

# Moral Dangers for Working Girls

U. S. Government Investigators Find the Most Hazardous Occupations Are

- 1--Domestic Service
- 2--Hotel Waitresses
- 3--Factory Girls
- 4--Trained Nurses
- 5--Stenographers

**W**HY do girls go wrong and to what extent do occupation and low wages affect the change? There are to-day about 8,500,000 women workers in the United States.

The United States Government has undertaken an exhaustive inquiry to learn if the trend of modern industry is dangerous to women, and if their moral qualities are affected by her occupation.

Two striking facts have become apparent out of the countless statistics that have been officially collected. Of nearly four thousand women made the subject of this inquiry, in Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, not one assigned poverty or low wages as a direct and immediate cause of immorality. It was agreed that indirectly their influence is great, but not primarily responsible for retrogression.

The other fact is that occupations in themselves have nothing to do with leading a girl astray, but that the influences surrounding certain occupations, such as being a servant in a household with men of low type, are a very serious cause of wrongdoing.

It is not improbable that the complete alteration in the industrial status and environment of women in the course of three or four decades has had a marked influence on women in several ways, and more especially that their moral natures may have been affected by increased exposure, increased economic independence and their active share in the competitive struggle involved in their transfer from the home to the shop, factory or office.

Why, then, do girls fall from grace? Rescue workers assigned five occupations as being morally dangerous:

- First--Domestic service.
- Second--Work of hotel or restaurant waitresses.
- Third--Low-grade factory trades.
- Fourth--Trained nursing.
- Fifth--Cheaper stenographic positions.

Careful inquiry revealed the fact that with both domestic service and the low-grade factory trades it seemed that the dangers lay not so much in the work itself—though with each the conditions under which it is carried on are frequently dangerous—as in the class of women who are likely to enter such occupations.

The good showing made by the newer occupations is due to a combination of education and discipline. The stenographer or bookkeeper or cashier must have a certain amount of intelligence and general education to begin with, and must usually have taken some special training in addition. Some force of character, some sustained and purposeful effort, is required before a woman can enter such a position.

The place once secured, it cannot be held without a considerable amount of patient application, of attention to uninteresting detail, of doing a thing because it must be done, and of sacrificing present inclination to a definitely conceived plan of action. By their very nature these positions carry with them a training and discipline of high value.

No girl could submit to the discipline of a well-ordered office or shop and continue to be really anti-social. The lower grades of factory work share this advantage to a very limited extent. When work is irregular or seasonal, when it can be entered upon without training and exchanged for something equally good or bad, as the caprice of the moment dictates; when it involves a stupefying monotony or a nervous strain so intense that no woman can endure it for more than a few years; then what small disciplinary values it may have is entirely overbalanced by its disadvantages. Nevertheless, even in the poorest of trades there is apt to be more order and system than is found in houses of the world class.

The contrast of the power trades has the interest of working in company, the better ones have much more. It is entirely possible for the girl to go to her work with pleasurable zest and to find in it the interest and excitement of the day. The loneliness of domestic service and the degrading monotony of the poorer grades of factory work, both of which naturally lead a girl to seek

**Inquiry Has Classified Stenography Among the Occupations Surrounded by Dangers.**



A Scene from "Common Clay" in which the Dangers That Constantly Surround the Attractive Domestic Servant Furnished the Plot.

relief in dubious pleasures, are alike wanting.

Her work itself may supply interest and companionship, both of which are safeguards against the temptations most likely to assail her. Add the element of ambition, the possibility that if the worker desires it she may rise to one of the really well-paid and responsible positions, and it will be admitted that the saleswoman or stenographer or clerk or cashier has some cogent inducements to avoid forfeiting her standing. When we turn to personal and domestic service and to housekeeping—which has usually been considered a safe occupation—we find the situation reversed.

Domestic service, as known to most of the women found under sentence, has the drawbacks of housekeeping—drinking as an accompaniment of the gossip which fills up the abundant leisure of such housekeeping, and the probability that the woman is married, which will excuse an

occasional overindulgence which would be considered unbecoming in a girl. This service has little in itself to restrain such tendencies. It has some dangerous features, because it affords an opening for the low-grade and unskilled worker who could not possibly secure or retain a place in any well-organized industry.

The servant who finds her way into such a position is not ordinarily a trained domestic worker. A few such are found among those committed for intemperance or theft, but generally she is an unskilled worker of the poorest grade. Nothing is more surprising than that such women are able to secure places at all, but they rarely seem to have any difficulty in doing so.

This, of course, applies to service in houses that does not belong to the first class. Their employers are those whose standards are but little higher than their own, work is carried on under unhygienic conditions, with long and irregular hours,



United States Government Inquiry Shows That Domestic Service Is Surrounded with the Greatest Perils.

and with mistresses who are frequently "awful aggravating." They have no prospect of rising any higher, so that the spur of ambition does not drive them forward in the right way and there is no social standard of their own class to hold them back from the wrong.

In the case of intemperance, and its allied offense—disorderly conduct—it seems probable that the large proportion from domestic service is due mainly to the temptations inherent in the occupation. A few, indeed, ascribed their first overindulgence to loneliness.

The work of a waitress in a hotel, restaurant or lunch room—and this class of workers has been the subject of much study on the part of sociologists—presents some very obvious dangers. It has generally been attributable to low wages and long hours, but such is not the case. The waitress comes in contact with men of every kind, some of whom consider a girl in her position fair game. She can not resent their advances, for she must not offend customers. Even her refusal to accept overtures must be carefully managed, or she risks losing her position.

Usually she has constantly before her temptations to intemperance as well as to immorality, and the girl who would resist one may fall before the other. Moreover, the work presents some peculiar advantages for the woman who anticipates temptation with the full intention of not resisting it, and for the woman who seeks such work as a cloak for a different life.

The presence of these dangers, of course, increases greatly the chance of intemperance and immorality for girls innocent of evil who become waitresses, and adds a grave danger to those normally inherent in the occupation.

As first thought it seems rather surprising to find trained nursing assigned as a calling from which women are especially likely to go wrong, but it was so assigned in many large cities. It is easy for the trained nurse to become a hard drinker or a drug fiend, because her position makes it easy for her to secure drugs and liquor, and the nature of her work creates a special demand for stimulants or narcotics.

She, like the domestic servant, is in a position which makes it easy for her to go any distance towards her if they have any desire in that direction. She has not the protection or publicity afforded by the factory or department store, and when she

"Sisters," by A. Chevalier Taylor. An Interesting "Problem Picture" Dealing with the Working Girl Who Has Succumbed to Temptation.



Work in a Certain Type of Factory Involves Hazardous Associations for Inexperienced Girls.

is nursing a man, opportunities for complications are evident.

On the other hand, the preparatory training demands self-control, energy and a sustained purpose, and a professional spirit is usually found among nurses which should serve as a strong restraint, so that these possible complications do not arise so often as the nature of the work one might lead to expect.

Stenography was assigned as a dangerous occupation by only one social worker, one who, however, was of such wide experience that her opinion should count for much. Her belief is that its dangers are confined to the class who receive the lowest salaries of all—the girls of fourteen or fifteen years of age—just out of school, who are ignorant and untrained, wholly undeveloped in character, not habituated to self-control, rather weak and willful, and entirely unaware of the possible dangers of their position.

Of the 3,229 women studied during this investigation, 1,356 were single, 1,495 married, 244 widowed, and 124 divorced or separated. Accordingly, a trifle more than three-fifths are or have been married. It is not safe to use the figures for widowed and separated as indicating much more than the fact of a previous marriage, for in many cases both the woman and penal officials use the terms with considerable freedom. Often some one, describing some widow, would remark incidentally:

"Her husband is no account at all!"

"But we thought you said she was a widow?"

"Well, she is, just about; he's away all the time."

In the end, however, the pertinent conclusion arrived at as a result of this investigation, is that the increase in the number of female offenders cannot be ascribed to the entrance of women into new industrial fields. This conclusion reverses the accepted opinion that much of the libertine conduct on the part of women is due either to low wages or hard work.

It seems, therefore, that regardless of the merits of a minimum wage scale, the wages cannot be directly connected with retrogression. Officials have been unanimous in saying that the women who reach the point of public arrest or conviction are mostly of the uncultivated class, women who are not really capable of holding the better positions. Usually, in the consensus of opinion, if a woman has intelligence enough to fit herself for one of the better positions, she has too much intelligence to do anything that will bring her within grasp of the law.

In a certain city, however, after looking up the records of women under sentence and finding the same general conditions as elsewhere, the agent visited the juvenile court to see what was the situation among girls under sixteen years of age. The officials explained that they had but few girls between fourteen and sixteen, but that the majority of their offenders within this age period who were employed at all were sales girls or cash girls in the cheaper department stores.

This was such a complete contrast to conditions prevailing elsewhere, and even in the same city among the women over sixteen, that it seemed almost surprising.

which only led to reiterated assurances on the part of the officers. At last the records for a year past were tabulated, and the following division resulted: Telephone operators, 8.4 per cent; sales or cash girls, 16.6 per cent; factory operatives, 12.5 per cent; domestic service, 33.3 per cent, and at home or school, 29.2 per cent.

Yet in plain figures the group of department store girls gives a smaller share of offenders than comes directly from the home, and a considerably smaller proportion than comes from domestic service. If occupation affects the question at all, it would seem that domestic service is, in that place, more open to objection than the department store.

Again, it is only fair to say that after an examination of the detailed study so far made during the Federal investigation of the subject, no possible connection has been found between the occupation and going wrong. Often it is an accompaniment rather than a cause. Of fifty-eight women taken into one group, normally of good character, the following reasons were adduced for retrogression: Waitress, through her affections; waitress, through her affections by her employer; waitress, bad family influences and laziness; ladies' maid, through her affections, and in the same cause was also given in the instance of two trained nurses, a watch factory worker, a shoe factory worker, a stenographer, and a teacher; a shoe factory worker went wrong through her mother's influence; a crepe paper factory employe through the influence of friends made at work; a saleswoman because of ill health; a demonstrator because of lack of work, and a chorus girl because of associations of work.

Neither do low wages nor want appear as conspicuously as might have been expected. The waitresses received nominal wages ranging from \$4 to \$7 a week, but as board was always given in addition, and as tips were received, the real wages were considerably in excess of the nominal. The factory workers earned from \$6 to \$12, and in every case were living at home. The saleswomen received from \$5 to \$10—the average being \$7.15 a week. The one who received \$5 lived at home with her parents. The chorus girl received \$15 a week, and the trained nurse, who had no difficulty in securing engagements, made from \$21 upward a week when working.

The women themselves do not complain of these wages at all generally. One woman found life unendurable hard on \$7 a week. Another ascribed her fall as due in part to wage conditions. She went to Boston some years ago "with her father, and for a time kept house for him. Afterward she entered a store, but soon gave it up, as the pay was too small and the work too fatiguing." As this girl is described as being too lazy even to earn her own living as a fat woman, it seems hardly reasonable to ascribe her downfall to the amount of her earnings as a saleswoman.

Wages, however, is a different matter from low wages, and is more effective among those who have not been self-supporting than among the workers.