

PROOF.



FABIAN TRACT No. 80.

## SHOP ASSISTANTS.

### Modern Shopkeeping.

It would be difficult to point out any industry which has altered more rapidly in its social aspects within recent years than shopkeeping. The small shop is rapidly losing its place in the economy of distribution, and the "respectable shopkeeper" is disappearing as the Store and the Limited Liability Company step in to do his work.

This change has not been on the whole of benefit to the shop assistant. In former times he\* worked in close contact with his employer; he had opportunities of gaining a wide knowledge of his trade; he had social advantages almost on a level with those of his master, and a reasonable prospect of being some day in business on his own account. Now he is a machine in the employ of a firm; dependent for his comfort and security on a foreman who is also a machine; and having before him practically no chance of advancement, and, worse still, no chance of employment when his hair begins to turn grey and he is past his prime. Only a small proportion of shop assistants become shopkeepers; and while an old assistant is seldom to be seen behind the counter, we know that he has not received a training which will fit him for any other useful work when the shop no longer needs him.

Still graver problems are presented by the lives of the young men and young women who serve us so briskly and obligingly on our shopping expeditions. Although they work under such varied circumstances, some still serving almost single-handed in small shops while others are massed together by the hundred or thousand by some Universal Provider, yet there is a similarity in the conditions of almost all, which may be summed up in the words "long hours, small pay, and unhealthy mode of life." Let us examine their grievances more closely.

### References.

Shopkeeping is an easy profession to enter without training and without references; but then you must serve in it, whether you are child or adult, for six months or more without pay and with no teacher except the pains and penalties which follow on your own mistakes. To enter a good situation the assistant must have references from his last employers; and the system, or want of system,

\* In this Tract the masculine pronoun includes the feminine.

which obtains with regard to these is most unsatisfactory. As a rule they are kept secret from the employee, so that however unjustly or carelessly they may be drawn up he cannot defend himself; and often most impertinent and irrelevant questions are asked as to the employee's religion, parentage, etc.; and the result of the farce is that very little store is set even upon good references by the employer who insists on demanding them.

### Engagements and Dismissals.

The same competition which makes it difficult for the assistant to get work makes it also difficult for him to keep it. It is a common practice with large firms to engage extra hands for each busy season of the year, giving them to understand that, if they prove suitable, the engagement will be permanent. At the end of the season very few are found to be "suitable," and these are only retained in place of less "pushing" salesmen who were there before them. The rule in most houses is, that the employer has the power to dismiss an assistant at a moment's notice, but that the assistant must give one or more week's notice. Wages are rarely paid in lieu of notice. Where assistants live in, the only provision to secure that he shall not be absolutely penniless when he leaves is the retention by the employer of the first week's or fortnight's wage, which is paid on dismissal. "In one shop six girls were dismissed on Christmas Eve, without any reason being assigned and with no extra pay. The girls, being allowed to buy things in the shop and have them entered against their wages during the month, and not expecting to have notice given them, might have been only just out of debt when dismissed."\*

### Agreements.

Employers often demand from assistants the signing of certain agreements as a condition of engagement. These may prohibit after employment in the same neighborhood, enforce obedience to all rules on pain of instant dismissal, or grant the right of search to the employer's inspectors; whatever they are, the assistant will probably sign away his liberty with scarcely a glance at what he is doing, for it is a choice between that and losing the place. He dare not risk his situation or the prospects of obtaining a situation by non-compliance with regulations, though these may hamper him in his business career. He must sign the customary agreement or seek other employment. A notable legal case was that of *Bladon v. Davidson*.† Some time after the defendant had accepted the position of shop-walker in the employ of Messrs. F. F. Bladon and Co., he was requested to sign an agreement that he would not accept any position in the drapery trade within a radius of ten miles or in the town of Hull, should he at any time, for any cause, leave the employ of the plaintiffs. He objected to the condition, but finally submitted under threat of dismissal. Some eighteen months afterwards the

\* C—6894 XXIII., page 88, Royal Commission on Labor Report.

† *Hull Daily*, May, 1892.

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defendant left, and secured a situation with another firm of drapers in Hull. Messrs. Bladon and Co. thereon applied for a perpetual injunction restraining Davidson from continuing in employment as a draper's assistant within the area specified by the agreement. The injunction was granted, and, although the local Trades Council interceded with Messrs. Bladon and Co. on Davidson's behalf, the legal decision was enforced, and the defendant was made bankrupt to defray the cost of the action.

To take another example, an assistant, working in Bradford,\* signed an agreement not to accept employment in a similar capacity within a mile of any of the firm's branch shops, which, as this firm had from twenty-five to thirty branch shops scattered over several neighboring towns, practically amounted to a contract not to accept employment with any other firm in those towns. He did accept employment contrary to his contract, and his late employers applied for a perpetual injunction and £50 damages. The Bradford Branch of the National Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks took up the case, and the firm agreed to compromise by withdrawing the claim for damages, on condition the assistant left the situation he then held.

#### Hours of Labor.

If eight hours is the daily allowance for a man's toil, then many shop assistants do the work of two men in one day. The work, while they are at it, is both laborious and tedious. In very few places have the assistants either time or strength after it for recreation and social intercourse. We must not judge the length of hours only by the time the shops keep open; there is much to do, before and after, in arranging and sorting stock; and the weekly hours given in the examples which follow only include the hours in which the shop is open to the public.

The House of Commons' Committee which received evidence on Shop Hours in 1886, reported that "The hours of labor in shops range as high as 85 per week. The Lady Commissioner says the hours compare unfavorably with those permitted in industries protected by the Factory Acts," and that "the idea that a shop assistant's work is less arduous than that of a person in factories seems also to be erroneous." The representatives of the National Union, when giving evidence before the Royal Commission on Labor (November 9th, 1892) estimated the average hours per week as from 80 to 84. The Secretary of the London Early Closing Association stated to the House of Commons Committee, on the Shops Early Closing Bill, 1895, that, "where there is an early closing day in London, hours still average from 80 to 82 per week, and, where there is no early closing day, from 82 to 84 per week." Other witnesses put the hours from 68 to 100 per week.

Mr. Henry Cushen, an official of the Metropolitan Grocers' and Provision Dealers' Association, and a tireless opponent of Parliamentary limitation of Shop Hours, stated that "The following are

\* Gallon and Co. v. H. Rogers, Grocer, 1894.

the hours, in my experience, in London: Monday,  $13\frac{1}{2}$  hours; Tuesday,  $9\frac{1}{2}$ ; Wednesday,  $13\frac{1}{2}$ ; Thursday,  $13\frac{1}{2}$ ; Friday,  $14\frac{1}{2}$ ; Saturday,  $16\frac{1}{2}$  hours. Total: 81 hours per week, less half-an-hour each for *dressing*, breakfast, dinner, tea and supper =  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours per day, being 15 hours per week, net total of working hours 66 per week." Mr. Lomax, Secretary of the Loughborough Shop Assistants' Association, stated, at the Shop Hours Conference, Manchester, 1892, that he had worked in a shop where, during four years, he had never had an opportunity of putting on his coat or his hat, except on Sundays.

Mr. Charles Booth gives the hours of men in drapers' shops in London as from 59 to 70 in first class shops, and hours of women as from 56 to 67 (exclusive of meals). The difference between the hours of men and women who work in the same shop is explained by the fact that women seldom enter the shop before breakfast. The hours of labor in first class suburban shops, Mr. Booth "estimates as from  $62\frac{1}{2}$  to  $74\frac{1}{2}$ : medium shops, from 71 to 76, and in some places more; small shops have no quotable hours. The grocers, oil and colormen, work longer hours. The almost universal time of opening is 8 a.m. . . . The usual closing hour for the first four days is 9 or 9.30 p.m.—in some districts there is an early closing day from 5 p.m. On Friday few shops close before 10.30 or 11 o'clock, and on Saturday the usual hour is 12 p.m."

The Women's Co-operative Guild, in their June, 1896, Report, state that of the 1,554 women and girls employed by 104 societies, 8 per cent. work 48 hours or less per week; 31 per cent. work 49 to 53 hours per week; 48 per cent. work 53 to 57 per week; 11 per cent. work 57 to 60 hours per week; and 2 per cent. 60 hours or upwards. The longest hours worked are 63 hours, and the shortest  $40\frac{1}{2}$  hours per week. The 1,554 women and girls include shop assistants, dressmakers, clerks, milliners, etc.

In small shops, and in those shops where meals are provided on the premises, the assistants rarely leave the shop *during the day*. In medium and lower class shops the number of hours during which assistants are confined to the shop cannot, in large cities, be less than 78 hours per week on the average. In those places where a half-holiday is customary, the average would be less, but, in far too many cases, the larger average is exceeded. In country towns and in first class shops the hours are fewest.

### Wages.

In considering comparative rates of wages it must be borne in mind that the shop assistant's chance of obtaining or retaining employment largely depends upon a neat and prosperous appearance. He cannot, like many other workmen, economize on his clothes. The wages-table compiled by the Labor Commissioners gives, for male assistants, an average of 23s. 11d. per week. A representative of the National Union of Shop Assistants, when giving evidence before the Commission, put the average wage at 23s. The *Lancet* Sanitary Commissioners estimated the hourly earnings of assistants at from

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2d. to 6d. Mr. Charles Booth tabulated the earnings of assistants with twenty-five firms, representing grocers, oil and colormen, tea, coffee and cocoa traders. 770 adult men were employed, 64½ per cent. of whom received under 30s. per week; 20 per cent. from 30s. to 35s. per week; and 15½ per cent. received over that sum. The same firms employed 314 women, of whom 41 per cent. earned under 12s. per week; and of 344 boys employed, 62½ per cent. received under 12s. per week. The average hours of the class of traders mentioned were about 80 per week. More than half the boys and women were paid less than 2d. per hour; 33 per cent. of the adult men were working for 4d. per hour, and 85 per cent. were receiving less than 6d. per hour. Drapers are better paid than grocers, and work fewer hours. Mr. Booth gave similar particulars about the earnings of drapers employed by thirty-six wholesale and retail firms in London. 2,268 assistants were employed, of whom 1,177 were men, 931 women, and 160 apprentices (115 lads and 45 girls). Of total 2,002 "lived in," and 411 "lived out"; of the 115 lads returned as apprentices, 34 received some remuneration, which in most cases was under £10 per annum. None of the 45 girls received any salary; board and lodgings were provided.

Mr. Booth says further that "to compare the earnings of drapers' assistants with other workers, allowance must be made for premiums and also for food and lodging." About "half the men are little better off than a workman earning 30s. per week. . . . On the other hand, life, so far as the drapery trade is concerned, ends much earlier." The returns upon which Mr. Booth has based his estimate of wages current in the drapery trade in London include too many wholesale firms to give any other than the most favorable average. His estimated value of board and lodgings at 10s. is certainly above the actual cost to the employer, and even a much lower estimate would be qualified by the varying styles of food and accommodation provided. Mr. Booth estimates premiums to average 5s. per week. This estimate may be correct for the firms to which his enquiries have been confined, but as an average throughout the trade it is too high; and even if that figure were accepted it should be considered in its relation to the prevalence of fines. Premiums fluctuate and are largely reduced by fines. The Scottish Shopkeepers' and Assistants' Union put in a statement to the Royal Commission on Labor in which they estimated the average wage of drapers' assistants in Scotland to be—men 25s., women 10s. per week. The Women's Co-operative Guild, in the Report already mentioned, stated that of 1,349 women and girls employed by 104 societies, 108 girls received no remuneration; 103 received under 5s. per week; 401 women and girls received 5s. and under 10s. per week; 438 received 10s. and under 15s.; 182 received 15s. and under 20s.; and 117 received 20s. and upwards per week. There are two classes of women and girls seeking employment as drapers' and milliners' assistants, induced to do so by the apparent gentility of such occupations, whose competition for work and indifference to the wage question have done much to injure the prospects of the women and girls without other

sources of income. The most numerous are those whose parents are in fairly comfortable circumstances and can augment their daughters' earnings; the other consists of those who obtain luxury by an immoral life. The latter class, always well dressed and well supplied with money, are dangerous associates for poor and vain juniors who look upon such possessions with envy.

#### Premiums and Commissions.

The system of giving premiums on special goods sold (often old stock or that most difficult to sell) or commissions on total amount sold, is bad, both for shop assistant and customer. It makes the former push things which are not wanted by the latter, and perhaps keep back things which are cheaper or do not happen to have a premium put upon their sale; and it also is bad for the assistant, because it introduces an element of uncertainty into his wages. These additional sources of income, given as rewards for "special attention to business," are quoted to justify the low wages prevalent, and are put before the assistant as part of his possible earnings, often at a much higher figure than they can actually reach.

#### Compulsory Peculators.

One discreditable phase of modern trading, accentuated by the branch shop system, is that of giving short weight and selling goods of inferior value for and at the price of superior and well known articles. It is the practice to invoice to managers of branch shops all goods at weight, length, and number specified on the wholesaler's or manufacturer's invoice, but at *retail* prices. Few firms allow for "shortage," and most of the others do not allow sufficient. Deficiencies in stock have to be made good by the manager, and frequently the only way of avoiding them is to give short weight to customers, and the assistants are instructed accordingly. Those who disobey run the risk of being discharged, while those who obey and are found out also lose their places.

#### Rules, Fines and Deductions.

"What kind of men are they who work under such rules, and what work can be expected under such conditions? . . . Fines such as are enforced in English houses do not exist (in German houses), nor would a firm employ people for whom such rules are necessary." (Miss H. Jastrow, late Secretary Berlin Women Clerks' and Shop Assistants' Association, writing in the *Drapers' Record*.) Most of us who know of the petty annoyances to which the shop assistants are continually subject would share her indignation.

There are rules in every establishment, amounting sometimes to as many as 100 or 150, dealing with all the details of the business and of meal-times, etc., and often there is a fine, varying from 1d. to 2/6 or 5/-, attached to each rule. Compulsory and exorbitant deductions are sometimes made for library, piano, breakages, etc. This custom again introduces an element of uncertainty into the weekly earnings, and it also places the assistants at the mercy of the

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shopwalker or manager, who generally has power to fine "at discretion" without the assistant having any chance of appeal. Any good manager can keep order without these artificial aids, while the assistant who is persistently late or careless ought to be dismissed. Some of the largest firms have abolished fines, acknowledging that they are an unnecessary cause of irritation and of loss of self-respect amongst their employees; and the inclusion of shop assistants in the Truck Amendment Act, 1896, will do much to regulate and ultimately to abolish the system.

### The Living-in System.

From motives of economy, convenience and discipline, assistants are frequently compelled to board and lodge on premises provided by their employers. The system has, no doubt, grown out of the old custom of boarding and lodging apprentices until their period of apprenticeship had expired. It is mainly confined to the drapery and grocery trades, but it is commoner in the former than in the latter, and, as with the system of apprenticeship, it is more prevalent in the South of England than in the North. In Scotland, Germany and France the system does not exist.

To "live-in" was very advantageous for young people who had to go far from home to learn a business, when, as formerly, they lived with their employer and were treated as members of their employer's family. Now they are lodgers without freedom of choice as to the food they eat, the rooms they occupy, the person they sleep with, the time they may come and go after business hours, the opinions they may express, or the associations they may belong to. They cannot receive friends who do not work for the same firm. They are subject to supervision over act and word by managers and housekeepers. On Sundays they are often shut out from their rooms all day long, whether they have any other place to go to or not. Large numbers are disfranchised because the partitions between their bedrooms do not reach the ceiling.

Even under the best firms the system is bound to curtail the liberty and independence of the assistants; but the physical comforts of this barrack life vary, as might be expected, with the character of the employer.

### The Quality of the Food.

The Lady Commissioners\* say frequent complaints were made about the insufficiency and poor quality of the food supplied, and the want of cleanliness in its preparation. The Lady Commissioner who conducted the enquiry in Wales specified the complaints on the quality and quantity of food supplied under five heads, as follows: (1) Weak tea; many of the witnesses said they spent money in buying tea to make for themselves. (2) Badly cooked food. (3) Nothing nourishing for breakfast, which generally consisted of tea and thick bread and butter; the girls bought bacon. (4) No variety of food;

\* C—6894 XXIII., Royal Commission on Labor Report.

the eternal beef and mutton, with "resurrection pie," and pudding with cold meat. (5) No fruit or green vegetables, causing indigestion and poor health. One witness (No. 71) said that drapers dealt with their customers in return for bread, meat, etc., and put up with any stuff they chose to send. A shopkeeper, claiming damages from the father of an apprentice who had run away from business, was asked: "Have you given them (the apprentices) bread and cheese for dinner every Saturday?" He replied: "There was always something else on the table, such as pickles." He was also asked: "Was it true that on Saturdays, when they worked sixteen hours, they had bread and dripping for breakfast, bread and cheese for dinner, bread and butter for tea, and bread and cheese for supper?" The reply was: "No, not invariably; they have sometimes had ham and eggs for tea, or perhaps - sausages"!!

#### Inadequate Time for Meals.

The time allowed for meals varies a great deal. Where they are not provided on the premises, an hour for dinner and half-an-hour for tea is usually given, but in some cases only half that time. Where meals are served on the premises, the time allowed varies from ten minutes to half-an-hour. The assistant cannot go to a meal if engaged with a customer at the time, and he must return to the counter when required to do so and as often as he is required during the meal-time.

The *Lancet* Special Commissioner (February 27th, 1892) says: "Very often only half-an-hour is given for breakfast, dinner and tea; this is altogether insufficient in itself; but, in large establishments, it sometimes takes nearly five minutes to go to and from the counter to the dining-room, so that food is consumed in great haste . . . all this naturally tends to interfere with the process of digestion, and dyspepsia is very common among this class of workers."

The Oldham Industrial Co-operative Stores are closed from 12 o'clock to 1 o'clock each day to enable the assistants to have an undisturbed hour for dinner, although the population of Oldham is about 160,000, largely consisting of factory operatives, 70 to 75 per cent. of them are members of the Co-operative Societies, whose legitimate convenience must necessarily be considered.

#### House Doctors and Medical Attendance.

Where the assistants live-in it is customary to make them subscribe 6d. or 1/- a month to a fund for medical attendance. In many cases the system does not work satisfactorily. Complaints are made that the "House Doctor" does not take sufficient interest, and assistants often go, at their own extra expense, to some other doctor. Frequently great kindness is shown to the patient by the housekeeper and the other assistants, but often the sick are shamefully neglected. In an Oxford Street house an extra fee of 3/- is charged for medical attendance; and if the assistant is ill more than three days he must go home or to the hospital. Very often the time lost

\* Birmingham County Court, February 3rd, 1892.

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during illness is deducted from wages. Such rules as these do much harm in forcing the assistants back to work before they are fit for it.

### Sanitation.

Unfortunately, there is usually only too much cause for illness amongst shop assistants. Bad accommodation, bad sanitation, and bad ventilation are the most frequent and the greatest evils which are met with both in business and domestic premises. In many shops the dining-room is underground, with gas burning all day, and ventilation only through the grating in the pavement of the street. In some cases the odours of defective drains pervade both kitchen and dining-room. "In many shops there is no water-closet accommodation. In hundreds of cases in Glasgow, for instance, the nearest closet is one common to several shopkeepers, and often it is without water, owing to the shopkeepers, who are assessed for it, repudiating using it."\* In some cases "two, four, and even six assistants sleep in one room." One witness who slept "six in a room" was obliged to consult a doctor, who attributed her illness to foul air.† In one house, described as comfortable enough, there were eight assistants sleeping in separate beds in one large room; but the girls differed on the subject of ventilation. One suffered from headache, because some of the others refused to have the window open at night, even in summer-time. In the premises provided by a London firm, "which advertised itself as one of Christian workers, the rain came through the roof of the assistants' bedroom."‡ It was reported of one West End drapery house, that "the bedroom linen was not changed for months." It is no wonder that shop assistants so often are anæmic and narrow-chested, and that so many break down in health.

### Condemned to Celibacy.

Two causes condemn the large majority of shop assistants to celibacy. One is that the salary is seldom sufficient to keep a family; the second is that the living-in system does not provide accommodation for married assistants, so that even where marriage is possible with some degree of comfort the employers' permission must be obtained, and it is generally refused unless the assistant hold one of the higher positions. Under any circumstances, the fact that two assistants of opposite sex show a special interest in each other's society, leads in many cases to the dismissal of one or both delinquents. While the men are forced to shun marriage for fear of losing their work, the women hail it as a means of escape from their slavery, and would, as one girl expressed it, "marry anybody to get out of the drapery trade."

### REMEDIES.

We have now given some idea of the conditions under which shop assistants do their work, and have found that their grievances

\* C—6894 XXIII., page 314, Royal Commission on Labor Report.

† C—6894 XXIII., page 88, Royal Commission on Labor. ‡ *Ibid*, Witness No. 10.

are many and serious. Let us now see what has been done to remedy them, and what is the most hopeful direction for further effort.

### I.—Organization.

Numerous attempts during the past fifty years have been made to form some organization to promote earlier closing, but as the method has been to combine philanthropists, employers, and assistants, few have lived beyond a season. One of these is the Early Closing Association and Traders' Parliamentary Alliance. This body did much to pass the Act now in force for limiting the hours of young persons in shops, and on their behalf Sir John Lubbock has introduced from time to time an Early Closing Bill. Where a weekly half-holiday or early closing has been obtained by voluntary effort it is always liable to break down by the competition of even one shopkeeper who disregards it. No attempt to form a Trade Union, on lines similar to those adopted by workers in other great industries of the country, appears to have been made until 1889, when unions were started in Manchester, London and South Wales. In March, 1891, a conference was held in Birmingham of delegates from existing unions and as many associations as could be induced to attend, and the present National Union of Shop Assistants was then formed. It has now about forty-five branches in different towns. Its objects are: to shorten hours; to abolish unjust fines; to secure definite and adequate time for meals; to obtain proper supervision of the sanitary arrangements of shops, and the abolition of the living-in system; to give legal aid to members, financial assistance during sickness and want of employment, etc. The questions of a minimum wage and a list of fair shops have also been under consideration. Attempts have been made to amalgamate with this the United Shop Assistants' Union, but so far without success.

There are many difficulties in organizing shop assistants. First, it is difficult to get hold of them, because they are a nomadic class of workers. "This tendency to move from situation to situation seems to be partly due to anxiety to obtain more experience in their business, partly to the desire for higher wages or shorter hours, and partly to weariness and illness making an interval of rest or change of air and surroundings compulsory."\* Then they have amongst them a feeling that they are of a superior order, in fact most genteel, and that it is quite beneath them to belong to a common Trade Union such as navvies and factory workers have. They are, however, gradually beginning to recognize that they work under conditions much worse than those of many navvies and factory workers; and that to improve these they must organize as other workers have done. Already there are 2,300 members of the National Union of Shop Assistants; they are represented each year at the Trade Union Congress; an excellent monthly magazine, *The Shop Assistant*, is published at Cardiff by members of the Union; and their annual meeting of delegates at Hull last Easter was the largest and most

\* Royal Commission on Labor Report, C—6894, XXIII., p. 88.

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business-like yet held. But it is estimated that there are about 700,000 shop assistants employed in the wholesale and retail distributive trades in the United Kingdom, and more of these must be brought into rank before the Union can exert the force it should.

## II.—Legislation.

Under this head little has been accomplished at present. In 1873 a Factory Commission received evidence on Shop Hours, and from 1876 to 1896 no less than twenty Bills have been considered and reconsidered by the House of Commons. For over twenty years discontent has been dulled and organization deferred by vain hopes. Year by year, up to 1896, the legislative proposals of the shop assistants' friends have been modified until the latest production of the philanthropists has been reduced to preamble and platitudes. The Shop Hours Act, passed in 1886, and renewed from year to year up to 1892, when it was adopted as a permanent Statute, limits the hours of young persons under eighteen years of age to 74 hours per week. This Act, up to 1893, contained no provisions to ensure its enforcement—which was left optional with the local authorities—or penalties for non-compliance with its regulations. The promoters of the measure relied upon its moral effect, and the consequence is, it remained practically a dead letter. In 1893 a few local authorities, acting under pressure from the National Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks, appointed inspectors; but from the Home Office Return, August 8th, 1896, it appears that there are only 10 inspectors throughout Great Britain who devote their whole time to the duties required by the Act. Five of these are for England and Wales, two for Scotland, and three for Ireland; but there are 288 other persons, such as police officers, sanitary inspectors, school attendance officers, inspectors of weights and measures, inspectors of hackney carriages, inspectors of canal boats, *inspectors of the prevention of cruelty to animals*, inspectors under the Diseases of Animals Act, and others, who, in addition to their legitimate and onerous duties, are supposed to perform those of a shop hours inspector, under an Act which provides no power to solve the difficulties of inspection. The London County Council has only appointed one person to devote his whole official time to such duties; and has only recently resolved on a policy of systematic and rigorous inspection.

The only other labor legislation affecting shop assistants is the Truck Act, 1896, mentioned above, which has for the first time given the Government inspector the right of entry into a shop.

Dissatisfied with the principles and provisions of the Shops Early Closing Bill of Sir John Lubbock, the National Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks drafted a Bill, which was laid before the House of Commons in August, 1896, by Sir C. Dilke, in the names of Mr. John Burns, Dr. Clark, Mr. M. Davitt, and Mr. E. Flowers. The Bill provides that *all shops shall close* on one day not later than 1 o'clock, on three days not later than 7 o'clock, on one day not later than 9 o'clock, and on one day not later than 10 o'clock p.m. The local authority must fix the closing hours for each day in accordance with the Act. No assistant may be employed for more

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than half-an-hour after the shop has been closed. No person shall be exempted on the ground that he is an apprentice or an improver, or a member of the occupier's family. Every shop must be provided with sufficient and suitable sitting accommodation for females employed in the shop, who may not be prohibited from using it when not actually at work, and reasonable intervals for rest must be provided. A young person or a woman shall not be employed continuously for more than five hours without an interval of at least half-an-hour for a meal. All persons employed in shops must have an interval at noon of not less than one hour, and an interval of not less than half-an-hour between four and seven o'clock in the evening. All premises used for business or domestic purposes in connection with a shop must be kept in a cleanly state and ventilated in an efficient and suitable manner, and suitable sanitary conveniences must be provided for the separate use of each sex. Every shop must exhibit an extract of the Act and a notice showing the closing hours for each day of the week, and the days when, by special permit, overtime may be worked on forty days in the year. Every shopkeeper shall furnish the inspector in his district, every year, with a return specifying, with respect to the year ending December, the number of persons employed in the shop, with such particulars as to the age and sex of the persons employed as the Secretary of State may direct. It will be the duty of inspectors appointed to enforce the Factory and Workshops Acts, to enforce the provisions of this Act, and for this purpose Sections 67, 68 and 70 of the Factory and Workshops Act shall apply as if a shop were a factory or workshop. The Bill has already been welcomed by Employers' Associations, and the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress was authorized at the 1897 Congress to bring it before the notice of the Government. There is good reason to believe that a knowledge of the evils and difficulties involved by existing conditions will provide the Bill with substantial support both in and out of Parliament.

Other countries are ahead of us in legislation for shop assistants. Provisions similar to those proposed in the National Union's Bill are already law in New Zealand. Several of the American States make the provision of seats for assistants compulsory, and New York established last September a sixty-hour week for males under sixteen and females under twenty-one years of age. Germany affords our shop assistants a good object lesson, for there, by dint of strong organization (they have a Federation of Trade Unions numbering 130,000 assistants, both men and women, besides 70,000 or 80,000 organized who have not yet joined the "Verbund"), they have obtained a law, which will come into force next year, which will obviate many of the grievances which they have in common with our English assistants. It provides, amongst other things, for thorough apprenticeship, good sanitation, sick benefits, just references, and just agreements, with no "contracting out."

Among shop assistants, as amongst other workers, the two remedies, organization and legislation, must go hand in hand; and with the advance of these two we may hope that the "slavery" which at present too often prevails behind the counter will become a thing of the past.