers generally.

Pianoforte-tuning is one of the occupations suggested, but not as yet adopted by women, and open to grave objections, it is thought. As dispensing chemists they are more at home. Many a doctor's wife or sister helps him in this branch of his profession, and the difficulty of obtaining young men to do the work will make it all the easier for women to obtain such situations. By the Pharmacy Act of 1868 they are allowed to pass the examination necessary to enable them to practise pharmacy; and in the January of the present year it was further laid down that, to be a chemist or druggist, women must undergo a three years' apprenticeship with a registered member of the trade.

The decorative arts are daily opening out fresh fields for the extended remunerative employment of women. Of late years needlework has been raised to the dignity of an art; china-painting keeps many women in comfort; the wood-engravings in books and periodicals bring grist to women's mills, and so does the colouring of photographs; while valentines, and Christmas and birthday cards, owe much of their beauty to their dainty fingers. Printing, law-copying, tracing engineers' and architects' plans, are successfully carried out by women. Their taste in matters appertaining to the house and home is so practically recognised, that a firm of ladies as artistic decorators have originated quite a revolution, and it is now suggested that the sex should start as flower-market gardeners, raising and selling flowers, and, moreover, supervising the laying-out of gardens.

