

CHAPTER III

AMELIORATION OF ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

It may be possible to extract some small degree of comfort from the recent revelations of the white slave traffic when we reflect that at the present moment, in the midst of a freedom such as has never been accorded to young women in the history of the world, under an economic pressure grinding down upon the working girl at the very age when she most wistfully desires to be taken care of, it is necessary to organize a widespread commercial enterprise in order to procure a sufficient number of girls for the white slave market.

Certainly the larger freedom accorded to woman by our changing social customs and the phenomenal number of young girls who are utilized by modern industry, taken in connection with this lack of supply, would seem to show that the chastity of women is holding its own in that [end page 55] slow-growing civilization which ever demands more self-control and conscious direction on the part of the individuals sharing it.

Successive reports of the United States census indicate that self-supporting girls are increasing steadily in number each decade, until 59 per cent. of all the young women in the nation between the ages of sixteen and twenty, are engaged in some gainful occupation. Year after year, as these figures increase, the public views them with complacency, almost with pride, and confidently depends upon the inner restraint and training of this girlish multitude to protect it from disaster. Nevertheless, the public is totally unable to determine at what moment these safeguards, evolved under former industrial

conditions, may reach a breaking point, not because of economic freedom, but because of untoward economic conditions.

For the first time in history multitudes of women are laboring without the direct stimulus of family interest or affection, and they are also unable to proportion their hours of work and intervals of rest according to their strength; in addition to this for thousands of them the effort [end page 56] to obtain a livelihood fairly eclipses the very meaning of life itself. At the present moment no student of modern industrial conditions can possibly assert how far the superior chastity of woman, so rigidly maintained during the centuries, has been the result of her domestic surroundings, and certainly no one knows under what degree of economic pressure the old restraints may give way.

In addition to the monotony of work and the long hours, the small wages these girls receive have no relation to the standard of living which they are endeavoring to maintain. Discouraged and over-fatigued, they are often brought into sharp juxtaposition with the women who are obtaining much larger returns from their illicit trade. Society also ventures to capitalize a virtuous girl at much less than one who has yielded to temptation, and it may well hold itself responsible for the precarious position into which, year after year, a multitude of frail girls is placed.

The very valuable report recently issued by the vice commission of Chicago leaves no room for doubt upon this point. The report estimates the yearly profit of this nefarious business as [end page 57] conducted in Chicago to be between fifteen and sixteen millions of dollars. Although these enormous profits largely accrue to the men who conduct the business side of prostitution, the report emphasizes the fact that the average girl earns very much more in such a life than she can hope to earn by any honest work. It points out that the capitalized value of the average working girl is six thousand dollars, as she ordinarily earns six dollars a week, which is three hundred dollars a year, or five per cent. on

that sum. A girl who sells drinks in a disreputable saloon, earning in commissions for herself twenty-one dollars a week, is capitalized at a value of twenty-two thousand dollars. The report further estimates that the average girl who enters an illicit life under a protector or manager is able to earn twenty-five dollars a week, representing a capital of twenty-six thousand dollars. In other words, a girl in such a life " earns more than four times as much as she is worth as a factor in the social and industrial economy, where brains, intelligence, virtue and womanly charm should bring a premium." The argument is specious in that it does not record the economic [end page 58] value of the many later years in which the honest girl will live as wife and mother, in contrast to the premature death of the woman in the illicit trade, but the girl herself sees only the difference in the immediate earning possibilities in the two situations.

Nevertheless the supply of girls for the white slave traffic so far falls below the demand that large business enterprises have been developed throughout the world in order to secure a sufficient number of victims for this modern market. Over and over again in the criminal proceedings against the men engaged in this traffic, when questioned as to their motives, they have given the simple reply "that more girls are needed", and that they were "promised big money for them". Although economic pressure as a reason for entering an illicit life has thus been brought out in court by the evidence in a surprising number of cases, there is no doubt that it is often exaggerated; a girl always prefers to think that economic pressure is the reason for her downfall, even when the immediate causes have been her love of pleasure, her desire for finery, or the influence of evil companions. It is easy [end page 59] for her, as for all of us, to be deceived as to real motives. In addition to this the wretched girl who has entered upon an illicit life finds the experience so terrible that, day by day, she endeavors to justify herself with the excuse that the money she earns is needed for the support of some one dependent upon her, thus following habits established by generations of virtuous women who cared for feeble folk. I know one such girl living in a disreputable house in Chicago who has adopted a delicate child afflicted with curvature of the spine, whom she boards with respectable people and keeps for many weeks out of each year in an

expensive sanitarium that it may receive medical treatment. The mother of the child, an inmate of the house in which the ardent foster-mother herself lives, is quite indifferent to the child's welfare and also rather amused at such solicitude. The girl has persevered in her course for five years, never however allowing the little invalid to come to the house in which she and the mother live. The same sort of devotion and self-sacrifice is often poured out upon the miserable man who in the beginning was responsible for the girl's entrance into the [end page 60]

life and who constantly receives her earnings. She supports him in the luxurious life he may be living in another part of the town, takes an almost maternal pride in his good clothes and general prosperity, and regards him as the one person in all the world who understands her plight.

Most of the cases of economic responsibility, however, are not due to chivalric devotion, but arise from a desire to fulfill family obligations .such as would be accepted by any conscientious girl. This was clearly revealed in conversations which were recently held with thirty-four girls, who were living at the same time in a rescue home, when twenty-two of them gave economic pressure as the reason for choosing the life which they had so recently abandoned. One piteous little widow of seventeen had been supporting her child and had been able to leave the life she had been leading only because her married sister offered to take care of the baby without the money formerly paid her. Another had been supporting her mother and only since her recent death was the girl sure that she could live honestly because she had only herself to care for. [end page 61]

The following story, fairly typical of the twenty-two involving economic reasons, is of a girl who had come to Chicago at the age of fifteen, from a small town in Indiana. Her father was too old to work and her mother was a dependent invalid. The brother who cared for the parents, with the help of the girl's own slender wages earned in the country store of the little town, became ill with rheumatism. In her desire to earn more money the country girl came to the nearest large city,

Chicago, to work in a department store. The highest wage she could earn, even though she wore long dresses and called herself "experienced," was five dollars a week. This sum was of course inadequate even for her own needs and she was constantly filled with a corroding worry for "the folks at home." In a moment of panic, a fellow clerk who was "wise" showed her that it was possible to add to her wages by making appointments for money in the noon hour at down-town hotels. Having earned money in this way for a few months, the young girl made an arrangement with an older woman to be on call in the evenings whenever she was summoned by telephone, thus join- [end page 62] ing that large clandestine group of apparently respectable girls, most of whom yield to temptation only when hard pressed by debt incurred during illness or non-employment, or when they are facing some immediate necessity. This practice has become so general in the larger American cities as to be systematically conducted. It is perhaps the most sinister outcome of the economic pressure, unless one cites its corollary -the condition of thousands of young men whose low salaries so cruelly and unjustifiably postpone their marriages. For a long time the young saleswoman kept her position in the department store, retaining her honest wages for herself, but sending everything else to her family. At length however, she changed from her clandestine life to an openly professional one when she needed enough money to send her brother to Hot Springs, Arkansas, where she maintained him for a year. She explained that because he was now restored to health and able to support the family once more, she had left the life "forever and ever", expecting to return to her home in Indiana. She suspected that her brother knew of her experience, although she was sure [end page 63] that her parents did not, and she hoped that as she was not yet seventeen, she might be able to make a fresh start. Fortunately the poor child did not know how difficult that would be.

It is perhaps in the department store more than anywhere else that every possible weakness in a girl is detected and traded upon. For while it is true that "wherever many girls are gathered together more or less unprotected and embroiled in the struggle for a livelihood, near by will be hovering the procurers and evil-minded", no other place of employment is

so easy of access as the department store. No visitor is received in a factory or office unless he has definite business there, whereas every purchaser is welcome at a department store, even a notorious woman well known to represent the demi-monde trade is treated with marked courtesy if she spends large sums of money. The primary danger lies in the fact that the comely saleswomen are thus easy of access. The disreputable young man constantly passes in and out, making small purchases from every pretty girl, opening an acquaintance with complimentary remarks; or the procuress, a fashionably-dressed woman, buys cloth- [end page 64] ing in large amounts, sometimes for a young girl by her side, ostensibly her daughter. She condoles with the saleswoman upon her hard lot and lack of pleasure, and in the role of a kindly, prosperous matron invites her to come to her own home for a good time. The girl is sometimes subjected to temptation through the men and women in her own department, who tell her how invitations to dinners and theatres may be procured. It is not surprising that so many of these young, inexperienced girls are either deceived or yield to temptation in spite of the efforts made to protect them by the management and by the older women in the establishment.

The department store has brought together, as has never been done before in history, a bewildering mass of delicate and beautiful fabrics, jewelry and household decorations such as women covet, gathered skilfully from all parts of the world, and in the midst of this bulk of desirable possessions is placed an untrained girl with careful instructions as to her conduct for making sales, but with no guidance in regard to herself. Such a girl may be bitterly lonely, but she is expected to smile affably all day long [end page 65] upon a throng of changing customers. She may be without adequate clothing, although she stands in an emporium where it is piled about her, literally as high as her head. She may be faint for want of food but she may not sit down lest she assume "an attitude of inertia and indifference," which is against the rules. She may have a great desire for pretty things, but she must sell to other people at least twenty-five times the amount of her own salary, or she will not be retained. Because she is of the first generation of girls which has stood alone in the midst of trade, she is clinging and timid, and yet the only person, man or woman, in this commercial

atmosphere who speaks to her of the care and protection which she craves, is seeking to betray her. Because she is young and feminine, her mind secretly dwells upon a future lover, upon a home, adorned with the most enticing of the household goods about her, upon a child dressed in the filmy fabrics she tenderly touches, and yet the only man who approaches her there acting upon the knowledge of this inner life of hers, does it with the direct intention of playing upon it in order to despoil her. Is it surprising [end page 66] that the average human nature of these young girls cannot, in many instances, endure this strain? Of fifteen thousand women employed in the down-town department stores of Chicago, the majority are Americans. We all know that the American girl has grown up in the belief that the world is hers from which to choose, that there is ordinarily no limit to her ambition or to her definition of success. She realizes that she is well mannered and well dressed and does not appear unlike most of her customers. She sees only one aspect of her countrywomen who come shopping, and she may well believe that the chief concern of life is fashionable clothing. Her interest and ambition almost inevitably become thoroughly worldly, and from the very fact that she is employed down town, she obtains an exaggerated idea of the luxury of the illicit life all about her, which is barely concealed.

The fifth volume of the report of "Women and Child Wage Earners" in the United States gives the result of a careful inquiry into "the relation of wages to the moral condition of department store women." In connection with this, the investigators secured "the personal histories of [end page 67] one hundred immoral women," of whom ten were or had been employed in a department store. They found that while only one of the ten had been directly induced to leave the store for a disreputable life, six of them said that they had found "it was easier to earn money that way." The report states that the average employee in a department store earns about seven dollars a week, and that the average income of the one hundred immoral women covered by the personal histories, ranged from fifty dollars a week to one hundred dollars a week in exceptional cases. It is of these exceptional cases that the department store girl hears, and the knowledge becomes part of the unreality and glittering life that is all about her.

Another class of young women which is especially exposed to this alluring knowledge is the waitress in down-town cafes and restaurants. A recent investigation of girls in the segregated district of a neighboring city places waiting in restaurants and hotels as highest on the list of "previous occupations." Many waitresses are paid so little that they gratefully accept any fee which men may offer them. It is also [end page 68] the universal habit for customers to enter into easy conversation while being served. Some of them are lonely young men who have few opportunities to speak to women. The girl often quite innocently accepts an invitation for an evening, spent either in a theatre or dance hall, with no evil results, but this very lack of social convention exposes her to danger. Even when the proprietor means to protect the girls, a certain amount of familiarity must be borne, lest their resentment should diminish the patronage of the cafe. In certain restaurants, moreover, the waitresses doubtless suffer because the patrons compare them with the girls who ply their trade in disreputable saloons under the guise of serving drinks.

The following story would show that mere friendly propinquity may constitute a danger. Last summer an honest, straightforward girl from a small lake town in northern Michigan was working in a Chicago cafe, sending every week more than half of her wages of seven dollars to her mother and little sister, ill with tuberculosis, at home. The mother owned the little house in which she lived, but except for the vegetables [end page 69] she raised in her own garden and an occasional payment for plain sewing, she and her younger daughter were dependent upon the hard-working girl in Chicago. The girl's heart grew heavier week by week as the mother's letters reported that the sister was daily growing weaker. One hot day in August she received a letter from her mother telling her to come at once if she "would see sister before she died." At noon that day when sickened by the hot air of the cafe, and when the clatter of dishes, the buzz of conversation, the orders shouted through the slide seemed but a hideous accompaniment to her tormented thoughts, she was suddenly startled by hearing the name of her native town, and realized that one of her regular patrons was saying to

her that he meant to take a night boat to M. at 8 o'clock and get out of this "infernal heat." Almost involuntarily she asked him if he would take her with him. Although the very next moment she became conscious what his consent implied, she did not reveal her fright, but merely stipulated that if she went with him he must agree to buy her a return ticket. She reached home twelve hours before her sister died, but [end page 70] when she returned to Chicago a week later burdened with the debt of an undertaker's bill, she realized that she had discovered a means of payment.

All girls who work down town are at a disadvantage as compared to factory girls, who are much less open to direct inducement and to the temptations which come through sheer imitation. Factory girls also have the protection of working among plain people who frankly designate an irregular life in harsh, old-fashioned terms. If a factory girl catches sight of the vicious life at all, she sees its miserable victims in all the wretchedness and sordidness of their trade in the poorer parts of the city. As she passes the opening doors of a disreputable saloon she may see for an instant three or four listless girls urging liquor upon men tired out with the long day's work and already sodden with drink. As she hurries along the street on a rainy night she may hear a sharp cry of pain from a sick-looking girl whose arm is being brutally wrenched by a rough man, and if she stops for a moment she catches his muttered threats in response to the girl's pleading "that it is too bad a night for street work." [end page 71]

She sees a passing policeman shrug his shoulders as he crosses the street, and she vaguely knows that the sick girl has put herself beyond the protection of the law, and that the rough man has an understanding with the officer on the beat. She has been told that certain streets are "not respectable," but a furtive look down the length of one of them reveals only forlorn and ill-looking houses, from which all suggestion of homely domesticity has long since gone; a slovenly woman with hollow eyes and a careworn face holding up the lurching bulk of a drunken man is all she sees of its

"denizens," although she may have known a neighbor's daughter who came home to die of a mysterious disease said to be the result of a "fast life, and whose disgraced mother "never again held up her head."

Yet in spite of all this corrective knowledge, the increasing nervous energy to which industrial processes daily accommodate themselves, and the speeding up constantly required of the operators, may at any moment so register their results upon the nervous system of a factory girl as to overcome her powers of resistance. Many a working girl at the end of a day is so hysterical [end page 72] and overwrought that her mental balance is plainly disturbed. Hundreds of working girls go directly to bed as soon as they have eaten their suppers. They are too tired to go from home for recreation, too tired to read and often too tired to sleep. A humane forewoman recently said to me as she glanced down the long room in which hundreds of young women, many of them with their shoes beside them, were standing: "I hate to think of all the aching feet on this floor; these girls all have trouble with their feet, some of them spend the entire evening bathing them in hot water." But aching feet are no more usual than aching backs and aching heads. The study of industrial diseases has only this year been begun by the federal authorities, and doubtless as more is known of, the nervous and mental effect of over-fatigue, many moral breakdowns will be traced to this source. It is already easy to make the connection in definite cases: "I was too tired to care," "I was too tired to know what I was doing," "I was dead tired and sick of it all," "I was dog tired and just went with him," are phrases taken from the lips of reckless girls who are endeavoring to [end page 73] explain the situation in which they find themselves.

Only slowly are laws being enacted to limit the hours of working women, yet the able brief presented to the United States supreme court on the constitutionality of the Oregon ten-hour law for women, based its plea upon the results of overwork as affecting women's health, the grave medical statement constantly broken into by a portrayal of the disastrous effects of over-fatigue upon character. It is as yet difficult to distinguish between the results of long hours and

the results of overstrain. Certainly the constant sense of haste is one of the most nerve-racking and exhausting tests to which the human system can be subjected. Those girls in the sewing industry whose mothers thread needles for them far into the night that they may sew without a moment's interruption during the next day; those girls who insert eyelets into shoes, for which they are paid two cents a case, each case containing twenty-four pairs of shoes, are striking victims of the over-speeding which is so characteristic of our entire factory system.

Girls working in factories and laundries are [end page 75] also open to the possibilities of accidents. The loss of only two fingers upon the right hand, or a broken wrist, may disqualify an operator from continuing in the only work in which she is skilled and make her struggle for respectability even more difficult. Varicose veins and broken arches in the feet are found in every occupation in which women are obliged to stand for hours, but at any moment either one may develop beyond purely painful, symptoms into crippling incapacity. One such girl recently returning home after a long day's work deliberately sat down upon the floor of a crowded street car, explaining defiantly to the conductor and the bewildered passengers that "her feet would not hold out another minute. " A young woman who only last summer broke her hand in a mangle was found in a rescue home in January, explaining her recent experience by the phrase that she was "up against it when leaving the hospital in October."

In spite of many such heart-breaking instances the movement for safeguarding machinery and securing indemnity for industrial accidents proceeds all too slowly. At a recent exhibition in Boston the knife of a miniature guillotine fell [end page 75] every ten seconds to indicate the rate of industrial accidents in the United States. Grisly as was the device, its hideousness might well have been increased had it been able to demonstrate the connection between certain of these accidents and the complete moral disaster which overtook their victims.

Yet factory girls who are subjected to this overstrain and overtime often find their greatest discouragement in the fact that after all their efforts they earn too little to support themselves. One girl said that she had first yielded to temptation when she had become utterly discouraged because she had tried in vain for seven months to save enough money for a pair of shoes. She habitually spent two dollars a week for her room, three dollars for her board, and sixty cents a week for carfare, and she had found the forty cents remaining from her weekly wage of six dollars inadequate to do more than re-sole her old shoes twice. When the shoes became too worn to endure a third soling and she possessed but ninety cents towards a new pair, she gave up her struggle; to use her own contemptuous phrase, she "sold out for a pair of shoes." [end page 76]

Usually the phrases are less graphic, but after all they contain the same dreary meaning: "Couldn't make both ends meet," "I had always been used to having nice things," "Couldn't make enough money to live on," "I got sick and ran behind," "Needed more money," "Impossible to feed and clothe myself," "Out of work, hadn't been able to save." Of course a girl in such a strait does not go out deliberately to find illicit methods of earning money, she simply yields in a moment of utter weariness and discouragement to the temptations she has been able to withstand up to that moment. The long hours, the lack of comforts, the low pay, the absence of recreation, the sense of "good times" all about her which she cannot share, the conviction that she is rapidly losing health and charm, rouse the molten forces within her. A swelling tide of self-pity suddenly storms the banks which have hitherto held her and finally overcomes her instincts for decency and righteousness, as well as the habit of clean living, established by generations of her forebears.

The aphorism that "morals fluctuate with trade " was long considered cynical, but it has been [end page 77] demonstrated in Berlin, in London, in Japan, as well as in several American cities, that there is a distinct increase in the number of registered prostitutes during periods of financial depression and even during the dull season of leading local

industries. Out of my own experience I am ready to assert that very often all that is necessary to effectively help the girl who is on the edge of wrong-doing is to lend her money for her board until she finds work, provide the necessary clothing for which she is in such desperate need, persuade her relatives that she should have more money for her own expenditures, or find her another place at higher wages. Upon such simple economic needs does the tried virtue of a good girl sometimes depend.

Here again the immigrant girl is at a disadvantage. The average wage of two hundred newly arrived girls of various nationalities, Poles, Italians, Slovaks, Bohemians, Russians, Galatians, Croatians, Lithuanians, Roumanians, Germans, and Swedes, who were interviewed by the Immigrants' Protective League, was four dollars and a half a week for the first position which they had been able to secure in Chicago. It [end page 78] often takes a girl several weeks to find her first place. During this period of looking for work the immigrant girl is subjected to great dangers. It is at such times that immigrants often exhibit symptoms of that type of disordered mind which alienists pronounce "due to conflict through poor adaptation." I have known several immigrant young men as well as girls who became deranged during the first year of life in America. A young Russian who came to Chicago in the hope of obtaining the freedom and self-development denied him at home, after three months of bitter disillusionment, with no work and insufficient food, was sent to the hospital for the insane. He only recovered after a group of his young countrymen devotedly went to see him each week with promises of work, the companionship at last establishing a sense of unbroken association. I also recall a Polish girl who became utterly distraught after weeks of sleeplessness and anxiety because she could not repay fifty dollars which she had borrowed from a countryman in Chicago for the purpose of bringing her sister to America. Her case was declared hopeless, but when the creditor [end page 79] made reassuring visits to the patient she began to mend and now, five years later, is not only free from debt, but has brought over the rest of the family, whose united earnings are slowly paying for a house and lot. Psychiatry is demonstrating the after-effects of fear upon the minds of children, but

little has yet been done to show how far that fear of the future, arising from economic insecurity in the midst of new surroundings, has superinduced insanity among newly arrived immigrants. Such a state of nervous bewilderment and fright, added to that sense of expectation which youth always carries into new surroundings, often makes it easy to exploit the virtue of an immigrant girl. It goes without saying that she is almost always exploited industrially. A Russian girl recently took a place in a Chicago clothing factory at twenty cents a day, without in the least knowing that she was, undercutting the wages of even that ill-paid industry. This girl rented a room for a dollar a week and all that she had to eat was given her by a friend in the same lodging house, who shared her own scanty fare with the newcomer.

In the clothing industry trade unionism has [end page 80] already established a minimum wage limit for thousands of women who are receiving the protection and discipline of trade organization and responding to the tonic of self-help. Low wages will doubtless in time be modified by Minimum, Wage Boards representing the government's stake in industry, such as have been in successful operation for many years in certain British colonies and are now being instituted in England itself. As yet Massachusetts is the only state which has appointed a special commission to consider this establishment for America, although the Industrial Commission of Wisconsin is empowered to investigate wages and their effect upon the standard of living.

Anyone who has lived among working people has been surprised at the docility with which grown-up children give all of their earnings to their parents. This is, of course, especially true of the daughters. The fifth volume of the governmental report upon "Women and Child Wage Earners in the United States," quoted earlier, gives eighty-four per cent. as the proportion of working girls who turn in all of their wages to the family fund. In most cases this [end page 81] is done voluntarily and cheerfully, but in many instances it is as if the tradition of woman's dependence upon her family for support held long after the actual fact had changed, or as if the tyranny established through generations when daughters

could be starved into submission to a father's will, continued even after the roles had changed, and the wages of the girl child supported a broken and dissolute father.

An over-restrained girl, from whom so much is exacted, will sometimes begin to deceive her family by failing to tell them when she has had a raise in her wages. She will habitually keep the extra amount for herself, as she will any overtime pay which she may receive. All such money is invariably spent upon her own clothing, which she, of course, cannot wear at home, but which gives her great satisfaction upon the streets.

The girl of the crowded tenements has no room in which to receive her friends or to read the books through which she shares the lives of assorted heroines, or, better still, dreams of them as of herself. Even if the living-room is not full of boarders or children or washing, it is comfort- [end page 82] able neither for receiving friends nor for reading, and she finds upon the street her entire social field; the shop windows with their desirable garments hastily clothe her heroines as they travel the old roads of romance, the street cars rumbling noisily by suggest a delectable somewhere far away, and the young men who pass offer possibilities of the most delightful acquaintance. It is not astonishing that she insists upon clothing which conforms to the ideals of this all-absorbing street and that she will unhesitatingly deceive an uncomprehending family which does not recognize its importance.

One such girl had for two years earned money for clothing by filling regular appointments in a disreputable saloon between the hours of six and half-past seven in the evening. With this money earned almost daily she bought the clothes of her heart's desire, keeping them with the saloon-keeper's wife. She demurely returned to her family for supper in her shabby working clothes and presented her mother with her unopened pay envelope every Saturday night. She began this life at the age of fourteen after her Polish mother had beaten her because she [end page 83] had "elbowed" the

sleeves and "cut out" the neck of her ungainly calico gown in a vain attempt to make it look "American." Her mother, who had so conscientiously punished a daughter who was "too crazy for clothes," could never of course comprehend how dangerous a combination is the girl with an unsatisfied love for finery and the opportunities for illicit earning afforded on the street. Yet many sad cases may be traced to such lack of comprehension. Charles Booth states that in England a large proportion of parents belonging to the working and even lower middle classes, are unacquainted with the nature of the lives led by their own daughters, a result doubtless of the early freedom of the street accorded city children. Too often the mothers themselves are totally ignorant of covert dangers. A few days ago I held in my hand a pathetic little pile of letters written by a desperate young girl of fifteen before she attempted to commit suicide. These letters were addressed to her lover, her girl friends, and to the head of the rescue home, but none to her mother towards whom she felt a bitter resentment "because she did not warn me. " The poor [end page 84] mother after the death of her husband had gone

to live with a married daughter, but as the son-in-law would not "take in two" she had told the youngest daughter, who had already worked for a year as an apprentice in a dressmaking establishment, that she must find a place to live with one of her girl friends. The poor child had found this impossible, and three days after the breaking up of her home she had fallen a victim to a white slave trafficker, who had treated her most cruelly and subjected her to unspeakable indignities. It was only when her "protector" left the city, frightened by the unwonted activity of the police, due to a wave of reform, that she found her way to the rescue home, and in less than five months after the death of her father she had purchased carbolic acid and deliberately "courted death for the nameless child" and herself.

Another experience during which a girl faces a peculiar danger is when she has lost one "job" and is looking for another. Naturally she loses her place in the slack season and pursues her search at the very moment when positions are hardest to find, and her un-employment is there- [end page 85] fore most prolonged. Perhaps nothing in our social order is so

unorganized and inchoate as our method, or rather lack of method, of placing young people in industry. This is obvious from the point of view of their first positions when they leave school at the unstable age of fourteen, or from the innumerable places they hold later, often as high as ten a year, when they are dismissed or change voluntarily through sheer restlessness. Here again a girl's difficulty is often increased by the lack of sympathy and understanding on the part of her parents. A girl is often afraid to say that she has lost her place and pretends to go to work each morning while she is looking for a new one; she postpones telling them at home day by day, growing more frantic as the usual pay-day approaches. Some girls borrow from loan sharks in order to take the customary wages to their parents, others fall victims to unscrupulous employment agencies in their eagerness to take the first thing offered.

The majority of these girls answer the advertisements in the daily papers as affording the cheapest and safest way to secure a position. These out-of-work girls are found, sometimes as [end page 86] many as forty or fifty at a time, in the rest rooms of the department stores, waiting for the new edition of the newspapers after they have been the rounds of the morning advertisements and have found nothing.

Of course such a possible field as these rest rooms is not overlooked by the procurer, who finds it very easy to establish friendly relations through the offer of the latest edition of the newspaper. Even pennies are precious to a girl out of work and she is also easily grateful to anyone who expresses an interest in her plight and tells her of a position. Two representatives of the Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago, during a period of three weeks, arrested and convicted seventeen men and three women who were plying their trades in the rest rooms of nine department stores. The managers were greatly concerned over this exposure and immediately arranged both for more intelligent matrons and greater vigilance. One of the less scrupulous stores voluntarily gave up a method of advertising carried on in the rest room itself where a demonstrator from "the beauty counter" made up the faces of the patrons of the rest room with [end

page 87] the powder and paint procurable in her department below. The out-of-work girls especially availed themselves of this privilege and hoped that their search would be easier when their pale, woe-begone faces were "made beautiful." The poor girls could not know that a face thus made up enormously increased their risks. [end page 88]

A number of girls also came early in the morning as soon as the rest rooms were open. They washed their faces and arranged their hair and then settled to sleep in the largest and easiest chairs the room afforded. Some of these were out-of-work girls also determined to take home their wages at the end of the week, each pretending to her mother that she had spent the night with a girl friend and was working all day as usual. How much of this deception is due to parental tyranny and how much to a sense of responsibility for younger, children or invalids, it is impossible to estimate until the number of such recorded cases is much larger. Certain it is that the long habit of obedience, as well as the feeling of family obligation established from childhood, is often utilized by the white slave trafficker. [end page 88]

Difficult as is the position of the girl out of work when her family is exigent and uncomprehending, she has incomparably more protection than the girl who is living in the city without home ties. Such girls form sixteen per cent. of the working women of Chicago. With absolutely every penny of their meagre wages consumed in their inadequate living, they are totally unable to save money. That loneliness and detachment which the city tends to breed in its inhabitants is easily intensified in such a girl into isolation and a desolating feeling of belonging nowhere. All youth resents the sense of the enormity of the universe in relation to the insignificance of the individual life, and youth, with that intense self-consciousness which makes each young person the very centre of all emotional experience, broods over this as no older person can possibly do. At such moments a black oppression, the instinctive fear of solitude, will send a lonely girl restlessly to walk the streets even when she is "too tired to stand," and when her desire for companionship in itself constitutes a grave danger. Such a girl living in a rented room is usually without any place in which to properly [end page

89] receive callers. An investigation was recently made in Kansas City of 411 lodging-houses in which young girls were living; less than 30 per cent. were found with a parlor in which guests might be received. Many girls quite innocently permit young men to call upon them in their bedrooms, pitifully disguised as "sitting-rooms," but the danger is obvious, and the standards of the girl gradually become lowered.

Certainly during the trying times when a girl is out of work she should have much more intelligent help than is at present extended to her; she should be able to avail herself of the state employment agencies much more than is now possible, and the work of the newly established vocational bureaus should be enormously extended.

When once we are in earnest about the abolition of the social evil, society will find that it must study industry from the point of view of the producer in a sense which has never been done before. Such a study with reference to industrial legislation will ally itself on one hand with the trades-union movement, which insists upon a living wage and shorter hours for the workers, [end page 90] and also upon an opportunity for self-direction, and on the other hand with the efficiency movement, which would refrain from over-fatiguing an operator as it would from over-speeding a machine. In addition to legislative enactment and the historic trade-union effort, the feebleness and newer movement on the part of the employers is being reinforced by the welfare secretary, who is not only devising recreational and educational plans, but is placing before the employer much disturbing information upon the cost of living in relation to the pitiful wages of working girls. Certainly employers are growing ashamed to use the worn-out, hypocritical pretence of employing only the girl "protected by home influences" as a device for reducing wages. Help may also come from the consumers, for an increasing number of them, with compunctions in regard to tempted young employees, are not only unwilling to purchase from the employer who underpays his girls and thus to share his guilt, but are striving in divers ways to modify existing conditions.

As working women enter fresh fields of labor which ever open up anew as the old fields [end page 91] are submerged, behind them, society must endeavor to speedily protect them by an amelioration of the economic conditions which are now so unnecessarily harsh and dangerous to health and morals. The world-wide movement for establishing governmental control of industrial conditions is especially concerned for working women. Fourteen of the European countries prohibit all night work for women and almost every civilized country in the world is considering the number of hours and the character of work in which women may be permitted to safely engage.

Although amelioration comes about so slowly that many young girls are sacrificed each year under conditions which could so easily, and reasonably be changed, nevertheless it is apparently better to overcome the dangers in this new and freer life, which modern industry has opened to women, than it is to attempt to retreat into the domestic industry of the past; for all statistics of prostitution give the largest number of recruits for this life as coming from domestic service and the second largest number from girls who live at home with no definite occupation [end page 92] whatever. Therefore, although in the economic aspect of the social evil more than in any other, do we find ground for despair, at the same time we discern, as nowhere else, the young girl's stubborn power of resistance. Nevertheless, the most superficial survey of her surroundings shows the necessity for ameliorating, as rapidly as possible, the harsh economic conditions which now environ her.

That steadily increasing function of the state by which it seeks to protect its workers from their own weakness and degradation, and insists that the livelihood of the manual laborer shall not be beaten down below the level of efficient citizenship, assumes new forms almost daily. From the human as well as the economic stand-point there is an obligation resting upon the state to discover how many victims of the white slave traffic are the result of social neglect, remedial

incapacity, and the lack of industrial safeguards, and how far discontinuous employment and non-employment are factors in the breeding of discouragement and despair.

Is it because our modern industrialism is so new that we have been slow to connect it with the poverty and vice all about us? The socialists talk constantly of the relation of economic law to destitution and point out the connection between industrial maladjustment and individual wrongdoing, but certainly the study of social conditions, the obligation to eradicate vice, cannot belong to one political party or to one economic school. It must be recognized as a solemn obligation of existing governments, and society must realize that economic conditions can only be made more righteous and more human by the unceasing devotion of generations of men.