

Sheltered Workshop

BECAUSE so many Women's Institutes are interested in their County Homes and in the problems of age and aging, it seems in order to pass along these observations of a sheltered workshop and what it can mean to an older person to have some work to do, to earn a little and to have companionship for at least part of every day instead of sitting idle and alone, perhaps steadily breaking down both physically and mentally.

This workshop was started by the Women's Patriotic League in 1914 to provide a centre where older or handicapped women could work at sewing for the Red Cross or making such toys as rag dolls which had formerly been imported from Germany. The shop is now operated under Provincial Charter by a Board of thirty women. The building is a large house in Toronto made from two rooming houses to give several large sunny workrooms, a kitchen—for the women who come here to work are given a good, hot dinner at noon, a dining-room with a piano in one corner so that there can be music and singing in the recreation period after the noon meal and an office for the director, Mrs. Henrietta Kirkness. The third floor is an apartment rented continuously as a residence.

The work program is carried on under professional supervisors and includes making drapes and slip covers, quilting, re-covering eiderdowns, dressmaking alterations and all kinds of mending. Most of the orders come from individual customers; the dressmaking alterations are done for both individuals and women's dress shops. There is a steady supply of contracts in less skilled work—folding circulars, filling envelopes, stringing price tags. Payment to the women for this work ranges from two to five dollars a day according to the skill required and includes the noon dinner and a coffee break. They work from nine to four, five days a week, a staff of about eighty women. With a few donations from public-spirited citizens the enterprise is self-supporting.

A second shop on a smaller scale is quartered in a church basement under the direction of Mrs. Mary Agnew. Both men and women work here. They do only such work as folding and mailing circulars, stapling the pages of booklets. No sewing is undertaken;



One of the great satisfactions of age is having something interesting to do.

but they are experimenting in making small articles for sale. And they help to pay expenses by taking care of the church.

While these "sheltered" workshops are taking care of themselves financially their real purpose is not economic; they exist for the happiness and well-being of the people they serve. They were set up to provide daytime care for needy women fifty years old or over, helping them to maintain their independence and their self respect. These women could not measure up to employment outside a sheltered shop. Some are in their eighties, some are disabled in one way or another, some have been referred to the shop as alcoholics or psychiatric cases. In the friendly atmosphere of the place, with work to absorb their interest, with a sympathetic director to talk to, they take on a "new lease of life." They sing (My, how they sing!); they play cards or read or "visit" in their rest period. Best of all, they make friends. It all adds up to a form of therapy that wards off senility and gives a purpose to the days.

For many reasons a sheltered workshop on the scale of this one is practical only in a fairly large centre. But is it possible that some phase of the work might be workable in a small town, perhaps under the sponsorship of the Senior Citizens' Club with its fair proportion of sixty to seventy-year-old retired men and women as capable as they have ever been to handle such a project—if it is needed. And the Women's Institute might give some assistance.—Ethel Chapman.