

Home Life of the Silk-Mill Workers

THE CONSERVATION OF OUR YOUNG WOMANHOOD

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THE town straggled into existence at a point marked by a towering coal-breaker, and broke off where the single street disappeared behind a hill of black culm. The houses sat in dejected and irregular rows, where they had been thrown up close to the dust of the unpaved road. For every dozen houses there appeared a dingy yellow "hotel," its invitation expressed on the ground-glass windows—sometimes in English, sometimes in Hungarian. Over all things—houses, yards, and roads—had settled a coat of fine black coal-dust.

We entered the town at noon, just as the chorus of whistles from the factory and the coal-breakers was subsiding; and by the time the trolley-car had disappeared in its own cloud of dust, the road was dotted with hurrying black-faced boys, girls with tattered colored aprons, and an occasional man with coal-smears on his face.

We had a double object to attain—to secure work at the factory and to find board in the town. We had reserved this town for a prolonged stay, as a former visit had indicated that it possessed typical features of some of the worst of the mining settlements in the anthracite coal-fields of Pennsylvania, and therefore offered valuable opportunities in our effort to realize some of the more pressing needs of industrial betterment.

The little settlement lay about five miles from one of the larger towns of Pennsylvania, connected with it by a trolley line and two coal-carrying railroads which passed through it on the way to more important communities farther north. Its three thousand inhabitants—American and Hungarian, with a scattering of Welsh and Polish Jews—lived in the houses between the saloons and coal-breakers on the main street, or along half-defined streets that

ran part way up the hillside. The three collieries provided work for the men and boys. The silk-mill employed a large number of the girls both day and night—another mill in a near-by community inviting, through its better conditions, a still greater number, in spite of the intervening two miles.

While Miss Cochran crossed the railroad track to ask for work at the factory, I stopped at a candy store to inquire about board, and waited for my friend's return. She came back shortly, proclaiming success, and we proceeded together to a recommended address. We found the house with some difficulty, tracing it to the rear court, into which it was crowded with four others of its kind. It was not an inviting home. There was little space between its front door and the rear door of the front house, and the intervening hard-trodden dirt blazed in the hot sun. The back yard extended to the railroad tracks, an ash and refuse heap and a row of unsightly outhouses marking its progress. A hydrant in the foreground supplied the needs of the four families. These disadvantages were offset, however, by the fact that the daughter of the house worked in the silk-mill, and offered a ready channel for introductions to our other fellow workers.

We finally agreed to come for supper that evening, arranging to board here with Mrs. Wilson, but to occupy a room at her mother's house across the street. We had chosen this plan when we found that the room offered us here was, for practical purposes, a hallway, opening directly from the stair, with no intervening wall to screen it. In view of the necessity of writing up our nightly notes, and discussing the day's doings, not to mention the ordinary disadvantages of

so public an abiding-place, we hailed the suggestion that we occupy a smaller but more secluded room across the street.

At sunset that evening we arrived with our bags and went directly in to supper. We had entered a typical American family of the community. The father, a naturalized Welsh miner, had deserted his wife two years previously, leaving a little son of eight, and Nellie, a sixteen-year-old daughter, who worked in the silk-mill. Her earnings and the help of the grandmother were the only resources of the family. The mother was a gaunt, nervous woman, morbidly absorbed by the subject of her deserting husband; and the conversation at supper revolved steadily around him and his neglect, except for interruptions by Nellie, who showed herself at first meeting a pretty, rather pert and self-sufficient young person. She had chosen to work at the more distant and better-conducted mill, pitying Miss Cochran for her prospect of work at the near one. "They treat yer like dogs. I'd be d—— if I'd work there!" she declared, and advised me to try for a job at her mill. As Miss Cochran and I were anxious to separate our efforts so as to cover as wide as possible an experience, I consented.

Soon after supper we were escorted to our lodging by Mrs. Wilson, Nellie remaining behind to soak (in salt and water) her feet, swollen from the day's standing, and to go to bed. The grandmother's house presented almost a pleasing aspect. It had been built nearly a half-century earlier, before coal-mining had taken the place of farming; and it had the gabled roof, porches, vines, and bushes of an earlier day. The woman who greeted us was a wrinkled, kindly old soul, who did not seem overjoyed at the prospect of lodgers, and tried to point out the advantages of living where we ate. As we seemed unimpressed by these arguments, she finally and apologetically showed us to a tiny little space—more closet than room—behind the parlor, completely filled by a bureau and a bed, where we deposited our belongings.

As we sat on the porch with old Mrs. Evans, after Mrs. Wilson had returned home, the whole sorry panorama of the life about us slowly began to unfold. Mrs. Evans kept a little penny candy

and cigar store which she had added to her house. As the evening wore on, the store and the adjoining porch became filled with young men and boys, who called across to her as they proceeded up the steps, looking askance at the two strangers.

"Them's my boys," Mrs. Evans explained, in language interspersed with the same freedom of profanity that had startled us on the lips of Nellie, and her mother as well. "They come here summers and winters. There hain't nuthin' for 'em in this hell of a place but the saloons. They know they kin use my store and porch like their own, jest so long as there hain't no gamblin'. I give 'em dominoes and checkers—and they kin drink their ginger ale and root beer, and smoke. Since I let 'em come in here, by G——! some of these here saloons have given me —— for sp'illin' their business!" She chuckled, then saddened. "The poor boys go to the devil fast enough with the drink; if it's this much I kin do fer 'em, I'll do it!"

And before our three weeks' stay was completed we saw the bitter correctness of her statements. In all the community hers was the only effort which sought to make good as attractive as evil; which offered itself as a rival to the saloons. She told us once of the grieved expostulations of the Baptist minister on the subject of her keeping her store open on Sundays and allowing the boys to play there.

"What 'd they do then?" I asks him. "The men manages somehow to git hold of their drinks Sunday nights; would yer have the boys do the same?" But he's no kind of a man and couldn't see it. You can't expect nuthin' out of a hog but a grunt nohow; so I don't heed him, and goes my own way."

The influences of the church in the town apparently counted for nothing. Except for the Greek Catholics, I do not remember hearing of any one's going to church while we lived there. Perhaps Mrs. Evans had provided the explanation. But we found that she had only too aptly described the resources of the town. Two "Nickelettes" — moving-picture shows — were permanently established there. No one can thoughtfully deny that this form of entertainment possesses

wonderful opportunities for good if they are properly developed. We have made a point of visiting as many of them as possible in the various towns where we have worked; and we have seen some shows that provided an education as well as a cheap and harmless entertainment. But the shows in the very small settlements are of an inferior kind; and those which we visited in this town were brutal and degrading. The one other source of entertainment offered was a dance pavilion, which was opened while we were there, and was patronized by most of the young people and many of the older ones. This took the place of the winter dance-hall or "casino" which adjoins one of the saloons. We joined in the dancing several nights at the pavilion, and I was impressed with the chance for harmless recreation which it would afford under proper control and management. But this one, situated in an unlighted grove, and exposed to visits of unknown and questionable people, held dangerous possibilities for unescorted girls. Sometimes the good sense and social pride of a girl will prevent her from accepting dances with entire strangers when her own young men friends are present. But the opportunity is continuously placed before her. Miss Cochran and I were both asked to dance by two young men who, as strangers ourselves, we thought belonged in the community, but who were later described to us as "drummers."

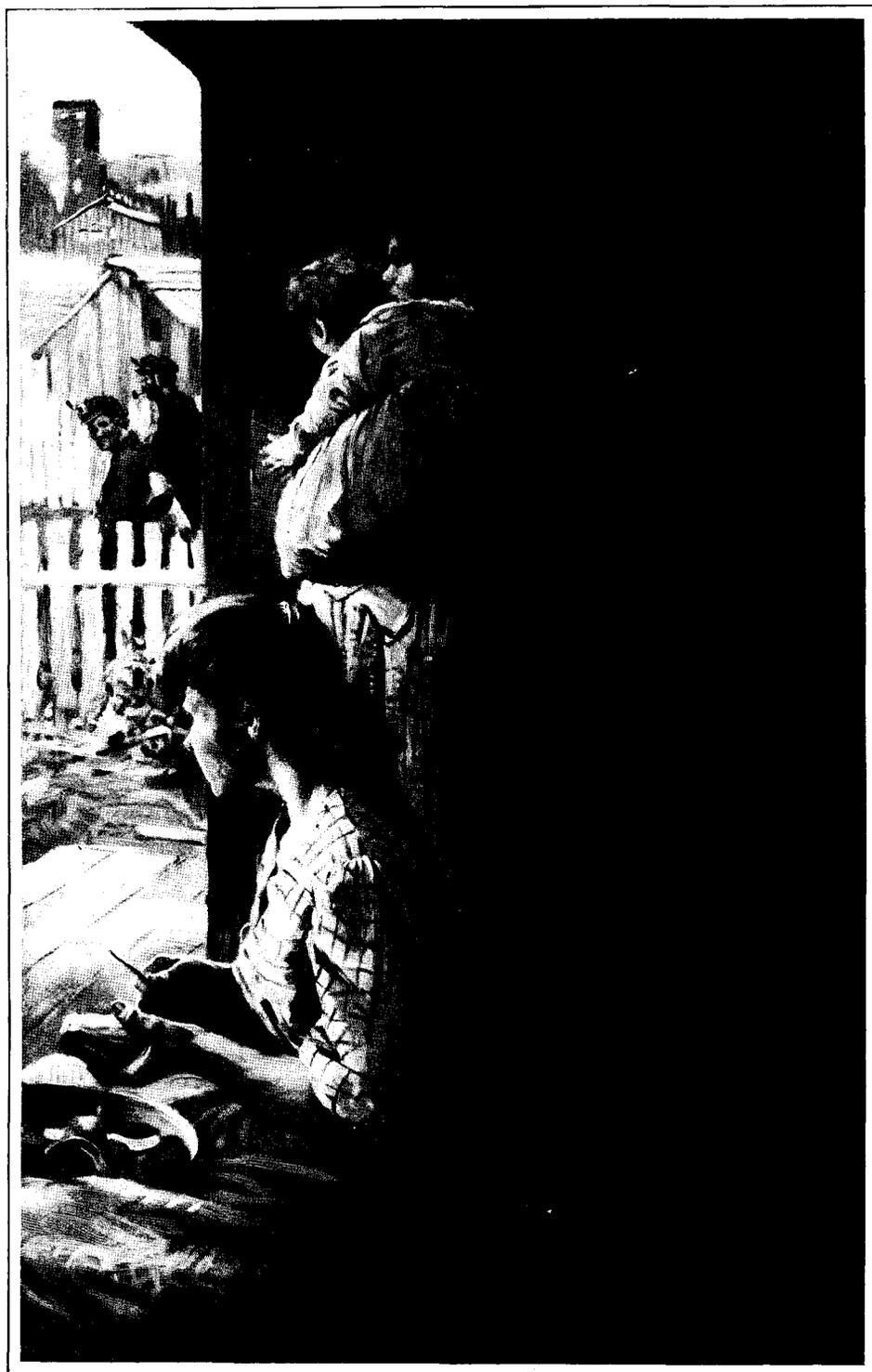
After a couple of weeks the pavilion was closed for some reason which we were not able to fathom. Rumor had it that the "priest had ordered it shut." But what was the reason for this order, even if given, we could not ascertain.

We had no opportunity to see the rest of the town until the next Saturday, as I was fortunate enough to secure work the next morning by starting off at six o'clock with a company of girls to take the two-mile walk to the mill where Nellie worked. When we did wander about the town on Saturday afternoon, we saw what we had been led to expect, from visits to many other communities of its kind. No trees, or grass, or paving; acres of hillside on which to settle, and yet narrow, crowded alleys cut into and across rutted ways that stood for

streets; absolutely no system of sewerage, but a series of horrible streamlets running into an open gutter at the side, or in the middle, of the main path—or collecting in loathsome pools; on all sides heaps of garbage, cans, and refuse.

We saw dozens of children playing about in the sunlight—fair-haired Hungarians many of them, some of them Americans—all born into a world of sordid dirt. At eight years old the arm of the law—if it catches them—forces them into school. But it would require a genius in the schoolroom to raise the vision of those young eyes beyond their coal-grimed surroundings, above the black heaps of coal waste that on every side cut off the splendid hills. The teacher has a fair chance at them for three or four years, when the pressure begins from home to utilize them by diverting their young feet into more lucrative paths. These paths lead but in two directions—for the girls, into the silk-mill; for the boys, into the breakers. For those children whose teachers are persistent enough to hold them within the protection of the law the possibilities of school life continue until they are fourteen; for the others—and in Pennsylvania these have numbered uncounted hundreds—at eleven or twelve years old the way is blocked, brutally and impassably, by an eternal succession of days or nights of toil.

Practically every boy whom Mrs. Evans discussed with us while we stayed with her, including her own son, had graduated from school to the coal-breaker before he was fourteen—some boys as early as ten or eleven years. The coal-breaker is a gaunt, tower-like wooden structure, at the top of which the coal is broken into the required sizes for use, and then sent in a continuous stream down chutes which empty into waiting coal-cars or pockets. The boys are employed to pick out of the moving stream the pieces of slate as they appear—straddling the chutes, or sitting on small wooden projections at the side. The atmosphere in the breaker is so thick and dark with flying coal-dust that an attempt to take a photograph of a couple of boys at noon, near a window, resulted in one indistinguishable black surface; the noise is so great that I could not



Drawn by F. E. Schoonover

Half-tone plate engraved by H. Leinroth

THE HOME OFFERS LITTLE TO COUNTERACT THE EFFECT OF EXCESSIVE TOIL

distinguish the words of my guide even when he put his mouth close to my ear and shouted; the movement and shaking of the whole structure is at times so violent that in some breakers I have been obliged to hold tightly to a hand-rail for safety. The boys grow so cramped from long sitting in one position that sometimes they seize the opportunity to chase each other around the slippery metal platforms. And there was not one superintendent in the four or five collieries that we have happened to visit who did not, upon our questioning, relate at least one tragedy that had occurred in his experience, of a boy who had slipped into a coal-pocket and been smothered, or had been mangled and killed by falling into the machinery. When we have asked whether the slate-picking could not be done by mechanical devices, the invariable answer has been, "Yes, but the boys are cheaper."

The one advantage of work in the breakers is that the boys have been protected by union regulations of the men from excessive hours of work; ten hours a day with an interval at noon is the prescribed day—adhered to because the workers themselves are the enforcers of the rule.

For the girls in the neighboring silk-mill there is no such protection. In a certain limited district where a successful strike was once organized, ten hours a day are prescribed as the result. But night work even there extends for eleven and a half hours; and outside of this district an excess over ten hours of day work is the rule. The influences which surround these young girls during these hours I have described as an eye-witness in a preceding article in *Harper's Magazine*. While different from, they are no more elevating than those to which their brothers are subjected in the breakers. "The kids like to quit school to go to work," replied a fellow worker one day in answer to a pitying remark drawn from me by the sight of some of the overheated little girls who were carrying the bobbin-trays to and from our frame. "That is," she added, "they like the notion at first. But they git tired of it after a little, and then it's too late to git out agin. I guess their pa's git kinder used to the extra money."

So, then, at about the age of fifteen, these defrauded little ones, sickened and weary of the burden which in the ignorance of early childhood they had perhaps welcomed as a novelty, begin to think of marriage as a release. "Most all the girls expects to git married quick," many girls have said to me; and it seems that marriage at seventeen years old is very usual.

"Hain't you married?" demanded my small Hungarian "learner," about fifteen years old, during my first day in the mill. At my "No," her eyes dwelt in perplexity upon my left hand, and travelled upward to my face, and thence to my hair, where the gray hairs are distinctly noticeable. In incredulous amazement she reiterated, "Hain't you never *been* married?" Then she added in scorn: "H'm! Most of the girls around here marries when they're seventeen. I expect to."

"What 'll you do that for?" I asked.

"Oh, I dun'no'. To git out of the mill, I guess," she answered, without interest.

What is sought as a release from monotonous toil by the girls themselves seems to be encouraged, for unknown motives, by their parents. During our stay at the Wilsons', marriage and its preliminary or attendant circumstances provided more conversational material than all other subjects combined. Nellie's beaux—who numbered legion—were a source of ever-explosive conversation between her none too tactful mother and her wilful self. Maternal pressure was all for an immediate choice and marriage; Nellie insisted that she was only having a good time with all the boys, and had no desire for a more serious move.

This desire for early marriage is the more remarkable on the part of people whose own married life has been dismal or tragic. It would seem that Mrs. Wilson, the deserted wife of a drunkard, would hesitate to urge an immediate marriage between her sixteen-year-old girl and a young man not yet twenty-one. The pity of it is that her derelict husband was but one of many such in the town. No one has, that I am aware of, been interested in making a statistical record of the cases of desertion and of confirmed drunkards among the families of a mining population. Were this done

I am convinced that even the appalling figures that have been gathered in certain congested districts of great cities would be surpassed.

We could find no satisfactory explanation of the great number of desertions. It seems quite probable, however, that the effect of mine-work, especially when begun at a very early age, has been to brutalize the men and pervert their natural feelings. Drunkenness, which may be another contributory cause, is more easily accounted for. Since early boyhood the lighted and sociable saloon has been the only town attraction after a day of underground gloom. A bishop of one of the dioceses of Pennsylvania was recently remonstrating with a drunkard in one of these mining-towns, and asked him how it was that he had come to such a pass. "Bishop," said the man, turning upon him, "if the coal had got rubbed into yer hide fer years, until yer'd given up ever tryin' to git it out, ye'd git drunk yerself!"

Even the homes which now send forth these children to early toil have an advantage which will be denied to the homes of the next adult generation of the community. The mothers of these present workers had at least a normal girlhood, in so far as it was free from factory work and provided opportunity for an average home training.

These girls of to-day have not normally, with the exception of Sunday, any opportunity to take part in home duties; or if such duties fall to them, as is frequent, the more evil is their case. The burden of home work, before or after an exhausting day or night in the mill, is a cruel imposition rather than a training; the double tax upon a girl teaches her to loathe the one as much as the other, and the physical strain often results seriously. A woman who was attempting to help the young people in one of these mining communities has told us of a girl who, at eighteen years old, is a hopeless invalid from the combination of mill work and home work. As the oldest daughter of the family, for years she had carried this double burden—doing the family washing on Monday nights, and the ironing and mending on subsequent nights, until outraged Nature finally demanded her toll.

It is only to be expected that "home" influence in a community where human life is merely incidental to industry, where collieries are planned with purposeful care, but houses strewn haphazard at their base, can offer little to counteract the effect of excessive toil on the one hand, and the saloon and the saloon "casino" on the other. The houses are cramped for room, especially among the Hungarian families, where the prevailing number of children seemed to be eight. Washing is not a complicated operation—a small basin of cold water, and a towel changed weekly, perhaps, serving the needs of a family. Some men in despair give up the attempt to wash off the dust of the mine, and we have seen them in the evening, before their door-steps, still covered with the impenetrable coating of black. Other men bathe in a tub on their return; and in this another evil occurs. For we have been told that in the crowded condition of some homes, where the kitchen is the centre of life, privacy is impossible; and the afternoon bath is taken, when necessary, in the presence of the family.

Perhaps the neglect in personal care which struck us most forcibly was the disregard of teeth. Toothache was of common occurrence, but the idea of a dentist seemed to occur to no one. Instead, people continuously send in to their neighbors to ask if they had "some-thin' to cure the toothache." We noticed the miserable condition of the teeth of even the young girls. And we scarcely met a woman above thirty years who had not false teeth.

The care and money spent on food in the home was disproportionately large when compared with other expenses. In this respect the families of these small towns differ very essentially from the corresponding working class in large cities, where food expenditure bears a comparatively low ratio to rent and clothes. The supply of food even in the Wilson family, where the income was at the lowest ebb, was positively lavish. Often dinner offered us more than one kind of meat, a variety of vegetables, pickles, and condiments, cakes and preserves. The cooking, too, excepting that of the meat, was palatable and wholesome. The only seriously unappetizing

element in our food was the manner of serving. The same articles of food in the same dishes were left on the table for meal after meal, or shoved into a closet to be promptly brought forth again. Too much of an article was invariably provided at its first presentation, and it persistently reappeared until it was finished. Delicious home-made cake, most tempting for luncheon or dinner, lost its attraction on the breakfast table. Freshly sliced cucumber was submerged in a bowl already occupied by week-old slices swimming in vinegar. We learned with practice to capture deftly the pale-green pieces, leaving the brown ones for a further fate. Our "dinner pails" were always well supplied with a variety of eatables, including usually a jar of preserves, tomatoes, or some other semi-liquid substance. And I noticed that the dinner pails of my companions were usually equally well supplied. It was perfectly apparent that a disproportionate part of the family budget was devoted to food in other families as well as in our landlady's.

Books and other resources for recreation fell below, as far as food rose above, the normal level. Not one household which we saw possessed a book of any description. In the families where there were men, the local newspaper usually arrived daily. But neither reading nor conversation of any general nature furnished any part of family life. Nellie Wilson—over sixteen years old—told us in a wholly matter-of-fact manner that she had never written a letter in her life. She was surprised at our amazement, and defended herself by adding, "None of the girls ever writes letters." Conversation reflected this contraction of interests. It dwelt chiefly upon the deeds and misdeeds of friends and relations; and it served as all too clear a mirror of the social and moral standards engendered by an environment in which toil and its incidentals completed the whole circle. The revelation of the working of a girl's mind under such conditions was appallingly revealed to us one evening at supper, when Mrs. Wilson was absent. Nellie took the opportunity to explain that her mother had gone to attend the enforced and unexpected marriage of a nephew to a girl whom he had

wronged. With this incident as a text, Nellie launched forth into a conversation concerning herself and the girls and boys of her acquaintance, the substance and facts of which appalled us no less than the perfect equanimity with which she accepted them. Not only did she at sixteen years old know evil, but she both accepted and expected it. In her case, and with her disposition, such knowledge may provide fair ammunition against personal danger for herself; in the case of other girls of her set, with their temptations and the lack of protection in their social life, it will continue to mean, as it already has meant, disaster.

There seems to be little in the home to counteract this danger, and local customs only accentuate it. Apparently a young man is not supposed to call unless he is already established as "steady company." I asked Nellie how, then, people ever "got to keeping company." "Oh," she replied, "the girls meets the fellers outside. They takes us to git ice-cream, and see the moving pictures and to dances, and we can tell pretty soon if we want them or not. Why, how do folks do in the city?"

Thus a young man is not tried and tested in the safety of a girl's home, but under conditions where the evil in him, if it exists, is discovered too late to be warded off. We could not discover how this remarkable custom originated, or why it is perpetuated and encouraged by the parents.

When we left that town in mid-July it was with many misgivings in our hearts for the future of the headstrong and undisciplined though warm-hearted girl, against whom—with hundreds of girls like herself—the influences of society, home, and industry seemed to have leagued themselves in deadly array. And even with her temperament, and with the ill-advised thrusts of a self-absorbed and weak mother, Nellie had certain staying qualities which may yet prove her salvation. Also, she had had at least the advantage of school training until she was fourteen—won for her by an unusual display of strength on her mother's part. The father, before his desertion, had persistently tried to put the child to work, "so's to git more for drink," as Mrs. Wilson confessed to us.



Drawn by F. E. Schoonover

Half-tone plate engraved by F. A. Pettit

AT AN EARLY AGE THEY BEGIN TO THINK OF MARRIAGE AS A RELEASE

Nellie was only twelve years old at the time, and her teacher remonstrated with him on the ground that she was not of legal working age—fourteen years.

"Well," the drunkard had argued, "can't we *make* her fourteen? Lots of others do!" But in this case mother and teacher combined were too strong for him. Not many of Nellie's fellow workers had been granted so long a childhood; and at sixteen their ten hours of daily or eleven hours of nightly toil is already an old story.

Except the early marriage, which at all events presents the attraction of novelty, what is the outlook of these girls? Socially, the picnic park of the nearest large town is their most extended vision, for gala occasions such as legal holidays. We spent the Fourth of July at one such with a crowd of girls, and saw clearly enough its possibilities. For ordinary occasions there are the railroad station and the street corners as rendezvous, with the weekly and semi-weekly public dance at the "casino" as the favorite reaction from the monotonous day.

Industrially, life presents a vista of days of toil in which the work never varies, and the weekly recompense never rises above the \$5.25 mark. We have met many girls who, after eight or nine years of work in one factory, were receiving only five dollars; and I have talked with a few others in a mill where the wage standard was especially low, who, after ten years of work, were being paid four dollars a week. There is no incentive to develop skill, since the only reward of merit is the imposition of more disagreeable and difficult tasks. The clearest instance which I recall of this was in the case of a young Italian who was assigned as my "learner" at doubling. She was a pretty girl of about eighteen, with a face striking in its clear pallor and its sweet and gentle expression—very different from the rather rough Slav and Irish girls working on the neighboring frames. "Maggie's the best doubler on this floor," confided one of these same Irish girls to me. "She's a great learner, too. There hain't no one can tie up ends so fast on this floor; she's been here seven years."

So I was impelled to ask Margaret

how much she received for this skill. "Five dollars and a quarter," she answered; "they don't pay no more except to foreladies."

"Not after seven years!" I ventured. "Won't they ever give you more?"

"Nope—nuthin' but more sides to keep up or harder silk," she replied.

The very next morning her words were put to proof. We were working on a variety of natural-colored silk, called "organ"—hailed with delight by the girls and proudly exhibited upon my arrival as the best time they ever get at that mill. Five minutes after the whistle, the forelady called Margaret—and that was the end of her. When I saw her at noon her face was disconsolate and weary. "They've put me on some rotten new white Canton they just got in, and I'm near wild with it. It's always the way, because I keep my ends up they give me the worst silk."

No more money was given to her in return for the truly exhausting work of keeping up threads that are continuously breaking; her only reward for work that was conscientious and quick in the extreme was a harder and more disagreeable job.

Working-girls suffer an economic disadvantage even in the disposal of their wages—small as they are. With boys, the weekly earnings are considered in a sense their own, even if the greater proportion of them is paid into the home; and they usually keep out enough for their own use and necessities. A girl's earnings, however, generally are not considered her own by her family. They are paid over entire, and she is given such clothing as is necessary—not the money to buy it, but the clothing itself. This is true of working-girls in the city as well as in the country. I have met working-women as old as thirty years who are not allowed sufficient economic independence to buy their own clothing with their earnings. And thus they are deprived of the sole compensation which their life of toil might hold for them—the feeling of independence and the pleasure of expending money earned by their own efforts.

Detail for detail, the industrial and the social welfare of our young workers are bound together—the word "social"

signifying all that affects their intellectual and spiritual, as well as emotional, natures. A speaker at a recent meeting in Philadelphia defended the long working-day on the ground that girls only get into mischief when they have too much leisure time. At a subsequent meeting another speaker lamented the difficulty of inducing girls to desire any "improving recreation," and deplored the degeneracy of the working-girl as shown in her sole devotion to dancing.

In the premises of both speakers there was a sting of truth; but the conclusions of both were alike incorrect and unjust. If girls fall into mischief in their leisure hours, it is because we have consistently neglected to provide for them in even the smallest degree the sort of amusement and recreation which is so painstakingly devised by mothers of the well-to-do classes for their growing daughters. The instinct for pleasure exists alike in girls who work and girls who play, except that perhaps it is keener in natures that are starved and thwarted by unnatural and extended toil. These are the very natures to whom all expression of this instinct is most persistently denied. The form of amusement which is accessible to the slender pocket-book of a girl who receives a weekly wage of five or six dollars is not either elevating or truly recreative; and her opportunity to share this recreation in a normal way with her boy friends is rudely limited. But it is grimly the counterpart of the opportunities offered in life to her more fortunate sisters, in the shape of opera and theatre parties, receptions, balls, and luncheons. So long as the cheap public dance-hall, the ten-cent vaudeville performances, and the un-

supervised moving-picture shows are the only resources offered to a normal girl with a hardly saved twenty-five cents weekly for pleasure, so long will her leisure hours be filled with these things.

To those who, like the second speaker referred to, lament—with the best intention in the world—the lack of response to really good opportunities, in lectures, classes, and sewing-circles, let the reverse of the picture appear. Such leisure as working-girls now have is forced by society into the worst channels; but also, still more leisure and different conditions of work must prevail before the girls will consider the more serious attractions now offered in vain. Not by any stretch of the imagination could I picture myself attending a lecture at the close of any day's work that I have put in during the last two summers. In spite of the novelty of the whole environment, and my ulterior interest in studying my companions, my mind as well as my body tended to be in a stagnant condition at the end of ten hours of monotonous, unremitting, and irritating work. The girls who are still standing in front of the machines where I stood for a few weeks, and who see no cessation of the dreary repetition of days, are in a far worse case. They crave—and conversation pointed indubitably in this direction—one of two things: wild gayety when the day's work is over—light, motion, fun, and noise—or bed. For their sapped vitality there is no intermediate; and there can be none for the average girl so long as ten or eleven hours in every twenty-four of her adolescent years are inexorably consumed in occupations and under conditions which stunt her youth and foredoom her womanhood.



The Black Night

BY JAMES HOPPER

THE weazened apothecary put on his mantle and his hat, wrapped his muffler thick about his thin, dry neck, placed his hand on the door-knob, and then turned his sharp nose abruptly upon the apprentice. "And see that you watch well," he snarled. "Sleep light, and keep an ear to the bell. There's much illness abroad; sleep light and with an ear vigilant!"

"Yes, master," answered Jean the apprentice, humbly.

The little old man's querulous note rose to a sudden fury. "Yes, but you don't!" he piped, shrilly. "You don't, you worthless one! You sleep and snore and snore and snore! As though I did not feed and house and clothe you! Three weeks ago last night Mother Gros came for spirits of camphor and rang and called and could not wake you—!"

"I slept too hard that night, master; it is true I slept too hard; but it won't happen again, it won't happen again," said the pale apprentice.

"See that it won't, see that it won't," pursued the old man, with bitter voice. He paused again with hand on the door-knob, his small eyes peering about the shop with malevolent scrutiny, peering upon the dusty bottles on the shelves, vaguely golden and red in the weak candle-light, upon the jars of crystals, the packages of herbs hanging from the black beams. "Humph!" he growled, mollified and yet uneasy. "Everything is well, is it? Everything is well?"

"Everything is well," answered the apprentice; "everything, master. I will watch."

"Well, good night," said the old man. "Good night. And sweep early in the morning. Good night."

His arid hand at last turned the knob. He took one step and seemed to drop into a hole, so black was it outside. For a moment there sounded loud the drumming of the rain upon his cloak, then

the door slammed upon his disappearance, setting in motion the bell, which immediately began a rusty ding-dinging.

Jean remained, nose in the air, watching the bell as though he did not like it; then, when finally it was stilled, gave a big sigh and turned away. He lowered the two lamps that burned beneath the red and the green bowl at the window, slid the light of his candle inquisitively among the shelves, into the obscure corners of the shop, then passed through the small door at the back into his room; into the closet, rather, that served him as room. His narrow cot almost filled it, the narrow cot upon which, after the day's long toil, he stretched in uneasy somnolence, his ear alert to the night-bell, to the bell apt to clamor at the deepest hour of the night at the urgent tug of some pale inhabitant of Penthière.

But it was not time yet even for this torturing half-rest. Keeping on his clothes, Jean sat himself on the cot, his back against the wall, and drew from the folds of his blanket a thick, damp tome that exhaled an odor of age. He opened it out across his knees, placed the candle close upon his pillow, sighed, knit his brows, and began to pore upon the yellow pages. It was an old book of old lore, written in obscure and barbaric Latin, and crammed with the names and properties of drugs and herbs; for several months already he had toiled over it, seeking to stuff into his brain, numb with weariness and long vigil, the endless and fantastic catalogue; and this night the work was harder than ever. The candle sputtered and sputtered, as though continually an invisible hand were attacking it; grains of sand seemed to roll upon his eyeballs; his head was of lead and stubbornly beat back the knowledge he sought to place within it. He would read over and over again the same name, the same sentence, and then when, placing over it his hand, he tried