

TAILORING.

There is a steady increase in the number of women employed in the tailoring trade, whilst at the same time labour-saving machinery is multiplying. Machines for cutting out, for making both coat and shirt buttonholes, for sewing on buttons, &c., are in use by several of the larger wholesale firms. Tailoring shops and workrooms, and the class of girl employed in them, vary greatly. In the old-established order or bespoke trade one finds either one or two machinists, experts—usually a superior class of girl, and treated with every consideration. If on piecework, these can make from £1 5s. to £2 a week; if on weekly wage, the log rate for a first-class machinist is £1 5s. In the wholesale trade, which has grown so rapidly of late years, a number of women and girls find employment to a small proportion of men as cutters and pressers. The character of these factories and workrooms, and the conduct of the girls employed, depends chiefly on the personality of the employer or manager. Very close factory inspection is required in some cases, whilst on the other hand some of our largest clothing-factories, notably those in Dunedin, are models, with admirable conditions in every respect. The scheduled log rates of pay of the Tailoresses' Union may be seen placed conspicuously on the walls, side by side with Factory Act regulations.

The numerically large proportion of girls employed in the clothing trade in Dunedin, and also the grouping together of so many fine factories within a small area, lend themselves to complete organization of the workers; consequently the Tailoresses' Union of Dunedin is a strong and compact body, numbering several hundred members. This organization of the workers is alike beneficial to employers and employed. The benefit to the girl-workers in being able to pay salary to an efficient secretary, willing to devote herself to their interests, is obvious, and no less obvious is the advantage derived by employers from so complete a system of organization in the protection afforded against undercutting in trade competition. As a rule, the Dunedin girl-workers in the clothing trade are of exceptionally fine physique, healthful in appearance. The cost of living being less in Dunedin than in some parts of New Zealand, and the log rates being uniform, the Dunedin girl is better off than many of her fellow-tradeswomen in other cities. This tends to her healthy development, and also to an independence that should check the curse of marriage for subsistence.

The Tailoresses' Union in Christchurch does good work; and there is also a union in Auckland, and one in Wellington. In the latter town there is difficulty in organization, as the tailoresses are scattered about in shops rather than massed together in factories; and the evil to be combatted, both in Auckland and Wellington, is "home-work," the only form in which "sweating" might find a nidus in New Zealand. Small retail traders, instead of getting their goods at established wholesale factories where the comfort and sanitary conditions of the workers are a point of consideration, give it out in small bundles to necessitous women, who undercut each other, and work long hours in their own cottages for a miserable pittance. However, "The Factories Act, 1894," enables the Inspectors effectually to check the growth of this evil—(1) By the definition of factory or workroom to be registered having been extended to rooms where two or more are employed; (2) by the obligation to affix a label upon clothing made in a private dwelling if unregistered as a workroom. I would like to suggest, however, that in any future amendment of the Factory Act the fee for registration of these smaller rooms be reduced.

The system of unpaid apprenticeship has not hitherto prevailed in the tailoring trade. The girls are paid a small sum weekly from the start, with a gradual rise, and are thoroughly taught one branch of the business. I regret, however, to say that during my visit to the South Island I found a young man employing six or eight girls; and he told me that he took them apprentices without wage for the first six months. I cannot speak highly of the rooms provided for the tailoresses in large shops as contrasted with those provided for the dressmakers. The tailoring department seems to be an after development; and, although obliged to comply with Factory Act in regard to sanitation, there is room for further improvement. In two instances—one in Oamaru and one in Dunedin—the tailoresses were working in underground cellars. This is not right. It necessitates long hours of artificial light, and cannot be healthful in any way. In any future amendment of the Act I would suggest a provision being inserted to prohibit workrooms below the level of the street.

Closely connected with the wholesale tailoring is shirt-making, and the conditions are similar. The larger factories—notably in Auckland and Dunedin—are all that could be desired, but the smaller places of business, and the "out-workers," demand efficient inspection.

BOOTMAKING.

The bootmaking industry employs a large number of girls, and conditions are, generally speaking, rougher than in the before-mentioned trades, although Factory Act regulations as to sanitation and hours of work are fairly complied with. The earnings of skilled machinists on piecework show a slight tendency to rise; as a counter-balance to this, many firms employ their girl-workers at a weekly wage, the nominal reason given being that girls on piecework are found to overtax their strength. The increasing use of power-driven machines is of undoubted benefit to the health of the workers, for the treadle-driving of the heavy machines used in bootmaking has a tendency to induce womb troubles. Girls employed in boot-factories have borne a reputation for a certain amount of rowdiness of behaviour. This is but what might be expected, so long as employers were content to crowd their workrooms to the full extent permissible, and let a number of young girls from fifteen to twenty years of age work in contiguity to the men employés. In several factories they work in the same room with the clickers, within interchange of speech and earshot. This lends itself to the display of a certain coarseness and rough behaviour amongst the younger girls. The newer and better-class boot-factories are showing an improvement in this respect by separating the girls