OUR WORKSHOP GIRLS

HOME LABOR IN Pittsburg.

PRETTY FEMALES IN THE WIREWORKS

Strange Mechanical Contrivances Controlled by Fragile Forms and Lily White Hands.

Continuing the subject commenced in last Sunday's DISPATCH, the wireworks of Scott & Co., Southside, are placed under tribute for sketches and incident. These are the only wireworks in the world where female operators are employed, which in itself is a fact worthy of special note.

The works, located on Bingham street, Southside, cover about two acres of ground. The building is three stories high, thereby furnishing about six acres of floor space. It is tastefully painted, well lighted and ventilated, all of which cannot be said of every mill in the city. During the short days, when darkness comes before the signal for quitting work, the rooms are lighted with gas and electric lights almost equal to the brightest daylight.

On either side of the building are wide doors and hallways, also fire escapes, equal to almost any emergency. Ample arrangements for extinguishing fires are provided, each floor being supplied with an automatic hose wheel on which is 100 feet of hose. Two dozen hydrants, fire extinguishers are placed in easy reach in all parts of the building, while in the yard are two fire plugs. Should a fire break out the entire building can be flooded in five minutes.

It was the impression when girls were first employed here that the work was extra hazardous and laborious, but experience has shown this to have been a mistake. Girls have been employed here three years, during which time no one has been seriously hurt. The injuries that have been received in the majority of cases are of the most trifling character. During the past six months no accident of any kind whatever has happened to either male or female operator.

Spooling Wire.

The wire is made at the Oliver & Roberts wire mill entirely by men, and is brought to the manipulating department in large coils which are about two feet in diameter and weigh from one hundred to one hundred and fifty pounds. These coils are taken by men and thrown over a large wooden drum which resembles a bucket turned bottom upward on a round table. The girl then loosens the wire, takes the end and starts it on a spool that looks exactly like a mammoth bobbin used on some sewing machines.

As the spool swing in readiness, she starts the machine, and, it being automatic, she has nothing to do but to see that it runs on evenly and smoothly. She keeps an eye on the drum, as it sometimes happens that the coil gets tangled or a kink flies off the drum, when the machine must be stopped and the strand replaced. One girl can supply six bunching machines with all the wire they use in a day. "The spooler," as the girl is called, can tend two machines if they are in perfect working order. Spooling is clean and easy work.

EASY TO LEARN.

"Do you like your work?" was asked a "spooler."

"Yes, I like it," she answered.

"Don't you get very tired working all day?"

"No, I am used to it now, and don't mind it much.

"Did it take you very long to learn?"

"I learned in two days."

"Do all learn as rapidly?"

"Oh, no; some work a week, some two weeks before they understand thoroughly how to run it."

"I suppose the one machine keeps you quite busy?"

"No; when the spooler next to me wishes to go away for awhile I can attend to both machines easily, especially if we are spooling cable wire, as it is the easiest to work with."

"I suppose you like your work, then?"

"Well, I never did anything but housework before I came here, and I like this well enough."

Another pretty and very intelligent girl said:

"I never worked before I came here, and at first I was very much ashamed to be a factory girl. I was afraid to look at the other girls because I had always been told factory girls were the worst girls on earth, but I have found some very nice, sensible ones here. Some of them are rough and swear, but aside from that I do not believe we have a bad girl employed here. I have learned a girl can be a lady as well in a factory as in a parlor. I have become accustomed to my work, and when anyone asks me where I am employed I answer without shame or hesitation."

Barbing Wire, Oliver Twist Machine.

When these bobbins, or spools, are filled with wire they are placed on iron trucks and distributed to the barbing machine in easy reach of the operators throughout the entire factory. The machine on which the "Oliver Twist" is made is supplied with one reel of ribbon and one spool of wire. The operator threads the machine, pulls the lever and the wire is carried through a machine that puts the barbs on at regular intervals. The barbs are cut to the right length and bent by steel knives, which form a part of the machine. The wire comes out at one end of the machine twisted and barbed, and is neatly coiled on a wooden reel. It is then ready for shipping.

Two and four point barbed wire is also made on machines similar to this. Four spools are placed on each machine before it is ready to run. The operator tends both machine, splices the wire, and when ready starts it by pulling a lever. If everything works perfectly, of which she is as a rule, she has nothing special to do but watch it. If a wire breaks she must splice the ends, if a spool becomes empty take it out and put in a full one, and when the reel of finished or barbed wire becomes full, she must take it off the machine and put on an empty one. She is called a "machine operator."

For each 12 machines there is employed a machinist and a helper. It is the duty of these men to look after and keep the machines in order. They grind and set the knives, adjust the belts and act in the capacity of general overseers, watching the quality of the work done by the machines.

ONE OF THE PIONEERS.

"Have you been working here long?"

"I was one of the first girls, and it is three

Scott Barbing Machine.

On the third floor of one of the buildings are the Scott barbing machines. These are threaded with two spools, and the barb is cut out of ribbon wire in another building. After the machine is threaded the operator sits down, and on a bench, above which the wire is run, are placed the barbs. The machine runs rapidly, and, as it twists the wire for the cable, the operator feeds the barbs at regular distances apart, some three and some six inches, just as ordered. Being experienced, she measures the distance by the eye alone. She feeds with both hands, turn about, as rapidly as the machine runs. This is very fine work, as the operator must keep wide awake while the machine is running. If she stopped the consequence would be barbless wire. When finished the wire runs on a wooden reel, such as can be seen any day in a hardware store.

Tabular wire is made by the same process. The operator sits by her machine, and as it forms the cable she places tabulars eight inches apart. Tabulars are pieces of steel one and a half inches square. The idea of this tabular wire is to furnish a wire which is more visible to cattle than the ordinary barbed wire; in fact, some States have enacted a law requiring all fences built to be at least one strand of some visible wire, hence the tabular was made. No doubt this is a very wise law, and should be adopted by all States, as there is no fear of cattle failing to see a tabular wire full "ribboned."

"Oliver Twist" is also more visible than round wire, and for this reason is being largely manufactured and sold by this company.

A RAPID WORKER.

"You feed very rapidly, I was said to an operator.

"I should; I have been here ever since they started," she replied. "All the girls appear to be experienced hands."

"The majority are most, as the hands have been here two years."

"I presume you are tired out when work evening comes?"

"No; I hardly ever feel tired."

"What do you do when you go home in the evenings?"

"I have no home. My father and mother are dead, and I board. I never go anywhere; always stay in the house."

"What do you pay a week for board?"

"I give $5 every two weeks."

"That is very reasonable. Do you board on the Southsides?"

"No, over in Pittsburg."

"Then, what time must you get up to be here at 7?"

"I generally get up at 5 or 5:30."

Staple Machine.

A wire nail machine is a new addition to the factory. When the coils are opened pieces of wire 2 and 3 feet in length, that have held the coils together, are thrown by the scrap. This nail machine was invented to utilize it. The operator starts a piece of wire in the machine, which is also automatic, picks it on through and a nail is struck in the machine drops it down into a keg—a perfect nail. These nails are used to put the wooden reels together and for many other things. The machine is easily worked and has a machinist to keep it in order.

The staple machine, an ingenious mechanical contrivance, is also operated by a girl. Her work is light and clean, and is plainly shown in plainly shown in the accompanying engraving.

80 TONS OF WIRE DAILY.

This factory employs 250 girls, and from 100 to 125 men. They can put up ready for market 80 tons of wire in one day. In busy seasons the pay roll has had 500 names, almost invariably 300 and more. The system of paying here is complex. A day's wages—which is 75 cents—is guaranteed to each and every one. A task is set, and so much work constitutes a day's task. When this is done, all work done above is paid for by its piece, and is called "over produ t." Besides pay for "over product," each one earning more than the daily task is paid a cash premium; the more the cash premium is paid every 13 days, and has amounted to $2. When the girls come in the morning they go to the office and get their check. They all go by numbers. This check they deposit in a box placed in their department. Some time in the forenoon they are taken back to the office. At noon the girls must go for them again and deposit them once more in the box. They are then taken back to the office and are ready for the next morning. Their daily task is weighed off by the foreman, who marks on each the gross tare and net weight. The weighmisters have sheets on which the actual weight of each operator's work is marked down as it is weighed. These sheets are returned to the office and the total product of each operator is entered in the books. A copy of this entry is also posted in every room throughout the factory. Any operator can see at a glance what she has earned the day before. If the weight credited to her is not correct she reports to the foreman of the room. In this way all "piece" workers know exactly what they earn each day.

WIRE BARBED BY GIRLS.

The following are the wires barbed by girls: "Twisted wire, four-point barbed wire known as the "Cactus," "Boldfast" and "Scutt," two styles of two-point, called the "improved" and "new style;" "ribbon" wire, having no barbs, with barbs called the "Oliver Twist," and the "tabular." Three-fourths of the wire used is galvanized where it is made, at Oliver & Roberts' mill.

This firm holds a process by which they galvanize the "ribbon," "Oliver Twist" and "Holdfast" wires after the barbs have been put on. All other firms in the United States are compelled to galvanize before barbing. Here they have the advantage, and can either galvanize before or after. Galvanizing is coating the wire with zinc. Zinc is an article which is indestructible. The lifetime is not definitely known, as wire fences are comparatively a recent invention. The first erected, ten or fifteen years ago, are as good as when put up. It is safe to say they will last a lifetime.

The firm also manufacture wire that is not galvanized. This, however, requires to be painted, which is done immediately and mutually by a similar process to galvanizing. Sunk into the earth are large tubs, one filled with red metal paint, the other with black, and the third with a solution of zinc. The wire to be painted is immersed wholesale into either the black or red paint. It is then immediately drawn out and placed on a slanting drip table. The wire to be galvanized is treated the same way in the zinc tub. It goes in dull and ugly and comes forth shining and bright, every part being thoroughly coated. The barbs keep the coil open and admit the zinc to every particle of wire. After this is done the wire is placed in the smoke room ready for shipping.

This firm has never employed male operators. One of the partners stated that the girls give entire satisfaction; in fact, they could not possibly get girls they would employ men, as boys could never do the work as the girls do. The ages of the girls employed range from 16 to 23. There are some

REMARKABLY PRETTY GIRLS

employed here. One has the most beautiful golden hair the writer ever beheld, and nature had furnished it all. Another had hair as black as ink. Some girls talked well and intelligently. The office will a pretty, affable young lady, formerly a student of the High School.

Bath and dressing-rooms are on each floor. The girls provide their own towels and soap. The bath tubs are long, zinc-lined iron receptacles. One remarked he would rather have men, as the girls were "cranks" and hard to satisfy. The hours are from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. On Saturday they stop at 4:30 and clean their machines. At noon they sit around anywhere, between machines, in the wire, in boxes and "spools" to eat their dinner. They are very quiet, as the noise from the machinery makes conversation an impossibility in some places. At noon one pretty, bite-eyed girl waited patiently for dinner, which was to be her brother. When she had almost thought they had forgotten her her sister brought it.

"Pater had to go to town, so I brought your dinner," the little messenger remarked.

"I think you were slow about it. I thought you were not coming."

"I have got something for you. I thought I would bring it over so you would not be in a bad humor," and the sister produced a paper box.

With a hasty exclamation of "Oh! it is a valentine! He told me he had one, but I thought he was only making fun!" with nimble fingers the box was untied and opened, bringing to view a beautiful blue satin valentine. It was duly admired and commented on.

"Oh! let me see it!" "Is it lovely!" "When did you get it?" "Do you know who sent it?" was asked on all sides, each took the valentine in turn and examined it, seemingly as glad as if they had received it.

"As you have some one who sends you valentines, I suppose you also go out in the evenings?" I asked.

"No, I don't; I never go out at night. He comes to the house and I always stay in."

"What do you do the evenings 'he' is not there?"

"I make nicknacks and do all kinds of fancy work. I like to read and sometimes I know some girls who go to balls and such places, but I have never started yet."

One bright-looking girl always kept house for her father and worked here all day. Her evenings are taken up getting things ready for the next day and making her clothes, and she had not one minute to spare to go anywhere.

The machinery used here can do almost everything but talk. It is something wonderful to see a piece of wire started in a machine. Nothing else is done by the operator, and in a few moments perfect nails drop out, or wire is rolled up with plain, straight wire; the operator only watches, and the wire runs out at one end into a neat, rolled coil at the other end. Plain ribbon wire started in a machine drops on a four-pointed barb such as is made on the Scott machine. It is wonderfully strange that such things can be invented.

NELLIE BLY.

A Laughing Plant.

(Vic's Floral Magazine.)

This is not a flower that laughs, but one that creates laughter, if the printed stories of travelers are to be believed. It grows in Arabia, and is called the laughing plant, because its seeds produce effects like those produced by laughing gas. The flowers are of a bright yellow and the seed-pods are soft and downy, while the seeds resemble small black beans, and only two or three grow in a pod. The natives dry and pulverize them, and the powder, if taken in small doses, makes the soberest person behave like a circus clown or a madman, for he will dance, sing and laugh boisterously and indulge in most fantastic capers, and be in an uproariously ridiculous condition for about an hour. When the excitement ceases the enchanted exhibitor of these antics falls asleep, and when he awakes he has not the slightest remembrance of his frisky doings.