

SKILFUL CIGARETTE GIRLS.

VERY LITTLE ROMANCE AND MUCH WORK THE RULE AMONG THEM.

How the Tobacco Is Treated in its Progress from the Plantation to the Cigarette—Taking Care of Sick Girls—Washing All the Young Women to Keep Them Good—Wages Paid and the Work Pleasant—Girls Who Earn \$13.50 Per Week.

HERE is no more unimportant looking object than a paper cigarette. Even when it borrows grace from the bronzed figures and ruby lips of a daring girl it is association that makes it important and not divine right. All the same, it is a very pretty bit of experience to note the thousand and one twists and turns that are given to a long yellow leaf of tobacco before it is ready to sit in solace between a pair of lips, gulfed or gentle, as the occasion is. There is a Southern grandee puff forth his chief of staffs, and you can see it with his lips, all it is necessary with real Cuban tobacco, and then with that, cool and cool, yellow line not without some feeling, in an expression of nature, content, and to be forgiven. Yet, in no way, it is so much more than the exhibition of an ordinary cigarette.

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From the improving treatment the leaves go into the trough of the cutting-machine. They go in loosely enough, but when they are dragged by a brass-plate that, through the smallest possible apertures to meet the revolving knives the soft leaves are pressed into a block like wood. Standing in front of the knives and watching the mist, which is all that can be seen in their two thousand revolutions in a minute, the ever-changing surface of the shaven block of leaves is a sight of marvellous beauty. The four-flanged knives cut off innumerable fine shavings in a minute, and the result is a surface that looks like a yellow stem and veins change their relative position on the brown leaves with every cut, and the result is a winking, blinking mass that completely fascinates the beholder. The leaves are stopped, and in the box below is the shaven tobacco, exactly as we see it in the finished cigarette, damp, it is true, but that is necessary in the making, and the over-supply is kept covered by wet blankets until carried to the makers.

Then comes the making. You go into a large, low, light room, down which go long benches which are partitioned off in three-foot compartments. On each side, each at a piece of paper, sit the girls. Before them are a stout bit of paper fastened by the back edge to the table, two pounds of tobacco and some packs of rice paper. A marble slab is at the right hand end on it some lumps of wet starch and a long-pointed stick. With her left hand the girl picks up a paper, lays it on the roller with the front edge slightly projecting. With her right hand she picks up the tobacco, not too much, but just enough, and puts it on the rice paper, squeezing it a little into shape as she does so. Then she takes up the two corners of both papers that are nearest her and lays them over towards the back, then brings them back, rolling up the tobacco with her fingers as she does so. Getting it moderately firm, she changes to the tips of her fingers and rolls it snugly, lifting it the while from the under paper. A second and it lies along her left forefinger, rolled but with a loose edge. The starch stick glides along this, another twist and it is sealed and delivered, that is to say, dropped into the box edge of the bench.



RECEIVING INSTRUCTIONS. The process looks exceedingly simple, but it often takes a week of patient teaching and trial to learn in many motions correctly, and even then it is a long time to think how many motions it takes to make ten a thousand cigarettes in a day. The maker of thousands perfect cigarettes containing neither for ounces more nor less than two pounds, receives cents for her work. Does it seem possible, that any one could make 3,000 of these in a day? Well, they do. There are a number of girls at Duke's factory on Avenue A, who make from 2,500 to 3,000 a day. Mary Jones, a young woman, of course, and Miss White, who has some of their experts average 14,000 and 15,000 cigarettes a week, while one good girl who works here in order to do as much as the possibly can for her widowed mother, Sarah Winward by name, has made as many as 24,000 cigarettes in her week of five days. Miss White

now sits, so far as known, champion among the girl cigarette-makers of the city, although it is a common story that one man has been known to make 104,000 perfect cigarettes in a month of twenty-five days, an unprecedented feat.

After leaving the hands of the makers the cigarettes are passed over to the cutters, who sit between the benches and with big shears cut off the hanging shreds of tobacco from the ends. These shreds are constantly swept away by the little sweepers, whose duty it is to keep the floor always in perfect order. The finished cigarettes go next to the examiners, who run their hands through the boxes and, with the eyes of ferrets, pick out the badly made or imperfect ones. In some instances, 15 cents a hundred is taken out at the end of the week for cigarettes so badly made as to be necessarily split open and made again.

The boxing and stamping and the packing is work very easily imagined, the only particular interest being in the rapidity and automatic precision with which it is done. And indeed the whole fascination of the trade lies in the lightninglike nimbleness with which it is necessary to bring about a satisfactory result. The work is clean and is said to be healthy, the girls themselves claiming that they have rarely any trouble except with headaches, which is very possibly caused by the fumes of the tobacco, but very probably is nothing for which further reason is necessary than what lack of exercise and such close application to work can give.

The rules of attending to the business at hand are, of course, according to the factory. The two largest establishments in the city where girls are employed on hand work are Duke's and Kinney Bros.' In regard to Kinney's, considerable has been said of their hospital arrangements for girls, and much of this has been largely exaggerated. The fact is that the firm has put aside a room which is used as a day hospital. A girl is taken suddenly ill and sent there for the day and put to bed by the nurse—who is, by the way, a graduate of the New York Training School, she is visited and fed during the night, but when night comes she either goes home by herself or is sent in a carriage by the firm.

This scheme of treatment is one which is not paralleled in any other industry, but as a rule of general benevolence, the girls work better when they feel well in body and mind, and it is for the interest of their employers to do all that is in their power to attach the girls to them and render them faithful.



ABSTINENCE IS IMPOSED upon the workers, regardless of the fact that if they waste time it is their own loss, and the penalties imposed are exceedingly severe. At Kinney's the pay is from 20 to 30 cents a thousand, and it is of course to be understood that the girl who is caught whispering or talking with another girl is not down to 10 or 15 cents a thousand. A second offense brings either a further reduction or a solemn warning of loss. The third brings dismissal. A teacher or foreman—'queens,' as the girls call these lofty creatures—who utters sufficiently to speak even to an own sister otherwise than with the voice of authority is at once put down to making cigarettes again.

As to the dress and deportment and with leaving the building to go home. The firm employs a detective and any member of 'sneak-pigeons' who is taken these sentences at least. A girl who is seen on 42nd street at 11:30 at night is discharged the next day. A girl who is seen at any hour with a girl from another factory who are members of Assembly District 49 is reported immediately, and if she would join the Knights of Labor herself is at once 'laid off.' Direct discharge is not usual, but the same course is pursued that was carried out a year ago last May when two of the girls joined the union. Notices were put up all about the building that slack work would necessitate the 'laying off' for a time of some of their hands, and so girls not wanted were got rid of.

The life of an unsexed girl who is being allowed to and from her home, her home is a place and every detail of the attempt carefully noted can certainly not be overlooked, especially as it seems to be a common belief among them that it depends entirely upon a girl's graciousness to her up to what is reported of her.



A TYPICAL CIGARETTE GIRL. Her work and rest her for five years to school, at Mount St. Vincent, and then married her. This is a very pretty story, and it gains an additional romance from the cleverness of Mr. Kinney's engineer. He was bright enough to see things and he forthwith married Mary Brady's sister. As might easily be expected, he is now Superintendent of the Southern factory.

It does not often happen that romances come about among girls from their own friends, but it has in one or two instances, the girls attracting some salesman or manager by their neat, modest ways, and so doing very well for themselves. As a rule, however, they choose men of their home or outside acquaintances. Once married they rarely come back to their work again, but devote themselves to the homes they are then really enjoying for the first time.

Of course it naturally follows that in a class of people where girls from ten to fifteen years of age are set to work all the traces of civilization are not to be found, and yet the actual state of morality among them is far better than is often suggested. Ten years ago there were a number of girls wandering about from city to city, and from factory to factory, and they were sometimes of little credit to womankind. They had been up and down so many times that they got careless, and they drank and said bad words, like their big, old brothers. The manufacturers took in hand and soon weeded out the unpleasant element, getting as closely as possible to the line of faithful, honest girls.

At Kinney's there is so much restriction and authority that it is almost impossible to find the girls' real self, but at Duke's factory it comes straight to the surface. Mr. Duke looks after his girls very closely, but gives them a great deal of latitude. They may join as many orders as they please, and he will let them union rules as long as they like, provided the girls are reasonable and give him faithfully. He expects them to behave in the building, and he says he thinks they do—both there and out of doors. He does not expect young girls to be absolute machines. Indeed, if a stranger might be allowed to say so, I think he rather glories in their spunk a little while ago, when they rose in a body at a moment's notice in on business, took it upon them to make certain disagreeing remarks about them generally. At any rate, he winked when he tells how the man was obliged to pin himself together to go home. "Let them alone," he says. "They can take of themselves."

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