

and back-biting and pride, the kings and queens, the poor ignored and the ugly ducklings. The salary differs so at different shops that it is impossible to give more than a very rough estimate. The pay runs from £15 to £200 per annum, according to the shop, position held therein, &c. This sounds low, it being, of course, that the former and not the latter is the more general figure; but board and lodging are, it must be remembered, provided as well, and also there is commission money on certain articles, especially at sale times; and sales are now a recognised fact in nearly all large establishments, and small ones, too, for the matter of that. Linen drapers, fancy shops, &c., employ ladies; also many stationers. There is usually a premium asked, averaging from £5 to £40 or £50, and also "time" is expected to be given, one, two, or three years; but, as I said before, every establishment has in this respect its own rules. The work is fairly agreeable, and there is the pleasure of being always able to look neat and nice, also the charm of variety; but the long hours of standing—though many shops now provide seats for their assistants—are a great drawback, having in many cases brought on ill-health. The hours are long and customers can be aggravating; the feeling of "surveillance" and the want of independence are trying. It is like being at school again, and has all the disadvantages as well as the advantages of school life. The principal lesson to be learnt is self-control, a difficult lesson to perfect, believe me. Young ladies look very favourably on this sphere of labour, and it is therefore very difficult to obtain entrance into first-class houses without introductions, and second-class houses are—well, to be avoided. Country firms take rather less premium and are better in many respects for learning the desired trade. Window dressing is now an art, and those possessing taste for it will find that it is pleasant and easy way of advancement; but this taste falls not to the lot of all. The gift is appreciated now the days of high art are upon us, and men have learnt that it is good to please the eye, and colour has become a science.

A FAIR education is absolutely necessary to obtain entrance within the gates of "Behind the Counter." The majority are refined, lady-like girls by birth, the daughters of tradesmen or farmers, though at some of the best London houses only professional men's daughters are admitted; but many ladies seek refuge in their ranks from the drudgery of "governessing," and often rise to be heads of their departments, whilst ambitious girls—whose mothers were content with domestic service—consider they raise themselves by entering a shop. No wonder the supply far exceeds the demand!

BUT these young lady assistants must be endowed apparently with perpetual youth. A grey-haired elderly spinster behind the counter! Why, the very idea raises a smile. But then the question follows, what does, what will become of these said young ladies when they grow old, for grow old they must assuredly, unless this one class has learnt the secret others have sought so arduously in vain? Perhaps a minority of them—owing to hard work and long standing—do not live to reach middle age. Those that the gods love die young, they say. Perhaps the prettiest and most fascinating among them marry, but even then there is a vast majority of whom to wonder whither they drift—to the workhouse, to add to the poor rate, or to swell the awful list of those who have died of starvation, or by their own hand, within the year?

MIGHT not a Society well be founded (and surely subscriptions would pour in) to provide homes or self-help institutions for the benefit of those who have served us often and well, that in their latter years they may find a place where they may "rest and be thankful"? And better still would it be if a guild could be started amongst the young ladies themselves, a sort of Assurance Company, but one not seeking its own profits, to provide for them, on payment of a small weekly sum, an annuity for old age averaging from £10 to £30 or £40, according to the payments made. Surely the masters would assist and forward so benevolent a scheme, even though thrift and economy are not now-a-days the characteristics of the English nation.

THE following story founded on fact, as I learn from good authority, having met a lady who knew a lady who knew the lady, is told of one of our largest establishments. A gentleman going to India had been making thereat large purchases ere quitting his native shores. His needs supplied, he was leaving the shop, when he was politely asked if he wanted anything more. "Nothing," he replied jocosely, "except a wife." "I think I can oblige you," answered the smiling proprietor. "I have a very charming young lady, the widow of a professional man, as one of my assistants; she has been driven by poverty to seek a means of livelihood thus." At the gentleman's desire the said young lady was introduced to him, and the "consequences were," as they say so often in the old game, "they married and lived happily ever after," but the world was unable for once to say, "I told you so."

THOSE who train the young are at last learning that home influence is after all the main factor in the formation of the ideas, the needle of the

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