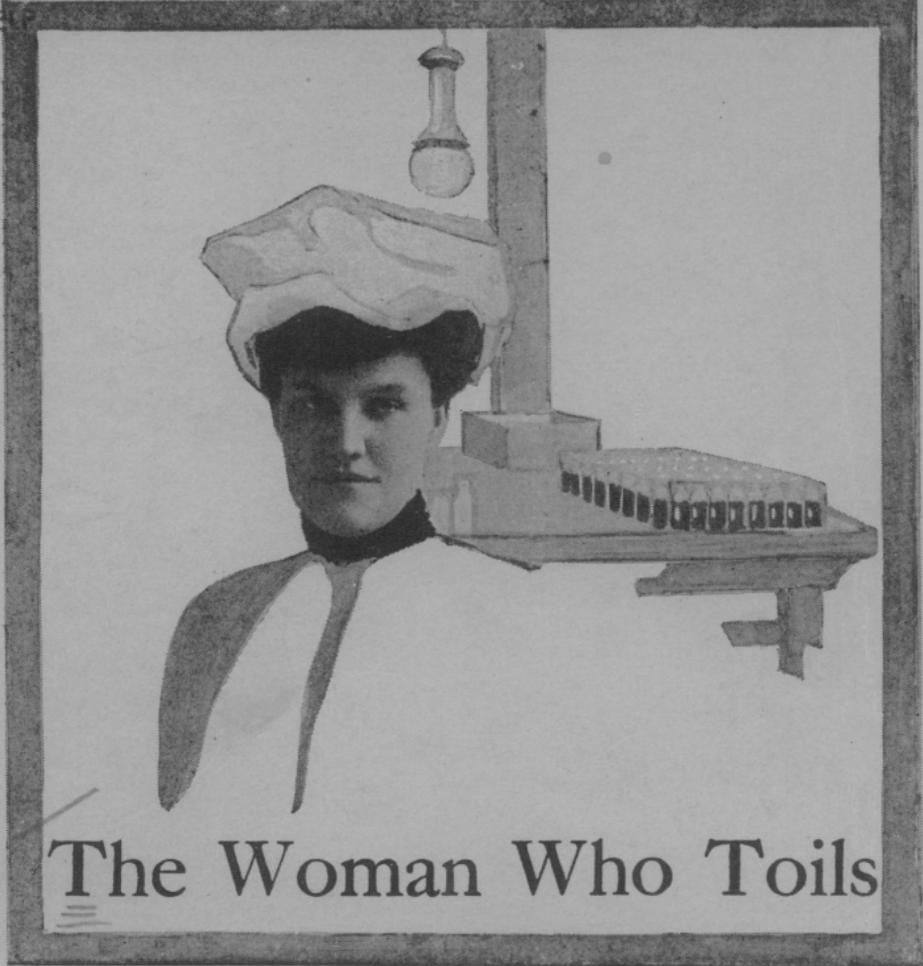


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# The Woman Who Toils

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Cover: Mrs. John Van Vorst as “Esther Kelly” wearing the costume of the pickle factory

# The Woman Who Toils

*Being the Experiences of Two Ladies  
as Factory Girls*

BY  
MRS. JOHN VAN VORST and  
MARIE VAN VORST

With an Introduction by Daniel J.B. Mitchell



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## INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the century, two well-to-do ladies sought to examine the phenomenon of the "factory girl." Bessie Van Vorst and her sister-in-law, Marie Van Vorst, dressed themselves as working-class women and took various jobs in Pittsburgh, Chicago, Perry, New York (a small mill town of 3,346 inhabitants), Lynn, Massachusetts, and Columbia, South Carolina. The purpose of this adventure, according to Bessie, was to assume the "mode of existence" of the woman worker, "in the hope that I might put into words her cry for help." Their descriptions of prevalent working conditions for women workers were first serialized in popular magazines, and then compiled into the book, **The Woman Who Toils: Being the Experiences of Two Ladies as Factory Girls**. In this volume, the first part of that book, the experiences of Bessie Van Vorst—who signed her name "Mrs. John Van Vorst"—in Pittsburg, Perry, and Chicago, is reprinted.

Heightened interest in women's studies at the present time makes these descriptions of the female work experience timely. The Van Vorst study is not a scholarly treatise on female labor markets, nor was it intended to be. Mrs. Van Vorst describes her impressions in an anecdotal and personal fashion. We are given fleeting views of working conditions, lodging arrangements, attitudes, as they appeared to an outside observer in disguise. What comes through is therefore a feeling, a spirit of the time, which might escape the more sophisticated analysis of an economic historian. These impressions provide an improved understanding of the background to modern circumstances. After all, the current labor market represents a gradual evolution from the one experienced by Mrs. Van Vorst.

Apart from the insights into labor-market conditions, the Van Vorst descriptions also give an interesting glimpse of the development of social thought. In general, tales of factory life at the turn of the century bring to mind the exposés of the muckrakers. But aside from an interest in the Upton Sinclairs and the other social reformers who were concerned with factory conditions in general, there was apparently a readership for descriptions of female working life. A number of ladies wrote about their experiences in the workforce. **Everybody's Magazine**, a periodical similar in format to the modern **Reader's Digest**, serialized "Toilers of the Home," the story of a disguised Mt. Holyoke graduate who worked as a domestic servant.<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Richardson, a middle-class young woman forced by circumstances to become a "New York working girl," wrote of her experiences in **The Long Day**.<sup>2</sup> In cooperation with a (male) sociologist, Rheta Childe Dorr described her observations posing as a factory worker in Fall River, Massachusetts—an adventure also serialized in **Everybody's Digest**.<sup>3</sup> Patricia Russell, the American-born wife of Bertrand Russell, conducted a similar experiment in England.<sup>4</sup> In short, this literary ferment indicates that the idea of women in factories was new to the reading public—even though female employment itself was not new.

Protective labor legislation for women advanced during that period. The Supreme Court, in 1908, upheld a 1903 Oregon law providing maximum hour protection for women, noting that a woman's "maternal functions" and "her disposition and habits of life" justify legislation "to protect her from the greed as well as the passion of man." Influencing this decision was the famous brief for the State of Oregon in which Louis Brandeis and Josephine Goldmark martialed evidence from medical and economic

studies of female factory workers.<sup>5</sup> Social historians might well want to consider what factors stimulated the special interest in female employment at that time. Was it an interaction of the employment issue with the suffragette and anti-saloon movements? The spread of woman's higher education which provided more candidates for investigations like those of the Van Vorsts? Or was it just the continual rise in female participation in the labor force? Aside from the interest in women at work, the Van Vorst study must be viewed as part of the general atmosphere of the "progressive" reform movement.

Social thinking of the period is also reflected in the attitudes expressed by Mrs. Van Vorst. One might have expected her to have been appalled by tangible factory conditions, since she had not been exposed to work of that type before. But she tells us from the beginning that her concern is with "the paucity of . . . moral and esthetic inspiration, (and) . . . lack of opportunity for physical development." Thus, the immediate surroundings of the pickle factory in Pittsburgh, where she first finds work, is described as "clean, well-aired . . ." with "hygienic and moral advantages of all kinds." What bothers her most is the tedium, the long hours, which forces life to revolve around the job and is disruptive of potential or actual family life.

The "prefatory letter" from President Theodore Roosevelt would not please a contemporary liberated woman. The President compliments Mrs. Van Vorst on her exploits. But he expresses concern over her finding that some women seem to work simply to be "independent." He condemns "the man or woman who deliberately avoids marriage and . . . children" as "a criminal against the race."<sup>6</sup> One reviewer criticized the publicity given this letter—it apparently contributed significantly to the book's popularity—

because of an alleged inconsistency between the author's views and those of the President.<sup>7</sup> But it is not at all clear that their viewpoints are at odds. Mrs. Van Vorst does not express the sentiments of a militant feminist. She, too, is disheartened at the notion of any woman working who does not absolutely have to. The young woman working for "pin money" rather than settling down strikes her as being irresponsible and short-sighted. Indeed, Mrs. Van Vorst's major conclusion is that the state should sponsor schools with the help of which young women who insist on working—but who are not supporting themselves or dependents—could be sucked out of the labor market. This would prevent them from continuing to spoil the market for women who do have to work. "Relief . . . could be brought to the breadwinner by separating from her the girl who works for luxuries." The schools would teach "lace-making, hand-weaving, the fabrication of tissues and embroideries, gold-smithery, bookbinding, rug-weaving, wood-carving and inlaying, all the branches of industrial art which could be executed by woman in her home." Mrs. Van Vorst was convinced there would be a market for the output of these handicrafts and that "the question of wages would be self-regulating."

Factory women, the author finds, are not sufficiently aggressive. In the Pittsburgh pickle factory, the women clean up their work quarters by scrubbing the floor on their knees using a hand brush. But in the men's departments (the working arrangements were generally segregated by sex) the workers refused to scrub on their knees, and were given long-handled mops. "The women wouldn't have to scrub, either," says her male foreman, "if they had enough spirit all of 'em to say so." The men in the factory pay 10 cents for a hot dinner of "meat, bread and butter, vegetables and coffee, sometimes soup, sometimes

dessert.” The kitchen which prepares this meal is staffed by factory women—Mrs. Van Vorst is assigned there on one occasion—and by the only blacks apparently working at the factory. But the same option of buying dinner—at cost—is not offered to the women. Female employees generally eat meals of pickles and sandwiches of preserves, brought from home. The dinner option is not available to women because “they don’t demand it.”

Mrs. Van Vorst does not extend the notion of aggressiveness into pressing for higher wages, although she notes, “The women’s highest wages were lower than the men’s lowest.” Sister-in-law Marie Van Vorst, after working in a southern textile plant, was somewhat more radicalized: “Organize labour, therefore, so well that the workwoman who obtains her task may be able to continue it and keep her health and self respect.” But even such a vague hint at unionization is absent from Bessie Van Vorst’s narrative. Union membership is estimated to have stood at 868,500 in 1900, a small fraction of the labor force.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it was primarily a male institution concentrated in the skilled trades of particular industries. Although union membership was growing rapidly during the period the book describes, unionization apparently did not touch the thinking of Mrs. Van Vorst’s co-workers.

The author was evidently a bold woman—given the nature of her adventure—and was certainly aware of the idea of unionization. One reviewer found her book to be “a strong argument for labor unions.”<sup>9</sup> But her failure to consider it directly in her account may simply reflect the influence of economic thinking of the day. Although some reviewers criticized a lack of economic sophistication in her book,<sup>10</sup> her view that the workings of the labor market produced an inevitable male-female wage differential would

have been widely accepted. "The wages paid by employers, economists tell us, are fixed at the level of bare subsistence. This level [is] . . . determined by competition . . . . In the masculine category I met but one class of competitor: the bread-winner. In the feminine category, I found a variety of classes: the bread-winner, the semi-bread-winner, the woman who works for luxuries. This inevitably drags the wage level."

Many economists, even at the turn of the century, would not have subscribed to the inevitability of a subsistence wage, but a certain economic fatalism and *laissez-faire* ideology seems to have been in general circulation.<sup>11</sup> And even today, economists are generally skeptical of the ability of unionization to raise the real wage of a group of workers as large as the entire female labor force.<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Van Vorst looked to a market solution—the handicraft schools—because she did not believe that another solution existed. Her solution strikes the modern reader as being impractical, a criticism that was also made when the book first appeared.<sup>13</sup>

The current vogue, when examinations of ethnic or racial subcultures are made, is to assume a stance of cultural relativism or even to go out of one's way to praise other subcultures. Mrs. Van Vorst did not feel that she had to suspend her own judgments and values during her experiences. She does not seem to approve of the conversations which go on in the Pittsburg plant about "fancy dress balls, valentine parties, church sociables, flirtations and clothes." Evidently, she would have preferred more serious discussions. Her sentiments are similar to those expressed by Dorothy Richardson who condemned the romantic pulp novels her fellow workers were reading.<sup>14</sup>

Mrs. Van Vorst frowns on the purchases of

shoddy—but fashionable—ladies' clothing in Chicago, and on the consumption of pie *a la mode* for lunch instead of more wholesome fare. On the other hand, she tells us she no longer believes that "the young society women who sacrifice one evening every week to talk to the poor in the slums about Shakespeare and Italian art" are doing an effective job of spreading cultural development. After a long day in the factory, women are not receptive to "an abstract lesson." It might be noted parenthetically that entertaining the urban poor with Italian art may seem a quaint and amusing notion to the modern observer. Yet, seventy years from now, entertaining the poor with sensitivity sessions and T-groups will undoubtedly appear equally quaint. And criticisms of the frivolous use of time by the working class at the turn of the century bring to mind the complaints about television and other working class habits of today.

In the small town of Perry, the atmosphere was rather different from that of either Pittsburgh or Chicago. Work was hard and hours were long, as it was in the urban centers. But the drabness of the city's industrial district was not present. Her co-workers "trifle with love" and talk incessantly about their "beaux." Mrs. Van Vorst speaks disapprovingly of the woman who "continues to work after marriage. . .invariably [at] a kind of occupation which is inconsistent with child-bearing." In Perry, she tells us, "I never saw a baby."

On the other hand, the town seemed to offer numerous community social functions. The man who chose Mrs. Van Vorst's lunch at the church box-luncheon told her his favorite plays were "The Merchant of Venice" and "Julius Caesar." The play "Faust" came to town—one of the major events of the season. The author is somewhat critical of the fact that the play was viewed by her co-workers

largely as an occasion for showing off the latest fashions while seated in the audience. But for all their frivolity, the mill women were "self-respecting." "The mill owners," she notes approvingly, "exert, as far as possible an influence over the moral tone of their employees, assuming the right to judge their conduct both in and out of the factory and to treat them as they see fit." All in all, Mrs. Van Vorst concludes, "the Perry factory girl is separated from the New York society girl, not by a few generations, but by a few years of culture and training. . . . Give the Perry millhands a free chance for growth, transplant them, care for them, and they will readily show how slight and how merely a thing of culture the difference is between the wild rose and the American beauty."

These descriptions provide some insights into the state of the labor market at the turn of the century. Other characteristics of that market can be gleaned from government statistical sources. The impact of immigration on the urban market for unskilled labor was evidently pronounced. Table 1 shows the trend in immigration over the ten-year period 1895-1905. About 312,000 immigrants arrived in the United States in 1899, 449,000 in 1900, and 488,000 in 1901. But there were apparently considerable reverse flows; some immigrants came for temporary periods of work in the United States and then returned to their native countries.<sup>15</sup> About 14 percent of the resident U. S. population was foreign-born in 1900, according to the **Census of Population**, compared with less than 5 percent in 1970.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 1****IMMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED STATES**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number (000s)</b>	<b>Percent Male</b>
1895	259	57.6
1896	343	61.9
1897	231	58.5
1898	229	59.2
1899	312	62.6
1900	449	67.8
1901	448	67.9
1902	649	71.9
1903	857	71.5
1904	813	67.6
1905	1026	70.6

Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 62.

The figures in Table 1 indicate a bias toward males in immigration patterns. This probably reflects a reluctance on the part of single foreign women to make the journey alone. It also reflects the presence of men intending a temporary stay in the United States who left their families behind. In addition, since immigration was rising rapidly, the practice of the husband preceding the rest of his family would account for the tendency toward men. Although immigration may have been male-oriented, there would have been an indirect effect on female wages and conditions—despite the segregation by sex of working arrangements and jobs.

Mrs. Van Vorst does encounter immigrant women, particularly in Chicago. In the clothing factory where she finds employment, some of the women workers do not speak English. The shop was supervised by a “ferocious” forewoman who terrorizes the women with her crossness. There are a few American women working in the factory—despite the relatively high wages paid—because, we are told, “the proud American spirit” would not put up with such supervision. Mrs. Van Vorst describes her fellow workers in the clothing factory as mainly Germans and Poles, who had learned their trades abroad.<sup>17</sup>

It is curious that Mrs. Van Vorst does not consider the effects of immigration on the market for unskilled labor, although it is much to her credit that she does not exhibit the anti-foreign prejudices sometimes found among her contemporary reformers. In Pittsburgh, she does not refer to immigrant labor in the pickle factory. However, there were immigrant workers in evidence in the industrial part of the city. She describes Pittsburgh as “a Western bazaar where the nations assemble not to buy but to be employed.” Although city statistics are not available, the

state of Pennsylvania experienced net out-migration of native whites during 1890-1910, and a considerable net in-migration of foreign-born whites. Illinois shows the same pattern.<sup>18</sup> (Perry, New York, appeared to have recruited labor from its immediate hinterland.)

In contrast to the immigrant movements, population estimates indicate that blacks would have had a much smaller impact on the northern labor markets in 1900. The Census recorded about 12 percent of the U.S. population was black at the time, but 90 percent of the Negro population resided in the South.<sup>19</sup> Out-migration from the South by Negroes did occur, but the overall shift was small compared to the impact of foreign immigrants. Mrs. Van Vorst reports some blacks working in the kitchen maintained for male employees at the Pittsburgh pickle plant, and one black woman at the Perry shirt factory who "worked in a corner quite by herself and attended to menial jobs, such as sweeping and picking up scraps." Blacks were certainly present in the Chicago labor force. They were used as strikebreakers in labor disputes in meatpacking, in 1894 and 1904, in that city. But blacks in Chicago were mainly employed as service workers; less than 10 percent were employed in manufacturing.<sup>20</sup> Mrs. Van Vorst does not mention black workers at any of her jobs in Chicago.

Labor-market specialists concerned with U.S. manpower problems in the late 1960s and early 1970s considered some of the problems of adjustment to be due to a bulge in young people—the postwar baby boom.<sup>21</sup> As they entered the labor market, absorption difficulties were encountered. Young people would tend to have the greatest impact on the unskilled and inexperienced part of the market, the sector which Mrs. Van Vorst chose to investigate.

Data for 1900 indicate that the proportion of the U.S. population fifteen to twenty-nine years of age was significantly higher than in 1970: 28 percent as compared to 24 percent.<sup>22</sup> However, the labor market was probably more fluid and flexible in 1900, for reasons discussed below. Absorption problems may therefore have been much less critical for young workers at the turn of the century than they were in the 1960s and 1970s.

We know from Census data that about 20 percent of women fourteen years old and over participated in the labor force in 1900. As Table 2 shows, there had been an upward trend in this rate—a trend continuing to this day. Like the current pattern, participation rates were highest for women in their early twenties, the age before marriage and child-bearing. Unfortunately, data are not available for 1900 concerning participation rates by marital status. The 1890 figures (Table 3) indicate that married women with husbands present comprised less than 14 percent of the female labor force. Married women with husbands present were still a minority in the labor force in 1940. By 1970, in contrast, such women comprised 59 percent of the female labor force.

Table 2  
LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES,  
AGES 14 AND OVER

Year	Male	Females					
		Ages 14 and Over	14-19	20-24	25-44	45-64	65 and Over
1890	84.3%	18.2%	24.5%	30.2%	15.1%	12.1%	7.6%
1900	85.7	20.0	26.8	31.7	17.5	13.6	8.3
1920	84.6	22.7	28.4	37.5	21.7	16.5	7.3
1970 <sup>1/</sup>	80.6	43.4	44.0 <sup>2/</sup>	57.8	47.9	49.3	9.7

<sup>1/</sup> 16 years and older

<sup>2/</sup> 16-19 years

Source: U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Handbook of Labor Statistics 1973* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1973), pp. 30, 32; and U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 71.

**Table 3**  
**MARITAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE**

Year	Single	Married— Husband Present	Other 1/
1890	2565	500	638
1940	6710	4200	2930
1970	6965	18377	5891
	Number in thousands		
1890	36.9%	4.5%	28.6%
1940	48.1	14.7	36.0
1970	53.0	41.5	38.9
1/	Widowed, divorced, married with husband not present		

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 72; and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1973* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 222.

In 1890, the labor-force participation rate for married women with husbands present was only 4.5 percent, compared with 41.5 percent by 1970.<sup>23</sup> However, Mrs. Van Vorst's complaints—particularly in Perry—revolved partly around married women who choose “invariably a kind of occupation which is inconsistent with childbearing.” She tells us a number of married couples worked at the Perry mill. But, as the Census figures suggest, this was not the common practice. “A phrase,” Mrs. Van Vorst notes, “which I have heard often repeated at the factory speaks by itself for a condition: ‘She must be married, because she don’t work.’” In any case, women were less likely to be household heads at the turn of the century, even though ages at first marriage were somewhat higher than they are today.<sup>24</sup> The 1890 Census indicates that slightly over 14 percent of households were headed by women, compared with 21 percent in 1970.<sup>25</sup>

We do know that the pressure of child-caring responsibilities was decreasing when Mrs. Van Vorst conducted her investigation. Among ever-married women who survived until the 1940 Census of Population, 45.5 percent aged twenty-one to twenty-five in 1900 had two or fewer children, and 13.9 percent had no children during their lifetimes. For twenty-six to thirty years olds, the figures are 42.3 percent and 13.9 percent. And for thirty-one to thirty-five year olds, the figures are 38.9 percent and 12.3 percent, respectively. Thus, there was a progressive change in attitude toward size of family—partly a function of increased urbanization—among younger women.<sup>26</sup> Table 4 presents an alternative view of the pressure of child-rearing responsibilities on women of child-bearing age. In 1890, there were 685 children under age five for every 1000 white women aged twenty to forty-four. By 1900, the figure had fallen

to 666, and by 1910 to 631. A similar phenomenon was taking place among Negro women. While the proportion of young children to women in this age bracket is high by contemporary standards, the declining trend did have the effect of freeing more women for labor-force participation.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 4**  
**NUMBER OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 5**

Per 1000 Women, Aged 20–44 1/

Year	White Women	Negro Women <u>1/</u>
1890	685	930
1900	666	845
1910	631	736
1970	503	650

1/ Adjusted for Underreporting, 1890–1910.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 24; and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population 1970, General Population Characteristics, Final Report PC (1)–B1* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972), Table 52.

How typical were the wages and working conditions described by Mrs. Van Vorst? Table 5 summarizes the jobs and job offers she encountered. Her first job in the Pittsburgh pickle factory paid \$4.20 per week (70 cents per day for a six-day week). This seems to have been an entry-level wage. She described female jobs which paid as high as \$1.20 per day, still significantly below the lowest rate for male workers. In general, the jobs to which she referred paid somewhere between \$3.00 and \$8.00 per week (50 cents to \$1.33 per day), most paying at the lower end of that range. Table 6 provides data on average daily wage rates for a number of manufacturing industries; for all manufacturing, average weekly earnings were estimated to be \$9.44 in 1900.<sup>28</sup> Full-time weekly earnings of "lower-skilled" labor in manufacturing were \$8.83.<sup>29</sup> Except in textiles, the figures tend to be higher than the rates reported by Mrs. Van Vorst. But since wages of male workers were considerably higher than those of female, it is natural that the industry averages would be greater.

**Table 5**  
**JOBS AND JOB OFFERS**  
**DESCRIBED BY MRS. VAN VORST**

<u>Employer &amp; Hours</u>	<u>Job Description</u>	<u>Pay</u>
Pickle bottler Pittsburgh, Pa. (10 hour day; 9 on Saturdays)	Making jar lids by hand	\$4.20 per week (.70 per day)
	Filling bottles by hand	\$.90-\$1.05 per day (piece work)
	Assisting in corking bottles	\$1.15-\$1.20 per day
	Male jobs	\$1.35-\$3.00 per day

Table 5 (con't.)

Employer & Hours	Job Description	Pay
Shirt factory Perry, N.Y. (10-1/4 hour day; 8-1/2 on Sat.)	Placing linen strips on shirt fronts using machine	Piece rate with guarantee of \$.75 per day for first two weeks. Experienced woman who provided training averaged \$1.75 per day. Trainer paid \$.10 per hour while providing train- ing. Wages had just been cut.
Steam laundry Chicago, Ill. (hours unspecified)	Shaker (shakes out wet clothing) Offer not accepted.	\$4.00 per week while learning then \$5.00-\$5.50.
Clothing manufacturer (costumes and uniforms) Chicago, Ill. (10 hour day)	Hand sewing	\$6.00 per week while learning
Picture frame manufacturer Chicago, Ill. (10 hour day; 9 on Saturdays)	Attaching molding to frame using hammer and tacks.	Earns \$.50 first day on piecework.
	Assisting a team in glueing paper to backing of frame in cooperation with mechanical roller.	\$1.05 per day (can make \$7.00-\$8.00 per week).
Printing plant Chicago, Ill. (hours unspecified)	No description. Offer not accepted.	\$3.00 per week during trial period.
Printing Plant "Box and label" Chicago, Ill. (10-1/2 hour day; 6 or 6-1/2 hours on Saturdays).	Feed a "printing machine" produc- ing circulars.	\$3.00 per week

Table 6

**SELECTED MANUFACTURING  
WAGE SERIES, 1900**

Industry	Average daily earnings (\$)
Textiles	\$ 1.11
Cotton	1.02
Wool	1.29
Silk	1.06
Hosiery & knit goods	1.01
Dyeing & finishing textiles	1.46
Boots and Shoes	1.43
Leather	1.48
Electrical machinery	1.66
Paper and paper products	1.32
Rubber	1.53
Glass	1.76
Foundry and machine shops	1.79
Iron and steel	2.01

Source: Albert Rees, *Real Wages in Manufacturing, 1890-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 44-50.

Paul Douglas' data for 1900 indicate that canning—which presumably includes the bottling of pickles—and shirt manufacturing were relatively low-paid industries, as they are today. The printing industry—where Mrs. Van Vorst also worked—was relatively high-paid.<sup>30</sup> However, Douglas' estimates for printing include the better-paying unionized shops, a segment of the industry which Mrs. Van Vorst did not penetrate. In short, the spotty evidence available suggests that her descriptions of the female labor market were generally typical of the kinds of jobs then available to the unskilled woman.

The types of wage rates described tend to shock the modern observer because they are so absolutely low. However, account must be taken of the considerable price inflation which has occurred since the turn of the century. The 1897 Sears Roebuck catalogue lists a pocket watch for as little as 98 cents, and a sewing machine with stand for \$8.50.<sup>31</sup> When Mrs. Van Vorst's sister-in-law, Marie, set out on her expedition to Lynn, Massachusetts, she provided the following account of the cost of her working-class outfit.<sup>32</sup>

Small felt hat	\$ .25
Woolen gloves	.25
Flannel shirt-waist	1.95
Gray serge coat	3.00
Black shirt	2.00
Underwear	1.00
Tippet (a scarf)	<u>1.00</u>

TOTAL \$9.45

At Bessie Van Vorst's first job at the pickle factory, it would have taken her over two weeks to earn enough to purchase this simple costume. Room and meals at a boarding house cost \$3.00 per week in Pittsburgh, \$2.75 in Perry, and \$3.70 in Chicago. Boarding houses appear to have been a common lodging arrangement for unattached workers.<sup>33</sup>

Some items could be extremely expensive in terms of typical income levels. Marie Van Vorst's normal upper-class costume—not including jewelry—cost \$447, fifty times more than her working-class attire. It is doubtful that such a large differential between working-class and upper-class wearing apparel could be found today.

In any case, price comparisons are extremely difficult to make over long periods of time. Between 1900 and the present, consumption patterns have changed dramatically. No amount of money could have bought a shot of polio vaccine, a television set, or a ballpoint pen in 1900. And today, the price of lighting one's home with gas would not be a cost of great interest. As a crude measure, however, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has estimated that the cost of living in 1973 was 5.3 times that prevailing in 1900.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the wages reported by Mrs. Van Vorst can be multiplied by the factor to give some idea of the standard of living entailed.

Obviously, at the beginning of the century living standards were far below modern conditions. A Bureau of Labor Statistics survey of 1901 indicates that families of "city wage and clerical workers" spent 43 percent of their budget on food. By 1960-1961, when a similar study was made to obtain the budget weights for the current Consumer Price Index, the proportion had dropped to 24 percent.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the lower standard of living translated into a greater proportion of income spent on necessities. It

is worth noting, however, that in most of the modern world standards of living are still below those described by Mrs. Van Vorst. As long as a person was healthy and could work, it was possible to get along in the economy of her time, although the margin above subsistence was not large. An illness, an industrial accident, or just getting too old, could quickly erode that margin and result in dire consequences.

Perhaps one of the most striking features of the labor market Mrs. Van Vorst describes was the ease she experienced in finding work. As many of the jobs paid on the basis of piece rates, there was little risk to an employer in giving her employment. If she produced little, she would be paid little. The training she received for her various jobs was minimal. Essentially, she watched other employees and/or was given brief instructions. Her trainer in Perry was paid an hourly supplement of 10 cents to make up for incentive earnings lost due to the effect of the initial ineptitude of a trainee on joint output. Generally, however, the cost of training to the employer was of little moment, and he was relatively indifferent about his rate of employee turnover. The labor market was therefore relatively fluid.

It is difficult to assess the overall state of the labor market. The unemployment rate for persons fourteen years old and over is estimated to have been 5.0 percent in 1900, 2.4 percent in 1901, and 2.7 percent in 1902.<sup>36</sup> However, these estimates are extremely crude. And, in the early part of the century, the heavy weight of the farm sector—where open unemployment is typically very low—would tend to exert a downward pull on the overall figures, relative to modern conditions. At best, it can simply be noted that there was not a major depression at the time Mrs. Van Vorst entered the market.<sup>37</sup>

It is also difficult to make an assessment—based on available data—whether there was more mobility within the labor force in 1900 than there is today. In terms of interstate mobility, the reverse seems to be true. Seventy-nine percent of the native population covered by the 1900 Census of Population resided in their state of birth, compared with 68 percent in 1970.<sup>38</sup> The cost and availability of long-distance transportation obviously have their impact on these figures.

Within metropolitan areas, however, there was cheap public transportation. Local mobility was possible. In Pittsburgh, Mrs. Van Vorst mentions the “innumerable tramways . . . up and down wire-lined avenues.” In Chicago, in search of employment, she pays a fare of one cent to ride a car to the opposite side of the city from her initial neighborhood of job search. Chicago had 469 miles of cable car lines as of 1894, and was in the process of modernizing them by substituting electric street cars when Mrs. Van Vorst sought work.<sup>39</sup> Pittsburgh had street railways as early as 1859, and eventually developed a 600-mile system.<sup>40</sup> Thus, job search in urban areas was clearly not confined to local neighborhoods.

Recent literature on the structure of the labor market has emphasized the concept of the “dual labor market.” This approach, developed by Peter B. Doeringer and Michael J. Piore, divides the labor market into primary and secondary sectors.<sup>41</sup> According to the concept’s originators,

Jobs in the primary market possess several of the following characteristics: high wages, good working conditions, employment stability, chances of advancement, equity, and due process in the administration of work rules. Jobs in the secondary market, in contrast, tend to have low wages and fringe benefits, poor working conditions, high labor turnover, little chance of advancement, and often arbitrary and capricious supervision.<sup>42</sup>

In modern literature the dual labor market approach has been mainly applied to the employment problems of ethnic minorities. According to Doeringer and Piore, an important element in the nature of the secondary market is the failure of employees to maintain work habits associated with steady employment. Instead, they tend to have records of high absenteeism, and tend to move in and out of legitimate employment to partake in quasi-legal and illegal activities. Such activities compete in remuneration with "legitimate" low-wage secondary employment. Proponents of the dualistic approach believe that the two sectors of the labor market tend to draw apart.<sup>43</sup>

Mrs. Van Vorst's descriptions suggest the secondary labor market was prevalent for female employment at the turn of the century. As already noted, she found jobs easily, and the jobs involved little skill or training. The wages she was paid were below average for that time. Opportunities for advancement were extremely limited. It is interesting to ask, however, whether what is now termed the secondary sector was in fact the dominant portion of the labor market in 1900. Would Mrs. Van Vorst's experiences with job searching and the types of jobs available have been typical for the bulk of the nonsupervisory labor force, both male and female?

In a certain sense, the secondary labor market is the market for employment in the classical economics textbooks. Wages are determined by demand for, and supply of, workers. Employees and employers are attached only through the immediate payment of wages. Although in the modern context cuts in wages are rare, Mrs. Van Vorse notes that vacancies became available at the Perry shirt factory because management reduced wages. "There's a lot of the girls left the mill yesterday," she is told by a man she

encounters at the Perry railroad station. "They cut the wages, and some of the oldest hands got right out."

Of course, there was a sector of the nonsupervisory labor force in 1900 composed of highly skilled workers. Apart from the white-collar and farm sectors, "craftsmen, foremen, and kindred workers" accounted for 31 percent of male employment and about 2 percent of female employment. The corresponding figures for 1970 are 37 percent and 3 percent.<sup>44</sup> Changes in occupational classification techniques have occurred, but it does appear that the difference in skill mix between these years is not great. However, some of the other characteristics which are associated with the primary labor market in modern times were much less common in 1900: unionization was not very extensive; the formalism of seniority systems, job ladders, and work rules which go with unionization were therefore less common, as were fringe benefits, such as pensions, which make labor turnover costly to employers. And social welfare legislation such as unemployment insurance and workmen's compensation was generally unknown, although there had been limited experiments in some states. Doeringer and Piore note that such legislation—from which the secondary market is often exempted—tends to make employee turnover expensive.<sup>45</sup> As noted above, the labor market in 1900 was probably a more fluid institution, with "permanent" attachment to an employer a less-common expectation among workers than it is today.<sup>46</sup> Today's secondary market—now clearly concentrated in the low-wage sector—may simply be a residual of what was once the general case.

There is no reference in Mrs. Van Vorst's study to activities which correspond to the quasi-legal or illegal pursuits ("hustling") that complete with regular em-

ployment in the Doeringer-Piore model. Dorothy Richardson, in her description of the New York City labor market at the turn of the century, tells of her shock at discovering that one of her co-workers was a "malpractitioner" (prostitute)<sup>47</sup> According to her, "The factories, the workshops, and to some extent the stores . . . are recruiting-grounds for the Tenderloin and the 'red light' districts."<sup>48</sup> However, the extent of this alternative activity cannot be determined.

Further research on the "secondary" features of labor markets in the early part of the century would certainly be worthwhile. Over the past 70-75 years, the proportion of the labor force engaged in the primary market has apparently grown significantly. What factors have permitted this transition? How do the workers in the labor market described by Mrs. Van Vorst differ from current participants in the secondary labor market? The answers to these questions go beyond an historical interest; they can provide important guidance for contemporary public manpower policies.

At the time Bessie and Marie Van Vorst set out to investigate factory life, Bessie was about twenty-seven years old, and Marie about thirty-three.<sup>49</sup> Marie was the daughter of a New York City judge who had been active in the reform movement which overthrew the corrupt Tweed Ring. The two women became associated after Bessie married Marie's brother, John. Marie had already written a novel, **Philip Longstreth** (1902), about a wealthy young man who decides to investigate the condition of the poor. (He conducts his investigation by becoming an employer, not an employee!) The jointly authored **Woman Who Toils** was the best known of their writings on social questions. The book apparently had its greatest impact on the child labor issue, despite its more

specific focus on the woman worker. In the section of the book written by Marie—not reprinted in this volume—a chapter was devoted to children working in southern textiles mills. The descriptions of such children as young as six years of age and her warning that “the infant population . . . whose cheap toil feeds the mills is doomed” sparked a reform movement in the South.

**The Woman Who Toils** was well received both in the United States and abroad.<sup>50</sup> Bessie Van Vorst went on to write **The Cry of the Children** (1908), a further exploration of the child-labor questions. Marie wrote a novel, **Amanda of the Mill** (1905), based on her experiences in a southern textile factory. The two women apparently did not collaborate on any later writings. Marie became an author of romantic novels, moved to Italy, married a count, and died in Florence in 1936. Bessie drifted out of the public eye and died in 1928.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Lillian Pettengill, "Toilers of the Home: A College Woman's Experiences as a Domestic Servant," **Everybody's Magazine**, VIII, (March 1903 and April 1903). Portions of **The Woman Who Toils** also appeared in **Everybody's Magazine**.

2. Reprinted in William L. O'Neill, ed., **Women at Work** (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972.)

3. William Hard and Rheta Childe Dorr, "The Woman's Invasion," **Everybody's Digest**, XIX, (November 1908).

4. Reference to her study appears in **The Review of Reviews**, XXVIII (1903), p. 54.

5. *Muller vs. Oregon*, 208 U.S. 412 (1908). The court's decision and the Brandeis-Goldmark brief is reprinted in Louis D. Brandeis and Josephine Goldmark, **Women in Industry** (New York: Arno, 1969).

6. President Roosevelt emphasized this theme elsewhere. See the excerpt of his views in **The Review of Reviews**, XXXIII (1906). Commenting on the opinion of a clergyman who had advised that only the rich should have more than two children, the President said, "A race that practised such a doctrine—that is a race that practised race-suicide—would thereby conclusively show that it was unfit to exist, and that it had better give place to people who had not forgotten the primary laws of their being."

7. See the review by Grace Isabel Colbron in **The Bookman**, XVII (April 1903), pp. 187-188.

8. Leo Wolman, **Growth of American Trade Unions: 1880-1923** (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1924), p. 33. Wolman estimated that 1.5% of the female nonfarm labor force was unionized by 1910 (p. 105). Richardson in O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 284, reports that the few women in New York City who belonged to unions did so "under protest." Trades which were organized by men sometimes required membership by women as a condition of employment.

9. T.D.A. Cockerell, "Various Social Problems," **The Dial**, XXXIV (June 1903), pp. 402-403.

10. The reviewer for **The Nation**, LXXVII (July 9, 1903), p. 39, complains of Mrs. Van Vorst's statement that workers are expending their youth on producing the world's material needs. Referring to the products Mrs. Van Vorst helped produce, the reviewer asks, "Shall the eaters of pickles and the wearers of shirts be condemned . . . ?"

11. The notion that wages would tend to subsistence was popular in the nineteenth century. By 1900, the mainstream of Western economics had adopted the familiar demand-supply analysis. The overall demand for labor was determined by the supplies of other factors of production and by the level of technology. Labor supply was determined by population, and there was no reason why the intersection of demand and supply might not come at a level above subsistence. John Stuart Mill, for example, argued that in areas such as North America, with abundant land, modern technology, and a high rate of "accumulation," "all . . . who can possibly be born can find employment without overstocking the market; every laborer enjoys in abundance the necessaries, many of the comforts and some of the luxuries of life . . ." **Principles of Political Economy** (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1872), p. 211.

12. Although labor's "share" of national income has shown an upward trend, the gain seems to come from increased employment concentration in industries where labor's share is high. The effect of unions is ambiguous. See Allan M. Cartter and F. Ray Marshall, **Labor Economics** (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, 1967), pp. 355-379.

13. See the review in the **New York Times**, March 21, 1903, p. 194.

14. Richardson in O'Neill, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-91.

15. Simon Kuznets and Ernest Rubin **Immigration and the Foreign Born** (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1954), p.28.

16. U.S. Bureau of the Census, **Historical Statistics of the United States from Colonial Times to 1957** (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960), pp. 7, 66; U.S. Bureau of the Census, **Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1973** (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1973), pp. 5, 34.

17. About 45% of the foreign-born population of the U.S. came from central, eastern, and southern Europe in 1900. The proportion rose to 56% by 1910. **Historical Statistics**, p. 66.

18. **Historical Statistics**, p. 46. During 1890-1910, Pennsylvania and Illinois experienced a net in-migration of foreign-born whites of 872,700 and 671,700, respectively. The figures for native whites are 238,300 and 154,900.

19. **Historical Statistics**, pp. 8-9, 12. Persons of mixed Indian-Negro ancestry were generally classified as Negro.

20. Walter A. Fogel, **The Negro in the Meat Industry** (Philadelphia: Industrial Research Unit, Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, 1970), p. 22.

21. See George L. Perry, "Changing Labor Markets and Inflation," **Brookings Papers on Economic Activity** (3:1970), pp. 411-441.

22. This is due partly to the shorter life expectancy in 1900 relative to 1970. Data from **Historical Statistics**, p. 10; and U.S. Bureau of the Census, **Census of Population: 1970, General Population Characteristics, Final report PC(1)-B1** (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972), Table 49.

23. See Table 3.

24. The median age of first marriage for women was 21.9 years in 1900 as compared with 20.8 years in 1970. **Historical Statistics**, p. 15; and **Statistical Abstract: 1973**, p. 65.

25. A household is defined as all the persons occupying a dwelling unit. A person living alone in a dwelling unit is counted as a household. Persons living in hotels, boarding houses, etc., are not considered to be residing in a household. Data from **Historical Statistics**, p. 16; and **Statistical Abstract: 1973**, p. 40.

26. **Historical Statistics**, p. 24.

27. Presumably, the declining trend has some relationship to job opportunities for women. The trend may have been in part due to increased opportunities. Modern economic literature stresses a choice between "household" and external market production by women based on relative opportunities in the two spheres. For example, see Arleen Leibowitz, "Education and Home Production," **American Economic Review**, LXIV (May 1974), pp. 243-250; and Reuben Gronau, "The Intrafamily Allocation of Time: The Value of the Housewives' Time," **American Economic Review**, LXIII. (September 1973), pp. 634-651.

28. Average hourly earnings were 15.2 cents and average weekly hours were 62.1. Paul H. Douglas, **Real Wages in the United States, 1890-1926** (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1930), pp. 101, 115.

29. Based on the lowest-paid or least-skilled occupations reported for various industries in Bureau of Labor Statistics bulletins. Source: Whitney Coombs, **The Wages of Unskilled Labor in Manufacturing Industries in the United States, 1890-1924** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), p. 99. However, the bulletins sometimes did not reflect the wages of the "laborer" job classification.

30. Douglas, *op. cit.*, reports average annual earnings in canning and preserving were \$144 in 1900 (pp. 252-253, Table 90), \$293 in shirt manufacturing (p. 265), and \$495 in book and job printing (p. 292). The extremely low figure for canning probably reflects part-year employment in rural areas.

31. Fred L. Israel, ed., **1897 Sears Roebuck Catalogue** (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1968), pp. 373, 698.

32. The prices cited for the various garments seem to be in general agreement with the prices for similar items in the **1897 Sears Roebuck Catalogue**.

33. Dorothy Richardson in O'Neill, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-288, is highly critical of lodging-house conditions in New York City for working women.

34. The Consumer Price Index stood at 133.1 in 1973 (1967 = 100). The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates the index would have stood at 25 in 1900 and 1901. See U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, **Handbook of Labor Statistics: 1973** (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 287.

35. **Historical Statistics**, p. 180; **Handbook of Labor Statistics: 1973**, p. 325.

36. Stanley Lebergott, "Annual Estimates of Unemployment in the United States, 1900-1954," in National Bureau of Economic Research, **The Measurement and Behavior of Unemployment** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 215.

37. The U.S. economy was depressed in the mid-1890s. Manufacturing output rose rapidly from 1896-1899. Between 1899 and 1900, production remained stagnant. Production of durables fell by 6%, but non-durable goods production rose by 2%. Rapid growth was renewed after 1900. See Edwin Frickley, **Production in the United States, 1860-1914** (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), pp. 54, 64. Thus, Mrs. Van Vorst probably entered the economy during a recovery from a recession in manufacturing.

38. **Historical Statistics**, p. 41; **Statistical Abstract: 1973**, p. 35. See footnote 46 for further comment on mobility.

39. John Anderson Miller, **Fares Please!** (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), pp. 43, 52.

40. William D. Middleton, **The Time of the Trolley** (Milwaukee: Kalmbach Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 16, 193.

41. Peter B. Doeringer and Michael J. Piore, **Internal Labor Markets and Manpower Analysis** (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1971), pp. 163-183.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

43. Thomas Vietorisz and Bennett Harrison, "Labor Market Segmentation: Positive Feedback and Divergent Development," **American Economic Review**, LXIII (May 1973), pp. 366-376.

44. **Historical Statistics**, p. 74; **Statistical Abstract**: 1973, p. 233.

45. Doeringer and Piore, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-175.

46. Recently developed historical evidence suggests a great deal of mobility in nineteenth century cities. For example, the City of Boston maintained a directory from which it is possible to estimate annual population movements. In the period 1889-1890, 20% of the population apparently left the city, and 29% moved to another Boston address. These figures and other supporting evidence suggest great flux in nineteenth century urban centers. See Stephan Thernstrom and Peter R. Knight, **Men in Motion: Some Data and Speculation about Urban Population Mobility in Nineteenth Century America** (Los Angeles: Institute of Government and Public Affairs, 1970), mimeographed report MR-143. There has also been comment in economic literature about declining job mobility during the twentieth century. See Arthur M. Ross, "Do We Have a New Industrial Feudalism?," **American Economic Review** XLVIII (December 1958), pp. 903-920.

47. Richardson in O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 276-277.

49. Biographical details of the two women have been drawn from the entry for Marie Van Vorst in Edward T. James, ed., **Notable American Women: 1807-1950** (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1971), Vol. III, pp. 514-515; and the obituary for Marie in **New York Times**, December 18, 1936, p. 25.

50. Comments by British reviewers may be found in Ethel B. Harrison, "The Woman Who Toils' in America," **The Nineteenth Century and After**, LIV (December 1903), pp. 1020-1025; and in **The Athenaeum** (August 15, 1903), p. 218. **The Woman Who Toils** was translated into French.

# The Woman Who Toils

PREFATORY LETTER FROM THEODORE  
ROOSEVELT

*Written after reading Chapter III. when published serially*

WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON, October 18, 1902.

*My Dear Mrs. Van Vorst:*

*I must write you a line to say how much I have appreciated your article, "The Woman Who Toils." But to me there is a most melancholy side to it, when you touch upon what is fundamentally infinitely more important than any other question in this country—that is, the question of race suicide, complete or partial.*

*An easy, good-natured kindliness, and a desire to be "independent"—that is, to live one's life purely according to one's own desires—are in no sense substitutes for the fundamental virtues, for the practice of the strong, racial qualities without which there can be no strong races—the qualities of courage and resolution in both men and women, of scorn of what is mean, base and selfish, of eager desire to work or fight or suffer as the case may be provided the end to be gained is great enough, and the contemptuous putting aside of mere ease, mere vapid pleasure, mere avoidance of toil and worry. I do not know whether I most pity or most despise the foolish and selfish man or woman who does not understand that the only things really worth having*

*in life are those the acquirement of which normally means cost and effort. If a man or woman, through no fault of his or hers, goes throughout life denied those highest of all joys which spring only from home life, from the having and bringing up of many healthy children, I feel for them deep and respectful sympathy—the sympathy one extends to the gallant fellow killed at the beginning of a campaign, or the man who toils hard and is brought to ruin by the fault of others. But the man or woman who deliberately avoids marriage, and has a heart so cold as to know no passion and a brain so shallow and selfish as to dislike having children, is in effect a criminal against the race, and should be an object of contemptuous abhorrence by all healthy people.*

*Of course no one quality makes a good citizen, and no one quality will save a nation. But there are certain great qualities for the lack of which no amount of intellectual brilliancy or of material prosperity or of easiness of life can atone, and which show decadence and corruption in the nation just as much if they are produced by selfishness and coldness and ease-loving laziness among comparatively poor people as if they are produced by vicious or frivolous luxury in the rich. If the men of the nation are not anxious to work in many different ways, with all their might and strength, and ready and able to fight at need, and anxious to be fathers of families, and if the women do not recognize that the greatest thing for any woman is to be a good wife and mother, why, that nation has cause to be alarmed about its future.*

*There is no physical trouble among us Americans. The trouble with the situation you set forth is one of character, and therefore we can conquer it if we only will.*

*Very sincerely yours,*

*THEODORE ROOSEVELT.*

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

ANY journey into the world, any research in literature, any study of society, demonstrates the existence of two distinct classes designated as the rich and the poor, the fortunate and the unfortunate, the upper and the lower, the educated and the uneducated—and a further variety of opposing epithets. Few of us who belong to the former category have come into more than brief contact with the labourers who, in the factories or elsewhere, gain from day to day a livelihood frequently insufficient for their needs. Yet all of us are troubled by their struggle, all of us recognize the misery of their surroundings, the paucity of their moral and esthetic inspiration, their lack of opportunity for physical development. All of us have a longing, pronounced or latent, to help them, to alleviate their distress, to better their condition in some, in every way.

Now concerning this unknown class whose oppression we deplore we have two sources of information: the financiers who, for their own material advancement, use the labourer as a means, and the philanthropists who consider the poor as objects of charity,

to be treated sentimentally, or as economic cases to be studied theoretically. It is not by economics nor by the distribution of bread alone that we can find a solution for the social problem. More important for the happiness of man is the hope we cherish of eventually bringing about a reign of justice and equality upon earth.

It is evident that, in order to render practical aid to this class, we must live among them, understand their needs, acquaint ourselves with their desires, their hopes, their aspirations, their fears. We must discover and adopt their point of view, put ourselves in their surroundings, assume their burdens, unite with them in their daily effort. In this way alone, and not by forcing upon them a preconceived ideal, can we do them real good, can we help them to find a moral, spiritual, esthetic standard suited to their condition of life. Such an undertaking is impossible for most. Sure of its utility, inspired by its practical importance, I determined to make the sacrifice it entailed and to learn by experience and observation what these could teach. I set out to surmount physical fatigue and revulsion, to place my intellect and sympathy in contact as a medium between the working girl who wants help and the more fortunately situated who wish to help her. In the papers which follow I have endeavoured to give a faithful picture of things as they exist, both in and out of the factory, and to suggest remedies that occurred

to me as practical. My desire is to act as a mouth-piece for the woman labourer. I assumed her mode of existence with the hope that I might put into words her cry for help. It has been my purpose to find out what her capacity is for suffering and for joy as compared with ours; what tastes she has, what ambitions, what the equipment of woman is as compared to that of man: her equipment as determined,

1st. By nature,

2d. By family life,

3d. By social laws;

what her strength is and what her weaknesses are as compared with the woman of leisure; and finally, to discern the tendencies of a new society as manifested by its working girls.

After many weeks spent among them as one of them I have come away convinced that no earnest effort for their betterment is fruitless. I am hopeful that my faithful descriptions will perhaps suggest, to the hearts of those who read, some ways of rendering personal and general help to that class who, through the sordidness and squalour of their material surroundings, the limitation of their opportunities, are condemned to slow death—mental, moral, physical death! If into their prison's midst, after the reading of these lines, a single death pardon should be carried, my work shall not have been in vain.

IN A PITTSBURG FACTORY

## CHAPTER II

### IN A PITTSBURG FACTORY

IN choosing the scene for my first experiences, I decided upon Pittsburg, as being an industrial centre whose character was determined by its working population. It exceeds all other cities of the country in the variety and extent of its manufacturing products. Of its 321,616 inhabitants, 100,000 are labouring men employed in the mills. Add to these the great number of women and girls who work in the factories and clothing shops, and the character of the place becomes apparent at a glance. There is, moreover, another reason which guided me toward this Middle West town without its like. This land which we are accustomed to call democratic, is in reality composed of a multitude of kingdoms whose despots are the employers—the multi-millionaire patrons—and whose serfs are the labouring men and women. The rulers are invested with an authority and a power not unlike those possessed by the early barons, the feudal lords, the Lorenzo de Medicis, the Cheops; but with this difference, that whereas Pharaoh by his unique will controlled a thousand slaves, the steel magnate uses, for his own ends also, thousands of

separate wills. It was a submissive throng who built the pyramids. The mills which produce half the steel the world requires are run by a collection of individuals. Civilization has undergone a change. The multitudes once worked for one; now each man works for himself first and for a master secondarily. In our new society where tradition plays no part, where the useful is paramount, where business asserts itself over art and beauty, where material needs are the first to be satisfied, and where the country's unclaimed riches are our chief incentive to effort, it is not uninteresting to find an analogy with the society in Italy which produced the Renaissance. Diametrically opposed in their ideals, they have a common spirit. In Italy the rebirth was of the love of art, and of classic forms, the desire to embellish—all that was inspired by culture of the beautiful; the Renaissance in America is the rebirth of man's originality in the invention of the useful, the virgin power of man's wits as quickened in the crude struggle for life. Florence is *par excellence* the place where we can study the Italian Renaissance; Pittsburg appealed to me as a most favourable spot to watch the American Renaissance, the enlivening of energies which give value to a man devoid of education, energies which in their daily exercise with experience generate a new force, a force that makes our country what it is, industrially and economically.

So it was toward Pittsburg that I first directed my

steps, but before leaving New York I assumed my disguise. In the Parisian clothes I am accustomed to wear I present the familiar outline of any woman of the world. With the aid of coarse woolen garments, a shabby felt sailor hat, a cheap piece of fur, a knitted shawl and gloves I am transformed into a working girl of the ordinary type. I was born and bred and brought up in the world of the fortunate—I am going over now into the world of the unfortunate. I am to share their burdens, to lead their lives, to be present as one of them at the spectacle of their sufferings and joys, their ambitions and sorrows.

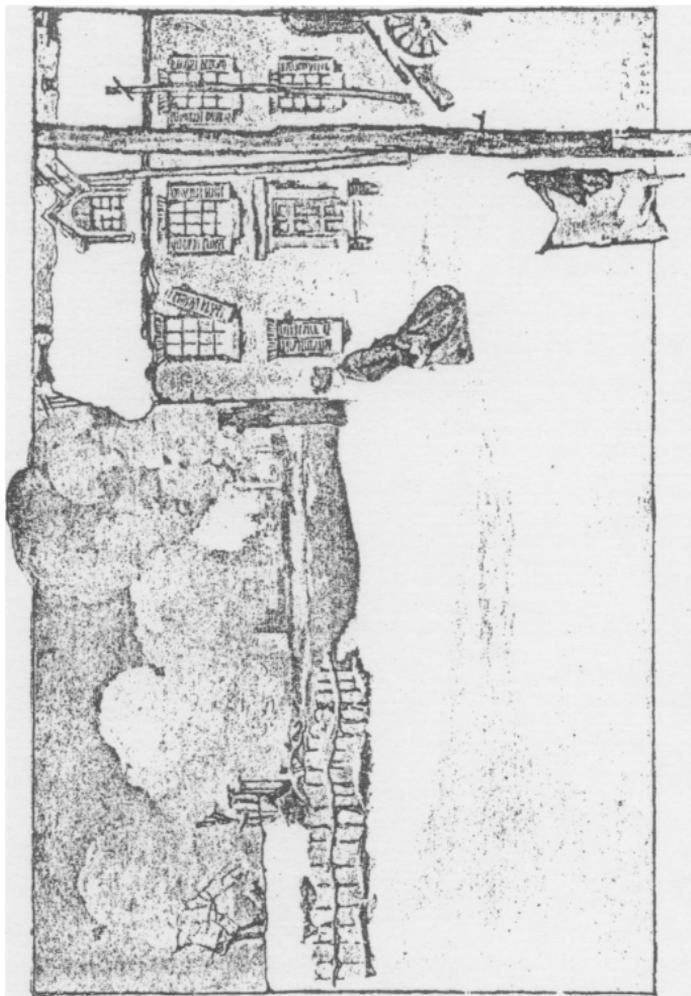
I get no farther than the depot when I observe that I am being treated as though I were ignorant and lacking in experience. As a rule the gateman says a respectful "To the right" or "To the left," and trusts to his well-dressed hearer's intelligence. A word is all that a moment's hesitation calls forth. To the working girl he explains as follows: "Now you take your ticket, do you understand, and I'll pick up your money for you; you don't need to pay anything for your ferry—just put those three cents back in your pocket-book and go down there to where that gentleman is standing and he'll direct you to your train."

This without my having asked a question. I had divested myself of a certain authority along with my good clothes, and I had become one of a class which,

as the gateman had found out, and as I find out later myself, are devoid of all knowledge of the world and, aside from their manual training, ignorant on all subjects.

My train is three hours late, which brings me at about noon to Pittsburg. I have not a friend or an acquaintance within hundreds of miles. With my bag in my hand I make my way through the dark, busy streets to the Young Women's Christian Association. It is down near a frozen river. The wind blows sharp and biting over the icy water; the streets are covered with snow, and over the snow the soot falls softly like a mantle of perpetual mourning. There is almost no traffic. Innumerable tramways ring their way up and down wire-lined avenues; occasionally a train of freight cars announces itself with a warning bell in the city's midst. It is a black town of toil, one man in every three a labourer. They have no need for vehicles of pleasure. The trolleys take them to their work, the trains transport the products of the mills.

I hear all languages spoken: this prodigious town is a Western bazaar where the nations assemble not to buy but to be employed. The stagnant scum of other countries floats hither to be purified in the fierce bouillon of live opportunity. It is a cosmopolitan procession that passes me: the dusky Easterner with a fez of Astrakhan, the gentle-eyed Italian with a shawl of gay colours, the loose-lipped



“THE STREETS ARE COVERED WITH SNOW, AND OVER THE SNOW THE SOOT FALLS SOFTLY  
LIKE A MANTLE OF PERPETUAL MOURNING.”

Hungarian, the pale, mystic Swede, the German with wife and children hanging on his arm.

In this giant bureau of labour all nationalities gather, united by a common bond of hope, animated by a common chance of prosperity, kindred through a common effort, fellow-citizens in a new land of freedom.

At the central office of the Young Women's Christian Association I receive what attention a busy secretary can spare me. She questions and I answer as best I can.

"What is it you want?"

"Board and work in a factory."

"Have you ever worked in a factory?"

"No, ma'am."

"Have you ever done any housework?"

She talks in the low, confidential tone of those accustomed to reforming prisoners and reasoning with the poor.

"Yes, ma'am, I have done housework."

"What did you make?"

"Twelve dollars a month."

"I can get you a place where you will have a room to yourself and fourteen dollars a month. Do you want it?"

"No, ma'am."

"Are you making anything now?"

"No, ma'am."

"Can you afford to pay board?"

"Yes, as I hope to get work at once."

She directs me to a boarding place which is at the same time a refuge for the friendless and a shelter for waifs. The newly arrived population of the fast-growing city seems unfamiliar with the address I carry written on a card. I wait on cold street corners, I travel over miles of half-settled country, long stretches of shanties and saloons huddled close to the trolley line. The thermometer is at zero. Toward three o'clock I find the waif boarding-house.

The matron is in the parlour hovering over a gas stove. She has false hair, false teeth, false jewelry, and the dry, crabbed, inquisitive manner of the idle who are entrusted with authority. She is there to direct others and do nothing herself, to be cross and make herself dreaded. In the distance I can hear a shrill, nasal orchestra of children's voices. I am cold and hungry. I have as yet no job. The noise, the sordidness, the witchlike matron annoy me. I have a sudden impulse to flee, to seek warmth and food and proper shelter—to snap my fingers at experience and be grateful I was born among the fortunate. Something within me calls *Courage!* I take a room at three dollars a week with board, put my things in it, and while my feet yet ache with cold I start to find a factory, a pickle factory, which, the matron tells me, is run by a Christian gentleman.

I have felt timid and even overbold at different moments in my life, but never so audacious as on entering a factory door marked in gilt letters: "*Women Employees.*"

The Cerberus between me and the fulfilment of my purpose is a gray-haired timekeeper with kindly eyes. He sits in a glass cage and about him are a score or more of clocks all ticking soundly and all surrounded by an extra dial of small numbers running from one to a thousand. Each number means a workman—each tick of the clock a moment of his life gone in the service of the pickle company. I rap on the window of the glass cage. It opens.

"Do you need any girls?" I ask, trying not to show my emotion.

"Ever worked in a factory?"

"No, sir; but I'm very handy."

"What have you done?"

"Housework," I respond with conviction, beginning to believe it myself.

"Well," he says, looking at me, "they need help up in the bottling department; but I don't know as it would pay you—they don't give more than sixty or seventy cents a day."

"I am awfully anxious for work," I say. "Couldn't I begin and get raised, perhaps?"

"Surely—there is always room for those who show the right spirit. You come in to-morrow morning at a quarter before seven. You can try it,

and you mustn't get discouraged; there's plenty of work for good workers."

The blood tingles through my cold hands. My heart is lighter. I have not come in vain. I have a place!

When I get back to the boarding-house it is twilight. The voices I had heard and been annoyed by have materialized. Before the gas stove there are nine small individuals dressed in a strange combination of uniform checked aprons and patent leather boots worn out and discarded by the babies of the fortunate. The small feet they encase are crossed, and the freshly washed faces are demure, as the matron with the wig frowns down into a newspaper from which she now and then hisses a command to order. Three miniature members are rocking violently in tiny rocking chairs.

"*Quit rocking!*" the false mother cries at them. "You make my head ache. Most of 'em have no parents," she explains to me. "None of 'em have homes."

Here they are, a small kingdom, not wanted, unwelcome, unprovided for, growled at and grumbled over. Yet each is developing in spite of chance; each is determining hour by hour his heritage from unknown parents. The matron leaves us; the rocking begins again. Conversation is animated. The three-year-old baby bears the name of a three-year-old hero. This "Dewey" complains in a plain-

tive voice of a too long absent mother. His rosy lips are pursed out even with his nose. Again and again he reiterates the refrain: "My mamma don't never come to see me. She don't bring me no toys." And then with pride, "My mamma buys rice and tea and lots of things," and dashing to the window as a trolley rattles by, "My mamma comes in the street cars, only," sadly, "she don't never come."

Not one of them has forgotten what fate has willed them to do without. At first they look shrinkingly toward my outstretched hand. Is it coming to administer some punishment? Little by little they are reassured, and, gaining in confidence, they sketch for me in disconnected chapters the short outlines of their lives.

"I've been to the hospital," says one, "and so's Lily. I drank a lot of washing soda and it made me sick."

Lily begins her hospital reminiscences. "I had typhoy fever—I was in the childun's ward awful long, and one night they turned down the lights—it was just evening—and a man came in and he took one of the babies up in his arms, and we all said, 'What's the row? What's the row?' and he says 'Hush, the baby's dead.' And out in the hall there was something white, and he carried the baby and put it in the white thing, and the baby had a doll that could talk, and he put that in the white thing too, right alongside o' the dead baby. Another

time," Lily goes on, "there was a baby in a crib alongside of mine, and one day he was takin' his bottle, and all of a suddint he choked, and he kept on chokin' and then he died, and he was still takin' his bottle."

Lily is five. I see in her and in her companions a familiarity not only with the mysteries but with the stern realities of life. They have an understanding look at the mention of death, drunkenness and all domestic difficulties or irregularities. Their vocabulary and conversation image the violent and brutal side of existence—the only one with which they are acquainted.

At bedtime I find my way upward through dark and narrow stairs that open into a long room with a slanting roof. It serves as nursery and parlour. In the dull light of a stove and an oil lamp four or five women are seated with babies on their knees. They have the meek look of those who doom themselves to acceptance of misfortune, the flat, resigned figures of the overworked. Their loose woolen jackets hang over their gaunt shoulders; their straight hair is brushed hard and smooth against high foreheads. One baby lies a comfortable bundle in its mother's arms; one is black in the face after a spasm of coughing; one howls its woes through a scarlet mask. The corners of the room are filled with the drones—those who "work for a bite of grub." The cook, her washing done, has piled her aching bones in a heap;

her drawn face waits like an indicator for some fresh signal to a new fatigue. Mary, the woman-of-all-work, who has spent more than one night within a prison's walls, has long ago been brutalized by the persistence of life in spite of crime; her gray hair ripples like sand under receding waves; her profile is strong and fine, but her eyes have a film of misery over them—dull and silent, they deaden her face. And Jennie, the charwoman, is she a cripple or has toil thus warped her body? Her arms, long and withered, swing like the broken branches of a gnarled tree; her back is twisted and her head bowed toward earth. A stranger to rest, she seems a mechanical creature wound up for work and run down in the middle of a task.

What could be hoped for in such surroundings? With every effort to be clean the dirt accumulates faster than it can be washed away. It was impossible, I found by my own experience, to be really clean. There was a total absence of beauty in everything—not a line of grace, not a pleasing sound, not an agreeable odour anywhere. One could get used to this ugliness, become unconscious even of the acrid smells that pervade the tenement. It was probable my comrades felt at no time the discomfort I did, but the harm done them is not the physical suffering their condition causes, but the moral and spiritual bondage in which it holds them. They are not a class of drones made differently

from us. I saw nothing to indicate that they were not born with like *capacities* to ours. As our bodies accustom themselves to luxury and cleanliness, theirs grow hardened to deprivation and filth. As our souls develop with the advantages of all that constitutes an ideal—an intellectual, esthetic and moral ideal—their souls diminish under the oppression of a constant physical effort to meet material demands. The fact that they become physically callous to what we consider unbearable is used as an argument for their emotional insensibility. I hold such an argument as false. From all I saw I am convinced that, *given their relative preparation* for suffering and for pleasure, their griefs and their joys are the same as ours in kind and in degree.

When one is accustomed to days begun at will by the summons of a tidy maid, waking oneself at half-past five means to be guardian of the hours until this time arrives. Once up, the toilet I made in the nocturnal darkness of my room can best be described by the matron's remark to me as I went to bed: "If you want to wash," she said, "you'd better wash now; you can't have no water in your room, and there won't be nobody up when you leave in the morning." My evening bath is supplemented by a whisk of the sponge at five.

Without it is black—a more intense black than night's beginning, when all is astir. The streets are

silent, an occasional train whirls past, groups of men hurry hither and thither swinging their arms, rubbing their ears in the freezing air. Many of them have neither overcoats nor gloves. Now and then a woman sweeps along. Her skirts have the same swing as my own short ones; under her arm she carries a newspaper bundle whose meaning I have grown to know. My own contains a midday meal: two cold fried oysters, two dried preserve sandwiches, a pickle and an orange. My way lies across a bridge. In the first gray of dawn the river shows black under its burden of ice. Along its troubled banks innumerable chimneys send forth their hot activity, clouds of seething flames, waving arms of smoke and steam—a symbol of spent energy, of the lives consumed and vanishing again, the sparks that shine an instant against the dark sky and are spent forever.

As I draw nearer the factory I move with a stream of fellow workers pouring toward the glass cage of the timekeeper. He greets me and starts me on my upward journey with a wish that I shall not get discouraged, a reminder that the earnest worker always makes a way for herself.

“What will you do about your name?” “What will you do with your hair and your hands?” “How can you deceive people?” These are some of the questions I had been asked by my friends.

Before any one had cared or needed to know my

name it was morning of the second day, and my assumed name seemed by that time the only one I had ever had. As to hair and hands, a half-day's work suffices for their undoing. And my disguise is so successful I have deceived not only others but myself. I have become with desperate reality a factory girl, alone, inexperienced, friendless. I am making \$4.20 a week and spending \$3 of this for board alone, and I dread not being strong enough to keep my job. I climb endless stairs, am given a white cap and an apron, and my life as a factory girl begins. I become part of the ceaseless, unrelenting mechanism kept in motion by the poor.

The factory I have chosen has been built contemporaneously with reforms and sanitary inspection. There are clean, well-aired rooms, hot and cold water with which to wash, places to put one's hat and coat, an obligatory uniform for regular employees, hygienic and moral advantages of all kinds, ample space for work without crowding.

Side by side in rows of tens or twenties we stand before our tables waiting for the seven o'clock whistle to blow. In their white caps and blue frocks and aprons, the girls in my department, like any unfamiliar class, all look alike. My first task is an easy one; anybody could do it. On the stroke of seven my fingers fly. I place a lid of paper in a tin jar-top, over it a cork; this I press down with both hands, tossing the cover, when done, into a pan. In spite

of myself I hurry; I cannot work fast enough—I outdo my companions. How can they be so slow? I have finished three dozen while they are doing two. Every nerve, every muscle is offering some of its energy. Over in one corner the machinery for sealing the jars groans and roars; the mingled sounds of filling, washing, wiping, packing, comes to my eager ears as an accompaniment for the simple work assigned to me. One hour passes, two, three hours; I fit ten, twenty, fifty dozen caps, and still my energy keeps up.

The forewoman is a pretty girl of twenty. Her restless eyes, her metallic voice are the messengers who would know all. I am afraid of her. I long to please her. I am sure she must be saying "*How well the new girl works.*"

Conversation is possible among those whose work has become mechanical. Twice I am sent to the storeroom for more caps. In these brief moments my companions volunteer a word of themselves.

"I was out to a ball last night," the youngest one says. "I stayed so late I didn't feel a bit like getting up this morning."

"That's nothing," another retorts. "There's hardly an evening we don't have company at the house, music or somethin'; I never get enough rest."

And on my second trip the pale creature with me says:

"I'm in deep mourning. My mother died last

Friday week. It's awful lonely without her. Seems as though I'd never get over missing her. I miss her *dreadful*. Perhaps by and by I'll get used to it."

"Oh, no, you won't," the answer comes from a girl with short skirts. "You'll never get used to it. My ma's been dead eight years next month and I dreamt about her all last night. I can't get her out o' mc mind."

Born into dirt and ugliness, disfigured by effort, they have the same heritage as we: joys and sorrows, grief and laughter. With them as with us gaiety is up to its old tricks, tempting from graver rivals, making duty an alien. Grief is doing her ugly work: hollowing round cheeks, blackening bright eyes, putting her weight of leaden loneliness in hearts heretofore light with youth.

When I have fitted 110 dozen tin caps the forewoman comes and changes my job. She tells me to haul and load up some heavy crates with pickle jars. I am wheeling these back and forth when the twelve o'clock whistle blows. Up to that time the room has been one big dynamo, each girl a part of it. With the first moan of the noon signal the dynamo comes to life. It is hungry; it has friends and favourites—news to tell. We herd down to a big dining-room and take our places, five hundred of us in all. The newspaper bundles are unfolded. The *ménu* varies little: bread and jam, cake and pickles, occasionally

a sausage, a bit of cheese or a piece of stringy cold meat. In ten minutes the repast is over. The dynamo has been fed; there are twenty minutes of leisure spent in dancing, singing, resting, and conversing chiefly about young men and "socials."

At 12:30 sharp the whistle draws back the life it has given. I return to my job. My shoulders are beginning to ache. My hands are stiff, my thumbs almost blistered. The enthusiasm I had felt is giving way to a numbing weariness. I look at my companions now in amazement. How can they keep on so steadily, so swiftly? Cases are emptied and refilled; bottles are labeled, stamped and rolled away; jars are washed, wiped and loaded, and still there are more cases, more jars, more bottles. Oh! the monotony of it, the never-ending supply of work to be begun and finished, begun and finished, begun and finished! Now and then some one cuts a finger or runs a splinter under the flesh; once the mustard machine broke—and still the work goes on, on, on! New girls like myself, who had worked briskly in the morning, are beginning to loiter. Out of the washing-tins hands come up red and swollen, only to be plunged again into hot dirty water. Would the whistle never blow? Once I pause an instant, my head dazed and weary, my ears strained to bursting with the deafening noise. Quickly a voice whispers in my ear:

"You'd better not stand there doin' nothin'. If *she* catches you she'll give it to you."

On! on! bundle of pains! For you this is one day's work in a thousand of peace and beauty. For those about you this is the whole of daylight, this is the winter dawn and twilight, this is the glorious summer noon, this is all day, this is every day, this is *life*. Rest is only a bit of a dream, snatched when the sleeper's aching body lets her close her eyes for a moment in oblivion.

Out beyond the chimney tops the snowfields and the river turn from gray to pink, and still the work goes on. Each crate I lift grows heavier, each bottle weighs an added pound. Now and then some one lends a helping hand.

"Tired, ain't you? This is your first day, ain't it?"

The acid smell of vinegar and mustard penetrates everywhere. My ankles cry out pity. Oh! to sit down an instant!

"Tidy up the table," some one tells me; "we're soon goin' home."

Home! I think of the stifling fumes of fried food, the dim haze in the kitchen where my supper waits me; the children, the band of drifting workers, the shrill, complaining voice of the hired mother. This is home.

I sweep and set to rights, limping, lurching along. At last the whistle blows! In a swarm we report;

we put on our things and get away into the cool night air. I have stood ten hours; I have fitted 1,300 corks; I have hauled and loaded 4,000 jars of pickles. My pay is seventy cents.

The impressions of my first day crowd pell-mell upon my mind. The sound of the machinery dins in my ears. I can hear the sharp, nasal voices of the forewoman and the girls shouting questions and answers.

A sudden recollection comes to me of a Dahomayan family I had watched at work in their hut during the Paris Exhibition. There was a magic spell in their voices as they talked together; the sounds they made had the cadence of the wind in the trees, the running of water, the song of birds: they echoed unconsciously the caressing melodies of nature. My factory companions drew their vocal inspiration from the bedlam of civilization, the rasping and pounding of machinery, the din which they must out-din to be heard.

For the two days following my first experience I am unable to resume work. Fatigue has swept through my blood like a fever. Every bone and joint has a clamouring ache. I pass the time visiting other factories and hunting for a place to board in the neighbourhood of the pickling house. At the cork works they do not need girls; at the cracker company I can get a job, but the hours are longer, the advantages less than where I am; at the broom

factory they employ only men. I decide to continue with tin caps and pickle jars.

My whole effort now is to find a respectable boarding-house. I start out, the thermometer near zero, the snow falling. I wander and ask, wander and ask. Up and down the black streets running parallel and at right angles with the factory I tap and ring at one after another of the two-story red-brick houses. More than half of them are empty, tenantless during the working hours. What hope is there for family life near the hearth which is abandoned at the factory's first call? The sociableness, the discipline, the division of responsibility make factory work a dangerous rival to domestic care. There is something in the modern conditions of labour which act magnetically upon American girls, impelling them to work not for bread alone, but for clothes and finery as well. Each class in modern society knows a menace to its homes: sport, college education, machinery—each is a factor in the gradual transformation of family life from a united domestic group to a collection of individuals with separate interests and aims outside the home.

I pursue my search. It is the dinner hour. At last a narrow door opens, letting a puff of hot rank air blow upon me as I stand in the vestibule questioning: "Do you take boarders?"

The woman who answers stands with a spoon in her hand, her eyes fixed upon a rear room

where a stove, laden with frying-pans, glows and sputters.

"Come in," she says, "and get warm."

I walk into a front parlour with furniture that evidently serves domestic as well as social purposes. There is a profusion of white knitted tidies and portieres that exude an odour of cooking. Before the fire a workingman sits in a blue shirt and overalls. Fresh from the barber's hands, he has a clean mask marked by the razor's edge. Already I feel at home.

"Want board, do you?" the woman asks. "Well, we ain't got no place; we're always right full up."

My disappointment is keen. Regretfully I leave the fire and start on again.

"I guess you'll have some trouble in finding what you want," the woman calls to me on her way back to the kitchen, as I go out.

The answer is everywhere the same, with slight variations. Some take "mealers" only, some only "roomers," some "only gentlemen." I begin to understand it. Among the thousands of families who live in the city on account of the work provided by the mills, there are girls enough to fill the factories. There is no influx such as creates in a small town the necessity for working-girl boarding-houses. There is an ample supply of hands from the existing homes. There is the same difference between city and

country factory life that there is between university life in a capital and in a country town.

A sign on a neat-looking corner house attracts me. I rap and continue to rap; the door is opened at length by a tall good-looking young woman. Her hair curls prettily, catching the light; her eyes are stupid and beautiful. She has on a black skirt and a bright purple waist.

"Do you take boarders?"

"Why, yes. I don't generally like to take ladies, they give so much trouble. You can come in if you like. Here's the room," she continues, opening a door near the vestibule. She brushes her hand over her forehead and stares at me; and then, as though she can no longer silence the knell that is ringing in her heart, she says to me, always staring:

"My husband was killed on the railroad last week. He lived three hours. They took him to the hospital—a boy come running down and told me. I went up as fast as I could, but it was too late; he never spoke again. I guess he didn't know what struck him; his head was all smashed. He was awful good to me—so easy-going. I ain't got my mind down to work yet. If you don't like this here room," she goes on listlessly, "maybe you could get suited across the way."

Thompson Seton tells us in his book on wild animals that not one among them ever dies a natural death. As the opposite extreme of vital persistence

we have the man whose life, in spite of acute disease, is prolonged against reason by science; and midway comes the labourer, who takes his chances unarmed by any understanding of physical law, whose only safeguards are his wits and his presence of mind. The violent death, the accidents, the illnesses to which he falls victim might be often warded off by proper knowledge. Nature is a zealous enemy; ignorance and inexperience keep a whole class defenseless.

The next day is Saturday. I feel a fresh excitement at going back to my job; the factory draws me toward it magnetically. I long to be in the hum and whirl of the busy workroom. Two days of leisure without resources or amusement make clear to me how the sociability of factory life, the freedom from personal demands, the escape from self can prove a distraction to those who have no mental occupation, no money to spend on diversion. It is easier to submit to factory government which commands five hundred girls with one law valid for all, than to undergo the arbitrary discipline of parental authority. I speed across the snow-covered courtyard. In a moment my cap and apron are on and I am sent to report to the head forewoman.

"We thought you'd quit," she says. "Lots of girls come in here and quit after one day, especially Saturday. To-day is scrubbing day," she smiles at me. "Now we'll do right by you if you do

right by us. What did the timekeeper say he'd give you?"

"Sixty or seventy a day."

"We'll give you seventy," she says. "Of course, we can judge girls a good deal by their looks, and we can see that you're above the average."

She wears her cap close against her head. Her front hair is rolled up in crimping-pins. She has false teeth and is a widow. Her pale, parched face shows what a great share of life has been taken by daily over-effort repeated during years. As she talks she touches my arm in a kindly fashion and looks at me with blue eyes that float about under weary lids. "You are only at the beginning," they seem to say. "Your youth and vigour are at full tide, but drop by drop they will be sapped from you, to swell the great flood of human effort that supplies the world's material needs. You will gain in experience," the weary lids flutter at me, "but you will pay *with your life* the living you make."

There is no variety in my morning's work. Next to me is a bright, pretty girl jamming chopped pickles into bottles.

"How long have you been here?" I ask, attracted by her capable appearance. She does her work easily and well.

"About five months."

"How much do you make?"

"From 90 cents to \$1.05. I'm doing piece-work,"

she explains. "I get seven-eighths of a cent for every dozen bottles I fill. I have to fill eight dozen to make seven cents. Downstairs in the corking-room you can make as high as \$1.15 to \$1.20. They won't let you make any more than that. Me and them two girls over there are the only ones in this room doing piece-work. I was here three weeks as a day-worker."

"Do you live at home?" I ask.

"Yes; I don't have to work. I don't pay no board. My father and my brothers supports me and my mother. But," and her eyes twinkle, "I couldn't have the clothes I do if I didn't work."

"Do you spend your money all on yourself?"

"Yes."

I am amazed at the cheerfulness of my companions. They complain of fatigue, of cold, but never at any time is there a suggestion of ill-humour. Their suppressed animal spirits reassert themselves when the forewoman's back is turned. Companionship is the great stimulus. I am confident that without the social *entrain*, the encouragement of example, it would be impossible to obtain as much from each individual girl as is obtained from them in groups of tens, fifties, hundreds working together.

When lunch is over we are set to scrubbing. Every table and stand, every inch of the factory floor must be scrubbed in the next four hours. The whistle on Saturday blows an hour earlier. Any girl who has not finished her work when the day is

done, so that she can leave things in perfect order, is kept overtime, for which she is paid at the rate of six or seven cents an hour. A pail of hot water, a dirty rag and a scrubbing-brush are thrust into my hands. I touch them gingerly. I get a broom and for some time make sweeping a necessity, but the forewoman is watching me. I am afraid of her. There is no escape. I begin to scrub. My hands go into the brown, slimy water and come out brown and slimy. I slop the soap-suds around and move on to a fresh place. It appears there are a right and a wrong way of scrubbing. The forewoman is at my side.

"Have you ever scrubbed before?" she asks sharply. This is humiliating.

"Yes," I answer; "I have scrubbed . . . oil-cloth."

The forewoman knows how to do everything. She drops down on her knees and, with her strong arms and short-thumbed, brutal hands, she shows me how to scrub.

The grumbling is general. There is but one opinion among the girls: it is not right that they should be made to do this work. They all echo the same resentment, but their complaints are made in whispers; not one has the courage to openly rebel. What, I wonder to myself, do the men do on scrubbing day. I try to picture one of them on his hands and knees in a sea of brown mud. It is impossible.

The next time I go for a supply of soft soap in a department where the men are working I take a look at the masculine interpretation of house cleaning. One man is playing a hose on the floor and the rest are rubbing the boards down with long-handled brooms and rubber mops.

"You take it easy," I say to the boss.

"I won't have no scrubbing in my place," he answers emphatically. "The first scrubbing day, they says to me 'Get down on your hands and knees,' and I says—'Just pay me my money, will you; I'm goin' home. What scrubbing can't be done with mops ain't going to be done by me.' The women wouldn't have to scrub, either, if they had enough spirit all of 'em to say so."

I determined to find out if possible, during my stay in the factory, what it is that clogs this mainspring of "spirit" in the women.

I hear fragmentary conversations about fancy dress balls, valentine parties, church sociables, flirtations and clothes. Almost all of the girls wear shoes with patent leather and some or much cheap jewelry, brooches, bangles and rings. A few draw their corsets in; the majority are not laced. Here and there I see a new girl whose back is flat, whose chest is well developed. Among the older hands who have begun work early there is not a straight pair of shoulders. Much of the bottle washing and filling is done by children from twelve to fourteen

years of age. On their slight, frail bodies toil weighs heavily; the delicate child form gives way to the iron hand of labour pressed too soon upon it. Backs bend earthward, chests recede, never to be sound again.

. . . . .

After a Sunday of rest I arrive somewhat ahead of time on Monday morning, which leaves me a few moments for conversation with a piece-worker who is pasting labels on mustard jars. She is fifteen.

"Do you like your job?" I ask.

"Yes, I do," she answers, pleased to tell her little history. "I began in a clothing shop. I only made \$2.50 a week, but I didn't have to stand. I felt awful when papa made me quit. When I came in here, bein' on my feet tired me so I cried every night for two months. Now I've got used to it. I don't feel no more tired when I get home than I did when I started out." There are two sharp blue lines that drag themselves down from her eyes to her white cheeks.

"Why, you know, at Christmas they give us two weeks," she goes on in the sociable tone of a woman whose hands are occupied. "I just didn't know what to do with myself."

"Does your mother work?"

"Oh, my, no. I don't have to work, only if I didn't I couldn't have the clothes I do. I save

some of my money and spend the rest on myself. I make \$6 to \$7 a week."

The girl next us volunteers a share in the conversation.

"I bet you can't guess how old I am."

I look at her. Her face and throat are wrinkled, her hands broad and scrawny; she is tall and has short skirts. What shall be my clue? If I judge by pleasure, "unborn" would be my answer; if by effort, then "a thousand years."

"Twenty," I hazard as a safe medium.

"Fourteen," she laughs. "I don't like it at home, the kids bother me so. Mamma's people are well-to-do. I'm working for my own pleasure."

"Indeed, I wish I was," says a new girl with a red waist. "We three girls supports mamma and runs the house. We have \$13 rent to pay and a load of coal every month and groceries. It's no joke, I can tell you."

The whistle blows; I go back to my monotonous task. The old aches begin again, first gently, then more and more sharply. The work itself is growing more mechanical. I can watch the girls around me. What is it that determines superiority in this class? Why was the girl filling pickle jars put on piece-work after three weeks, when others older than she are doing day-work at fifty and sixty cents after a year in the factory? What quality decides that four shall direct four hundred? Intelligence I put first;

intelligence of any kind, from the natural penetration that needs no teaching to the common sense that every one relies upon. Judgment is not far behind in the list, and it is soon matured by experience. A strong will and a moral steadiness stand guardians over the other two. The little pickle girl is winning in the race by her intelligence. The forewomen have all four qualities, sometimes one, sometimes another predominating. Pretty Clara is smarter than Lottie. Lottie is more steady. Old Mrs. Minns' will has kept her at it until her judgment has become infallible and can command a good price. Annie is an evenly balanced mixture of all, and the five hundred who are working under the five lack these qualities somewhat, totally, or have them in useless proportions.

Monday is a hard day. There is more complaining, more shirking, more gossip than in the middle of the week. Most of the girls have been to dances on Saturday night, to church on Sunday evening with some young man. Their conversation is vulgar and prosaic; there is nothing in the language they use that suggests an ideal or any conception of the abstract. They make jokes, state facts about the work, tease each other, but in all they say there is not a word of value—nothing that would interest if repeated out of its class. They have none of the sagaciousness of the low-born Italian, none of the wit and penetration of the French *ouvriere*. The Old

World generations ago divided itself into classes; the lower class watched the upper and grew observant and appreciative, wise and discriminating, through the study of a master's will. Here in the land of freedom, where no class line is rigid, the precious chance is not to serve but to live for oneself; not to watch a superior, but to find out by experience. The ideal plays no part, stern realities alone count, and thus we have a progressive, practical, independent people, the expression of whose personality is interesting not through their words but by their deeds.

When the Monday noon whistle blows I follow the hundreds down into the dining-room. Each wears her cap in a way that speaks for her temperament. There is the indifferent, the untidy, the prim, the vain, the coquettish; and the faces under them, which all looked alike at first, are becoming familiar. I have begun to make friends. I speak bad English, but do not attempt to change my voice and inflection nor to adopt the twang. No allusion is made to my pronunciation except by one girl, who says:

"I knew you was from the East. My sister spent a year in Boston and when she come back she talked just like you do, but she lost it all again. I'd give anything if I could talk *aristocratic*."

I am beginning to understand why the meager lunches of preserve-sandwiches and pickles more than satisfy the girls whom I was prepared to

accuse of spending their money on gewgaws rather than on nourishment. It is fatigue that steals the appetite. I can hardly taste what I put in my mouth; the food sticks in my throat. The girls who complain most of being tired are the ones who roll up their newspaper bundles half full. They should be given an hour at noon. The first half of it should be spent in rest and recreation before a bite is touched. The good that such a regulation would work upon their faulty skins and pale faces, their lasting strength and health, would be incalculable. I did not want wholesome food, exhausted as I was. I craved sours and sweets, pickles, cake, anything to excite my numb taste.

So long as I remain in the bottling department there is little variety in my days. Rising at 5:30 every morning, I make my way through black streets to offer my sacrifice of energy on the altar of toil. All is done without a fresh incident. Accumulated weariness forces me to take a day off. When I return I am sent for in the corking-room. The forewoman lends me a blue gingham dress and tells me I am to do "piece"-work. There are three who work together at every corking-table. My two companions are a woman with goggles and a one-eyed boy. We are not a brilliant trio. The job consists in evening the vinegar in the bottles, driving the cork in, first with a machine, then with a hammer, letting out the air with a knife stuck under the

cork, capping the corks, sealing the caps, counting and distributing the bottles. These operations are paid for at the rate of one-half a cent for the dozen bottles, which sum is divided among us. My two companions are earning a living, so I must work in dead earnest or take bread out of their mouths. At every blow of the hammer there is danger. Again and again bottles fly to pieces in my hand. The boy who runs the corking-machine smashes a glass to fragments.

"Are you hurt?" I ask, my own fingers crimson stained.

"That ain't nothin'," he answers. "Cuts is common; my hands is full of 'em."

The woman directs us; she is fussy and loses her head, the work accumulates, I am slow, the boy is clumsy. There is a stimulus unsuspected in working to get a job done. Before this I had worked to make the time pass. Then no one took account of how much I did; the factory clock had a weighted pendulum; now ambition outdoes physical strength. The hours and my purpose are running a race together. But, hurry as I may, as we do, when twelve blows its signal we have corked only 210 dozen bottles! This is no more than day-work at seventy cents. With an ache in every muscle, I redouble my energy after lunch. The girl with the goggles looks at me blindly and says:

"Ain't it just awful hard work? You can make good money, but you've got to hustle."

She is a forlorn specimen of humanity, ugly, old, dirty, condemned to the slow death of the over-worked. I am a green hand. I make mistakes; I have no experience in the fierce sustained effort of the bread-winners. Over and over I turn to her, over and over she is obliged to correct me. During the ten hours we work side by side not one murmur of impatience escapes her. When she sees that I am getting discouraged she calls out across the deafening din, "That's all right; you can't expect to learn in a day; just keep on steady."

As I go about distributing bottles to the labelers I notice a strange little elf, not more than twelve years old, hauling loaded crates; her face and chest are depressed, she is pale to blueness, her eyes have indigo circles, her pupils are unnaturally dilated, her brows contracted; she has the appearance of a cave-bred creature. She seems scarcely human. When the time for cleaning up arrives toward five my boss sends me for a bucket of water to wash up the floor. I go to the sink, turn on the cold water and with it the steam which takes the place of hot water. The valve slips; in an instant I am enveloped in a scalding cloud. Before it has cleared away the elf is by my side.

"Did you hurt yourself?" she asks.

Her inhuman form is the vehicle of a human heart, warm and tender. She lifts her wide-pupiled eyes to mine; her expression does not change from

that of habitual scrutiny cast early in a rigid mould, but her voice carries sympathy from its purest source.

There is more honour than courtesy in the code of etiquette. Commands are given curtly; the slightest injustice is resented; each man for himself in work, but in trouble all for the one who is suffering. No bruise or cut or burn is too familiar a sight to pass uncared for.

It is their common sufferings, their common effort that unites them.

When I have become expert in the corking art I am raised to a better table, with a bright boy, and a girl who is dignified and indifferent with the indifference of those who have had too much responsibility. She never hurries; the work slips easily through her fingers. She keeps a steady bearing over the morning's ups and downs. Under her load of trials there is something big in the steady way she sails.

"Used to hard work?" she asks me.

"Not much," I answer; "are you?"

"Oh, yes. I began at thirteen in a bakery. I had a place near the oven and the heat overcame me."

Her shoulders are bowed, her chest is hollow.

"Looking for a boarding place near the factory, I hear," she continues.

"Yes. You live at home, I suppose."

"Yes. There's four of us: mamma, papa, my sister and myself. Papa's blind."

"Can't he work?"

"Oh, yes, he creeps to his job every morning, and he's got so much experience he kind o' does things by instinct."

"Does your mother work?"

"Oh, my, no. My sister's an invalid. She hasn't been out o' the door for three years. She's got enlargement of the heart and consumption, too, I guess; she 'takes' hemorrhages. Sometimes she has twelve in one night. Every time she coughs the blood comes foaming out of her mouth. She can't lie down. I guess she'd die if she lay down, and she gets so tired sittin' up all night. She used to be a tailoress, but I guess her job didn't agree with her."

"How many checks have we got," I ask toward the close of the day.

"Thirteen," Ella answers.

"An unlucky number," I venture, hoping to arouse an opinion.

"Are you superstitious?" she asks, continuing to twist tin caps on the pickle jars. "I am. If anything's going to happen I can't help having presentiments, and they come true, too."

Here is a mystic, I thought; so I continued:

"And what about dreams?"

"Oh!" she cried. "Dreams! I have the queerest of anybody!"

I was all attention.

"Why, last night," she drew near to me and spoke

slowly, "I dreamed that mamma was drunk, and that she was stealing chickens!"

Such is the imagination of this weary worker.

The whole problem in mechanical labour rests upon economy of force. The purpose of each, I learned by experience, was to accomplish as much as possible with one single stroke. In this respect the machine is superior to man, and man to woman. Sometimes I tried original ways of doing the work given me. I soon found in every case that the methods proposed by the forewoman were in the end those whereby I could do the greatest amount of work with the least effort. A mustard machine had recently been introduced to the factory. It replaced three girls; it filled as many bottles with a single stroke as the girls could fill with twelve. This machine and all the others used were run by boys or men; the girls had not strength enough to manipulate them methodically.

The power of the machine, the physical force of the man were simplifying their tasks. While the boy was keeping steadily at one thing, perfecting himself, we, the women, were doing a variety of things, complicated and fussy, left to our lot because we had not physical force for the simpler but greater effort. The boy at the corking-table had soon become an expert; he was fourteen and he made from \$1 to \$1.20 a day. He worked ten hours at one job, whereas Ella and I had a dozen little jobs

almost impossible to systematize: we hammered and cut and capped the corks and washed and wiped the bottles, sealed them, counted them, distributed them, kept the table washed up, the sink cleaned out, and once a day scrubbed up our own precincts. When I asked the boy if he was tired he laughed at me. He was superior to us; he was stronger; he could do more with one stroke than we could do with three; he was by *nature* a more valuable aid than we. We were forced through physical inferiority to abandon the choicest task to this young male competitor. Nature had given us a handicap at the start.

For a few days there is no vacancy at the corking-tables. I am sent back to the bottling department. The oppressive monotony is one day varied by a summons to the men's dining-room. I go eagerly, glad of any change. In the kitchen I find a girl with skin disease peeling potatoes, and a coloured man making soup in a wash-boiler. The girl gives me a stool to sit on, and a knife and a pan of potatoes. The dinner under preparation is for the men of the factory. There are two hundred of them. They are paid from \$1.35 up to \$3 a day. Their wages begin above the highest limit given to women. The dinner costs each man ten cents. The \$20 paid in daily cover the expenses of the cook, two kitchen maids and the dinner, which consists of meat, bread and butter, vegetables and coffee, sometimes soup,

sometimes dessert. If this can pay for two hundred there is no reason why for five cents a hot meal of some kind could not be given the women. They don't demand it, so they are left to make themselves ill on pickles and preserves.

The coloured cook is full of song and verse. He quotes from the Bible freely, and gives us snatches of popular melodies.

We have frequent calls from the elevator boy, who brings us ice and various provisions. Both men, I notice, take their work easily. During the morning a busy Irish woman comes hurrying into our precincts.

"Say," she yells in a shrill voice, "my cauliflowers ain't here, are they? I ordered 'em early and they ain't came yet."

Without properly waiting for an answer she hurries away again.

The coloured cook turns to the elevator boy understandingly:

"Just like a woman! Why, before I'd *make a fuss* about cauliflowers or anything else!"

About eleven the head forewoman stops in to eat a plate of rice and milk. While I am cutting bread for the two hundred I hear her say to the cook in a gossipy tone:

"How do you like the new girl? She's here all alone."

I am called away and do not hear the rest of the

conversation. When I return the cook lectures me in this way:

"Here alone, are you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I see no reason why you shouldn't get along nicely and not kill yourself with work either. Just stick at it and they'll do right by you. Lots o' girls who's here alone gets to fooling around. Now I like everybody to have a good time, and I hope you'll have a good time, too, but you mustn't carry it too far."

My mind went back as he said this to a conversation I had had the night before with a working-girl at my boarding-house.

"Where is your home?" I asked.

She had been doing general housework, but ill-health had obliged her to take a rest.

She looked at me skeptically.

"We don't have no homes," was her answer. "We just get up and get whenever they send us along."

And almost as a sequel to this I thought of two sad cases that had come close to my notice as fellow boarders.

I was sitting alone one night by the gas stove in the parlour. The matron had gone out and left me to "answer the door." The bell rang and I opened cautiously, for the wind was howling and driving the snow and sleet about on the winter air. A

young girl came in; she was seeking a lodging. Her skirts and shoes were heavy with water. She took off her things slowly in a dazed manner. Her short, quick breathing showed how excited she was. When she spoke at last her voice sounded hollow, her eyes moved about restlessly. She stopped abruptly now and then and contracted her brows as though in an appeal for merciful tears; then she continued in the same broken, husky voice:

“I suppose I’m not the only one in trouble. I’ve thought a thousand times over that I would kill myself. I suppose I loved him—but I *hate* him now.”

These two sentences, recurring, were the story’s all.

The impotence of rebellion, a sense of outrage at being abandoned, the instinctive appeal for protection as a right, the injustice of being left solely to bear the burden of responsibility which so long as it was pleasure had been shared—these were the thoughts and feelings breeding hatred.

She had spent the day in a fruitless search for her lover. She had been to his boss and to his rooms. He had paid his debts and gone, nobody knew where. She was pretty, vain, homeless; alone to bear the responsibility she had not been alone to incur. She could not shirk it as the man had done. They had both disregarded the law. On whom were the consequences weighing more heavily? On the

woman. She is the sufferer; she is the first to miss the law's protection. She is the weaker member whom, for the sake of the race, society protects. Nature has made her man's physical inferior; society is obliged to recognize this in the giving of a marriage law which beyond doubt is for the benefit of woman, since she can least afford to disregard it.

Another evening when the matron was out I sat for a time with a young working woman and her baby. There is a comradeship among the poor that makes light of indiscreet questions. I felt only sympathy in asking:

"Are you alone to bring up your child?"

"Yes, ma'am," was the answer. "I'll never go home with *him*."

I looked at *him*: a wizened, four-months-old infant with a huge flat nose, and two dull black eyes fixed upon the gas jet. The girl had the grace of a forest-born creature; she moved with the mysterious strength and suppleness of a tree's branch. She was proud; she felt herself disgraced. For four months she had not left the house. I talked on, proposing different things.

"I don't know what to do," she said. "I can't never go home with *him*, and if I went home without him I'd never be the same. I don't know what I'd do if anything happened to *him*." Her head bowed over the child; she held him close to her breast.

But to return to the coloured cook and my day in

the kitchen. I had ample opportunity to compare domestic service with factory work. We set the table for two hundred, and do a thousand miserable slavish tasks that must be begun again the following day. At twelve the two hundred troop in, toil-worn and begrimed. They pass like locusts, leaving us sixteen hundred dirty dishes to wash up and wipe. This takes us four hours, and when we have finished the work stands ready to be done over the next morning with peculiar monotony. In the factory there is stimulus in feeling that the material which passes through one's hands will never be seen or heard of again.

On Saturday the owner of the factory comes at lunch time with several friends and talks to us with an amazing *camaraderie*. He is kindly, humorous and tactful. One or two missionaries speak after him, but their conversation is too abstract for us. We want something dramatic, imaginative, to hold our attention, or something wholly natural. Tell us about the bees, the beavers or the toilers of the sea. The longing for flowers has often come to me as I work, and a rose seems of all things the most desirable. In my present condition I do not hark back to civilized wants, but repeatedly my mind travels toward the country places I have seen in the fields and forests. If I had a holiday I would spend it seeing not what man but what God has made. These are the things to be remembered in addressing

or trying to amuse or instruct girls who are no more prepared than I felt myself to be for any preconceived ideal of art or ethics. The omnipresence of dirt and ugliness, of machines and "stock," leave the mind in a state of lassitude which should be roused by something natural. As an initial remedy for the ills I voluntarily assumed I would propose amusement. Of all the people who spoke to us that Saturday, we liked best the one who made us laugh. It was a relief to hear something funny. In working as an outsider in a factory girls' club I had always held that nothing was so important as to give the poor something beautiful to look at and think about—a photograph or copy of some *chef d'oeuvre*, an *objet d'art*, lessons in literature and art which would uplift their souls from the dreariness of their surroundings. Three weeks as a factory girl had changed my beliefs. If the young society women who sacrifice one evening every week to talk to the poor in the slums about Shakespeare and Italian art would instead offer diversion first—a play, a farce, a humorous recitation—they would make much more rapid progress in winning the confidence of those whom they want to help. The working woman who has had a good laugh is more ready to tell what she needs and feels and fears than the woman who has been forced to listen silently to an abstract lesson. In society when we wish to make friends with people we begin by entertaining them.

It should be the same way with the poor. Next to amusement as a means of giving temporary relief and bringing about relations which will be helpful to all, I put instruction, in the form of narrative, about the people of other countries, our fellow man, how he lives and works; and, third, under this same head, primitive lessons about animals and plants, the industries of the bees, the habits of ants, the natural phenomena which require no reasoning power to understand and which open the thoughts upon a delightful unknown vista.

My first experience is drawing to its close. I have surmounted the discomforts of insufficient food, of dirt, a bed without sheets, the strain of hard manual labour. I have confined my observations to life and conditions in the factory. Owing, as I have before explained, to the absorption of factory life into city life in a place as large as Pittsburg, it seemed to me more profitable to centre my attention on the girl within the factory, leaving for a small town the study of her in her family and social life. I have pointed out as they appeared to me woman's relative force as a worker and its effects upon her economic advancement. I have touched upon two cases which illustrate her relative dependence on the law. She appeared to me not as the equal of man either physically or legally. It remained to study her socially. In the factory where I worked men and women were employed for ten-hour days.

The women's highest wages were lower than the man's lowest. Both were working as hard as they possibly could. The women were doing menial work, such as scrubbing, which the men refused to do. The men were properly fed at noon; the women satisfied themselves with cake and pickles. Why was this? It is of course impossible to generalize on a single factory. I can only relate the conclusions I drew from what I saw myself. The wages paid by employers, economists tell us, are fixed at the level of bare subsistence. This level and its accompanying conditions are determined by competition, by the nature and number of labourers taking part in the competition. In the masculine category I met but one class of competitor: the bread-winner. In the feminine category I found a variety of classes: the bread-winner, the semi-bread-winner, the woman who works for luxuries. This inevitably drags the wage level. The self-supporting girl is in competition with the child, with the girl who lives at home and makes a small contribution to the household expenses, and with the girl who is supported and who spends all her money on her clothes. It is this division of purpose which takes the "spirit" out of them as a class. There will be no strikes among them so long as the question of wages is not equally vital to them all. It is not only nature and the law which demand protection for women, but society as well. In every case of

the number I investigated, if there were sons, daughters or a husband in the family, the mother was not allowed to work. She was wholly protected. In the families where the father and brothers were making enough for bread and butter, the daughters were protected partially or entirely. There is no law which regulates this social protection: it is voluntary, and it would seem to indicate that civilized woman is meant to be an economic dependent. Yet, on the other hand, what is the new force which impels girls from their homes into the factories to work when they do not actually need the money paid them for their effort and sacrifice? Is it a move toward some far distant civilization when women shall have become man's physical equal, a "free, economic, social factor, making possible the full social combination of individuals in collective industry"? This is a matter for speculation only. What occurred to me as a possible remedy both for the oppression of the woman bread-winner and also as a betterment for the girl who wants to work though she does not need the money, was this: the establishment of schools where the esthetic branches of industrial art might be taught to the girls who by their material independence could give some leisure to acquiring a profession useful to themselves and to society in general. The whole country would be benefited by the opening of such schools as the Empress of Russia has patronized for the main-

tenance of the "petites industries," or those which Queen Margherita has established for the revival of lace-making in Italy. If there was such a counter-attraction to machine labour, the bread-winner would have a freer field and the non-bread-winner might still work for luxury and at the same time better herself morally, mentally and esthetically. She could aid in forming an intermediate class of labourers which as yet does not exist in America: the hand-workers, the *main d'oeuvre* who produce the luxurious objects of industrial art for which we are obliged to send to Europe when we wish to beautify our homes.

The American people are lively, intelligent, capable of learning anything. The schools of which I speak, founded, not for the manufacturing of the useful but of the beautiful, could be started informally as classes and by individual effort. Such labour would be paid more than the mechanical factory work; the immense importation from abroad of objects of industrial art sufficiently proves the demand for them in this country; there would be no material disadvantage for the girl who gave up her job in a pickle factory. Her faculties would be well employed, and she could, without leaving her home, do work which would be of esthetic and, indirectly, of moral value.

I was discouraged at first to see how difficult it was to help the working girls as individuals and how still more difficult to help them as a class. There is

perhaps no surer way of doing this than by giving opportunities to those who have a purpose and a will. No amount of openings will help the girl who has not both of these. I watched many girls with intelligence and energy who were unable to develop for the lack of a chance a start in the right direction. Aside from the few remedies I have been able to suggest, I would like to make an appeal for persistent sympathy in behalf of those whose misery I have shared. Until some marvelous advancement has been made toward the reign of justice upon earth, every man, woman and child should have constantly in his heart the sufferings of the poorest.

On the evening when I left the factory for the last time, I heard in the streets the usual cry of murders, accidents and suicides: the mental food of the overworked. It is Saturday night. I mingle with a crowd of labourers homeward bound, and with women and girls returning from a Saturday sale in the big shops. They hurry along delighted at the cheapness of a bargain, little dreaming of the human effort that has produced it, the cost of life and energy it represents. As they pass, they draw their skirts aside from us, the labourers who have made their bargains cheap; from us, the coöperators who enable them to have the luxuries they do; from us, the multitude who stand between them and the monster Toil that must be fed with human lives. Think of us, as we herd to our work in the winter

dawn; think of us as we bend over our task all the daylight without rest; think of us at the end of the day as we resume suffering and anxiety in homes of squalour and ugliness; think of us as we make our wretched try for merriment; think of us as we stand protectors between you and the labour that must be done to satisfy your material demands; think of us—be merciful.



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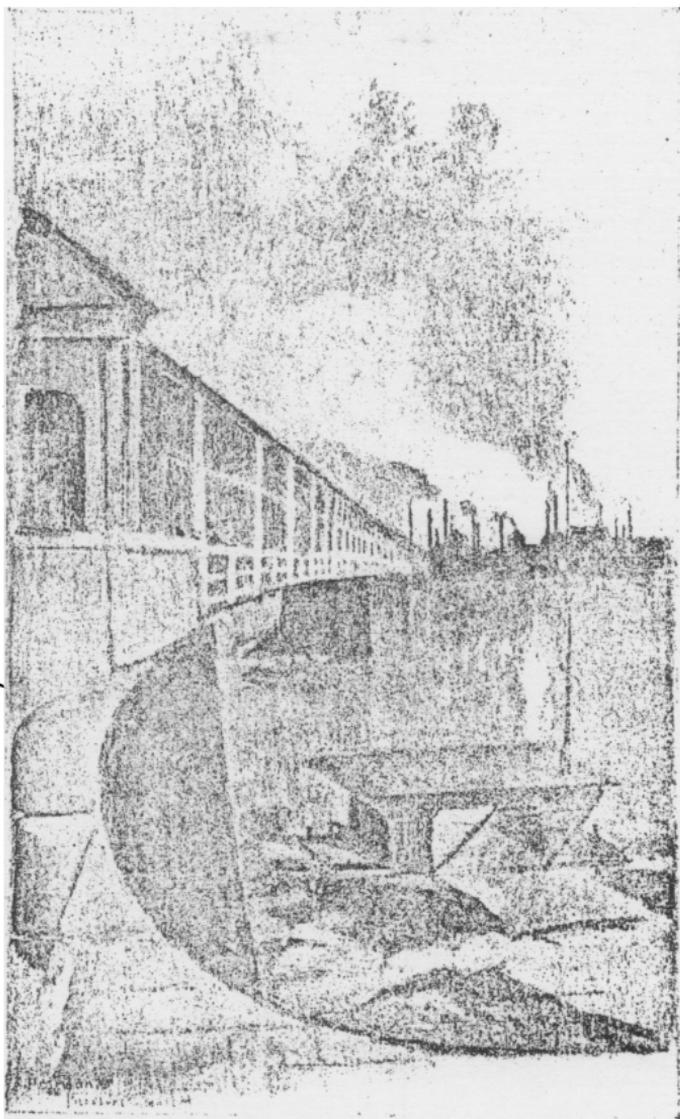
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PERRY, A NEW YORK MILL TOWN

## CHAPTER III

### PERRY, A NEW YORK MILL TOWN

No place in America could have afforded better than Pittsburg a chance to study the factory life of American girls, the stimulus of a new country upon the labourers of old races, the fervour and energy of a people animated by hope and stirred to activity by the boundless opportunities for making money. It is the labourers' city *par excellence*; and in my preceding chapters I have tried to give a clear picture of factory life between the hours of seven and six, of the economic conditions, of the natural social and legal equipment of woman as a working entity, of her physical, moral and esthetic development.

Now, since the time ticked out between the morning summoning whistle to that which gives release at night is not half the day, and only two-thirds of the working hours, my second purpose has been to find a place where the factory girl's own life could best be studied: her domestic, religious and sentimental life.

Somewhere in the western part of New York State, one of my comrades at the pickle works had told me,

there was a town whose population was chiefly composed of mill-hands. The name of the place was Perry, and I decided upon it as offering the typical American civilization among the working classes. New England is too free of grafts to give more than a single aspect; Pittsburg is an international bazaar; but the foundations of Perry are laid with bricks from all parts of the world, held together by a strong American cement.

Ignorant of Perry further than as it exists, a black spot on a branch of a small road near Buffalo, I set out from New York toward my destination on the Empire State Express. There was barely time to descend with my baggage at Rochester before the engine had started onward again, trailing behind it with world-renowned rapidity its freight of travelers who, for a few hours under the car's roof, are united by no other common interest than that of journeying quickly from one spot to another, where they disperse never to meet again. My Perry train had an altogether different character. I was late for it, but the brakeman saw me coming and waved to the engineer not to start until my trunk was checked and safely boarded like myself. Then we bumped our way through meadows quickened to life by the soft spring air; we halted at crossroads to pick up stray travelers and shoppers; we unloaded plowing machines and shipped crates of live fowl; we waited at wayside stations with high-sounding names

for family parties whose unpunctuality was indulgently considered by the occupants of the train.

My companions, chiefly women, were of the homely American type whose New England drawl has been modified by a mingling of foreign accents. They took advantage of this time for "visiting" with neighbours whom the winter snows and illnesses had rendered inaccessible. Their inquiries for each other were all kindness and sympathy, and the peaceful, tolerant, uneventful way in which we journeyed from Rochester to Perry was a symbol of the way in which these good people had journeyed across life. Perry, the terminus of the line, was a frame station lodged on stilts in a sea of surrounding mud. When the engine had come to a standstill and ceased to pant, when the last truck had been unloaded, the baggage room closed, there were no noises to be heard except those that came from a neighbouring country upon whose peace the small town had not far encroached; the splash of a horse and buggy through the mud, a monotonous voice mingling with the steady tick of the telegraph machine, some distant barnyard chatter, and the mysterious, invisible stir of spring shaking out upon the air damp sweet odours calling the earth to colour and life. Descending the staircase which connected the railroad station with the hill road on which it was perched, I joined a man who was swinging along in rubber boots, with several farming tools, rakes

and hoes, slung over his shoulder. A repugnance I had felt in resuming my toil-worn clothes had led me to make certain modifications which I feared in so small a town as Perry might relegate me to the class I had voluntarily abandoned. The man in rubber boots looked me over as I approached, bag in hand, and to my salutation he replied:

"Going down to the mill, I suppose. There's lots o' ladies comes in the train every day now."

He was the perfection of tact; he placed me in one sentence as a mill-hand and a lady.

"I'll take you down as far as Main Street," he volunteered, giving me at once a feeling of kindly interest which "city folks" have not time to show.

We found our way by improvised crossings through broad, soft beds of mud. Among the branches of the sap-fed trees which lined the unpaved streets transparent balls of glass were suspended, from which, as twilight deepened, a brilliant artificial light shot its rays, the perfection of modern invention, over the primitive, unfinished little town of Perry, which was all contrast and energy, crudity and progress.

"There's a lot of the girls left the mill yesterday," my companion volunteered. "They cut the wages, and some of the oldest hands got right out. There's more than a thousand of 'em on the pay-roll, but I guess you can make good money if you're ready to work."

We had reached Main Street, which, owing to the absence of a trolley, had retained a certain individuality. The rivers of mud broadened out into a sea, flanked by a double row of two-story, flat-roofed frame stores, whose monotony was interrupted by a hotel and a town hall. My guide stopped at a corner butcher shop. Its signboard was a couple of mild-eyed animals hanging head downward, presented informally, with their skins untouched, and having more the appearance of some ill-treated pets than future beef and bouillon for the Perry population.

"Follow the boardwalk!" was the simple command I received. "Keep right along until you come to the mill."

I presently fell in with a drayman, who was calling alternately to his horse as it sucked in and out of the mud and to a woman on the plank walk. She had on a hat with velvet and ostrich plumes, a black frock, a side bag with a lace handkerchief. She was not young and she wore spectacles; but there was something nervous about her step, a slight tremolo as she responded to the drayman, which suggested an adventure or the hope of it. The boardwalk, leading inevitably to the mill, announced our common purpose and saved us an introduction.

"Going down to get work?" was the question we simultaneously asked of each other. My companion,

all eagerness, shook out the lace handkerchief in her side bag and explained:

"I don't have to work; my folks keep a hotel; but I always heard so much about Perry I thought I'd like to come up, and," she sighed, with a flirt of the lace handkerchief and a contented glance around at the rows of white frame houses, "I'm up now."

"Want board?" the drayman called to me. "You kin count on me for a good place. There's Doctor Meadows, now; he's got a nice home and he just wants two boarders."

The middle-aged woman with the glasses glanced up quickly.

"Doctor Meadows of Tittihute?" she asked. "I wont go there; he's too strict. He's a Methodist minister. You couldn't have any fun at all."

I followed suit, denouncing Doctor Killjoy as she had, hoping that her nervous, frisky step would lead me toward the adventure she was evidently seeking.

"Well," the drayman responded indulgently, "I guess Mr. Norse will know the best place for you folks."

We had come at once to the factory and the end of the boardwalk. It was but a few minutes before Mr. Norse had revealed himself as the pivot, the human hub, the magnet around which the mechanism of the mill revolved and clung, sure of finding its proper balance. Tall, lank and meager, with a wrinkled face and a furtive mustache, Mr. Norse

made his rounds with a list of complaints and comments in one hand, a pencil in the other and a black cap on his head which tipped, indulgent, attentive to hear and overhear. His manner was professional. He looked at us, placed us, told us to return at one o'clock, recommended a boarding-house, and, on his way to some other case, sent a small boy to accompany us on future stretches of boardwalk to our lodgings. The street we followed ended in a rolling hillside, and beyond was the mysterious blue that holds something of the infinite in its mingling of clouds and shadows. The Geneseo Valley lay near us like a lake under the sky, and silhouetted against it were the factory chimney and buildings. The wood's edge came close to the town, whose yards prolong themselves into green meadows and farming lands. We knocked at a rusty screen door and were welcomed with the cordiality of the country woman to whom all folks are neighbours, all strangers possible boarders. The house, built without mantelpiece or chimney, atoned for this cheerlessness with a large parlour stove, whose black arms carried warmth through floor and ceiling. A table was spread in the dining-room. A loud-ticking clock with a rusty bell marked the hour from a shelf on the wall, and out of the kitchen, seen in vista, came a spluttering sound of frying food. Our hostess took us into the parlour. Several family pictures of stony-eyed women and men with chin beards, and a life-sized

Frances Willard in chromo, looked down at our ensuing interview.

Board, lodging, heat and light we could have at \$2.75 a week. Before the husky clock had struck twelve, I was installed in a small room with the middle-aged woman from Batavia and a second unknown roommate.

Now what, I asked myself, is the mill's attraction and what is the power of this small town? Its population is 3,346. Of these, 1,000 work in the knitting-mill, 200 more in a cutlery factory and 300 in various flour, butter, barrel, planing mills and salt blocks. Half the inhabitants are young hands. Not one in a hundred has a home in Perry; they have come from all western parts of the State to work. There are scarcely any children, few married couples and almost no old people. It is a town of youthful contemporaries, stung with the American's ambition for independence and adventure, charmed by the gaiety of being boys and girls together, with an ever possible touch of romance which makes the hardest work seem easy. Within the four board walls of each house, whose type is repeated up and down Perry streets, there is a group of factory employes boarding and working at the mill. Their names suggest a foreign parentage, but for several generations they have mingled their diverse energies in a common effort which makes Americans of them.

As I lived for several weeks among a group of this

kind, who were fairly representative, I shall try to give, through a description of their life and conversation, their personalities and characteristics, their occupations out of working hours, a general idea of these unknown toilers, who are so amazingly like their more fortunate sisters that I became convinced the difference is only superficial—not one of kind but merely of variety. The Perry factory girl is separated from the New York society girl, not by a few generations, but by a few years of culture and training. In America, where tradition and family play an unimportant part, the great educator is the spending of money. It is through the purchase of possessions that the Americans develop their taste, declare themselves, and show their inherent capacity for culture. Give to the Perry mill-hands a free chance for growth, transplant them, care for them, and they will readily show how slight and how merely a thing of culture the difference is between the wild rose and the American beauty.

What were my first impressions of the hands who returned at noon under the roof which had extended unquestioning its hospitality? Were they a band of slaves, victims to toil and deprivation? Were they making the pitiful exchange of their total vitality for insufficient nourishment? Did life mean to them merely the diminishing of their forces?

On the contrary, they entered gay, laughing young, a youth guarded intact by freedom and

hope. What were the subjects of conversation pursued at dinner? Love, labour, the price paid for it, the advantages of town over country life, the neighbour and her conduct. What was the appearance of my companions? There was nothing in it to shock good taste. Their hands and feet were somewhat broadened by work, their skins were imperfect for the lack of proper food, their dresses were of coarse material; but in small things the differences were superficial only. Was it, then, in big things that the divergence began which places them as a lower class? Was it money alone that kept them from the places of authority? What were their ambitions, their perplexities? What part does self-respect play? How well satisfied are they, or how restless? What can we learn from them? What can we teach them?

We ate our dinner of boiled meat and custard pie and all started back in good time for a one o'clock beginning at the mill. For the space of several hundred feet its expressionless red brick walls lined the street, implacable, silent. Within all hummed to the collective activity of a throng, each working with all his force for a common end. Machines roared and pounded; a fine dust filled the air—a cloud of lint sent forth from the friction of thousands of busy hands in perpetual contact with the shapeless anonymous garments they were fashioning. There were, on their way between the cutting- and the



“THEY TRIFLE WITH LOVE”

finishing-rooms, 7,000 dozen shirts. They were to pass by innumerable hands; they were to be held and touched by innumerable individuals; they were to be begun and finished by innumerable human beings with distinct tastes and likings, abilities and failings; and when the 7,000 dozen shirts were complete they were to look alike, and they were to look as though made by a machine; they were to show no trace whatever of the men and the women who had made them. Here we were, 1,000 souls hurrying from morning until night, working from seven until six, with as little personality as we could, with the effort to produce, through an action purely mechanical, results as nearly as possible identical one to the other, and all to the machine itself.

What could be the result upon the mind and health of this frantic mechanical activity devoid of thought? It was this for which I sought an answer; it is for this I propose a remedy.

At the threshold of the mill door my roommate and I encountered Mr. Norse. There was irony in the fates allotted us. She was eager to make money; I was indifferent. Mr. Norse felt her in his power; I felt him in mine. She was given a job at twenty-five cents a day and all she could make; I was offered the favourite work in the mill—shirt finishing, at thirty cents a day and all I could make; and when I shook my head to see how far I could exploit my indifference and said, "Thirty cents is

too little," Mr. Norse's answer was: "Well, I suppose you, like the rest of us, are trying to earn a living. I will guarantee you seventy-five cents a day for the first two weeks, and all you can make over it is yours." My apprenticeship began under the guidance of an "old girl" who had been five years in the mill. A dozen at a time the woolen shirts were brought to us, complete all but the adding of the linen strips in front where the buttons and buttonholes are stitched. The price of this operation is paid for the dozen shirts five, five and a half and six cents, according to the complexity of the finish. My instructress had done as many as forty dozen in one day; she averaged \$1.75 a day all the year around. While she was teaching me the factory paid her at the rate of ten cents an hour.

A touch of the machine's pedal set the needle to stitching like mad. A second touch in the opposite direction brought it to an abrupt standstill. For the five hours of my first afternoon session there was not an instant's harmony between what I did and what I intended to do. I sewed frantically into the middle of shirts. I watched my needle, impotent as it flew up and down, and when by chance I made a straight seam I brought it to so sudden a stop that the thread raveled back before my weary eyes. When my back and fingers ached so that I could no longer bend over the work, I watched my comrades with amazement. The machine was

not a wild animal in their hands, but an instrument that responded with niceness to their guidance. Above the incessant roar and burring din they called gaily to each other, gossiping, chatting, telling stories. What did they talk about? Everything, except domestic cares. The management of an interior, housekeeping, cooking were things I never once heard mentioned. What were the favourite topics, those returned to most frequently and with surcest interest? Dress and men. Two girls in the seaming-room had got into a quarrel that day over a packer, a fine looking, broad-shouldered fellow who had touched the hearts of both and awakened in each an emotion she claimed the right to defend. The quarrel began lightly with an exchange of unpleasant comment; it soon took the proportions of a dispute which could not give itself the desired vent in words alone. The boss was called in. He made no attempt to control what lay beyond his power, but applying factory legislation to the case, he ordered the two Amazons to "register out" until the squabble was settled, as the factory did not propose to pay its hands for the time spent in fights. So the two girls "rang out" past the timekeeper and took an hour in the open air, hand to hand, fist to fist, which, as it happens to man, had its calming effect.

We stitched our way industriously over the 7,000 dozen. Except for the moments when some girl

called a message or shouted a conversation, there was nothing to occupy the mind but the vibrating, pulsing, pounding of the machinery. The body was shaken with it; the ears strained.

The little girl opposite me was a new hand. Her rosy cheeks and straight shoulders announced this fact. She had been five months in the mill; the other girls around her had been there two years, five years, nine years. There were 150 of us at the long, narrow tables which filled the room. By the windows the light and air were fairly good. At the centre tables the atmosphere was stagnant, the shadows came too soon. The wood's edge ran within a few yards of the factory windows. Between it and us lay the stream, the water force, the power that had called men to Perry. There, as everywhere in America, for an individual as for a place, the attraction was industrial possibilities. As Niagara has become more an industrial than a picturesque landscape, so Perry, in spite of its serene and beautiful surroundings, is a shrine to mechanical force in whose temple, the tall-chimneyed mill, a human sacrifice is made to the worshipers of gain.

My *vis-à-vis* was talkative. "Say," she said to her neighbour, "Jim Weston is the worst flirt I ever seen."

"Who's Jim Weston?" the other responded, diving into the box by her side for a handful of gray woolen shirts.

"Why, he's the one who made my teeth—he made teeth for all of us up home," and her smile reveals the handiwork of Weston.

"If I had false teeth," is the comment made upon this, "I wouldn't tell anybody."

"I thought some," continues the implacable new girl, unruffled, "of having a gold filling put in one of my front teeth. I think gold fillings are so pretty," she concludes, looking toward me for a response.

This primitive love of ornament I found manifest in the same medico-barbaric fancy for wearing eye-glasses. The nicety of certain operations in the mill, performed not always in the brightest of lights, is a fatal strain upon the eyes. There are no oculists in Perry, but a Buffalo member of the profession makes a monthly visit to treat a new harvest of patients. Their daily effort toward the monthly finishing of 40,000 garments permanently diminishes their powers of vision. Every thirty days a new set of girls appears with glasses. They wear them as they would an ornament of some kind, a necklace, bracelet or a hoop through the nose.

When the six o'clock whistle blew on the first night I had finished only two dozen shirts. "You've got a good job," my teacher said, as we came out together in the cool evening air. "You seem to be taking to it." They size a girl up the minute she comes in. If she has quick motions she'll get on all right. "I guess you'll make a good finisher."

Once more we assembled to eat and chat and relax. After a moment by the kitchen pump we took our places at table. Our hostess waited upon us. "It takes some grit," she explained, "and more grace to keep boarders." Except on Sundays, when all men might be considered equals in the sight of the Lord, she and her husband did not eat until we had finished. She passed the dishes of our frugal evening meal—potatoes, bread and butter and cake—and as we served ourselves she held her head in the opposite direction, as if to say, "I'm not looking; take the biggest piece."

It was with my roommates I became the soonest acquainted. The butcher's widow from Batavia was a grumbler. "How do you like your job?" I asked her as we fumbled about in the dim light of our low-roofed room.

"Oh, Lordy," was the answer, "I didn't think it would be like this. I'd rather do housework any day. I bet you won't stay two weeks." She was ugly and stupid. She had been married young to a butcher. Left alone to battle with the world, she might have shaken out some of her dullness, but the butcher for many years had stood between her and reality, casting a still deeper shadow on her ignorance. She had the monotony of an old child, one who questions constantly but who has passed the age when learning is possible. The butcher's death had opened new possibilities. After a period of respectful

mourning, she had set out, against the wishes of her family, with a vague, romantic hope that was expressed not so much in words as in a certain picture hat trimmed with violet chiffon and carried carefully in a bandbox by itself, a new, crisp sateen petticoat, and a golf skirt she had sat up until one o'clock to finish the night before she left home. It was inevitable that the butcher's widow should be disappointed. There was too much grim reality in ten-hour days spent over a machine in the stifling mill room to feed a sentimentalist whose thirty odd years were no accomplice to romance. She grumbled and complained. Secret dissatisfaction preyed upon her. She was somewhat exasperated at the rest of us, who worked cheerily and with no *arrière pensée*. At the end of the first week the picture hat was tucked away in the bandbox; the frou-frou of the sateen petticoat and the daring swish of the golf skirt were packed up, like the remains of a bubble that had reflected the world in its brilliant sides one moment and the next lay a little heap of soap-suds. She had gone behind in her work steadily at the factory; she was not making more than sixty cents a day. She left us and went back to do housework in Batavia.

My other roommate was of the Madonna type. In our class she would have been called an invalid. Her hands trembled, she was constantly in pain, and her nerves were rebellious without frequent doses of

bromide. We found her one night lying in a heap on the bed, her moans having called us to her aid. It was the pain in her back that never stopped, the ache between her shoulders, the din of the machines in her ears, the vibration, the strain of incessant hours upon her tired nerves. We fixed her up as best we could, and the next day at quarter before seven she was, like the rest of us, bending over her machine again. She had been a school-teacher, after passing the necessary examination at the Geneseo Normal School. She could not say why school-teaching was uncongenial to her, except that the children "made her nervous" and she wanted to try factory work. Her father was a cheese manufacturer up in the Genesee Valley. She might have lived quietly at home, but she disliked to be a dependent. She was of the mystic, sentimental type. She had a broad forehead, straight auburn hair, a clear-cut mouth, whose sharp curves gave it sweetness. Though her large frame indicated clearly an Anglo-Saxon lineage, there was nothing of the sport about her. She had never learned to skate or swim, but she could sit and watch the hills all day long. Her clothes had an esthetic touch. Mingled with her nervous determination there was a sentimental yearning. She was an idealist, impelled by some controlling emotion which was the mainspring of her life.

Little by little we became friends. Our common

weariness brought us often together after supper in a listless, confidential mood before the parlour stove. We let the conversation drift inevitably toward the strong current that was marking her with a touch of melancholy, like all those of her type whose emotional natures are an enchanted mirror, reflecting visions that have no place in reality. We talked about blondes and brunettes, tall men and short men, our favourite man's name; and gradually the impersonal became personal, the ideal took form. Her voice, like a broken lute that might have given sweet sounds, related the story. It was inevitable that she should love a dreamer like herself. Nature had imbued her with a hopeless yearning. She slipped a gold locket from a chain on her throat. It framed her hero's picture, the source of her courage, the embodiment of her heroic energy: a man of thirty, who had failed at everything; good-looking, refined, a personage in real life who resembled the inhabitants of her enchanted mirror. In the story she told there were stars and twilight, summer evenings, walks, talks, hopes and vague projects. Any practical questions I felt ready to ask would have sounded coarse. The little school-teacher with shattered nerves embodied a hope that was more to her than meat and drink and money. She was of those who do not live by bread alone.

Among the working population of Perry there are all manner of American characteristics manifest.

In a country where conditions change with such rapidity that each generation is a revelation to the one which preceded it, it is inevitable that the family and the State should be secondary to the individual. We live with our own generation, with our contemporaries. We substitute experience for tradition. Each generation lives for itself during its prime. As soon as its powers begin to decline it makes way with resignation for the next: "We have had our day; now you can have yours." Thus in the important decisions of life, the choosing of a career, matrimony or the like, the average American is much more influenced by his contemporaries than by his elders, much more stimulated or determined by the friends of his own age than by the older members of his family. This detaching of generations through the evolution of conditions is inevitable in a new civilization; it is part of the country's freedom. It adds fervour and zest and originality to the effort of each. But it means a youth without the peace of protection; an old age without the harvest of consolation. The man in such a battle as life becomes under these circumstances is better equipped than the woman, whose nature disarms her for the struggle. The American woman is restless, dissatisfied. Society, whether among the highest or lowest classes, has driven her toward a destiny that is not normal. The factories are full of old maids; the colleges are full of old maids; the ballrooms in the worldly

centres are full of old maids. For natural obligations are substituted the fictitious duties of clubs, meetings, committees, organizations, professions, a thousand unwomanly occupations.

I cannot attempt to touch here upon the classes who have not a direct bearing on our subject, but the analogy is striking between them and the factory elements of which I wish to speak. I cannot dwell upon details that, while full of interest, are yet somewhat aside from the present point, but I want to state a fact, the origin of whose ugly consequences is in all classes and therefore concerns every living American woman. Among the American born women of this country the sterility is greater, the fecundity less than those of any other nation in the world, unless it be France, whose anxiety regarding her depopulation we would share in full measure were it not for the foreign immigration to the United States, which counteracts the degeneracy of the American.\* The original causes for this increasing sterility are moral and not physical. When this is known, does not the philosophy of the American working woman become a subject of vital interest? Among the enemies to fecundity and a natural destiny there are two which act as potent in the lower as in the upper classes: the triumph of individualism, the love of luxury. America

\* George Engelman, M. D., "The Increasing Sterility of American Women," from the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, October 5, 1901.

is not a democracy, the unity of effort between the man and the woman does not exist. Men were too long in a majority. Women have become autocrats or rivals. A phrase which I heard often repeated at the factory speaks by itself for a condition: "She must be married, because she don't work." And another phrase pronounced repeatedly by the younger girls: "I don't have to work; my father gives me all the money I need, but not all the money I *want*. I like to be independent and spend my money as I please."

What are the conclusions to be drawn? The American-born girl is an egoist. Her whole effort (and she makes and sustains one in the life of mill drudgery) is for herself. She works for luxury until the day when a proper husband presents himself. Then she stops working and lets him toil for both, with the hope that the budget shall not be diminished by increasing family demands.

In those cases where the woman continues to work after marriage, she chooses invariably a kind of occupation which is inconsistent with child-bearing. She returns to the mill with her husband. There were a number of married couples at the knitting factory at Perry. They boarded, like the rest of us. I never saw a baby nor heard of a baby while I was in the town.

I can think of no better way to present this love of luxury, this triumph of individualism, this passion

for independence than to continue my account of the daily life at Perry.

On Saturday night we drew our pay and got out at half-past four. This extra hour and a half was not given to us; we had saved it up by beginning each day at fifteen minutes before seven. In reality we worked ten and a quarter hours five days in the week in order to work eight and a half on the sixth.

By five o'clock on Saturdays the village street was animated with shoppers—the stores were crowded. At supper each girl had a collection of purchases to show: stockings, lace, fancy buckles, velvet ribbons, elaborate hairpins. Many of them, when their board was paid, had less than a dollar left of the five or six it had taken them a week to earn.

"I am not working to save," was the claim of one girl for all. "I'm working for pleasure."

This same girl called me into her room one evening when she was packing to move to another boarding-house where were more young men and better food. I watched her as she put her things into the trunk. She had a quantity of dresses, underclothes with lace and tucks, ribbons, fancy hair ornaments, lace boleros, handkerchiefs. The bottom of her trunk was full of letters from her beau. The mail was always the source of great excitement for her, and having noticed that she seemed especially hilarious over a letter received that night, I made this the pretext for a confidence.

"You got a letter to-night, didn't you?" I asked innocently. "Was it the one you wanted?"

"My, yes," she answered, tossing up a heap of missives from the depths of her trunk. "It was from the same one that wrote me these. I've been going with him three years. I met him up in the grape country where I went to pick grapes. They give you your board and you can make twenty-seven or thirty dollars in a fall. He made up his mind as soon as he saw me that I was about right. Now he wants me to marry him. That's what his letter said to-night. He is making three dollars a day and he owns a farm and a horse and wagon. He bought his sister a \$300 piano this fall."

"Well, of course," I said cagerly, "you will accept him?"

She looked half shy, half pleased, half surprised.

"No, my! no," she answered, shaking her head. "I don't want to be married."

"But why not? Don't you think you are foolish? It's a good chance and you have already been 'going with him' three years."

"Yes, I know that, but I ain't ready to marry him yet. Twenty-five is time enough. I'm only twenty-three. I can have a good time just as I am. He didn't want me to come away and neither did my parents. I thought it would 'most kill my father. He looked like he'd been sick the day I left, but he



AFTER SATURDAY NIGHT'S SHOPPING

let me come 'cause he knew I'd never be satisfied until I got my independence."

What part did the love of humanity play in this young egoist's heart? She was living, as she had so well explained it, "not to save, but to give herself pleasure"; not to spare others, but to exercise her will in spite of them. Tenderness, reverence, gratitude, protection are the feelings which one generation awakens for another. Among the thousand contemporaries at Perry, from the sameness of their ambitions, there was inevitable rivalry and selfishness. The closer the age and capacity the keener the struggle.

There are seven churches in Perry of seven different denominations. In this small town of 3,000 inhabitants there are seven different forms of worship. The church plays an important part in the social life of the mill hands. There are gatherings of all sorts from one Sunday to another, and on Sunday there are almost continuous services. There are frequent conversions. When the Presbyterian form fails they "try" the Baptist. There is no moral instruction; it is all purely religious; and they join one church or another more as they would a social club than an ordained religious organization.

Friday was "social" night at the church. Sometimes there was a "poverty" social, when every one put on shabby clothes, and any one who wore a

correct garment of any sort was fined for the benefit of the church. Pound socials were another variety of diversion, where all the attendants were weighed on arriving and charged a cent admission for every pound of avoirdupois.

The most popular socials, however, were box socials, and it was to one of these I decided to go with two girls boarding in the house. Each of us packed a box with lunch as good as we could afford—eggs, sandwiches, cakes, pickles, oranges—and arrived with these, we proceeded to the vestry-room, where we found an improvised auctioneer's table and a pile of boxes like our own, which were marked and presently put up for sale. The youths of the party bid cautiously or recklessly, according as their inward conviction told them that the box was packed by friend or foe.

My box, which, like the rest, had supper for two, was bid in by a tall, nice-looking mill hand, and we installed ourselves in a corner to eat and talk. He was full of reminiscence and had had a checkered career. His first experience had been at night work in a paper mill. He worked eleven hours a night one week, thirteen hours a night the next week, in and out of doors, drenched to the skin. He had lost twenty-five pounds in less than a year, and his face was a mere mask drawn over the irregular bones of the skull.

"I always like whatever I am doing," he responded

at my protestation of sympathy. "I think that's the only way to be. I never had much appetite at night. They packed me an elegant pail, but somehow all cold food didn't relish much. I never did like a pail. . . . How would you like to take a dead man's place?" he asked, looking at me grimly.

I begged him to explain.

"One of my best friends," he began, "was working alongside of me, and I guess he got dizzy or something, for he leaned up against the big belt that ran all the machinery and he was lifted right up in the air and tore to pieces before he ever knew what struck him. The boss came in and seen it, and the second question he asked, he says, 'Say, is the machinery running all right?' It wasn't ten minutes before there was another man in there doing the dead man's work."

I began to undo the lunch-box, feeling very little inclined to eat. We divided the contents, and my friend, seeing perhaps that I was depressed, told me about the "shows" he had been to in his wanderings.

"Now, I don't care as much for comedy as some folks," he explained. "I like 'Puddin' Head Wilson' first rate, but the finest thing I ever seen was two of Shakespeare's: 'The Merchant of Venice' and 'Julius Cæsar.' If you ever get a chance I advise you to go and hear them; they're great."

I responded cordially, and when we had exhausted

Shakespeare I asked him how he liked Perry people.

"Oh, first rate," he said. "I've been here only a month, but I think there's too much formality. It seems to me that when you work alongside of a girl day after day you might speak to her without an introduction, but they won't let you here. I never seen such a formal place."

I said very little. The boy talked on of his life and experiences. His English was good except for certain grammatical errors. His words were well chosen. There was between him and the fortunate boys of a superior class only a few years of training.

The box social was the beginning of a round of gaieties. The following night I went with my box-social friend to a ball. Neither of us danced, but we arrived early and took good places for looking on. The barren hall was dimly lighted. In the corner there was a stove; at one end a stage. An old man with a chin beard was scattering sand over the floor with a springtime gesture of seed sowing. He had his hat on and his coat collar turned up, as though to indicate that the party had not begun. By and by the stage curtain rolled up and the musicians came out and unpacked a violin, a trombone, a flute and a drum. They sat down in the Medieval street painted on the scenery back of them, crossed their legs and asked for *sol la* from an esthetic young

lady pianist, with whom they seemed on very familiar terms. The old man with the chin beard made an official *entrée* from the wing, picked up the drum and became a part of the orchestra. The subscribers had begun to arrive, and when the first two-step struck up there were eight or ten couples on the floor. They held on to each other closely, with no outstretched arms as is the usual form, and they revolved very slowly around and around the room. The young men had smooth faces, patent leather boots, very smart cravats and a sheepish, self-conscious look. The girls had elaborate constructions in frizzed hair, with bows and tulle; black trailing skirts with coloured ruffled under-petticoats, light-coloured blouses and fancy belts. They seemed to be having a very good time.

On the way home we passed a brightly lighted grocery shop. My friend looked in with interest. "Goodness," he said, "but those Saratoga chips look good. Now, what would you order," he went on, "if you could have anything you liked?" We began to compose a *ménu* with oysters and chicken and all the things we never saw, but it was not long before my friend cried "Mercy! Oh, stop; I can't stand it. It makes me too hungry."

The moon had gone under a cloud. The wooden sidewalks were rough and irregular, and as we walked along toward home I tripped once or twice. Presently I felt a strong arm put through mine,

with this assurance: "Now if you fall we'll both fall together."

After four or five days' experience with a machine I began to work with more ease and with less pain between my shoulders. The girls were kind and sympathetic, stopping to help and encourage the "new girl." One of the shirt finishers, who had not been long in the mill herself, came across from her table one day when I was hard at work with a pain like a sword stab in my back.

"I know how you ache," she said. "It just makes me feel like crying when I see how you keep at it and I can guess how tired you are."

Nothing was so fatiguing as the noise. In certain places near the cyclet and buttonhole machines it was impossible to make one's neighbour hear without shouting. My teacher, whose nerves, I took it, were less sensitive than mine, expressed her sensations in this way:

"It's just terrible sitting here all day alone, worrying and thinking all by yourself and hustling from morning until night. Lots of the girls have nervous prostration. My sister had it and I guess I'm getting it. I hear the noise all night. Quite a few have consumption, too, from the dust and the lint."

The butcher's widow, the school-teacher and I started in at about the same time. At the end of two weeks the butcher's widow had long been gone. The school-teacher had averaged seventy-nine cents

a day and I had averaged eighty-nine. My best day I finished sixteen dozen shirts and netted \$1.11. My board and washing cost me three dollars, so that from the first I had a living insured.

There was one negress in the factory. She worked in a corner quite by herself and attended to menial jobs, such as sweeping and picking up scraps. A great many of the girls and boys took correspondence courses in stenography, drawing, bookkeeping, illustrating, etc., etc. The purely mechanical work of the mill does not satisfy them. They are restless and ambitious, exactly the material with which to form schools of industrial art, the class of hand-workers of whom I have already spoken.

One of the girls who worked beside us as usual in the morning, left a note on her machine at noon one day to say that she would never be back. She was going up to the lake to drown herself, and we needn't look for her. Some one was sent in search. She was found sitting at the lake's edge, weeping. She did not speak. We all talked about it in our leisure moments, but the work was not interrupted. There were various explanations: she was out of her mind; she was discouraged with her work; she was nervous. No one suggested that an unfortunate love affair be the cause of her desperate act. There was not a word breathed against her reputation. I would have felt impure in proposing what to me seemed most probable.

The mill owners exert, as far as possible, an influence over the moral tone of their employees, assuming the right to judge their conduct both in and out of the factory and to treat them as they see fit. The average girls are self-respecting. They trifle with love. The attraction they wish to exert is ever present in their minds and in their conversation. The sacrifices they make for clothes are the first in importance. They have superstitions of all kinds: to sneeze on Saturday means the arrival of a beau on Sunday; a big or little tea leaf means a tall or a short caller, and so on. There is a book of dreams kept on one table in the mill, and the girls consult it to find the interpretation of their nocturnal reveries. They are fanciful, sentimental, cold, passionless. The accepted honesty of married life makes them slow to discard the liberty they love, to dismiss the suitors who would attend their wedding as one would a funeral.

There is, of course, another category of girl, who goes brutally into passionate pleasures, follows the shows, drinks and knocks about town with the boys. She is known as a "bum," has sacrificed name and reputation and cannot remain in the mill.

We discussed one night the suitable age for a girl to become mistress of herself. The boy of the household maintained that at eighteen a girl could marry, but that she must be twenty-one before she could have her own way. All the girls insisted that they

could and did boss themselves and had even before they were eighteen.

Two chums who boarded in my house gave a charming illustration of the carelessness and the extravagance, the independence and love of it which characterizes feminine America. One of these was a *deracinee*, a child with a foreign touch in her twang; a legend of other climes in the dexterity of her deft fingers; some memory of an exile from France in her name: Lorraine. Her friend was a *mondaine*. She had the social gift, a subtle understanding of things worldly, the *glissey mortel n'appuyez jamais* attitude toward life. By a touch of flippancy, an adroit turn of mind, she kept the knowing mastery over people which has mystified and delighted in all great hostesses since the days of Esther.

When the other girls waited feverishly for love letters, she was opening a pile of invitations to socials and theatre parties. Discreet and condescending, she received more than she gave.

As soon as the posters were out for a Tuesday performance of "Faust," preparations began in the household to attend. Saturday shopping and supper were hurried through and by six o'clock Lorraine was at the sewing machine tucking chiffon for hats and bodices. After ten hours' work in the mill, she began again, eager to use the last of the spring twilight, prolonged by a quarter moon.

There was a sudden, belated gust of snow; in the blue mist each white frame house glowed with a warm, pink light from its parlour stove. Lorraine's fingers flew. A hat took form and grew from a heap of stuff into a Parisian creation; a bolero was cut and tucked and fitted; a skirt was ripped and stitched and pressed; a shirt-waist was started and finished. For two nights the girls worked until twelve o'clock so that when the "show" came they might have something new to wear that nobody had seen. This must have been the unanimous intention of the Perry populace, for the peanut gallery was a bower of fashion. Styles, which I had thought were new in Paris, were familiarly worn in Perry by the mill hands. White kid gloves were *en vogue*. The play was "Faust." All allusions to the triumph of religion over the devil; all insinuations on the part of Mephistopheles in regard to the enviable escape of Martha's husband and of husbands in general, from prating women in general; all invocations of virtue and moral triumph, were greeted with bursts of applause. Between the acts there was music, and the ushers distributed showers of printed advertisements, which the audience fell at once to reading as though they had nothing to talk about.

I heard only one hearty comment about the play: "That devil," said Lorraine, as we walked home together, "was a corker!"

I have left until the last the two friends who held

a place apart in the household: the farmer and his wife, the old people of another generation with whom we boarded. They had begun life together forty years ago. They lived on neighbouring farms. There was dissension between the families such as we read of in "Pyramus and Thisbe," "Romeo and Juliet." The young people contrived a means of corresponding. An old coat that hung in the barn, where nobody saw it, served as post-office. Truman pleaded his cause ardently and won his Louisa. They fixed a day for the elopement. A fierce snow-storm piled high its drifts of white, but all the afternoon long the little bride played about, burrowing a path from the garden to her bedroom window, and when night came and brought her mounted hero with it, she climbed up on to the saddle by his side and rode away to happiness, leaving ill nature and quarrels far behind. Side by side, as on the night of their wedding ride, they had traversed forty years together. Ill health had broken up their farm home. When Truman could no longer work they came in to Perry to take boarders, having no children. The old man never spoke. He did chores about the house, made the fire mornings, attended to the parlour stove; he went about his work and no one ever addressed a word to him; he seemed to have no more live contact with the youth about him than driftwood has with the tree's new shoots. He had lived his life on a farm; he was a land captain;

he knew the earth's secrets as a ship's captain knows the sea's. He paced the mild wooden pavements of Perry, booted and capped for storm and wind, deep snow and all the inimical elements a pioneer might meet with. His new false teeth seemed to shine from his shaggy gray beard as a symbol of this new town experience in a rough natural existence, out of keeping, ill assorted. Tempted to know what his silence hid, I spent an hour with him by the kitchen stove one Sunday afternoon. His memory went easily back to the days when there were no railroads, no telegraphs, no mills. He was of a speculative turn of mind:

"I don't see," he said, "what makes men so crazy after gold. They're getting worse all the time. Gold ain't got no real value. You take all the gold out of the world and it wouldn't make no difference whatever. You can't even make a tool to get a living with, out of gold; but just do away with the iron, and where would you be?" And again, he volunteered:

"I think Mr. Carnegie would have done a deal nobler if he had paid his men a little more straight along. He wouldn't have had such a name for himself. But don't you believe it would have been better to have paid those men more for the work they were doing day by day than it is now to give pensions to their families? I know what I think about the matter."

I asked him how he liked city life.



**SUNDAY EVENING AT SILVER LAKE**

The mill girls' excursion resort. A special train and 'busses run on Sundays, and "everybody" goes.

"Give me a farm every time," was his answer. "Once you've seen a town you know it all. It's the same over and over again. But the country's changing every day in the year. It's a terrible thing, being sick," he went on. "It seems sometimes as though the pain would tear me to pieces when I walk across the floor. I wasn't no good on the farm any more, so my wife took a notion we better come in town and take boarders."

Thus it was with this happily balanced couple; as his side grew heavier she took on more ballast and swung even with him. She had the quick adaptability common to American women. During the years of farm life religious meetings and a few neighbours had kept her in touch with the outside world. The church and the kitchen were what she had on the farm; the church and the kitchen were what she had in town; family life supplemented by boarders, a social existence kept alive by a few faithful neighbours. She had retained her activity and sympathy because she was intelligent, because she lived with the *young*. The man could not make himself one of another generation, so he lived alone. He had lost his companions, the "cow kind and the sheep kind"; he had lost control over the earth that belonged to him; he was disused; he suffered; he pined. But as they sat together side by side at table, his look toward her was one of trust and comfort. His glance traveled back over a long

vista of years seen to them as their eyes met, invisible to those about—years that had glorified confidence in this life as it passed and transfigured it into the promise of another life to come.

## MAKING CLOTHING IN CHICAGO

## CHAPTER IV

### MAKING CLOTHING IN CHICAGO

ON arriving in Chicago I addressed myself to the ladies of Hull House, asking for a tenement family who would take a factory girl to board. I intended starting out without money to see at least how far I could go before putting my hand into the depths where an emergency fund was pinned in a black silk bag.

It was the first day of May. A hot wind blew eddies of dust up and down the electric car tracks; the streets were alive with children; a group swarmed in front of each doorstep, too large to fit into the house behind it. Down the long, regular avenues that stretched right and left there was a broken line of tenements topped by telegraph wires and bathed in a soft cloud of black soot falling from a chimney in the neighbourhood. The sidewalks were a patchwork of dirt, broken paving-stones and wooden boards. The sunshine was hot and gloomy. There were no names on the corner lamps and the house numbers were dull and needed repainting. It was already late in the afternoon: I had but an hour or two before dark to find a lodging. The

miserable, overcrowded tenement houses repelled me, yet I dreaded that there should not be room among them for one more bread-winner to lodge. I hailed a cluster of children in the gutter:

"Say," I said, "do you know where Mrs. Hicks lives to?"

They crowded around, eager. The tallest boy, with curly red hair and freckles, pointed out Mrs. Hicks' residence, the upper windows of a brick flat that faced the world like a prison wall. After I had rung and waited for the responding click from above, a cross-eyed Italian woman with a baby in her arms motioned to me from the step where she was sitting that I must go down a side alley to find Mrs. Hicks. Out of a promiscuous heap of filth, a broken-down staircase led upward to a row of green blinds and a screen door. Somebody's house-keeping was scattered around in torn bits of linen and tomato cans.

The screen door opened to my knock and the Hicks family gushed at me—ever so many children of all ages and an immense mother in an under-waist and petticoat. The interior was neat; the wooden floors were scrubbed spotless. I congratulated myself. Mrs. Hicks clucked to the family group, smiled at me, and said:

"I never took a boarder in my life. I ain't got room enough for my own young ones, let alone strangers."



" THE BREATH OF THE  
BLACK, SWEET NIGHT  
REACHED THEM, FETID,  
HEAVY WITH THE ODOUR OF DEATH AS  
IT BLEW ACROSS THE STOCKYARDS "

There were two more names on my list. I proceeded to the nearest and found an Irish lady living in basement rooms ornamented with green crochet work, crayon portraits, red plaid table-cloths and chromo picture cards.

She had rheumatism in her "limbs" and moved with difficulty. She was glad to talk the matter over, though she had from the first no intention of taking me. From my then point of view nothing seemed so desirable as a cot in Mrs. Flannagan's front parlour. I even offered in my eagerness to sleep on the horsehair sofa. Womanlike, she gave twenty little reasons for not taking me before she gave the one big reason, which was this:

"Well, to tell you the truth, I wouldn't mind having you myself, but I've got three sons, and you know *boys is queer*."

It was late, the sun had set and only the twilight remained for my search before night would be upon me and I would be driven to some charity refuge.

I had one more name, and climbed to find its owner in a tenement flat. She was a German woman with a clubfoot. Two half-naked children incrustated with dirt were playing on the floor. They waddled toward me as I asked what my chances were for finding a room and board. The mother struck first one, then the other, of her offspring, and they fell into two little heaps, both wailing. From a hole back of the kitchen came the sympathetic response

of a half-starved shaggy dog. He howled and the babes wailed while we visited the dusky apartment. There was one room rented to a day lodger who worked nights, and one room without a window where the German family slept. She proposed that I share the bed with her that night until she could get an extra cot. Her husband and the children could sleep on the parlour lounge. She was hideous and dirty. Her loose lips and half-toothless mouth were the slipshod note of an entire existence. There was a very dressy bonnet with feathers hanging on a peg in the bedroom, and two gala costumes belonging to the tearful twins.

"I'll come back in an hour, thank you," I said. "Don't expect me if I am not here in an hour," and I fled down the stairs. Before the hour was up I had found, through the guidance of the Irish lady with rheumatism, a clean room in one street and board in another. This was inconvenient, but safe and comparatively healthy.

My meals were thirty-five cents a day, payable at the end of the week; my room was \$1.25 a week, total \$3.70 a week.

My first introduction to Chicago tenement life was supper at Mrs. Wood's.

I could hear the meal sputtering on the kitchen stove as I opened the Wood front door.

Mrs. Wood, combining duties as cook and hostess, called to me to make myself at home in the front

parlour. I seated myself on the sofa, which exuded the familiar acrid odour of the poor. Opposite me there was a door half open leading into a room where a lamp was lighted. I could see a young girl and a man talking together. He was sitting and had his hat on. She had a halo of blond hair, through which the lamplight was shining, and she stood near the man, who seemed to be teasing her. Their conversation was low, but there was a familiar cry now and then, half vulgar, half affectionate.

When we had taken our places at the table, Mrs. Wood presented us.

"This is Miss Ida," she said, pointing to the blonde girl; "she's been boarding over a year with me, and this," turning to the young man who sat near by with one arm hanging listlessly over the back of a chair, "this is Miss Ida's intended."

The other members of the household were a fox terrier, a canary and "Wood"—Wood was a man over sixty. He and Mrs. Wood had the same devoted understanding that I have observed so often among the poor couples of the older generation. This good little woman occupied herself with the things that no longer satisfy. She took tender care of her husband, following him to the door with one hand on his shoulder and calling after him as he went on his way: "Good-by; take care of yourself." She had a few pets, her children were married and gone, she had a miniature patch of garden,

a trust in the church guild—which took some time and attention for charitable works, and she did her own cooking and housework. “And,” she explained to me in the course of our conversation at supper, “I never felt the need of joining these University Settlement Clubs to get into society.” Wood and his wife were a good sort. Miss Ida was kind in her inquiries about my plans.

“Have you ever operated a power machine?” she asked.

“Yes,” I responded—with what pride she little dreamed. “I’ve run an electric Singer.”

“I guess I can get you a job, then, all right, at my place. It’s picce-work; you get off at five, but you can make good money.”

I thanked her, not adding that my Chicago career was to be a checkered one, and that I was determined to see how many things I could do that I had never done before.

But social life was beginning to wear on Miss Ida’s intended. He took up his hat and swung along toward the door. I was struggling to extract with my fork the bones of a hard, fried fish. Mrs. Wood encouraged me in a motherly tone:

“Oh, my, don’t be so formal; take your knife.”

“Say,” called a voice from the door, “say, come on, Ida, I’m waiting for you.” And the blonde fiancée hurried away with an embarrassed laugh to join her lover. She was refined and delicate, her ears were

small, her hands white and slender, she spoke correctly with a nasal voice, and her teeth (as is not often the case among this class, whose lownesses seem suddenly revealed when they open their mouths) were sound and clean.

The man's smooth face was all commonness and vulgarity.

"He's had appendicitis," Mrs. Wood explained when we were alone. "He's been out of work a long time. As soon as he goes to his job his side bursts out again where they operated on him. He ain't a bit strong."

"When are they going to be married?" I asked.

"Oh, dear me, they don't think of that yet; they're in no hurry."

"Will Miss Ida work after she's married?"

"No, indeed."

Did they not have their share of ideal then, these two young labourers who could wait indefinitely, fed by hope, in their sordid, miserable surroundings?

I returned to my tenement room; its one window opened over a narrow alley flanked on its opposite side by a second tenement, through whose shutters I could look and see repeated layers of squalid lodgings. The thermometer had climbed up into the eighties. The wail of a newly born baby came from the room under mine. The heat was stifling. Outdoors in the false, flickering day of the arc lights the crowd swarmed, on the curb, on the sidewalk, on

the house steps. The breath of the black, sweet night reached them, fetid, heavy with the odour of death as it blew across the stockyards. Shouts, calls, cries, moans, the sounds of old age and of infancy, of despair and of joy, mingled and became the anonymous murmur of a hot, human multitude.

The following morning I put ten cents in my pocket and started out to get a job before this sum should be used up. How huge the city seemed when I thought of the small space I could cover on foot, looking for work! I walked toward the river, as the commercial activity expressed itself in that direction by fifteen- and twenty-story buildings and streams of velvet smoke. Blocks and blocks of tenements, with the same dirty people wallowing around them, answered my searching eyes in blank response. There was an occasional dingy sign offering board and lodging. After I had made several futile inquiries at imposing offices on the river front I felt that it was a hopeless quest. I should never get work unknown, unskilled, already tired and discouraged. My collar was wilted in the fierce heat; my shabby felt sailor hat was no protection against the sun's rays; my hands were gloveless; and as I passed the plate glass windows I could see the despondent droop of my skirt, the stray locks of hair that blew about free of comb or veil. A sign out: "Manglers wanted!" attracted my attention in the window of a large steam laundry. I was not a

"mangler," but I went in and asked to see the boss. "Ever done any mangling?" was his first question.

"No," I answered, "but I am sure I could learn." I put so much ardour into my response that the boss at once took an interest.

"We might give you a place as shaker; you could start in and work up."

"What do you pay?"

"Four dollars a week until you learn. Then you would work up to five, five and a half."

Better than nothing, was all I could think, but I can't live on four a week.

"How often do you pay?"

"Every Tuesday night."

This meant no money for ten days.

"If you think you'd like to try shaking come round Monday morning at seven o'clock."

Which I took as my dismissal until Monday.

At least I had a job, however poor, and strengthened by this thought I determined to find something better before Monday. The ten-cent piece lay an inviting fortune in my hand. I was to part with one-tenth of it in exchange for a morning newspaper. This investment seemed a reckless plunge, but "nothing venture, nothing have," my pioneer spirit prompted, and soon deep in the list of *Wanted, Females*, I felt repaid. Even in my destitute condition I had a choice in mind. If possible I wanted to work without machinery in a shop where

the girls used their hands alone as power. Here seemed to be my heart's content—a short, concise advertisement, "Wanted, hand sewers." After a consultation with a policeman as to the whereabouts of my future employer, it became evident that I must part with another of my ten cents, as the hand sewers worked on the opposite side of the city from the neighbourhood whither I had strayed in my morning's wanderings. I took a car and alighted at a busy street in the fashionable shopping centre of Chicago. The number I looked for was over a steep flight of dirty wooden stairs. If there is such a thing as luck it was now to dwell a moment with one of the poorest. I pushed open a swinging door and let myself into the office of a clothing manufacturer.

The owner, Mr. F., got up from his desk and came toward me.

"I seen your advertisement in the morning paper."

"Yes," he answered in a kindly voice. "Are you a tailoress?"

"No, sir; I've never done much sewing except on a machine."

"Well, we have machines here."

"But," I almost interrupted, beginning to fear that my training at Perry was to limit all further experience to an electric Singer, "I'd rather work with my hands. I like the hand-work."

He looked at me and gave me an answer which

exactly coincided with my theories. He said this, and it was just what I wanted him to say.

"If you do hand-work you'll have to use your mind. Lots of girls come in here with an idea they can let their thoughts wander; but you've got to pay strict attention. You can't do hand-work mechanically."

"All right, sir," I responded. "What do you pay?"

"I'll give you six dollars a week while you're learning." I could hardly control a movement of delight. Six dollars a week! A dollar a day for an apprentice!

"But"—my next question I made as dismal as possible—"what do you pay?"

"Generally not till the end of the second week," the kindly voice said; "but we could arrange to pay you at the end of the first if you needed the money."

"Shall I come in Monday?"

"Come in this afternoon at 12:30 if you're ready."

"I'm ready," I said, "but I ain't brought no lunch with me, and it's too late now to get home and back again."

The man put his hand in his pocket and laid down before me a fifty-cent piece, advanced on my pay.

"Take that," he said, with courtesy; "get yourself a lunch in the neighbourhood and come back at half-past twelve."

I went to the nearest restaurant. It was an immense bakery patronized by office girls and men,

hard workers who came for their only free moment of the day into this eating-place. Everything that could be swallowed quickly was spread out on a long counter, behind which there were steaming tanks of tea, coffee and chocolate. The men took their food downstairs and the ladies climbed to the floor above. I watched them. They were self-supporting women—independent; they could use their money as they liked. They came in groups—a rustling frou-frou announced silk underfittings; feathers, garlands of flowers, masses of trimming weighed down their broad-brimmed picture hats, fancy veils, kid gloves, silver side-bags, embroidered blouses and elaborate belt buckles completed the detail of their showy costumes, the whole worn with the air of a manikin. What did these busy women order for lunch? Tea and buns, ice-cream and buckwheat cakes, apple pie *a la mode* and chocolate were the most serious menus. This nourishing food they ate with great nicety and daintiness, talking the while about clothes. They were in a hurry, as all of them had some shopping to do before returning to work, and they each spent a prinking five minutes before the mirror, adjusting the trash with which they had bedecked themselves exteriorly while their poor hard-working systems went ungarnished and hungry within.

This is the wound in American society whereby its strength sloughs away. It is in this class that

campaigns can be made, directly and indirectly, by preaching and by example. What sort of women are those who sacrifice all on the altar of luxury? It is a prostitution to sell the body's health and strength for gewgaws. What harmony can there be between the elaborate get-up of these young women and the miserable homes where they live? The idolizing of material things is a religion nurtured by this class of whom I speak. In their humble surroundings the love of self, the desire to possess things, the cherished need for luxuries, crowd out the feelings that make character. They are but one manifestation of the egoism of the unmarried American woman.

For what and for whom do they work?

Is their fundamental thought to be of benefit to a family or to some member of a family? Is their indirect object to be strong, thrifty members of society? No. Their parents are secondary, their health is secondary to the consuming vanity that drives them toward a ruinous goal. They scorn the hand-workers; they feel themselves a *noblesse* by comparison. They are the American snobs whose coat of arms marks not a well-remembered family but prospective luxuries. . . . Married, they bring as a portion thriftless tastes, to satisfy which more than one business man has wrecked his career. They work like men; why should they not live as men do, with similar responsibilities? What should

we think of a class of masculine clerks and employecs who spent all their money on clothes?

The boss was busy when I got back to the clothing establishment. From the bench where I waited for orders I could take an inventory of the shop's productions. Arrayed in rows behind glass cases there were all manner of uniforms: serious uniforms going to the colonies to be shot to pieces, militia uniforms that would hear their loudest heart-beats under a fair head; drum-majors' hats that would never get farther than the peaceful lawn of a military post; fireman's hats; the dark-blue coat of a lonely lighthouse guardian; the undignified short jacket of a "buttons." All that meant parade and glory, the uniforms that make men identical by making each proud of himself for his brass buttons and gold lace. Even in the heavy atmosphere of the shop's rear, though they appeared somewhat dingy and tarnished, they had their undeniable charm, and I thought with pity of the hands that had to sew on plain serge suits.

As soon as the boss saw me, the generous Mr. F. who advanced me the fifty cents smiled at the skeptical Mr. F. who had never expected to see me again. One self said to the other: "I told you so!" and all the kindly lines in the man's face showed that he had looked for the best even in his inferiors and that he had found mankind worth trusting. He was the most generous employer I met with



IN A CHICAGO THEATRICAL COSTUME FACTORY

anywhere; I also took him to be the least business-like. But, as though quickly to establish the law of averages, his head forewoman counterbalanced all his mercies by her ferocious crossness. She terrorized everybody, even Mr. F. It was to her, I concluded, that we owed our \$6 a week. No girl would stay for less; it was an atelier chiefly of foreign employees; the proud American spirit would not stand the lash of Frances' tongue. She had been ten years in the place whose mad confusion was order to her. Mr. F. did not dare to send her away; he preferred keeping a perpetual advertisement in the papers and changing hands every few days.

The workroom on our floor was fifty or sixty feet long, with windows on the street at one end and on a court at the other. The middle of the room was lighted by gas. The air was foul and the dirt lay in heaps at every corner and was piled up under the centre tables. It was less like a workshop than an old attic. There was the long-accumulated disorder of hasty preparation for the vanities of life. It had not at all the aspect of a factory which makes a steady provision of practical things. There were odds and ends of fancy costumes hanging about—swords, crowns, belts and badges. Under the sewing machines' swift needles flew the scarlet coats of a regiment; gold and silver braid lay unfurled on the table; the hand-workers bent over an armful of khaki; a row of young girls were fitting military

caps to imaginary soldier's heads; the ensigns of glory slipped through the fingers of the humble; chevrons and epaulets were caressed never so closely by toil-worn hands. In the midst of us sits a man on a headless hobby horse, making small gray trunks bound in red leather, such boxes as might contain jewels for Marguerite, a game of lotto, or a collection of jack-straws and mother-of-pearl counters brought home from a first trip abroad. The trunk maker wears a sombrero and smokes a corn-cob pipe. He is very handsome with dark eyes and fine features, and he has the "average figure," so that he serves as manikin for the atelier; and I find him alternately a workman in overalls and a Turkish magnate with turban and flowing robes. It is into this atmosphere of toil and unreality that I am initiated as a hand sewer. Something of the dramatic and theatrical possesses the very managers themselves. Below, a regiment waits impatient for new brass buttons; we sew against time and break all our promises. Messengers arrive every few minutes with fresh reports of rising ire on the part of disappointed customers. Down the stairs pell-mell comes an elderly partner of the firm with a gold-and-purple crown on his head and after him follows the kindly Mr. F, in an usher's jacket. "If you don't start now," he calls, "that order'll be left on our hands."

Amid such confusion the regular rhythm of the

needle as it carries its train of thread across the yards of coloured cloth is peaceful, consoling. I have on one side of me a tailor who speaks only Polish, on the other side a seamstress who speaks only German. Across the frontier I thus become they communicate with signs, and I get my share of work planned out by each. Every woman in the place is cross except the girl next to me. She has only just come in and the poison of the forewoman has not yet stung her into ill nature. She is, like all the foreigners, neatly, soberly dressed in a sensible frock of good durable material. The few Americans in the shop have on elaborate shirt-waists in light-coloured silks with fancy ribbon collars. We are well paid, there is no doubt of it. We begin work at 8 A. M. and have a generous half-hour at noon. Most of the girls are Germans and Poles, and they have all received training as tailoresses in their native countries. To the sharp onslaught of Frances' tongue they make no response except in dogged silent obedience, whereas the dressy Americans with their proper spirit of independence touch the limit of insubordination at every new command. Insults are freely exchanged; threats ring out on the tired ears. Frances is ubiquitous. She scolds the tailors with a torrent of abuse, she terrorizes the handsome manikin, she bewilders the kindly Mr. F., and before three days have passed she has dismissed the neat little Polish girl, in tears. This latter comes to me, her face

wrought with emotion. She was receiving nine dollars a week; it is her first place in America. This sudden dismissal, its injustice, requires an explanation. She cannot speak a word of English and asks me to put my poor German at her service as interpreter.

Mr. F. is clearly a man who advocates everything for peace, and as there is for him no peace when Frances is not satisfied, we gain little by our appeal to him except a promise that he will attend later to the troubles of the Polish girl. But later, as earlier, Frances triumphs, and I soon bid good-by to my seatmate and watch her tear-stained face disappear down the dingy hallway. She was a skilled tailoress, but she could not cut out men's garments, so Frances dismissed her. I wonder when my turn will come, for I am a green hand and yet determined to keep the American spirit. For the sake of justice I will not be downed by Frances.

It is hard to make friends with the girls; we dare not converse lest a fresh insult be hurled at us. For every mistake I receive a loud, severe correction. When night comes I am exhausted. The work is easy, yet the moral atmosphere is more wearing than the noise of many machines. My job is often changed during the week. I do everything as a greenhorn, but I work hard and pay attention, so that there is no excuse to dismiss me.

"I am only staying here between jobs," the girl

next me volunteers at lunch. "My regular place burnt out. You couldn't get *me* to work under *her*. I wouldn't stand it even if they do pay well." She is an American.

"You're lucky to be so independent," says a German woman whose dull silence I had hitherto taken for ill nature. "I'm glad enough to get the money. I was up this morning at five, working. There's myself and my mother and my little girl, and not a cent but what I make. My husband is sick. He's in Arizona."

"What were you doing at five?" I asked.

"I have a trade," she answers. "I work on hair goods. It don't bring me much, but I get in a few hours night and morning and it helps some. There's so much to pay."

She was young, but youth is no lover of discomfort. Hardships had chased every vestige of *jeunesse* from her high, wrinkled brow and tired brown eyes. Like a mirror held against despair her face reflected no ray of hope. She was not rebellious, but all she knew of life was written there in lines whose sadness a smile now and again intensified.

Added to the stale, heavy atmosphere there is now a smell of coffee and tobacco smoke. The old hands have boiled a noon beverage on the gas; the tailors smoke an after-dinner pipe. Put up in newspaper by Mrs. Wood, at my matinal departure, my lunches, after a journey across the city, held tightly under my

arm, become, before eating, a block of food, a composite meal in which I can distinguish original bits of ham sandwich and apple pie. The work, however, does not seem hard to me. I sew on buttons, rip trousers, baste coat sleeves—I do all sorts of odd jobs from eight until six, without feeling, in spite of the bad air, any great physical fatigue which ten minutes' brisk walk does not shake off. But never have the hours dragged so; the moral weariness in the midst of continual scolding and abuse are unbearable. Each night I come to a firm decision to leave the following day, but weakly I return, sure of my dollar and dreading to face again the giant city in search of work. About four one afternoon, well on in the week, Frances brings me a pair of military trousers; the stripes of cloth at the side seam are to be ripped off. I go to work cheerfully cutting the threads and slipping one piece of cloth from the other.

Apparently Frances is exasperated that I should do the job in an easy way. It is the only way I know to rip, but Frances knows another way that breaks your back and almost puts your eyes out, that makes you tired and behindhand and sure of a scolding. She shows me how to rip her way. The two threads of the machine, one from above and one from below, which make the stitch, must be separated. The work must be turned first on the wrong, then on the right side, the scissors must lift

first the upper, then the under thread. I begin by cutting a long hole in the trousers, which I hide so Frances will not see it. She has frightened me into dishonesty. Arrived at the middle of the stripe I am obliged to turn the trousers wrong side out and right side out again every other stitch. While I was working in this way, getting more enraged every moment, a bedbug ran out of the seam between my fingers. I killed it. It was full of blood and made a wet red spot on the table. Then I put down the trousers and drew away my chair. It was useless saying anything to the girl next me. She was a Pole, dull, sullen, without a friendly word; but the two women beyond had told me once that they pitied Frances' husband, so I looked to them for support in what I was about to do.

"There's bedbugs in them clothes," I said. "I won't work on 'em. No, sir, not if she sends me away this very minute."

In a great hurry Frances passed me twice. She called out angrily both times without waiting for an answer:

"Why don't you finish them pants?"

Frances was a German. She wore two rhinestone combs in her frizzes, which held also dust and burnt odds and ends of hair. She had no lips whatever. Her mouth shut completely over them after each tirade. Her eyes were separated by two deep scowls and her voice was shrill and nasal.

On her third round she faced me with the same question:

"Why don't you finish them pants?"

"Because," I answered this time, "there's bedbugs in 'em and I ain't goin' to touch 'em!"

"Oh! my!" she taunted me, in a sneering voice, "that's dreadful, ain't it? Bedbugs! Why, you need only just look on the floor to see 'em running around anywhere!"

I said nothing more, and this remark was the last Frances ever addressed to me.

"Mike!" she called to the presser in the corner, "will you have this *young lady's* card made out."

She gave me no further work to do, but, too humiliated to sit idle, I joined a group of girls who were sewing badges.

We had made up all description of political badges—badges for the court, for processions, school badges, military badges, flimsy bits of coloured ribbon and gold fringe which go the tour of the world, rallying men to glory. In the dismal twilight our fingers were now busied with black-and-silver "in memoriam" badges, to be worn as a last tribute to some dead member of a coterie who would follow him to the grave under the emblem that had united them.

We were behindhand for the dead as well as for the living. At six the power was turned off, the

machine hands went home, there was still an unfinished heap of black badges.

I got up and put on my things in the dark closet that served for dressing-room. Frances called to the hand sewers in her rasping voice:

"You darsn't leave till you've finished them badges."

How could I feel the slavery they felt? My nerves were sensitive; I was unaccustomed to their familiar hardships. But on the other hand, my prison had an escape; they were bound within four walls; I dared to rebel knowing the resources of the black silk emergency bag, money lined. They for their living must pay with moral submission as well as physical fatigue. There was nothing between them and starvation except the success of their daily effort. What opposition could the German woman place, what could she risk, knowing that two hungry mouths waited to be fed beside her own?

With a farewell glance at the rubbish-strewn room, the high, grimy windows, the group of hand sewers bent over their work in the increasing darkness, I started down the stairs. A hand was laid on my arm, and I looked up and saw Mike's broad Irish face and sandy head bending toward me.

"I suppose you understand," he said, "that there'll be no more work for you."

"Yes," I answered, "I understand," and we

exchanged a glance that meant we both agreed it was Frances' fault.

In the shop below I found Mr. F. and returned the fifty cents he had advanced me. He seemed surprised at this.

"I'm sorry," he said, in his gentle voice, "that we couldn't arrange things."

"I'm sorry, too," I said. But I dared not add a word against Frances. She had terrorized me like the rest, and though I knew I never would see her again, her pale, lifeless mask haunted me. I remembered a remark the German woman had made when Frances dismissed the Polish girl: "People ought to make it easy, and not hard, for others to earn a living."

At the end of this somewhat agitating day I returned to my tenement lodgings as to a haven of rest. There was one other lodger besides myself: she was studying music on borrowed money at four dollars a lesson. Obviously she was a victim to luxury in the same degree as the young women with whom I had lunched at the bakery. Nothing that a rich society girl might have had been left out of her wardrobe, and borrowed money seemed as good as any for making a splurge.

Miss Arnold was something of a snob, intellectual and otherwise. It was evident from my wretched clothes and poor grammar that I was not accustomed to ladies of her type, but, far from

sparing me, she humiliated me with all sorts of questions.

"I'm tired of taffeta jackets, aren't you?" she would ask, apropos of my flimsy ulster. "I had taffeta last year, with velvet and satin this winter; but I don't know what I'll get yet this summer."

After supper, on my return, I found her sitting in the parlour with Mrs. Brown. They never lighted the gas, as there was an electric lamp which sent its rays aslant the street and repeated the pattern of the window curtains all over Mrs. Brown's face and hands.

Drawn up on one end of the horsehair sofa, Miss Arnold, in a purple velvet blouse, chatted to Mrs. Brown and me.

"I'm from Jacksonville," she volunteered, patting her masses of curly hair. "Do you know anybody from Jacksonville? It's an elegant town, so much wealth, so many retired farmers, and it's such an educational centre. Do you like reading?" she asked me.

"I don't get time," is my response.

"Oh, my!" she rattles on. "I'm crazy about reading. I do love blank verse—it makes the language so choice, like in Shakespeare."

Mrs. Brown and I, being in the majority as opposed to this autocrat, remain placid. A current of understanding exists between us. Miss Arnold, on the other hand, finds our ignorance a flattering back-

ground for her learning and adventures. She is so obviously a woman of the world on the tenement horschair sofa.

"In case you don't like your work," she Lady Bountifuls me, "I can get you a stylish place as maid with some society people just out of Chicago—friends of mine, an elegant family."

"I don't care to live out," I respond, thanking her. "I like my Sundays and my evenings off."

Mrs. Brown pricks up her ears at this, and I notice that thereafter she keeps close inquiry as to how my Sundays and evenings are spent.

But the bell rings. Miss Arnold is called for by friends to play on the piano at an evening entertainment. Mrs. Brown and I, being left alone, begin a conversation of the personal kind, which is the only resource among the poor. If she had had any infirmity—a wooden leg or a glass eye—she would naturally have begun by showing it to me, but as she had been spared intact she chose second best.

"I've had lots of shocks," she said, rocking back and forth in a squeaky rocking-chair. The light from over the way flickered and gleamed. Mrs. Brown's broad, yellow face and gray hair were now brilliant, now somber, as she rocked in and out of the silver rays. Her voice was a metallic whine, and when she laughed against her regular, even, false teeth there was a sound like the mechanical yelp of a toy cat. Married at sixteen, her whole life had been

Brown on earth below and God in His heaven above. Childless, she and Brown had spent over fifty years together. It was natural in the matter of shocks the first she should tell me about was Brown's death. The story began with "a breakfast one Sunday morning at nine o'clock. . . . Brown always made the fire, raked down the ashes, set the coffee to boil, and when the toast and eggs were ready he called me. And that wasn't one morning, mind you—it was every morning for fifty years. But this particular morning I noticed him speaking strange; his tongue was kind o' thick. He didn't hardly eat nothing, and as soon as I'd done he got up and carried the ashes downstairs to dump 'em. When he come up he seemed dizzy. I says to him, 'Don't you feel good?' but he didn't seem able to answer. He made like he was going to undress. He put his hand in his pocket for his watch, and he put it in again for his pocketbook; but the second time it stayed in—he couldn't move it no more; it was dead and cold when I touched it. He leaned up against the wall, and I tried to get him over on to the sofa. When I looked into his eyes I see that he was gone. He couldn't stand, but I held on to him with all my force; I didn't let his head strike as he went down. *When he fell we fell together.*" Her voice was choked; even now after three years as she told the story she could not believe it herself.

Presently when she is calm again she continues

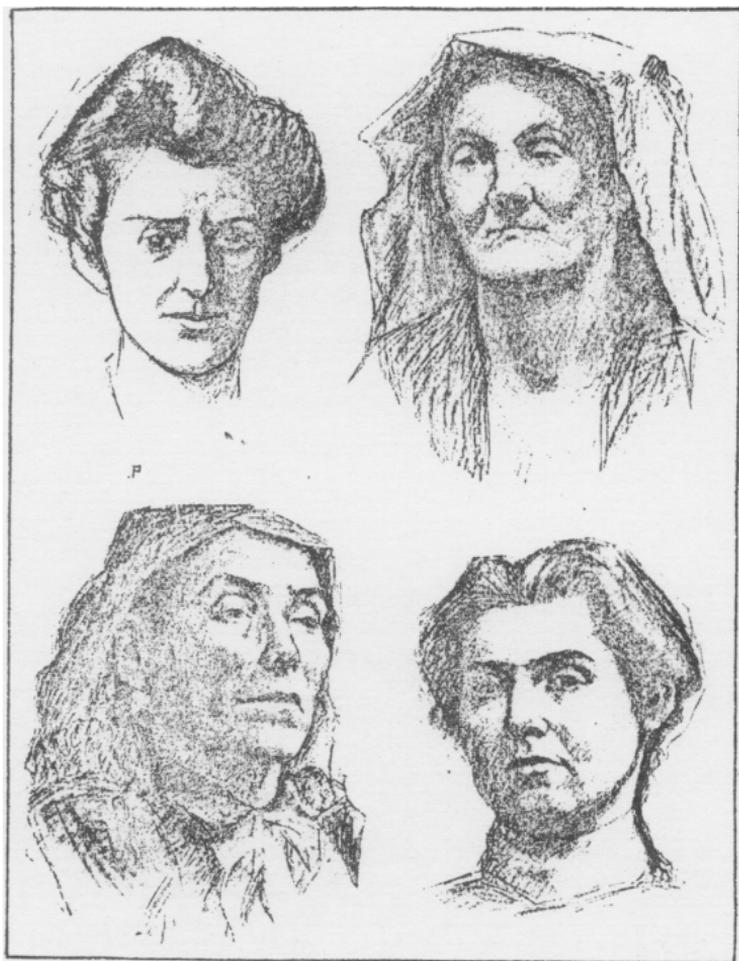
the recital of her shocks—three times struck by lightning and once run over. Her simple descriptions are straightforward and dramatic. As she talks the wind blows against the windows, the shutters rattle and an ugly white china knob, against which the curtains are draped, falls to the floor. Tenderly, amazed, she picks it up and looks at it.

“Brown put that up,” she says; “there hasn’t no hand touched it since his’n.”

Proprietor of this house in which she lives, Mrs. Brown is fairly well off. She rents one floor to an Italian family, one to some labourers, and one to an Irishman and his wife who get drunk from time to time and rouse us in the night with tumult and scuffling. She has a way of disappearing for a week or more and returning without giving any account of herself. Relations are strained, and Mrs. Brown in speaking of her says:

“I don’t care what trouble I was in, I wouldn’t call in that Irish woman. I don’t have anything to do with her. I’d rather get the Dago next door.” And hereafter follows a mild tirade against the Italians—the same sentiments I have heard expressed before in the labouring centres.

“They’re kind folks and good neighbours,” Mrs. Brown explains, “but they’re different from us. They eat what the rest of us throw away, and there’s no work they won’t do. They’re putting money aside fast; most of ’em owns their own houses; but



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since they've moved into this neighbourhood the price of property's gone down. I don't have nothing to do with 'em. We don't any of us. They're not like us; they're different."

Without letting a day elapse I started early the following morning in search of a new job. The paper was full of advertisements, but there was some stipulation in each which narrowed my possibilities of getting a place, as I was an unskilled hand. There was, however, one simple "Girls wanted!" which I answered, prepared for anything but an electric sewing machine.

The address took me to a more fashionable side of the city, near the lake; a wide expanse of pale, shimmering water, it lay a refreshing horizon for eyes long used to poverty's quarters. Like a sea, it rolled white-capped waves toward the shore from its far-away emerald surface where sail-freighted barks traveled at the wind's will. Free from man's disfiguring touch, pure, immaculate, it appeared bridelike through a veil of morning mist. And at its very brink are the turmoil and confusion of America's giant industries. In less than an hour I am receiving wages from a large picture frame company in East Lake Street. Once more I have made the observation that men are more agreeable bosses than women. The woman, when she is not exceptionally disagreeable, like Frances, is always annoying. She bothers and nags; things must be

done her way; she enjoys the legitimate minding of other people's business. Aiming at results only, the masculine mind is more tranquil. Provided you get your work done, the man boss doesn't care what methods you take in doing it. For the woman boss, whether you get your work done or not, you must do it her way. The overseer at J.'s picture frame manufactory is courteous, friendly, considerate. I have a feeling that he wishes me to cooperate with him, not to be terrorized and driven to death by him. My spirits rise at once, my ambition is stimulated, and I desire his approval. The work is all done by the piece, he explains to me, telling me the different prices. The girls work generally in teams of three, dividing profits. Nothing could be more modern, more middle-class, more popular, more philistine than the production of J.'s workrooms. They are the cheap imitations fed to a public hungry for luxury or the semblance of it. Nothing is genuine in the entire shop. Water colours are imitated in chromo, oils are imitated in lithograph, white carved wood frames are imitated in applications of pressed brass. Great works of art are belittled by processes cheap enough to be within reach of the poorest pocket. Framed pictures are turned out by the thousand dozens, every size, from the smallest domestic scene, which hangs over the baby's crib in a Harlem flat, to the large wedding-present size placed over the piano in the front parlour.

The range of subjects covers a familiar list of comedies or tragedies—the partings before war, the interior behind prison bars, the game of marbles, the friendly cat and dog, the chocolate girl, the skipper and his daughter, etc., etc.

My job is easy, but slow. With a hammer and tacks I fasten four tin mouldings to the four corners of a gilt picture frame. Twenty-five cents for a hundred is the pay given me, and it takes me half a day to do this many; but my comrades don't allow me to get discouraged.

"You're doing well," a red-haired *vis-a-vis* calls to me across the table. And the foreman, who comes often to see how I am getting along, tells me that the next day we are to begin team-work, which pays much better.

The hours are ten a day: from seven until five thirty, with twenty-five minutes at noon instead of half an hour. The extra five minutes a day mount up to thirty minutes a week and let us off at five on Saturdays.

The conversation around me leads me to suppose that my companions are not downtrodden in any way, nor that they intend letting work interfere with happiness. They have in their favour the most blessed of all gifts—youth. The tragic faces one meets with are of the women breadwinners whose burdens are overwhelming and of the children in whom physical fatigue arrests development and

all possibility of pleasure. My present team-mates and those along the rest of the room are Americans between fourteen and twenty-four years of age, full of unconscious hope for the future, which is natural in healthy, well-fed youth, taking their work cheerily as a self-imposed task in exchange for which they can have more clothes and more diversions during their leisure hours.

The profitable job given us on the following day is monotonous and dirty, but we net \$1.05 each. There is a mechanical roller which passes before us, carrying at irregular intervals a large sheet of coloured paper covered with glue. My *vis-à-vis* and I lay the palms of our right hands on to the glue surface and lift the sheet of paper to its place on the table before us, over a stiff square of bristol board. The boss of the team fixes the two sheets together with a brush which she manipulates skilfully. We are making in this way the stiff backs which hold the pictures into their frames. When we have fallen into the proper swing we finish one hundred sheets every forty-five minutes. We could work more rapidly, but the sheets are furnished to us at this rate, and it is so comfortable that conversation is not interrupted. The subjects are the same as elsewhere—dress, young men, entertainments. The girls have “beaux” and “steady beaux.” The expression, “Who is she going with?” means who is her steady beau. “I’ve got Jim Smith *now*, but I don’t

know whether I'll keep him," means that Jim Smith is on trial as a beau and may become a "steady." They go to Sunday night subscription dances and arrive Monday morning looking years older than on Saturday, after having danced until early morning. "There's nothing so smart for a ball," the mundane of my team tells us, "as a black skirt and white silk waist."

About ten in the morning most of us eat a pickle or a bit of cocoanut cake or some titbit from the lunch parcel which is opened seriously at twelve.

The light is good, the air is good, the room where we work is large and not crowded, the foreman is kind and friendly, the girls are young and cheerful; one can make \$7 to \$8 a week.

The conditions at J.'s are too favourable to be interesting, and, having no excuse to leave, I disappear one day at lunch time and never return to get my apron or my wages. I shall be obliged to draw upon the resources of the black silk bag, but before returning to my natural condition of life I wish to try one more place: a printing job. There are quantities of advertisements in the papers for girls needed to run presses of different sorts, so on the very afternoon of my self-dismissal I start through the hot summer streets in search of a situation. On the day when my appearance is most forlorn I find policemen always as officially polite as when I am dressed in my best. Other people of whom I inquire

my way are sometimes curt, sometimes compassionate, seldom indifferent, and generally much nicer or not nearly as nice as they would be to a rich person. Poor old women to whom I speak often call me "dear" in answering.

Under the trellis of the elevated road the "cables" clang their way. Trucks and automobiles, delivery wagons and private carriages plunge over the rough pavements. The sidewalks are crowded with people who are dressed for business, and who, whether men or women, are a business type; the drones who taste not of the honey stored in the hives which line the streets and tower against the blue sky, veiling it with smoke. The orderly rush of busy people, among whom I move toward an address given in the paper, is suddenly changed into confusion and excitement by the bell of a fire-engine which is dragged clattering over the cobbles, followed closely by another and another before the sound of the horses' hoofs have died away. Excitement for a moment supersedes business. The fire takes precedence before the office, and a crowd stands packed against policemen's arms, gazing upward at a low brick building which sends forth flames hotter than the brazen sun, smoke blacker than the perpetual veil of soot.

I compare the dingy gold number over the burning door with the number in print on the newspaper slip held between my thumb and forefinger. Decidedly this is not one of my lucky days. The numbers

correspond. But there are other addresses and I collect a series of replies. The employer in a box factory on the West Side takes my address and promises to let me know if he has a vacancy for an unskilled hand. Another boss printer, after much urging on my part, consents to give me a trial the following Monday at three dollars a week. A kindly forelady in a large printing establishment on Wabash Avenue sends me away because she wants only trained workers. "I'm real sorry," she says. "You're from the East, aren't you? I notice you speak with an accent."

By this time it is after three in the afternoon; my chances are diminishing as the day goes on and others apply before me. There is one more possibility at a box and label company which has advertised for a girl to feed a Gordon press. I have never heard of a Gordon press, but I make up my mind not to leave the label company without the promise of a job for the very next day. The stairway is dingy and irregular. My spirits are not buoyant as I open a swinging door and enter a room with a cage in the middle, where a lady cashier, dressed in a red silk waist, sits on a high stool overlooking the office. Three portly men, fat, well nourished, evidently of one family, are installed behind yellow ash desks, each with a lady typewriter at his right hand. I go timidly up to the fattest of the three. He is in shirt sleeves, evidently feeling

the heat painfully. He pretends to be very busy and hardly looks up when I say:

"I seen your ad. in the paper this morning."

"You're rather late," is his answer. "I've got two girls engaged already."

"Too late!" I say with an intonation which interrupts his work for a minute while he looks at me. I profit by this moment, and, changing from tragedy to a good-humoured smile, I ask:

"Say, are you sure those girls 'll come? You can't always count on us, you know."

He laughs at this. "Have you ever run a Gordon press?"

"No, sir; but I'm awful handy."

"Where have you been working?"

"At J.'s in Lake Street."

"What did you make?"

"A dollar a day."

"Well, you come in to-morrow about eleven and I'll tell you then whether I can give you anything to do."

"Can't you be sure now?"

Truly disappointed, my voice expresses the eagerness I feel.

"Well," the fat man says indulgently, "you come in to-morrow morning at eight and I'll give you a job."

The following day I begin my last and by far my most trying apprenticeship.

The noise of a single press is deafening. In the room where I work there are ten presses on my row, eight back of us and four printing machines back of them. On one side of the room only are there windows. The air is heavy with the sweet, stifling smell of printer's ink and cheap paper. A fine rain of bronze dust sifts itself into the hair and clothes of the girls at our end of the room, where they are bronzing coloured advertisements. The work is all done standing; the hours are from seven until six, with half an hour at noon, and holiday at one thirty on Saturdays. It is to *feed* a machine that I am paid three dollars a week. The expression is admirably chosen. The machine's iron jaws yawn for food; they devour all I give, and when by chance I am slow they snap hungrily at my hand and would crush my fingers did I not snatch them away, feeling the first cold clutch. It is nervous work. Each leaf to be printed must be handled twice; 5,000 circulars or bill-heads mean 10,000 gestures for the printer, and this is an afternoon's work.

Into the square marked out for it by steel guards the paper must be slipped with the right hand, while the machine is open; with the left hand the printed paper must be pulled out and a second fitted in its place before the machine closes again. What a master to serve is this noisy iron mechanism animated by steam! It gives not a moment's respite to the worker, whose thoughts must never wander

from her task. The girls are pale. Their complexions without exception are bad.

We are bossed by men. My boss is kind, and, seeing that I am ambitious, he comes now and then and prints a few hundred bill-heads for me. There is some complaining *sotto voce* of the other boss, who, it appears, is a hard taskmaster. Both are very young, both chew tobacco and expectorate long, brown, wet lines of tobacco juice on to the floor. While waiting for new type I get into conversation with the boss of ill-repute. He has an honest, serious face; his eyes are evidently more accustomed to judging than to trusting his fellow beings. He is communicative.

"Do you like your job?" he asks.

"Yes, first rate."

"They don't pay enough. I give notice last week and got a raise. I guess I'll stay on here until about August."

"Then where are you going?"

"Going home," he answers. "I've been away from home for seven years. I run away when I was thirteen and I've been knocking around ever since, takin' care of myself, makin' a livin' one way or another. My folks lives in California. I've been from coast to coast—and I tell you I'll be mighty glad to get back."

"Ever been sick?"

"Yes, twice. It's no fun. No matter how much

licking a boy gets he ought never to leave home. The first year or so you don't mind it so much, but when you've been among strangers two years, three years, all alone, sick or well, you begin to feel you must get back to your own folks."

"Are you saving up?" I ask.

He nods his head, not free to speak for tobacco juice.

"I'll be able to leave here in August," he explains, when he has finished spitting, "for Omaha. In three months I can save up enough to get on as far as Salt Lake, and in another three months I can move on to San Francisco. I tell you," he adds, returning to his work, "a person ought never to leave home." He had nine months of work and privation before reaching the goal toward which he had been yearning for years. With what patience he appears possessed compared to our fretfulness at the fast express trains, which seem to crawl when they carry us full speed homeward toward those we love! Nine months, two hundred and seventy days, ten-hour working days, to wait. He was manly. He had the spirit of adventure; his experience was wide and his knowledge of men extended; he had managed to take care of himself in one way or another for seven years, the most trying and decisive in a boy's life. He had not gone to the bad, evidently, and to his credit he was homeward bound. His history was something out of the ordinary; yet beyond the circle where he

worked and was considered a hard taskmaster he was a nonentity—a star in the milky way, a star whose faint rays, without individual brilliancy, added to the general luster.

The first day I had a touch of pride in getting easily ahead of the new girl who started in when I did. From my machine I could see only the back of her head; it was shaking disapproval at every stroke she made and had to make over again. She had a mass of untidy hair and a slouchy skirt that slipped out from her belt in the back. If not actually stupid, she was slow, and the foreman and the girl who took turns teaching her exchanged glances, meaning that they were exhausting their patience and would readily give up the job. I was pleased at being included in these glances, and had a miserable moment of vanity at lunch time when the old girls, the habitués, came after me to eat with them. The girl with the untidy hair and the long skirt sat quite by her self. Without unfolding her newspaper bundle, she took bites of things from it, as though she were a little ashamed of her lunch. My moment of vanity had passed. I went over to her, not knowing whether her appearance meant a slipshod nature or extreme poverty. As we were both new girls, there was no indiscretion in my direct question:

“Like your job?”

I could not understand what she answered, so I continued: “Ever worked before?”

She opened her hands and held them out to me. In the palm of one there was a long scar that ran from wrist to forefinger. Two nails had been worn off below the quick and were cracked through the middle. The whole was gloved in an iron callous, streaked with black.

"Does that look like work?" was her response. It was almost impossible to hear what she said. Without a palate, she forced the words from her mouth in a strange monotone. She was one of nature's monstrous failures. Her coarse, opaque skin covered a low forehead and broad, boneless nose; her teeth were crumbling with disease, and into her full lower lip some sharp tool had driven a double scar. She kept her hand over her mouth when she talked, and except for this movement of self-consciousness her whole attitude was one of resignation and humility. Her eyes in their dismal surroundings lay like clear pools in a swamp's midst reflecting blue sky.

"What was you doing to get your hands like that?" I asked.

"Tipping shoe-laces. I had to quit, 'cause they cut the pay down. I could do twenty-two gross in a day, working until eight o'clock, and I didn't care how hard I worked so long as I got good pay—\$9 a week. But the employer'd been a workman himself, and they're the worst kind. He cut me down to \$4 a week, so I quit."

"Do you live home?"

"Yes. I give all I make to my mother, and she gives me my clothes and board. Almost anywhere I can make \$7 a week, and I feel when I earn that much like I was doing right. But it's hard to work and make nothing. I'm slow to learn," she smiled at me, covering her mouth with her hand, "but I'll get on to it by and by and go as fast as any one; only I'm not very strong."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Heart disease for one thing, and then I'm so nervous. It's kind of hard to have to work when you're not able. To-day I can hardly stand, my head's aching so. They make the poor work for just as little as they can, don't they? It's not the work I mind, but if I can't give in my seven a week at home I get to worrying."

Now and then as she talked in her inarticulate pitiful voice the tears added luster to her eyes as her emotions welled up within her.

The machines began to roar and vibrate again. The noon recess was over. She went back to her job. Her broad, heavy hands began once more to serve a company on whose moderate remuneration she depended for her daily bread. Her silhouette against the window where she stood was no longer an object for my vain eyes to look upon with a sense of superiority. I could hear the melancholy intonation of her voice, pronouncing words of courage over

her disfigured underlip. She was one of nature's failures—one of God's triumphs.

Saturday night my fellow lodger, Miss Arnold, and I made an expedition to the spring opening of a large dry-goods shop in the neighbourhood of Mrs. Brown's. I felt rather humble in my toil-worn clothes to accompany the young woman, who had an appearance of prosperity which borrowed money alone can give. But she encouraged me, and we started together for the principal street of the quarter whose history was told in its show-case windows. Pawnshops and undertakers, bakeries and soda-water fountains were ranged side by side on this highway, as the necessity for them is ranged with incongruous proximity in the existence of those who live pell-mell in moral and material disorder after the manner of the poor. There was even a wedding coach in the back of the corner undertaker's establishment, and in the front window a coffin, small and white, as though death itself were more attractive in the young, as though the little people of the quarter were nearer Heaven and more suggestive of angels than their life-worn elders. The spotless tiny coffin with its fringe and satin tufting had its share of the ideal, mysterious, unused and costly; in the same store with the wedding coach, it suggested festivity: a reunion to celebrate with tears a small pilgrim's right to sleep at last undisturbed.

The silver rays of the street lamps mingled with

the yellow light of the shop windows, and on the sidewalk there was a cosmopolitan public. Groups of Italian women crooned to each other in their soft voices over the bargains for babies displayed at the spring opening; factory girls compared notes, chattered, calculated, tried to resist, and ended by an extravagant choice; the German women looked and priced and bought nothing; the Hungarians had evidently spent their money on arriving. From the store window wax figures of the ideal woman, clad in latest Parisian garb, with golden hair and blue eyes, gazed down benignly into the faces uplifted with envy and admiration. Did she not plainly say to them "For \$17 you can look as I do"?

The store was apparently flourishing, and except for such few useful articles as stockings and shirts it was stocked with trash. Patronized entirely by labouring men and women, it was an indication to their needs. Here, for example, was a stand hung with silk dress skirts, trimmed with lace and velvet. They were made after models of expensive dress-makers and were attempts at the sort of thing a Mme. de Rothschild might wear at the Grand Prix de Paris.

Varying from \$11 to \$20, there was not one of the skirts made of material sufficiently solid to wear for more than a few Sunday outings. On another counter there were hats with extravagant garlands of flowers, exaggerated bows and plumes, wraps



THE REAR OF A CHICAGO TENEMENT

with ruffles of lace and long pendant bows; silk boleros; a choice of things never meant to be imitated in cheap quality.

I watched the customers trying on. Possessed of grace and charm in their native costumes, hatless, with gay-coloured shawls on their shoulders, the Italian women, as soon as they donned the tawdry garb of the luxury-loving labourer, were common like the rest. In becoming prosperous Americans, animated by the desire for material possession which is the strength and the weakness of our countrymen, they lost the character that pleases us, the beauty we must go abroad to find.

Miss Arnold priced everything, compared quality and make with Jacksonville productions, and decided to buy nothing, but in refusing to buy she had an air of opulence and taste hard to please which surpassed the effect any purchase could have made.

Sunday morning Mrs. Brown asked me to join her and Miss Arnold for breakfast. They were both in slippers and dressing-gowns. We boiled the coffee and set the table with doughnuts and sweet cakes, which Miss Arnold kept in a paper bag in her room.

"I hardly ever eat, except between meals," she explained. "A nibble of cake or candy is as much as I can manage, my digestion is so poor."

"Ever since Brown died," the widow responded, "I've had my meals just the same as though he were here. All I want," she went on, as we seated our-

selves and exchanged courtesies in passing the bread and butter, "all I want is somebody to be kind to me. I've got a young niece that I've tried to have with me. I wrote to her and says: 'Your auntie's heart's just crying out for you!' And I told her I'd leave her all I've got. But she said she didn't feel like she could come."

As soon as breakfast is over the mundane member of the household starts off on a day's round of visits. When the screen door has shut upon her slender silhouette, Mrs. Brown settles down for a chat. She takes out the brush and comb, unbraids her silver locks and arranges them while she talks.

"Miss Arnold's always on the go; she's awful nervous. These society people aren't happy. Life's not all pleasure for them. You can be sure they have their ups and downs like the rest of us."

"I guess that's likely," is my response.

"They don't tell the truth always, in the first place. They say there's got to be deceit in society, and that these stylish people pretend all sorts of things. Well, then, all I say is," and she pricks the comb into the brush with emphasis, "all I say is, you better keep out of society."

She had twisted her gray braids into a coil at the back of her head, and dish-washing is now the order of the day. As we splash and wipe, Mrs. Brown looks at me rather closely. She is getting ready to

speak. I can feel this by a preliminary rattle of her teeth.

"You're a new girl here," she begins; "you ain't been long in Chicago. I just thought I'd tell you about a girl who was workin' here in the General Electric factory. She was sixteen—a real nice-lookin' girl from the South. She left her mother and come up here alone. It wasn't long before she got to foolin' round with one of the young men over to the factory. They were both young; they didn't mean no harm; but one day she come an' told me, cryin' like anythin', that she was in trouble, and her young man had slipped off up to Michigan."

Here Mrs. Brown stopped to see if I was interested, and as I responded with a heartfelt "Oh, my!" she went on:

"Well, you ought to have seen that girl's sufferin', her loneliness for her mother. I'd come in her room sometimes at midnight—the very room you have now—and find her on the floor, weepin' her heart out. I want to tell you never to get discouraged. Just you listen to what happened. The gentleman from the factory got a sheriff and they started up north after the young man, determined to get him by force if they couldn't by kindness. Well, they found him and they brought him back; he was willin' to come, and they got everythin' fixed up for the weddin' without tellin' her a thing about it, and one day she was sittin' right there," she pointed to the

rocking chair in the front parlour window, "when he come in. He was carryin' a big bunch of cream roses, tied with long white ribbons. He offered 'em to her, but she wouldn't look at them nor at him. After awhile they went together into her room and talked for half an hour, and when they come back she had consented to marry him. He was real kind. He kept askin' me if she had cried much and thankin' me for takin' care of her. They were married, and when the weddin' was over she didn't want to stay with him. She said she wanted her mother, but we talked to her and told her what was right, and things was fixed up between them."

She had taken down from its hook in the corner sunlight the canary bird and his cage. She put them on the table and prepared to give the bird his bath and fresh seed.

"You see," she said, drawing up a chair, "that's what good employers will do for you. If you're working in a good place they'll do right by you, and it don't pay to get down-hearted."

I thanked her and showed the interest I truly felt in the story. Evidently I must account for my Sundays! It was with the bird now that Mrs. Brown continued her conversation. He was a Rip Van Winkle in plumage. His claws trailed over the sand of the cage. Except when Mrs. Brown had a lodger or two with her, the bird was the only living thing in her part of the tenement.

"I've had him twenty-five years," she said to me. "Brown give him to me. I guess I'd miss him if he died." And presently she repeated again: "I don't believe I even know how much I'd miss him."

On the last evening of my tenement residence I was sitting in a restaurant of the quarter, having played truant from Mrs. Wood's, whose Friday fish dinner had poisoned me. My hands had been inflamed and irritated in consequence, and I was now intent upon a good clean supper earned by ten hours' work. My back was turned to the door, which I knew must be open, as I felt a cold wind. The lake brought capricious changes of the temperature: the thermometer had fallen the night before from seventy to thirty. I turned to see who the newcomer might be. The sight of him set my heart beating faster. The restaurant keeper was questioning the man to find out who he was. . . . He was evidently nobody—a fragment of anonymous humanity lashed into *debris* upon the edge of a city's vortex; a remnant of flesh and bones for human appetites to feed on; a battleground of disease and vice; a beggar animated by instinct to get from others what he could no longer earn for himself; the type *par excellence* who has worn out charity organizations; the poor wreck of a soul that would create pity if there were none of it left in the world. He was asking for food. The proprietor gave him the

address of a free lodging-house and turned him away. He pulled his cap over his head; the door opened and closed, letting in a fresh gale of icy air. The man was gone. I turned back to my supper. Scientific philanthropists would have means of proving that such men are alone to blame for their condition; that this one was in all probability a drunkard, and that it would be useless, worse than useless, to help him. But he was cold and hungry and penniless, and I knew it. I went as swiftly as I could to overtake him. He had not traveled far, lurching along at a snail's pace, and he was startled when I came up to him. One of his legs was longer than the other; it had been crushed in an accident. They were not pairs, his legs, and neither were his eyes pairs; one was big and blind, with a fixed pupil, and the other showed all his feelings. Across his nose there was a scar, a heavy scar, pale like the rest of his face. He was small and had sandy hair. The directors of charity bureaus could have detected perhaps a faint resemblance to the odour of liquor as he breathed a halo of frosty air over his scraggly red beard.

Through the weather-beaten coat pinned over it his bare chest was visible.

"It's a cold night!" I began. "Are you out of a job?"

With his wistful eye he gave me a kind glance.

"I've been sick. There's a sharp pain right in

through here." He showed me a spot under his arm. "They thought at the hospital that I 'ad consumption. "But," his face brightened, "I haven't got it." He showed in his smile the life-warrant that kept him from suicide. *He wanted to live.*

"Where did you sleep last night?" I asked. "It was a cold night."

"To tell you the truth," he responded in his strong Scotch accent, "I slept in a wagon."

I proposed that we do some shopping together; he looked at me gratefully and limped along to a cheap clothing store, kept by an Italian. The warmth within was agreeable; there was a display of garments hung across the ceiling under the gas-light. My companion waited, leaning against the glass counter, while I priced the flannel shirts. To be sure, my own costume promised little bounty. The price of the shirt was seventy-five cents, and as soon as he heard this the poor man said:

"Oh, you mustn't spend as much as that."

Looking first at the pauper, then at me, the Italian leaned over and whispered to me, "I think I understand. You can have the shirt for sixty, and I'll put in a pair of socks, too."

Thus we had become a fraternity; all were poor, the stronger woe helping the weaker. . . . When his toilet was complete the poor man looked half a head taller.

"Shall I wrap up your old cap for you?" the salesman asked, and the other laughed a broken, long-disused laugh.

"I guess I won't need it any more," he said, turning to me.

His face had changed like the children's valentines that grow at a touch from a blank card to a glimpse of paradise.

Once in the street again we shook hands. I was going back to my supper. He was going, the charity directors would say, to pawn his shirt and coat.

The man had evidently not more than a few months to live; I was leaving Chicago the following day. We would undoubtedly never meet again.

As his bony hand lay in mine, his eyes looked straight at me. "Thank you," he said, and his last words were these:

"I'll stand by you."

It was a pledge of fraternity at parting. There was no material substance to promise. I took it to mean that he would stand by any generous impulses I might have; that he would be, as it were, a patron of spontaneous as opposed to organized charity; a patron of those who are never too poor to give to some one poorer; of those who have no scientific reasons for giving, no statistics, only compassion and pity; of those who want to aid not only the promising but the hopeless cases; of those whose charity is tolerant and maternal, patient with

the helpless, prepared for disappointments; not looking for results, ever ready to begin again, so long as the paradox of suffering and inability are linked together in humanity.

THE MEANING OF IT ALL

## CHAPTER V

### THE MEANING OF IT ALL

BEFORE concluding the recital of my experiences as a working girl, I want to sum up the general conclusions at which I arrived and to trace in a few words the history of my impressions. What, first of all, was my purpose in going to live and work among the American factory hands? It was not to gratify simple curiosity; it was not to get material for a novel; it was not to pave the way for new philanthropic associations; it was not to obtain crude data, such as fill the reports of labour commissioners. My purpose was to *help* the working girl—to help her mentally, morally, physically. I considered this purpose visionary and unpractical, I considered it pretentious even, and I cannot say that I had any hope of accomplishing it. What did I mean by *help*? Did I mean a superficial remedy, a palliative? A variety of such remedies occurred to me as I worked, and I have offered them gladly for the possible aid of charitable people who have time and money to carry temporary relief to the poor. It was not relief of this kind that I meant by *help*. I meant an *amelioration in natural conditions*.

I was not hopeful of discovering any plan to bring about this amelioration, because I believed that the conditions, deplorable as they appear to us, of the working poor, were natural, the outcome of laws which it is useless to resist. I adopted the only method possible for putting my belief to the test. I did what had never been done. I was a skeptic and something of a sentimentalist when I started. I have become convinced, as I worked, that certain of the most unfortunate conditions are not natural, and that they can therefore be corrected. It is with hope for the material betterment of the bread-winning woman, for the moral advancement of the semi-breadwinner and the esthetic improvement of the country, that I submit what seems a rational plan.

For the first three weeks of my life as a factory girl I saw among my companions only one vast class of slaves, miserable drudges, doomed to dirt, ugliness and overwork from birth until death. My own physical sufferings were acute. My heart was torn with pity. I revolted against a society whose material demands were satisfied at the cost of minds and bodies. Labour appeared in the guise of a monster feeding itself on human lives. To every new impression I responded with indiscriminate compassion. It is impossible for the imagination to sustain for more than a moment at a time the terrible fatigue which a new hand like myself is

obliged to endure day after day; the disgust at foul smells, the revulsion at miserable food soaked in grease, the misery of a straw mattress, a sheetless bed with blankets whose acrid odour is stifling. The mind cannot grasp what it means to be frantic with pain in the shoulders and back before nine in the morning, and to watch the clock creep around to six before one has a right to drop into the chair that has stood near one all day long. Yet it is not until the system has become at least in a great measure used to such physical effort that one can judge without bias. When I had grown so accustomed to the work that I was equal to a long walk after ten hours in the factory; when I had become so saturated with the tenement smell that I no longer noticed it; when any bed seemed good enough for the healthy sleep of a working girl, and any food good enough to satisfy a hungry stomach, then and then only I began to see that in the great unknown class there were a multitude of classes which, aside from the ugliness of their esthetic surroundings and the intellectual inactivity which the nature of their occupation imposes, are not all to be pitied: they are a collection of human individuals with like capacities to our own. The surroundings into which they are born furnish little chance for them to develop their minds and their tastes, but their souls suffer nothing from working in squalour and sordidness. Certain acts of impulsive generosity, of disinterested

kindness, of tender sacrifice, of loyalty and fortitude shone out in the poverty-stricken wretches I met on my way, as the sun shines glorious in iridescence on the rubbish heap that goes to fertilize some rich man's fields.

My observations were confined chiefly to the women. Two things, however, regarding the men I noticed as fixed rules. They were all breadwinners; they worked because they needed the money to live; they supported entirely the woman, wife or mother, of the household who did not work. In many cases they contributed to the support of even the wage-earning females of the family: the woman who does not work when she does not need to work is provided for.

The women were divided into two general classes: Those who worked because they needed to earn their living, and those who came to the factories to be more independent than at home, to exercise their coquetry and amuse themselves, to make pin money for luxuries. The men formed a united class. They had a purpose in common. The women were in a class with boys and with children. They had nothing in common but their physical inferiority to man. The children were working from necessity, the boys were working from necessity; the only industrial unit complicating the problem were the girls who worked without being obliged to—the girls who had "all the

money they needed, but not all the money they wanted." To them the question of wages was not vital. They could afford to accept what the breadwinner found insufficient. They were better fed, better equipped than the self-supporting hand; they were independent about staying away from the factory when they were tired or ill, and they alone determined the reputation for irregularity in which the breadwinners were included.

Here, then, it seemed to me, was the first chance to offer help.

The self-supporting woman should be in competition only with other self-supporting industrial units. The problem for her class will settle itself, according to just and natural laws, when the purpose of this class is equally vital to all concerned. Relief, it seemed to me, could be brought to the breadwinner by separating from her the girl who works for luxuries.

How could this be done?

There is, I believe, a way in which it can be accomplished naturally. The non-self-supporting girls must be attracted into some field of work which requires instruction and an especial training, which pays them as well while calling into play higher faculties than the brutalizing machine labour. This field of work is industrial art: lace-making, hand-weaving, the fabrication of tissues and embroideries, gold-smithery, bookbinding, rug-weaving, wood-

carving and inlaying, all the branches of industrial art which could be executed by woman in her home, all the manual labour which does not require physical strength, which would not place the woman, therefore, as an inferior in competition with man, but would call forth her taste and skill, her training and individuality, at the same time being consistent with her destiny as a woman.

The American factory girl has endless ambition. She has a hunger for knowledge, for opportunities to better herself, to get on in the world, to improve. There is ample material in the factories as they exist for forming a new, higher, superior class of industrial art labourers. There is a great work to be accomplished by those who are willing to give their time and their money to lifting the non-breadwinners from the slavish, brutalizing machines at which they work, ignorant of anything better, and placing them by education, by cultivation, in positions of comparative freedom—freedom of thought, taste and personality.

Classes in industrial art already exist at the Simmons School in Boston and Columbia University in New York. New classes should be formed. Individual enterprise should start the ball and keep it rolling until it is large enough to be held in Governmental hands. It is not sufficient merely to form classes. The right sort of pupils should be attracted. There is not a factory which would not

furnish some material. The recompense for apprenticeship would be the social and intellectual advancement dear to every true American's heart. The question of wages would be self-regulating. At Hull House, Chicago, in the Industrial Art School it has been proved that, provided the models be simple in proportion to the ability of the artisan, the work can be sold as fast as it is turned out. The public is ready to buy the produce of hand-workers. The girls I speak of are fit for advancement. It is not a plan of charity, but one to ameliorate natural conditions.

Who will act as mediator?

I make an appeal to all those whose interests and leisure permit them to help in this double emancipation of the woman who toils for bread and the girl who works for luxuries.

With the rest of the world I have wondered how the vast complement of the labouring mass live. I have imagined; never until now have I felt. The peffection of sympathy, the real touching point is to experience with our fellows like sensations.