

WOMEN WORKERS IN THE UNITED STATES.

BY AN AMERICAN ART TEACHER.



HERE are among us very many who, having missed that desire of every womanly woman, "a home of my own," find that brothers and sisters marry, and that the new ties, new interests, thus formed weaken in some degree the old affection—on one side at least—that the bundle of sticks does not hold together as closely as of old, and that they stand virtually alone to carve out as best they may a future for themselves. How to do this is a problem which, though anxiously

considered, is found by women in this country as well as in England often difficult of solution.

That the supply of workers in every position exceeds the demand is an old story in England, and therefore the thoughts of many turn to this country in search of wider fields of labour and better remuneration than can be found at home. It is this knowledge that induces me to address a few words to those women who contemplate emigration.

Who will find work here? The best and most energetic labourers in almost every department; there is no room in this hive for drones. One kind of work at least must be *thoroughly* understood.

Good English teachers have great chance of success in the Western and Southern States, but they should bring with them Cambridge, or Oxford, or Government certificates, Science or Art certificates, or a diploma from one of the well-established musical institutions; for here, as in England, there are so many pretenders to the profession of teaching, that those only who possess first-class credentials of this kind can hope for success.

Comparatively few families employ private governesses, nor is it, indeed, a very pleasant position in this country; for while, according to my experience, a resident governess in England has a defined position, and that a very pleasant one—being respected by parents and pupils, and queen in her own domain—here the children are allowed much more liberty than in England, and therefore are not so amenable to the authority of either parents or teachers; and, too, there seems to be such an uncertainty as to *how* she shall be treated, *how* introduced to friends, &c., that I have often been annoyed, and often amused.

The position that allows most liberty of action, and is very enjoyable here, is that of teacher in some large seminary or ladies' college in the Western or Southern States. She would not be expected to teach more than two or three subjects. For instance, drawing and painting; drawing, painting, and one language; instrumental and vocal music; English grammar, composition, literature, and Latin, would be classed together, each group being the work expected from one teacher.

The salaries generally paid range from \$200 (£40) to \$600 (£120), with board, per annum, according to the efficiency of the teacher, and according, too, to the position of the school. The further west or south, the higher the salary.

The income is really no better than in England, for in the first place there are from ten weeks' to three months' vacation at a time of the year when it is nearly impossible to find any employment, and board, lodging, &c., for that time will cost from \$40 to \$60. Then, unless one can make one's own dresses, the expense of clothing is at least double what it is in England.

With regard to that important subject—dress, I would say a word. American women of all classes are extravagant in dress. All, from the wife of the millionaire to the "hired girl," dress more showily in the street and at home than French or English women consider either ladylike or becoming; there seems to be no thought of conforming dress to the position of the wearer or the work she happens to be engaged in.

I say to all English women, avoid this, and in so doing you need not be "dowdy" (as American girls accuse English girls of being). By her quiet dress and refined manner the English teacher can demonstrate to the American school-girl what constitutes a true gentlewoman.

Teachers will find that their American pupils lack the respect with which English girls usually treat those in authority over them.

The American girl is shrewd, nervous, quick of comprehension, instant in repartee, easily taught, but not easily trained, impatient of the restraint of school life, and therefore taking pleasure in breaking all possible rules, and trying to outwit her teachers—not from malice, but from sheer mischief and what she calls "fun." She is ready to make amends, also ready to offend again at the first opportunity. She is only to be guided by affection and quiet determination. I have had under my care both English and American pupils, and although there are many among the latter for whom I have great affection, and who will make noble women, they will acknowledge the justice and truth of my remarks (we have often discussed the matter), and will forgive my saying that English girls being more amenable to authority, and also having more *persistence* in the pursuit of knowledge, make better students than their American cousins.

With regard to other workers, domestic servants of all kinds have the best chance of success and of making money if they will only be thrifty and prudent, avoiding the pitfall of showy dress. Good cooks, laundresses, and general servants can generally obtain sufficient wages and comfortable homes.

Cooks will find that they have much to learn, however skilled they may be in English dishes, for in every American household the dainty serving of meals is considered of great importance; and while they

cannot attempt to compete with us in the cooking of "fish, flesh, and fowl," we must yield the palm for the making of bread and cakes to our American cousins.

A good bread-maker is considered a treasure in an American household.

Cooks can earn from \$2 to \$5 per week, according to ability; but do not expect to obtain large wages at first: it is better to take small wages, learn thoroughly the American method of cooking, and so go on step by step.

Really good laundresses can earn about the same wages.

A competent laundress, who possesses sufficient money to rent a suitable place, purchase tubs, &c.—one who understands her business *thoroughly*—is sure of success either in a small town or a large city. Ordinary laundry-work is paid for at the rate of from 75 cents (three shillings) to one dollar (four shillings) per dozen articles. Other domestic servants may earn from \$1.75 to \$4 per week.

Seamstresses are also sought for, and their wages—if resident in the family—would be about the same as those of cooks; in some families, and if they are very dainty and skilful, they may be paid more.

Dressmakers may also do well if they thoroughly understand cutting and fitting, and are careful to *finish* their work daintily. They may earn, if they go to work in families, from \$1.50 to \$2.50 per day, but out of this they would have to provide for lodging and partial board, and for the months when there is very little work to be done, viz., from July to October, and from January to April.

Shop-assistants are badly paid, and have to find their own board and lodging.

Telegraph operators receive from \$25 to \$60 per month.

The watch factories present a good source of employment for women, but the demand for employées is not so great as when I came here ten years ago, and all vacancies are promptly filled. The wages paid vary from 60 cents to \$2 per day.

Respectable board and lodging cannot be obtained for less than \$4 per week; the plainest laundry-work will cost you 50 cents per dozen articles in a country town, and from 75 cents to a dollar in the cities; so that in my opinion it is the wisest plan for women who come here to seek work, to try to obtain employment where they can also find a home. American boarding-houses, such as working women can afford to patronise, are anything but pleasant. English women cannot become accustomed to them, to their general stuffiness and disorder, the strange *mélange* of inmates, the tobacco-chewing and spitting of the men, and many other disagreeables too numerous to mention. I have tried boarding more than once, and always with the same result of complete disgust.

To all I would say, if you are earning a reasonably comfortable living in England, do not think of coming here to do better; but if you cannot find employment at home, then come here with the determination to work earnestly. Truly you must resolve, whatsoever your hand finds to do, to do it with your might; you

have not a chance of success if you are faint-hearted or wait for some one to help you. If you show yourself capable, energetic, successful, plenty will assist you to do better; but if by any chance you fail, you will have to "straighten *yourself* up," and commence once more, with what courage you may, to win back success by your own unassisted efforts. I speak from experience and observation. You will find the life here very different from any to which you have been accustomed. You will probably suffer much for some time from the change of climate, the intense heat of the summer, the great cold of the winter; but, above all, you will feel oppressed in the winter by the close warmth of the houses—whether heated by stoves, or steam, or hot air—and the insufficient ventilation, especially in the sleeping-rooms. But to these things you will learn, as time goes on, to accommodate yourself, and also how to obviate their disagreeable effects.

Do not for one instant imagine that the social barriers supposed to stand in the way of advancement in England are levelled here. Whatever Americans may say, class feeling—caste—is as strong here as in the old country. In both countries a *man* who has intellect, education, and *will* can surmount all obstacles, and gain for himself entrance to whatever society pleases him; a woman cannot, or only now and then—not by any means as a rule. You will make plenty of pleasant acquaintance in your own position, and you will be received pleasantly by those to whom you are intellectually akin; but should they be possessed of wealth, and you be a worker, there rises immediately the barrier. You will be no more likely to be invited to their social gatherings than in England—nay, by my experience, not as likely.

The best time of the year for teachers to leave England is in July or August. Schools close in June and re-open in September, and during the holiday months engagements are made for the ensuing school year. Applicants should not trust to advertising or answering advertisements, but apply at once to some well-established agency, such as will be found in all large towns.

If possible, provide yourself with dresses (including one good black one) of serviceable materials, sufficient to last you at least one year, also with a warm winter cloak, an umbrella, and all necessary flannel garments for winter wear. Cotton goods are much the same price here as in England, therefore do not cumber yourself with print dresses; bring only such few as you may require to work in, should you choose domestic service.

I am not supposing that those for whom I write this have any money to spare: if so, they would remain in England. Therefore, I say, travel as cheaply as you can, do not hesitate to take an intermediate passage by any of the great lines of steamers: you will be very comfortable. I would not recommend any woman to take a steerage passage if she can avoid it, because in the summer time that portion of the steamer is so crowded; but if she cannot afford anything else, she may be quite sure of kindness from all officials, especially if it is seen that she is travelling alone.