

OUR WORKSHOP GIRLS



NELLIE BLY INVESTIGATES THE WEED. How the Pittsburg Tobby and the Aristocratic Cigar are Manipulated by Females.

Woman's labor is our theme, yet in order to get the sterner sex know-how improbable and impossible it is to forget or ignore them we described how their linen was "done up," and to be able to tell them how their cigars and tobaccos are made we paid a visit to Collins' Cigar Factory, Penn. avenue. This is the largest factory of the kind in the country. The tobacco comes from Pennsylvania, Indiana, Ohio, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Cuba.

When the tobacco is received it is taken to the basement, where the cases are opened. Girls then perform the first operation—"casing." Tobacco when dry is hard and stiff. The girls dip it in water and then lay it in a box where steam sweats it, thus making the leaf pliable and easy to work. It is then taken to the second story. In a large room seated around on benches are many chubby, merry-looking girls busily engaged in "stripping" tobacco and using their tongues. The tobacco is laid in a bunch by each worker. They take it on their knees, separate it from the stem, and then "hook" or smooth the leaf out in piles of one pound and tie together with bands. All the piles are weighed on scales by their side, so as to be exact. Stripping is done exclusively by girls. The stem is the only waste, as it cannot be utilized in any way. The smaller pieces are then spread out and



dried, and is utilized for the "filler" of the cigar.

A CHAT WITH A STRIPPER.

"Will you tell how your work is done and how you like it?" said Mr. Collins to one of the girls, and he started for another part of the factory. "Well, there is not much to tell," she remarked, looking pleasantly. "We take a bunch on our knee and pull out the stem. Then we smooth out the largest parts and put them in bundles of one pound each. The smaller pieces are taken for 'fillers.' " "Is the work hard?" "Oh, no; it is quite easy; one gets tired sitting at first, but we get used to it." "Do you work all day?" "We go to work about 8 o'clock, sometimes earlier, and we are generally done by 3." "How much can you make a day?" "We must always average \$1, sometimes more. It is generally owing to work being plenty and how we attend to our duties." "Did you ever work elsewhere?" "Yes, I studied to be a bookkeeper, and did work at it a long while. I had longer hours, harder work and less pay, besides my health is better here."

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At long tables across the room, divided into squares for each worker, are where the "bunchers" are. In front of them are placed the "fillers" and the "wrapper." The worker smooths out the blinder with a knife, puts in the filler, rolls it up and places it in wooden molds, which are made just the size of the cigar or toby. Great care must be taken that the same amount is put in each mold; if not enough or too much the toby will not smoke, consequently it is worthless. After these wooden molds are full they are closed, the worker's number put on, and they are put in the presses and left there for an hour or more to give them the desired shape. They are next sent to the inspecting table. The inspectors are always experienced hands. They open the molds, trim each cigar, throw aside the imperfect ones and fill in with others, when they again close the



mold, and it is taken to the rolling department.

"PLEASE AN EMPLOYMENT. "Do you like your work here?" was asked an "inspector." "Yes, I think it is a nice place." "Your work is not hard?" "Oh, no; of course we had to learn everything else before we could do this—go through every branch of the work." "Do you consider this healthy?" "Yes, I have had better health here than I had where I worked before." "Where was that?" "At a tacker factory." "Was your work easier there?" "No, indeed; we had to lift some heavy weights." "How much?" "Two girls would have to lift 150 and 200 pounds, and you know that is too much to make a girl do." "Were they kind to you there?" "Well, the owner was very good to us, but the foreman was a dreadful crank." "Can you tell me how your work is done?" "Was asked a "buncher." "No m," and she laughed heartily. "How long have you been here?" "Very nearly two years." "Then you should be able to tell how you do your work." "Well, I take a blinder, smooth it out on

the table, put in the filler, roll it up and put it in the molds." "That's very good; just what I wanted to know." Does the tobacco make you cough?" "Not now; it did a little at first."

At tables similar to those in the bunching department are girls and boys rolling—that is, putting on the last cover. This is the only department in which boys are engaged, and the girls outnumber them by far. The molds that are filled with cigars, after they have been pressed and inspected, are sent here. The wrapper or leaf is made perfectly smooth, and after applying paste at the tip of the wrapper they roll the cigar or toby, lay it in a mold, the right size, and with a stationary sharp knife cut off the surplus. After clipping them the desired length they are tied up in bundles of 100 each, with the girl or boy's number on the band. All employees are known by numbers; their tables, their bands, their mold, their hook in the dressing-room all bear corresponding numbers. Then if any work is defective it can be traced back to the right party. This sys-



tem has a tendency to make them very particular and exact. "How long have you been here?" was the query put to a roller. "About one year." "I suppose you know all the business by this time?" "No, it takes two years to learn it thoroughly." "Will you stay that long?" "I think I will, if they keep me," she added archly. "Do you intend to make this your business?" "As long as I work I will." "Why don't you go to school?" "Because I would rather work." "What do you do in the evening?" "I mostly crochet." "Do you ever attend balls?" "Yes, I have gone sometimes with my sister and her beau." "Do you dance?" "A little."

QUIZZING THE BOYS.

"Fritz, come here and tell all about this place—how you like your work; how you do it and how you are treated," said the gentleman in charge to a young lad. Fritz came up slowly, while he looked around at the other workers with a smile. He told how he did his work at the same time going through the motions with his hands. He liked the place, and they treated him nicely. He was not anxious to talk, for he kept looking around and smiling at his fellow-workers, so another bright, good-looking boy was called. As he set his foot up on the rim of the stove and pushed back his cap, I asked him: "How do you like your work?" "Oh, first rate," and he spit into the stove pan. "Do you intend to make this your future business?" "I don't know yet; have not decided." "Do you like the girls here?" "Yes, I like them first rate, sometimes." "Do you ever fight?" "Often, but they are make up again." "Who whips?" "The girls always, both with their tongues and fists. They're stronger, and I always get whipped. Girls are pretty nice, but I get enough of them. I tell you I'll never go to see them at night; get too much of them in the day time. Glad when evening comes so I can have a rest." "You have soured early in life. Do you think I could learn the business?" "Yes, I'm sure you can; are you going to try?" "Some time, perhaps. Wouldn't you like me to come and work beside you?" "Yes, first rate; but sometimes I like the girl that's there now."



All bundles of cigars are taken to the packing department, where girls are engaged in assorting and packing. Any cigar in the least damaged is cast aside, and those perfect are packed in boxes in numbers ranging from ten to five hundred. Each packet puts her mark on the boxes she packs, when they are taken to the storage room where every box is opened by the shipper and examined, and they are all right, correct in number, perfect cigars, etc. It crosses the box and it is sent to the labeling table, where it is stamped. The girls, after putting on the labels, arrange the boxes in piles, ready to be shipped on.

"Your work does not look hard," was the way we broached conversation with a girl labeling. "One girl's trials." "No, it is easy, although we are compelled to stand; but when we get very tired they always make a change. This is the only work in the building that requires much standing."

"You have a very pleasant building to work in." "Yes, and nice people to work for. I worked in a printing office and also in a box factory before I came here. Printing was hard on my health, so I left that and went to a box factory. There's the place you have a hard time. The foreman was just dreadful with us girls. Besides this the gentleman's wife came there—just moved in—brought her sewing machine and stayed here constantly to keep an eye on the girls. She has a terrible crank, and she was very mean. She was the cake, and said it was very mean to work for girls to eat. She got so bad in fact that all the girls left, so the gentleman had to make her stay at home. He was very nice, and that woman had a great church member and Christian. But she is badly mistaken." "Did you get good wages there?" "Oh, no; we thought we made a lot if we averaged 40 cents. It was a hard and a big day's work when we made that. No, indeed, I should never want to be such a slave again."

The factory inspected is five stories high, well ventilated, well lighted and so clean and neat as to be surprising. The firm employs at present 140 girls, and in the spring, when the building, which is new, is in good order, they will have three hundred or more. They have employed girls on a small scale for five years. Mr. Collins states that girls give better satisfaction, do better work and are more easily controlled than boys. Their hours are from 7 o'clock on Saturday they close at 3 o'clock. The wages run from \$3 to \$10 per week. The girls are healthy,

hearty and merry-looking. There is not a cross or unpleasant one in the place. They have a dressing and bathroom, and when they appear on the streets they look as neat and clean as if they had just stepped from a boudoir.

PRETTY AS A PICTURE.

A young lady was visiting there during your correspondent's tour. She was one of their expert workers, but as they have been working so steady of late, some of the girls have been given a holiday. She was pretty, and was dressed with elegant taste. An heiress could not boast of a prettier face or a more elegant street dress than this little "tobacco-constit." The latter she had earned with her own dainty fingers. This factory averages 200 cigars per day when running full. On a wet or cloudy day it is very difficult to work tobacco properly. There is nothing that draws dampness quicker than the weed. Counting what girls this firm has now and those engaged at the smaller places in the city, there are fifty hundred and fifty to four hundred earning their living in Pittsburg at this business.

A gentleman while at a summer resort, one day hired a boat and went for a sail. He handed the boatman a cigar.

"You're a Pittsburger, ain't you?" said the aquatic troller.

"Yes." "I knew it as soon as you handed me this," he said, taking a long draw and then blowing the smoke skyward. "You know, gentlemen, you know how your cigars are made; and as you sit meditating and smoking think of the little delicate fingers that fashion them and for your smoke be the pleasanter therefor."

NELLIE BLY.