

EXCHANGES FOR WOMAN'S WORK.

HOW THE FIRST ONE WAS ESTABLISHED IN NEW YORK. THE SPREAD OF THE IDEA.

BY DAVID A. CURTIS.

It is now nearly a score of years since a benevolent impulse in the active brain of a woman took active form and resulted in an institution which has done great good to thousands of other women. The institution is called the New York Exchange For Women's Work, and while it is not connected with any of the numerous other similar exchanges that have been established in various cities all over the country it is fairly entitled to be called the parent organization, since it was the forerunner of the others, and the others are practically modeled after it.

The way of its birth was this: Mrs. M. L. Choate, wife of the well known William G. Choate, happened, one day in a fancy goods store, to see a lady of refinement and culture selling some fine needlework of her own literally at starvation prices and noticed the tears that gathered in her eyes as she accepted the pittance. It occurred at once to Mrs. Choate that some plan should be devised by which women should be enabled to dispose of their work at fair prices directly to consumers without losing the middleman's margin of profit. She invited to her own house a number of other women well known for their philanthropy and with them discussed the necessity for such an enterprise and asked their aid in formulating a plan for it.

Without going into a detailed account of the various plans suggested and the arguments presented it is enough to tell what was decided upon and what has grown out of that meeting.

The first step taken was the formation of a society of which Mrs. Choate was chosen president. Among the other officers and managers are the wives of Cornelius R. Agnew, William Amory, George F. Baker, Andrew Carnegie, Frederic Coudert, Charles F. Chandler, William E. Dodge, George Hoody, M. M. Holmes, Henry Iverson, A. D. Julliard, Russell Sage, John T. Terry, Francis B. Thurber, T. M. Wheeler, J. Henry Work and others to the number of about 40.

These ladies, acting under the advice of a board of eminent lawyers and business men, incorporated themselves under the laws of the state, taking the name of the New York Exchange For Women's Work. They then adopted a set of rules under which to do a regular consignment business for the purpose of carrying out Mrs. Choate's original idea.

As a matter of course, these rules have been modified from time to time as experience dictated, but they remain substantially the same as at first. Nothing was done hastily, but the system was carefully studied beforehand, and time has only elaborated the details of the original plan.

Feeling that the field into which they were entering was too large for them to cover entirely, they resolved to limit their efforts to the disposal of the handiwork of gentlemen whose circumstances make it necessary for them to work.

A strong disclaimer is made by the board of any motive of exclusiveness in this. The line is drawn where it is because it is absolutely necessary to draw it somewhere. Many hundreds of would be consignors apply to have their work disposed of, and if all were received there would speedily occur a large surplus of supplies over the demand which reaches this exchange.

"And what kind of work is it that is disposed of?" I asked Miss E. S. Vaill, the secretary of the exchange.

"Almost everything that women can make at home," was the comprehensive reply. "One special feature of our work is that it enables a multitude of women to maintain their homes who would without such help as we give be compelled to see those homes broken up, perhaps the family scattered. We learn to appreciate more and more all the time the importance of this point as we see ladies who come here distressed and almost heartbroken with apprehension growing happy and contented with the knowledge that they are wholly or in part self supporting.

"A curious and interesting fact illustrating this," continued Miss Vaill, "is that the demeanor of the ladies who come to us changes rapidly. It often happens when they first come, and it happened especially often when we first began, that they come in a shamed way, closely veiled and muffled so as to avoid recognition, and they talk almost in whispers, as if mortified at the necessity of working. But after awhile they come openly, with heads erect and faces glowing with honest pride. The educational effect of our exchange in this respect has been very valuable."

The exchange is located on Fifth avenue, where it occupies the whole of a handsome mansion which is hired at an expense of \$8,000 a year. A dozen or more ladies are hired at living salaries to attend to the different departments, such as the fancy work, the infants', the toy, the bric-a-brac and the domestic, or, more properly, kitchen, departments, where the thousand and one varieties of home manufactures are displayed for sale.

It is easy to see that conducting an establishment on such a scale means the expenditure of a large amount of money. This money is raised from

several different sources, and the urgent and constant need for a little more money keeps the managers active all the year around in the struggle to make both ends meet.

First the forty odd directors tax themselves \$50 or \$100 apiece each year. Next they impose an entrance fee, so to speak, on the consignors or such persons as desire to procure the privileges of the exchange for some gentleman who is in need. This fee is a mere trifle. Any person contributing \$5 yearly may name three consignors whose work will be taken on sale.

Then 10 per cent commission is charged on all sales that are made. As these average between \$40,000 and \$50,000 a year, this item of receipts is the largest. All these together, however, do not aggregate enough to pay expenses, and the exchange is therefore dependent upon the liberality of its friends to make up deficits.

A visit to the exchange commonly results in the astonishment of the visitor. As I said, the consignors are all ladies of culture who have been reduced in circumstances. This class in the community is larger than most people suppose or can easily realize, excepting by remembering that over 90 per cent of American business men fail.

These ladies commonly excel in some one thing, and the advice of the managers to them is always to do that particular thing, whether it be painting on ivory, embroidering in velvet or



cooking crullers. So it comes about that whatever is on sale is probably the very best of its kind, being produced by some lady who learned to make it either as an accomplishment or for amusement.

The bewildering variety of objects displayed can be imagined when it is remembered that there are several hundreds of the consignors. The report for one year, for instance, showed that in a total of \$51,000 sales over \$10,000 was received for cake and nearly \$2,500 for preserves. Decorated china, fancy screens, children's wrappers, chicken jelly and lace lamp shades are some of the numerous items in the catalogue.

In addition to the primary work that was undertaken of enabling women to reach their customers, the managers have undertaken several branches of what may be called auxiliary effort. For example, they have started dress-making classes for society girls and have succeeded in securing nearly 50 pupils among the wealthy and educated young women of the metropolis. Of course these pupils pay for their tuition and so help to support the exchange. At the same time they are providing for their own support in case they should ever have to earn their living.

There are other classes in stenography, in millinery, in Delsarte, in venetian embroidery and in cooking, and there is also a "shopping bureau," which is well patronized and affords a living to more than one employee. Besides this, a school for general culture has been opened in the country, of which a separate chapter could easily be written.

The effects of this beneficent movement—for the ladies term it beneficent rather than charity, as it is not giving so much as guiding that they do—are widespread and great. Beginning in a modest way in a comparatively small house in Twentieth street, the exchange sold the first year only about \$2,000 worth of goods. Now, as said, the sales are about \$50,000 yearly, and the association has paid more than half a million dollars to its beneficiaries. More than that, there have been similar exchanges to the number of 60 established in very many of the principal cities of the country.

There is no reason why one should not be established in every large community under rules fashioned according to the necessities of the place, and certainly there seems to have been no plan devised by which more intelligent help can be given to people who deserve help and need it more sorely than almost any other class. Partial reports from the 60 societies tell that they have paid to gentlemen over \$1,500,000.

JET AND BLACK.

Both Will Be Popular During the Coming Season.

While in London I visited some of the famous "shops," as they call them, and I was struck by the rather somber appearance they presented. Black seems to be the keynote in gowns of all descriptions. Perhaps this is due in a measure to the court mourning. The Princess of Wales, however, has set the fashion of having very elaborate mourning attire, so that were it not for the craze upon it one might think some of the gowns for festive occasions.

After all, this is as it should be. There is no reason why a woman's mourning gowns should not be fashionably made. Mourning garb is depressing enough at the best. But, aside from the mourning garb, we must expect to see a great deal of black worn this season. So many rich and new black fabrics are offered that one finds choice difficult. There are the silk warp goods, endora, harietta, melrose and drap d'ete, drap d'alma



NEW JACKET FOR GIRLS.

and crape cloths and bluster and other crepons. All these may be worn for mourning or for any occasion not especially festive.

Black silks are almost covered with jet, embroidery picked out with jet and with jetted passementerie. One gown for a swell dinner was of black armure silk thickly sewed with jet, so that altogether it weighed nearly 40 pounds. Black velvet gowns for grand occasions and for the street will be among the handsomest of all the winter costumes.

For mourning attire there are some very handsome wraps and capes; also empire coats and other shapes, such as tight jackets and blouse effects. Some of these are of all wool goods, like the wool drap d'alma and cachemire de l'inde. Broadcloth and venetian, melton and boucle will also be worn later in the season. All but the last two will be trimmed with crape. The melton and boucle will have black castle braid stitched on, and where buttons are required they will be of plain black horn. Everything in shape of wrap or jacket will have high collars, higher than ever, if possible. There is a new mantle where the body is blouse shaped and belted, with a flat revers collar and a high medial collar. The sleeves are cut like circular capes and joined. The top is sewed into the arm size, and the sleeve thus formed is left to fall in heavy folds.

For deep mourning these are quite or nearly covered with crape. Other sleeves are made very snug, almost as tight as they used to be some ten years ago, when it was said that a woman had to get up on a stepladder to get them on. The way she did it was to fall down.

The suits for what are generally called "growing girls" are very neat and pretty this season. I was looking at some cravanotte suits recently. One had four rows in each. They were all massed above the knees. The jacket was double breasted, but fastened with flies. It was scalloped and had several rows of soutache. Jaunty pockets and revers and coat collar finished it. The color was dark brown. Another pretty suit for a girl of 16 had the skirt of very dark blue serge made entirely plain. The jacket was of tan melton, double breasted and elegantly braided. A glance at the illustration will show how both of these looked.

For young girls there are many pretty felt hats, stitched round and round the crowns, made like Tam O'Shanter's. A quill and a band are considered the right trimming for these. Others there are with more of the sailor shape, with birds, quills, plumes or rosettes of velvet or of felt as garniture. For dress occasions velvet hats of dark color with light satin pipings are handsomer. These are trimmed with loops and bows of alternate velvet and satin.

Plaids will be unusually prominent for girls this season, but for dresses only. All coats and cloaks are of mixtures or solid color in smooth faced or boucle. The woolly effects in outer garments will be carried out to a greater extent than ever before. There are some self colored camel's hairs that are as thick as fur, with long, silky hair. These will make beautiful cloaks for small children in the lighter shades of gray.

HENRIETTE ROUSSEAU.

SHEEP FOR THE FARMER.

Only a small capital is required by any farmer for feeding a few sheep. Some poles covered with hay or straw for shed, a few racks, or if these cannot be had, some fence panels around a haystack to give coarse feed behind, a few troughs for shelled corn when muddy, are all that are necessary. The rest of the time feed shock corn on the dry ground, for the sheep does not need its grain either husked, shelled or ground. If a grain crop should fail, there is usually coarse feed in plenty on which sheep can be carried through until another year and give a crop of wool which will more than pay their keep. If one dies, he usually has wool enough on him to pay what he has cost that year. Sheep are emphatically the stock for the poor man who must start with few conveniences, and if he will stand by them they will build him a comfortable house and ample barns to shelter all the feed and stock the best farm in Kansas can produce. Where it can be done, it is an advantage to bring western sheep in early and give them a few months' pasture to domesticate them and fill them out.

As the pasture falls in the fall, gradually bring them on to grain; then turn them into the cornfields, where they will clean up the weeds and grass much better than the hired man will and will gather their own corn without any waste if the ground is dry. They can be put on the market in November or about Dec. 1, before many grain fed sheep come in.

Good natives or acclimated sheep do not need a longer feeding period than 90 to 100 days, especially on corn. Sheep direct from the range should be roughed 60 to 90 days on a light grain ration and plenty of good forage. They will make gain for some time on clover alone.

Clover and corn go admirably together and the best rotation for our farms is corn followed by oats and clover. Cut a crop or two of hay, pasture while the clover lasts with sheep, then corn again and the land will always be productive, says E. D. King, writing from his own successful experience in Kansas.

"TRY YOUR LUCK!"

This is what a fakir with one of these cheap swindling games of chance said to a young man who stopped to watch the game. This is a very significant phrase, characteristically American in its flavor, dash and disregard of consequences. "Try your luck" confronts the young man at every turn in life. He can try it by investing his money in one stinker of a cigar and take his chance of the lucky turn of the wheel which will give him two stinkers. He can "try his luck" at spending his money as fast as he earns it and take his chance—almost a dead sure thing—of being buried by charity. Or he can "try his luck" at loafing, drinking and devilry and take his chances on the penitentiary. Or he can "try his luck" at good, honest, hard work, self denial and manly living and take the chance—we might say certainly—of being of some use in the world and of not having any hired mourners at his funeral. It is all right to "try your luck," my boy, but try it sensibly and intelligently.

OUR BIRD FRIENDS.

We have one little friend that greatly interests us. It is a robin which every morning early when we have gone to work in the garden this spring has come flying down at our feet to pick up the grubs turned up by the hoe. From being quite shy at first our little friend became very tame and finally would pick up the worms within a foot of the hoe. It was surprising how many grubs his bright eyes would discover, and the way in which he would cock his head to one side and eye his victim before picking it up was something very comical indeed. Having a nestful of little ones not far away, he would keep on gathering worms until he could not hold another one in his mouth, and then he would go to the nest and return in a few minutes. One morning we took the lawn mower instead of the hoe and had hardly got to work on the lawn before down he came, and his disappointment at not finding any grubs was funny enough.

THE WEALTHY APPLE.

Our experience with the Wealthy apple leads us to commend it very highly for general orchard planting in most of this northwestern territory. It has so very much to recommend it that its weak points can be well overlooked. It may be said for it that it is an early bearer of very large, handsome red fruit of a finer flavor and a higher quality than any other apple which can be raised in the northwest. It is an apple which sells on sight, and when once the general public fully understands its merits there cannot be enough of them raised to supply the demand. Forty acres of Wealthy apple trees planted anywhere in Iowa and the south half of Minnesota and properly cared for will insure the man who owns the orchard a handsome income in five years after date of planting.

SHOULD BE CONTENT.

That man with a quarter section farm located in any good northwestern state, who has a comfortable home, a good wife and a lot of bright boys and girls, and who is not in debt to exceed \$1,000 at 5 per cent, should have no kick coming at Providence, the government or the seasons. He lives on one of the best farms on earth, eats at the best table, breathes the purest air, enjoys the largest civil and religious liberty and his children the best of educational facilities and can be right in touch with all the marvelous progress of the age. For such a man to howl and whine and be preaching the gospel of pessimism and calamity is to make the Lord sorry that he ever created such a man.

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