

## FINDING EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN.

BY ANNE BEALE.



NE of the last meetings presided over by the Earl of Shaftesbury was that of the Society for the Employment of Women. It was pleasant to watch him at these annual gatherings. We see him now, seated at the unpretentious table, listening to the report read by Miss King, the secretary; and hear his appreciative comments. He was wont to say that nowhere did he see so much useful work done at so small a cost, and praised the female talent for economy accordingly. He declared that, but for arbitrary custom, he would be waited on entirely by neat-handed Phillises; and lamented the days of his youth, when none but waitresses ministered to the needs of members of the House of Commons. He rejoiced over the successful registry kept in that office for waitresses and others; as well as over the innumerable branches of employment spreading to all points of the compass from that special centre. He pointed to the walls, hung with artistic specimens of all the industries, and wondered at the progress made by women both in intellectual and manual work during the last quarter of a century. He, who never undertook

what he did not understand, knew that much of this was mainly due to the Society he praised so highly, and our readers can scarcely do better than follow the example of England's Philanthropist, and examine some of the results of twenty-nine years' labour at 22, Berners Street. Most of the new occupations found for women during this period have been either established or materially aided by this parent institution, which, unnatural as it may seem, casts off her children and bids them support themselves as soon as they are old and clever enough to find food and shelter.

The first promising child of this prolific mother that we call upon outside this central home is located at 126, Strand. Here the Type Writing Office, which is a direct offshoot of the Society, is presided over by Mrs. Marshall, a lady well fitted for her work. She introduces us into the cheerful room where a dozen girls are seated before those marvellous machines which click off your thoughts, or copy your manuscripts more rapidly than many could transcribe them. In these days, when speed is everything, people yield to machine power, and allow these complicated typewriters to copy sixty-five words a minute instead of using pen and ink for the same purpose. Here are various degrees of skill—from the accomplished typist



THE TYPE-WRITING OFFICE.

assistant who can perform the above-mentioned feat, to the plodding learner puzzling over the keys like a six-year-old pianist. Six weeks is the minimum period of apprenticeship, but a much longer time is needed to attain proficiency. Indeed, the typist should be a girl of education, and should enter into the spirit of the work copied. This is apparent from the scientific as well as amusing works submitted to our inspection. One-third of the MSS. printed are medical, many are polemical, most are abbreviated or written illegibly, and some have quotations even from the Greek and Latin. It is curious sometimes to compare the copy with the original; and one admires the patience and skill of the transcribers, or transprinters (which is it?), and understands that success in this art, as in every other, depends on perseverance and intelligence. The demand for type-writers increases, and several ladies, trained by Mrs. Marshall, are established in London as well as in Liverpool, Oxford, and Cambridge.

Although our young friends look happy, seated in a comparatively easy position at their key-boards, they rejoice at the tea-hour, and we rejoice with them at sight of the kettle on the hearth and the cups and saucers. Respite from work! how good it is! and how pleasant the flow of talk of the released prisoners! They say they like their work, which is more easily done by young than by old and stiffened hands; but anxiety to live by it is tolerably apparent. Surveying the bright young faces, in a pretty room adorned by pictures, fans, and artistic workmanship, it is difficult to realise that each individual inmate will have to struggle for daily bread. We bid them God-speed, and partake of a cup of their good tea with Mrs. Marshall in her outer chamber. She tells us how that from thirty shillings to two pounds a week may be gained by expert typists and shorthand writers, but that they should have a knowledge of one or more foreign languages. She tells us, also, of the immense progress this profession has made since her office was opened in 1884.

As type writing and shorthand writing seem to go hand in hand, we may as well proceed to inspect another branch of female industry fostered by the Society for the Employment of Women. This Society was, we believe, the originator of classes for women in shorthand, and held a class at the office weekly, until the Metropolitan School for Shorthand was established. Hither they now send their girls for instruction, and hither we will wend our way through a maze of what it is the fashion to call "vehicular traffic." We certainly find ourselves in a maze of passages; and as to the flights of stone steps we have to mount to reach our goal, we can only say that strong muscles and plenty of breath are needed for the ascent. We make it with difficulty, and are thankful to arrive at an apartment where about thirty young women are receiving the first lessons in shorthand. A master specialist superintends the writing in the strange hieroglyphics used for the purpose. The room is singularly quiet, and great is the abstraction of the learners. But this is, so to say, the infant-school. Only from thirty to fifty words a minute are written here from dictation, and instruction is slow

and gradual. The other two rooms devoted to women are more lively. From seventy to one hundred words a minute is the maximum of No. 2; while in No. 3 the rapidity of from one hundred to one hundred and fifty is obtainable. It is no wonder that speed certificates are given to such as can perform the amazing feat of taking down, from the lips of a speaker, one hundred and fifty words in sixty seconds! We are told that ladies are among the most successful pupils



MISS KING.

in this school of phonography, and they can either go through the whole course by spending the day at the work, or employ their spare time in it. There are special instructors in every department; and the inventor of phonography, Mr. Isaac Pitman, examines every student's work and grants certificates to proficient. They are always sure of lucrative employment when they obtain "speed certificates;" so in these days "slow and sure" is an obsolete proverb, and the fable of the "hare and the tortoise" a story of the past. Five guineas is the charge for a complete education in shorthand; less sums are paid according to the instruction given; and pupils may attend at any hour between ten a.m. and ten p.m. Every facility is afforded to the learner, and in this wilderness of a mansion three of the innumerable rooms are appropriated to the weaker sex—*weaker*, it is contended, only in strength of body, but not in strength of will!

No sooner have we seen them at their type and shorthand writing than we are invited by our friend, the indefatigable secretary, to inspect the wood-engraving office, in which women are employed, in the same building. Here we find half a dozen young ladies working at this interesting but difficult art,

To acquire it, they must be able to draw well, and much skill and neatness of hand are indispensable.

"It is nice work, but it is so long before one is paid for it!" say the girls rather despondently.

The fact is that in this, as in most other arts, proficients get the lion's share of the food. An artist will scarcely entrust his block to an unskilled engraver. Still, the really competent are rarely unemployed. But it is doubtless hard for the young to sit hour after hour bending over work that they fear may not be remunerative. It is easy to advise perseverance, but difficult to persevere. At the head of the class is one who has persevered, and makes a good income, and of her the others speak admiringly. Happily they are not envious, and look very cheerful under their difficulties; though cheerfulness is almost as hard to maintain as perseverance.

We can only glance at wood-carving, plan-tracing, hair-dressing, chromo-lithography, and other branches, to which pupils have been apprenticed by the Society of which we write, because Miss King invites us to see with our own eyes how the said pupils are articed by the committee she represents. Before we proceed to the Women's Printing Office, 21B, Great College Street, Westminster, we would advise our readers to peruse the report issued from Berners Street for the current year. This gratuitous counsel given, we proceed briskly on our way.

It is refreshing to pass through quiet Dean's Yard, and to reach a rural spot, where there is actually a flower-bed near the door, and greenery about the window. Miss King is expected, and we enter the small office. Here we are joined by the secretary, one of the ladies of the committee, the young girl and her mother. The indentures are duly read and signed, and a promising young maiden of fifteen is apprenticed for three years. The premium, paid by the Society, is five pounds, but after the first three months the juvenile compositor will earn 2s. 6d. a week, rising 6d. every three months during her apprenticeship. Naturally, when her apprenticeship has expired, she will compete with others for a fixed wage.

The workroom communicates with the office, and here nine women are occupied at their high desks as compositors. Some are young, some old hands, but all are busily engaged in setting up type. The machinery is managed by a man and two boys, employed exclusively for the purpose.

"I love my work when I can get it to do," says one of the compositors. "I have been at it twelve years, and can make a good living when employed. We are here from nine till half-past six. Some printers employ women, but not all."

There is still, it appears, a latent jealousy between the sexes in this trade, but doubtless that will disappear. Indeed, competition is so keen that people have not time for jealousy. Such good and careful work is done here that customers have expressed high approval of it; and all that is wanted to insure an enlarged sphere of labour in this particular branch of women's work is the confidence and support of the public. That oft-quoted authority, Mr. Ruskin, has expressed his approval of it.

"Branches of Women's Work!" Why, they spread

everywhere. We return to our starting-point, the office in Berners Street, and find one nearly opposite. This bears for title "Decorative Art Studios," and owes its growth and strength to Mrs. Louisa Avant. On the ground floor is a dazzling display of painted glass *écailline*, terra-cotta, Renaissance tapestry, painted satin sachets and bags, miniatures, and various other specimens of decorative art. No less than two thousand of the sachets, a fabulous number of the dainty bags, and a portion of the beautiful painted glass, are about to be sent to America. On the first floor we find painted screens from designs by the lady workers, tapestry, Rhodian curtains, and painted window-blinds. We are so fortunate as to be introduced to Miss Turek, the inventor of *écailline* and various "mediums"—not spiritualistic, but decorative.

*Écailline* is a fine lustrous enamel resembling tortoiseshell, and is applied at the back of ordinary glass; and the other "mediums" appear to be colours for painting on all sorts of fabrics, from linen to glass and china. These "mediums" are used in all the artistic work we contemplate with so much pleasure. We are allowed to glance at the workers, who are just now literally "working their fingers to the bone" to complete orders received; for this is a wholesale house. Lady artists and articed pupils, as well as young girls who may be styled artistic needlewomen, are all busy as bees. Among them are several apprenticed here by Miss King and her committee, and any number of really *competent* helpers may find remunerative occupation. But, in this as in all other industries, unskilled hands are worse than useless. All employed here are women, and the energetic ladies who have originated and who carry on the business may be called public benefactors.

We will end this sketch where we began it—at 22, Berners Street. Yesterday we had tea with Mrs. Marshall; to-day it is with Miss King and her friend and co-secretary Miss Lewin. After this refreshment we are regaled by more work. Looking over a few pages of well-kept ledgers and registers, etc., we are amazed at the multifarious situations found at this office for women. Here are a few of them just as they arise:—"Clerk, book-keeper, housekeeper for an institution, compositor, shorthand secretary for member of Parliament, two auditors, nursery governess, dressmaker, waitress, superintendent of science and art examinations for women, upholstress;" in short, every occupation under the sun. And the registry is free, while two testimonials are required for the respectability of the registered.

And here is a page of what is called "odd office work," for which over £170 has been paid during the year:—"Addressing envelopes, directory, copying specifications, petitions, appeals, streeting boroughs, alphabetical list of voters;" we look up from the page and inquire. Neither sectarianism nor political bias admitted here! We learn that lists of voters were prepared, boroughs streeted, and cards and addresses sent at the last election for the Conservative, Liberal, and Radical candidates! Ten thousand addresses left the office, for which five shillings per thousand was received. When we consider the work done, and learn that the average income of this Society is £335 a year,



THE COMPOSITORS' ROOM.

we have no hesitation in pleading for increased aid to enable it to enlarge its borders. Debt is an unknown disgrace here; therefore care must be taken to "help those who will help themselves." To this end girls are trained and apprenticed, technical education having been long the object of the committee. Thus during the last ten years 642 girls have been thoroughly trained, and most of them now occupy important and useful places in this business world. Many thousands have been helped to employment, and the office is seldom void of candidates for it.

At the moment, we are roused from the consideration of registers by an influx of young women. It is seven o'clock, and nearly a score of them come in by twos and threes to the book-keeping class, held from seven to eight-thirty on Mondays and Thursdays. While they settle, we are shown their neatly written books—copy-book, day-book, petty-cash, cash, invoices, ledger, and journal. We hope the reader will understand them better than the writer, who yet fully appreciates the obligation on the learners to write a clear round hand, and to keep their figures and delicately drawn lines of

red and black ink in mathematical order. These learners come from all parts, and truly they must have their "daily bread" much at heart to journey hither from Brockley, Hornsey, Tufnell Park, Barnsbury, Plumstead, Peckham, and other places. They pay sixpence a week, but the Society pays the teacher, who has won, not only *their* certificate, but certificates for book-keeping and commercial correspondence from the Society of Arts, and herself holds a responsible position in a large firm. She gives out the, to us, difficult problems, which are taken down by her attentive pupils, all of whom hope to gain the Society's certificate after successful examination. Several hundreds of women, so certificated, are now maintaining themselves as book-keepers, which employment is one of the most prolific branches of the Berners Street ancestral tree. While these nightingales are sheltered beneath its leaves—in less poetical parlance, while our class of future book-keepers plod on towards perfection—we take our departure, praying that ever more and more success may attend the labours of those who thus devote themselves to the welfare of their fellow-creatures.

