

AN EXTINCT INDUSTRY.

By ONE WHO HAS SURVIVED IT.



pleasant and very informational little article on type-

writing which appeared in THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER for February, has set the present writer thinking of the palmy days of another industry, which now, partly owing to type-writing, is well-nigh extinct, but which, ere it expired, was made useful as one of the first

avenues by which women forced their way into employment, other than teaching or domestic work.

It must be more than thirty years ago, since a little office was opened in Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn, for the instruction of women in law copying, and the procuring of work for them in that and allied directions. The original head of that office was a Miss Rye, a woman of great energy, who afterwards devoted herself to the work of juvenile emigration. She was, I believe, a solicitor's daughter, which probably made it possible for her originally to obtain the knowledge of the art she imparted. Among her friends and supporters was Miss Bessie Parkes (now Mdme. Belloc), also a lawyer's daughter. With the advantage of introductions procured through such influence, the little office had started, I was told, only too brilliantly. A much greater quantity of work poured in than the skilled workers were able to do, and some disappointment and failure were the first results. By-and-by, however, things settled down, and it was quite clear that women could do the work.

It may be asked what there was in such work beyond the skill of any woman who could write. To this the answer is that the average woman of thirty-five years ago wrote a pale, pointed calligraphy, set off by as many "riding whips" and "fishing rods" as possible. Now lawyers required for their documents a plain, bold hand. Mind, we say for their documents, not their deeds. For those a curious, quaint, upright writing was used, called "engrossing."

Further, lawyers' documents are written in special forms. They are quite as particular as editors that paper must be written over only on one side. I think they are even more particular about "margins."

Again, copies of "affidavits" are written on a different kind of paper from "briefs," and an "Abstract of Title" is written on brief paper, but in very different form from a brief. Documents of one kind are fastened together in the corner, of another, are stitched down the back. Some have to be fastened with a fine green silk ribbon, and some with the "red tape," which has become the very symbol of officialism. All these little distinctions are not as they may seem, the mere outgrowth of use and wont. They serve a genuine purpose, by making each kind of document readily recognisable at a glance, no mean advantage for a lawyer's table whether in his office or in court. The precise accuracy and distinctness of "endorsements," i.e., the title written on the outside of the folded document is also very important, otherwise in the rush and pressure of business very awkward mistakes might be made. On a

"brief," for instance, beside the names of Smith the plaintiff *versus* Jones the defendant, there should be always added "Brief for the Plaintiff" or "Brief for the Defendant," as the case might be.

"Whatever else you do, always put that plainly," said one humorous old solicitor to me. "Don't you know that for want of that, a barrister once rushed into court and began to plead for the wrong side, and when the solicitor pulled his gown and said, 'But you are for the plaintiff,' I don't know what might have happened, save that the pleader was a sharp fellow, and turned it off by saying, 'Now, my Lord, having told you all that the defendant can possibly say for himself, I shall proceed to prove that his case has not a leg to stand upon.'"

Perhaps it may be well to explain that affidavits are the statements of witnesses, put into formal shape. On these affidavits witnesses are afterwards cross-examined by the counsel (barristers) on the opposing side.

"Briefs" are the whole history of any case prepared by the solicitor from the instructions of his client and the documents submitted to him. These briefs are then handed to the barrister. The solicitor acts as an intermediary between client and barrister. Many of the briefs I knew were very interesting, and really gave one excellent training in clear narrative or close reasoning.

"Abstracts of Title" mean short epitomes of the deeds, by which property of any sort passes from hand to hand or from generation to generation.

The lawyer's own manuscript, from which such documents are prepared, is probably written in a crabbed illegible hand, which inexperience might find hard to decipher. And it is certain to be filled with the most wonderful abbreviations, which must be understood before they can be written in full. And no knowledge of ordinary abbreviations would help one here. Nobody could "guess" that "messes" meant messages or that "assns" meant assigns, though they might make a lucky hit that "exors" and "ads" meant executors and administrators!

It is very odd to reflect what a slight thing may turn one's thoughts and so start one's life in a certain direction. When I was quite young, I found in a penny weekly journal (which came into our house by accident as a wrapper) a short story about a girl, who earned money for her mother's dying lodger, by imitating the writing he had done "for the lawyers," and taking it to his employers as if it was his own work. I don't know how it was, but the story, or rather its central idea, fascinated me. Singularly enough, at that very time, I found among some papers which were "cleared out" for destruction some old legal documents. I took possession of them and straightway imitated their writing. This caused such a change in my own, as was very unfavourably commented on by my school-fellows and by my governess, but which was highly approved by the English master.

I thought nothing more of the matter for years, when it became desirable that I should speedily find some means of earning money, that I might be independent while pursuing the object of my own pet ambition. Hearing that women had already begun "to do writing for the lawyers" on their own account, I turned my thoughts to the endeavour.

Because my old law papers had taught me a little, they had also convinced me I did not know everything, and I saw I must not at once attempt work on my own responsibility. There was no opening at Portugal Street

itself, but after a little inquiry, I found a lady who had herself been trained there, who was willing to impart her skill for a small fee, and who promised to find me at least some remunerative work as soon as I was fit for it. My strange old studies did me good service, for though for some time I required to ask direction when a new type of document arrived, still, at the end of a week, I was earning money, and I scarcely required to modify the handwriting I had already formed. My employer and teacher told me that, as a rule, novices took about three months' training and practice before they were worth anything at all.

In so many ways this work resembled that of the modern typist that I need not go into further details. Even the payment was the same, half-a-crown for twenty folios, each folio seventy-two words. A quick writer on a "good" piece of work could earn nearly two shillings an hour. But so far as our little office was concerned we had no regular hours. There was not enough regular work for a full staff (there were only three of us with an "extra" occasionally), and we just did what came, when it came! After two or three days of absolute idleness, so far as "office work" was concerned, a great pile of work would arrive one evening, say, a Tuesday evening, marked "return Thursday morning." We simply sat up all Tuesday night, worked on all through Wednesday and into Wednesday night until the task was completed. Then we might have more days of idleness. It was a life that looks very destructive of health and nerve. But it suited the peculiar circumstances surrounding me at the time, and I used to feel a sort of wild joy and pride in performing feats of endurance. Upon the whole I do not think that the late work in a quiet, cool room was a bit more "trying" than many of the "dissipations" which involve late hours, heated atmospheres and all sorts of emotional strain.

In one matter, our life and that of the modern typists run parallel, to wit, that every moral quality and mental endowment tells in the value of the work. One or two of the lawyers said that they preferred our writings to that of the ordinary "law stationers," because ours had more "individuality" and were consequently less tiring to read, an argument which bears against the monotonous "Civil Service" hand of to-day. Then again it seemed to me that every little quaint bit of information one possessed got called out, sooner or later, or one was left hopelessly at fault for want of it. This was more especially the case when we took writing other than law writing. Such outside writing was generally the confused MSS. of authors working in some obscure or recondite line. I remember the delight of one gentleman (now among our most distinguished authors) to find that even in his peculiar writing, and throughout a long MS., I could decipher and spell certain Indian words which scarcely anybody knew familiarly in those days, so long before the time of Rudyard Kipling.

It is pleasant to find that whatever mechanical changes may come—and type-writing itself will meet these in its turn—the full value of individuality and intelligence still remains.

We scarcely had any work in the way of business circulars. In those days these were generally lithographed. But we undertook the addressing of envelopes and newspaper wrappers. For these all sorts of prices were paid, from 2s. 6d. to 7s. 6d. per thousand. For the lower price, unskilled writers were

engaged simply to copy addresses straight off from streets marked in the Directories by the employer. For the higher rates "good" writers were wanted, *i.e.*, those who wrote bold hands, not too like a mere clerk's, and for the highest rates a knowledge of London and a share of tact and common-sense were required. For instance, was an "appeal" for some charitable institution being issued, the envelope addresser of the best class should know what streets to take for such a case, and even what individuals might well be omitted from such chosen streets. In the case of a musical, an artistic, or an educational prospectus the same judgment would turn in different directions.

What mistakes may be made for lack of such judgment, and what waste and misunderstanding may result can be understood when I relate that a friend of mine, a lady teacher, has lately told me that when she arrived in a certain provincial town and entrusted the issue of her prospectus to an office there, she found it had been sent, not to the heads of families in the residential quarter, but to the offices of professional men, many of whom were young and unmarried!

Very few, indeed, can "address" more than 1100 or 1200 in an "eight hours" day. It requires considerable energy and expertness to maintain that rate. Envelope addressing used to be a very good test for aspiring copyists. It tested their accuracy, for if there were mistakes the relentless Dead Letter Office returned the envelopes to the indignant employer. It also found out their common-sense—or the lack of it. I remember on one occasion we had a pile of letters sent us, from whose headings and signatures we were to cull our addresses. The work could not be very well paid, and we were told by the gentleman who sent it that we were not to waste time in vainly attempting to make out whether some illegible writer signed himself Jas. or Jos.; so long as the envelope reached its destination that would suffice. I was working along with a novice, and finding that the surnames brought her to a dead stand, to her own loss and the waste of time, I suggested that we should share the work, I deciphering the signatures (in which by that time I had grown tolerably expert) and she writing from my dictation. Presently I found I had got a number of letters from clergymen, who really seemed

from that experience to be sinners above all others in their signatures, especially as regarded their Christian names.

"Oh, well," said I, "'vicarage' and 'rectory' will save from any mistake in delivery. So we will just put a 'dash.'"

The Rev. — Scrawl,
The Vicarage,
Scribble, Yorks.

On I went—

The Rev. — Blotte,
The Rectory,
Angles, Norfolk,

when glancing at my companion's work I saw, to my mingled dismay and amusement, that she was following my instructions in each case by writing out in full the Rev. Dash Scrawl, and the Rev. Dash Blotte, as if the reverend gentlemen were dogs!

Of all the office work I ever did I liked least engrossing on parchment. It was paid at the rate of 2d. per seventy words. But to me it was slow, disagreeable work which I could never make really profitable. To facilitate writing on the skin we used a fine kind of powder called "pounce," which we sprinkled out of a thing like a pepper castor and then smeared softly over the whole surface. I have seen old desks in which a "pounce bottle" was fitted quite as a matter of course as an ink-bottle might be. I believe that many years ago it was required even for the kinds of paper that were then in use. I do not know whether any newer invention has now superseded its use on parchment. Occasionally a "plan" to be inserted in a deed gave scope for accurate draughtsmanship, and there was a good deal of art and dexterity in preparing the "seals" of parchments. On mere paper deeds the seals are generally red paper wafers adhesive on one side.

Three or four copies of a document were often required, and were done by us simultaneously, each sheet as finished being passed on from hand to hand. In that case the "reading for correction" always fell upon the best and quickest workers who were first done. That and the other unpaid part of the work, the counting of the folios, was the little tax whereby "the strong" aided the infirmities of "the weak." I never heard any discontent with the arrangement.

The first women who undertook such work as I have described, had trials which similar workers to-day are spared. To begin with, they were going contrary to all the antecedents of their lives, and to habits of thought and manners which, ingrained for generations, had well-nigh become instincts. Most of them had to face the disapprobation, or at least the reserve, of many whose good opinion they esteemed, yet who remained perversely blind to the pressure of individual needs in a changing state of society. They had to go into offices and houses of business where women, far from being the familiar sight they are to-day, had scarcely been seen before. They had to deal with men, many of whom were wise enough to recognise them as the pioneers of a great female invasion of domains that had hitherto been sacred to themselves. They had constantly to remember that they held the honour of their sex in their hands, and that any flightiness or folly, any imbecility or failure would not be set down merely against an individual, but might damage the prospects of hundreds.

But some of us, at least, who bore the burden and heat of that day, eventually passed into our domestic retreat with a better based opinion than we could otherwise have had of the solid good there is in human nature. And in these times when a certain feminine clique are shrieking of man as the natural enemy of woman, and as if the one was a creature of prey and the other a helpless quarry, we are prepared to give our testimony that we never once encountered the slightest incivility either of rudeness or of pseudo-"compliments," but on the contrary often received great kindness and were met with the most honest camaraderie from those who, in the interests of their own earnings might well have looked askance at us. I shall never forget the practical goodness of one "law-stationer" who, warning me that I was sure sometimes to get a rush of work beyond the skilled female labour at my command, and might suffer professional damage in consequence, volunteered to come to my rescue in any such emergency—and did not fail to fulfil his promise.

On some other occasion, perhaps, I may relate some of our experiences in "working out" at the residences of patrons who required help on their own premises.

VARIETIES.

"DON'T."

- Don't adopt the latest mode.
- Don't trail your dress upon the road.
- Don't ever lace your waist too tightly.
- Don't wear a glove or boot unsightly.
- Don't wear a thing that needs repair.
- Don't, please, forget to brush your hair.
- Don't ever wear too large a check.
- Don't show too much of snowy neck.
- Don't paint the lilies and roses on your face, fair maiden.
- Don't buy ribbons and chiffons because everyone else does; wait, until everyone doesn't, and then, don't buy.
- Don't have windows in your gloves and stockings, where they were never intended to be.
- Don't think the love your tiny waist wits will wash; because it won't.
- Don't dye while life is left in you.
- Don't be a slave to fashion, but rather make fashion your handmaid.
- Don't follow fashion blindly to any of her extremes; she has a way of laughing at fools of her own creating.
- Don't think because your neighbour's bonnet

is becoming to her, it will necessarily be becoming to yourself.

Don't go in for quantity so much as quality in dress. One well-made gown is worth half a dozen ill-fitting ones.

Don't neglect the accessories of dress; untidy gloves, unshapely shoes, will destroy the effect of the most charming toilette.

Don't, above all things, forget you are a woman; she is far more attractive when seen in the flowing draperies that centuries of use have made their own, than when masquerading as a man.

Don't invest in a cheap edition of the very latest fad.

Don't have several smart "jerry-built" gowns where one plain tweed would be more befitting.

Don't follow fashion, when fashion is folly.

Don't buy hats at the expense of boots.

Don't buy in haste and repent at leisure.

Don't ignore the conventional, and torture your friends with "a style of my own."

Don't wear dead rats round your throat, though it be the fashion.

Don't neglect the neat tying of a veil.

Don't put on your gloves in the street.

"LET THERE BE LIGHT."

In Haydn's oratorio of "The Creation" there is a unique arrangement which gives tremendous force to the words, "Let there be light." The gradual fading of the previous sounds prepares the ear for a thrilling surprise. Instantly there is a crash of all the instruments, producing the effect of a thousand torches suddenly flashing from darkness and illuminating the space.

On one occasion the oratorio was being given in Vienna, and Haydn, then in his seventy-sixth year, and very feeble, was taken to hear it. When the orchestra came to this passage, the whole audience rose, and turning to the old man, applauded with enthusiasm. Haydn, pointing upwards, falteringly exclaimed, "It came from there!" and overcame, fell back and was carried out.

NO MORE BITTER THOUGHTS. — "Our thoughts," says Jeremy Taylor, "like the waters of the sea when exhaled towards Heaven, will lose all their bitterness and saltness, and sweeten into an amiable humanity until they descend in gentle showers of love and kindness upon our fellow-men."