

A BRIDAL SONG.

DOST thou linger, gentle maiden,
At the minster door?
Dost thou tremble, tender maiden,
On the chancel floor?
Dost thou fear, and dost thou falter,
When thou kneelest at the altar?
With the bridegroom by thee now
Wilt thou take the marriage vow?

If thy heart, O loving maiden!
Thou hast given away,
Without fear, O trustful maiden!
Give thy hand to-day.

Leaving father, leaving mother,
Give thy life unto another,
Taking back a dearer life
From his love as wedded wife.

Let him lead thee, wedded maiden,
From the altar now.
Thou art his for ever, maiden,
By that marriage vow.
His in joy and sorrow ever,
None these holy bonds may sever.
Loving, trusting, stand beside
Him who loves thee, happy bride!

J. F. W.

LADY CLERKS IN THE CITY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "HOW WOMEN MAY EARN A LIVING."



NY habitual traveller on the Metropolitan Railway must have been struck by the large number of regular lady passengers by the business trains. These ladies I find, on inquiry, are for the most part employed as clerks in the City.

At the Central Telegraph Office alone about 500 female clerks are employed, at rates of pay varying from 8s. to 30s. a week. Hitherto the nomination of candidates has rested with the Postmaster-General, but "the old order changeth, giving place to new," and Mr. Fawcett announced

his intention, in his place in Parliament, after the present list of candidates (which I am told is but a small one) is exhausted, of throwing all appointments open to public competition. An exception will, I understand, be made in favour of counter-women, who are invariably selected from telegraph clerks.

The Government is evidently of the opinion that married women should find quite sufficient to occupy them in their home duties, and that the task of providing an income should rest solely with the husband, as directly a lady clerk marries she is compelled to resign her situation, and only single women are eligible for appointment.

The most distinguished of the Government offices open to ladies is the Receiver and Accountant-General's office. Here the lowest salary paid to the fortunate clerks is £40 a year, and the highest remuneration they receive is £150. The hours of work are

from ten to four, with an hour's interval for luncheon. At the handsome new buildings in Queen Victoria Street, where the office has lately been removed to, the accommodation is all that can be desired, and there is a restaurant on the premises where refreshments can be obtained.

The authorities are liberal enough to supply the telegraph clerks with tea and bread and butter free of charge, but this favour is not extended to the other branches of the service. The reason the telegraph clerks are so privileged is that their work has to be done at different hours. Their services may be required at any time from eight in the morning until eight at night, but they never work more than the regulation eight hours a day. They are not eligible for nomination after the age of eighteen, and when they have passed the present test examination, they have to attend the Post Office Telegraph School to undergo a course of instruction in Telegraphy. With an intelligent pupil this generally lasts about three months; during this time, of course, they do not receive any pay, but on the other hand they are not charged for the instruction they receive.

The clerks employed in the other Government offices enter upon their duties, and commence to receive their salaries, directly they have passed their preliminary examination, as they do not need any special knowledge. No one is appointed who has passed the age of twenty, and they cannot be nominated, excepting for telegraph clerks, before they are seventeen.

With a view to limiting the number of candidates when the appointments are thrown open to public competition, there is some idea of making it compulsory that all applicants shall have passed one of the well-known public examinations, such as the Oxford or Cambridge local; but the conditions of candidature are not at present finally decided upon.

The Prudential Assurance Company gives employment to a large number of ladies—somewhere about 170; they are all the daughters of professional men. This rule was at first made to limit the number of candidates, as the directors only contemplated employing perhaps half a dozen; but as these were found to do their work satisfactorily, and business increased, the staff of lady clerks was increased also. The authorities have as yet seen no reason to alter their rule; no doubt it has excluded many eligible clerks, but the number of candidates is always so large that there is no difficulty in selecting suitable ladies from the privileged classes. Many names have been on the list of applicants for the last two years; vacancies occur but rarely, as for once girls seem to know when they are well off, and seldom leave excepting to be married.

No one is engaged under the age of seventeen or over thirty; the girls require no special qualifications beyond an ordinary English education. Their duties consist principally in copying and writing letters from notes, so they do not even require a knowledge of book-keeping.

Any girl wishing to earn her own living may consider herself extremely fortunate if she can do so under the auspices of the Prudential Assurance Company. The arrangements are simply perfect. There is an excellent restaurant, solely for the use of the ladies, where a very fair dinner may be obtained for the moderate sum of eightpence; a capital library, containing all the newest books, which may be taken to read at home; a piano is also provided: this naturally may not be played during office hours, but any girl who likes may stay to practise until seven o'clock. Once a week during the winter, and once a fortnight during the summer, a choral class is held for the musical members of the staff, and every fortnight all the year round an elementary class for those not sufficiently advanced to join the other. These are both conducted by Mr. E. S. Such, and twice a year, under his presidency, the members give concerts; to these all the other lady clerks are invited, and generally some of the directors, with their families, attend.

The flat roof of the building has been converted into terraces, where the girls may take exercise during their luncheon hour, and very much they enjoy it. These terraces have been arranged to afford shelter whichever way the wind may blow, and are entirely free from the possibility of being overlooked. Skipping is the favourite amusement. It is, no doubt, difficult for the uninitiated to believe that there is any place in the heart of Holborn where fifty girls or more can indulge in this recreation in the open air, and in the middle of the day, without attracting inconvenient attention. I very much doubt if their nearest neighbours are even aware of their existence.

They are provided with a separate staircase to that used by the male clerks, and any attempt at flirtation is sternly discouraged. No one is allowed to absent herself from her duties for more than three days without a doctor's certificate, and if they are ten minutes late in the morning they are fined.

The bank holidays entail extra work upon the fol-

lowing days; for this they receive extra pay and their tea; even on these occasions they are dismissed at seven o'clock, as that is considered quite as late as they should be out alone. In this matter the directors show an almost paternal interest, preferring, if possible, to employ sisters, so that they may chaperon each other on their way to and from the office; and in the event of their having to depend entirely upon their own exertions, their combined salaries would give them a modest competency, and perhaps allow them to make some pleasant excursion to the seaside, or if they were very economical indeed, they might even venture on a trip abroad during the fortnight's holiday each clerk is allowed. It is, no doubt, a great advantage to the girls that they all belong to the same class, as there is less likelihood of undesirable acquaintances being formed. During my visit I congratulated the lady superintendent upon having such an attractive and lady-like set of girls under her charge. Her post must indeed be no sinecure, as the difficulty of managing a large number of women together is proverbial, and I am afraid the fact of their being ladies is not likely greatly to lessen that difficulty.

Messrs. Kelly and Co. employ about twenty-five young ladies to assist in compiling their directories. It is very interesting to see them at work. None of their duties require any technical knowledge, so they begin to receive their salaries from the commencement of their engagements; but the very greatest care and neatness are absolutely requisite. The lady manager is also very severe in the matter of legible writing, sternly discouraging all the flourishes and various ornamentations most of the young ladies are at first inclined to indulge in. She likes them to come to her when they are about fifteen or sixteen years old: in fact, directly they leave school, as she finds at that age they are most easily taught their duties. All applicants should, if possible, provide themselves with a private introduction; if that is impossible they must apply by letter.

These lady clerks revise all the information collected by Messrs. Kelly and Co's. canvassers, comparing it with the last edition, and make all the necessary corrections for the printers. They also arrange the useful alphabetical lists at the end of each volume, sorting the names from the sheet lists which are brought to them by the collectors; besides this, they cut out addresses from the old directories, and with marvellous neatness stick them on to pieces of paper to be sent to each householder for correction. Directing these circulars and sticking on the stamps is by no means a light task. A short time ago two young ladies were engaged the whole of one day in sticking on three thousand six hundred stamps. A large board is thoroughly wetted with a weak solution of gum, on this a sheet of stamps is placed, then each stamp is carefully taken up with a penknife and transferred to an envelope.

Mr. Kelly, until recently, employed boys for these tasks, but they proved so troublesome and so inordinately fond of play that he made up his mind to try girls, and it has proved a most successful experiment. During the six years which have elapsed since he first

employed them only two have been dismissed ; and it is an almost unheard-of thing for them to leave of their own accord, excepting to be married.

The hours of work are from half-past nine until half-past five, excepting on Saturdays, when they leave at four. They are allowed an hour in the middle of the day for their dinner, but they must bring it with them, as they are not allowed to leave the office during business hours.

Messrs. Baring and some other large banking firms employ a few women clerks as coupon-sorters, but the demand for them is so very small that it seems scarcely worth while to mention it. It is quite essential that all aspirants to this work should have remarkably keen eyesight, and they are not taken without the very best references. As a general rule, the preference is given to the relations of the male clerks. The hours of work are from ten to five.

The Junior Army and Navy Stores employ ladies as clerks ; if possible, the manager always chooses daughters of military and naval officers. They are expected to have a very thorough knowledge of book-keeping, besides a legible handwriting ; so for these posts some previous training is usually necessary, as the

average young lady's knowledge of arithmetic upon leaving school can scarcely be said to be thorough, though I am glad to hear that more attention is being paid to this branch of education, and that at some of the large day schools for middle-class girls even book-keeping forms a regular part of the ordinary course of study.

It is always an advantage for girls to begin any profession they may intend to adopt immediately upon leaving school, before they have acquired the pernicious habit of wasting their time, which is almost inevitable without some definite occupation.

The state of things I have attempted to describe is surely very different from what it was some fifty years ago ; and if the number of women dependent on their own exertions has increased to the extent that statisticians wish us to believe, surely the possibilities of their supporting themselves in a suitable manner have also increased to an extent sufficient to encourage the zealous advocates of the higher employment of women with the conviction that some of the most substantial advantages which they have been striving to secure have been silently granted almost without a struggle.

MERCY GROGAN.

A RAMBLE ROUND AND ABOUT PEWSEY VALE.



THE Vale of Pewsey, so well known to agriculturists for its corn-growing capacities, is a longitudinal depression, extending for somewhat more than twenty miles from east to west, and varying from two or three to ten miles in

breadth, the widest part being towards the west. It lies entirely within the county of Wilts, its eastern extremity verging on the borders of Hampshire, and stretching westward across nearly two-thirds of the former county. It is almost equally apportioned between North and South Wilts, the western half belonging to the former, the eastern to the latter division. A curved line drawn across the valley from St. Martin's Hill on the north, to the *debouchure* of the Avon Valley on the south, would roughly mark the boundary line between the two Divisions of the county at this point. The valley is bounded in on all sides, except the south-west, by long continuous ranges of chalk hills, with outlets, through which in most cases small water-courses run, on the south, south-east, and north-east. It bends slightly round at the latter point, and by a narrow prolongation is united to the marshy valley, drained by the Kennet, which extends throughout the length of Berkshire. The hills to the south form

the northern boundary of the Plain of Salisbury, and have no southern slope, properly so called, the land from their summit stretching away, plateau-like, in gentle undulations, like the petrified waves of a tempest-tossed sea. Those to the north and east are, for the most part, boldly defined, and on their further side overlook magnificent tracts of the most beautiful agricultural scenery. These hills form part of the North Downs, and are excellent pasture grounds for the innumerable flocks of sheep that browse their mossy verdure, and for which this district is so justly celebrated. For the most part they run along the borders of the valley in gently curving lines, and at a tolerably regular elevation, but rise at times suddenly to rounded eminences of greater height, from which splendid views of the valley and the surrounding country can be obtained, the whole appearing spread out like a map at the feet of the spectator. From below, these heights form interesting and conspicuous features in the landscape. They are more often than not crowned with clumps of lofty firs, and, before the days of the electric telegraph, were probably often utilised as convenient positions for the beacon fires, whose flickering radiance spread around for many miles the intelligence of great events anxiously and expectantly looked for, in hope or fear, in times of emergency and danger.

Many of these summits bear on their scarred brows the remains of ancient British or Roman earthworks, and numerous Druidical tumuli are scattered along the neighbouring Downs, or in the hollows beneath their shadow. A solemn stillness reigns around, broken only occasionally by the distant tinkling of