

GERMANY IS SINGING THE NEW SONG OF THE SHIRT WHILE 'ARISTOCRATS' WORK AT THREE CENTS A DAY

Gorgeous Palace Where the Kaiser Used to Strut Now Shelters the Housewives' League—German Ladies Have Become Scrubwomen and seamstresses—Paying the Price of War.

SEWING 'A SHROUD' AS WELL AS A SHIRT

Berlin, Germany. With fingers weary and worn, With eyelids heavy and red, A woman sat, in unwomanly rage, Plying her needle and thread,—
Stitch—stitch—stitch! poverty, hunger, and dirt; And still with a voice of dolorous pitch,
She sang the 'Song of the Shirt.'

Work—work—work Till the brain begins to swim! Work—work—work Till the eyes are heavy and dim! Band, and gusset, and band, Band, and gusset, and band,— All over the buttons I fall asleep, And sew them on in a dream!

Thomas Hood's "Song of the Shirt" is closely into the Germany of today. The fall of the mark has ruined the middle and upper classes and hundreds of thousands of women, who formerly were rich or well-to-do, are now destitute and looking for work. Some go out to service at pitiful wages, some take in sewing, some are scrub-women in the public buildings, some even walk the streets as sandwich advertisements of the vaudeville theatres, and others hide their poverty by working secretly in homes where they were once society queens. These reduced gentlewomen are legion, and some starve rather than let their wants be known. A baroness who died the other day, upon being prepared for burial, was found to be wearing paper underclothing, and the fustian of others are so desperate that many of the charitable organizations are trying to relieve them. One movement, started here in Berlin in a small way, is now spreading through all parts of the German capital and even going out to other cities and towns. This is the establishing of a home industry that such women can

carry on outside the factories and stores. It might really be called a sweat-shop industry, in which the workers are aristocrats. The articles made will go to the wholesale and retail stores, and in some cases to factories. They are prepared according to order, and at prices much below those in the regular trade.

In the Kaiser's Palace.

The headquarters of this new movement is the palace of the Kaiser. The gorgeous home in which he strutted about, often changing his uniform a half dozen times a day, is now given up to public offices and shown also as a museum. One of the offices is that of the German Housewives' League, which has to do with supplying this work to reduced gentlewomen. The director of the new industry is Miss Pawel Ramingen, a society lady of great organizing and executive ability. When I called upon her she was surrounded by goods of all kinds, made by the ex-aristocrats, and, as we looked over them, well-dressed but woe-begone ladies, young and old, came in, bringing the work they had done and carrying away the material and orders for other work to do. During my stay I looked over the stock in trade and made some purchases to take home as presents. The things are exquisitely done and the amount of labor upon them in comparison with the prices charged is pitiful. I bought two lace doilies, made by hand with fine linen thread. Each was twice as large as a dinner plate and as delicate as a cobweb. The price was not quite fifty cents, and the woman who did the work received thirty cents each. Miss Ramingen told me that it takes at least ten days to make a doily and as I look at mine I am sure this is an underestimate. I have had one photographed, pinning it on the back of the black dress of my typist, to show my friends what it is like. It measures fourteen inches in diameter, and is so gossamerlike that it might almost be called a museum piece. I am ashamed to own it when I think that the woman who made it could not have earned more than ten cents a day.

Baby Shoes at Two Cents a Pair.

The ladies were anxious to sell, and I bought a number of other articles of various kinds. I bought six pairs of baby shoes for my little grandson, aged four months, at a price that could not have netted the maker more than two cents a pair. They were of fine white wool, trimmed with blue, and were crocheted by hand. I bought for my little granddaughter, who was born in Paris just five months ago, a beautiful sheet of fine netting to spread over her cradle. This article lies before me as I write. It is four feet in width by five feet in length. It is edged with silk thread and decorated with great lilies of white silk



IN GERMANY TODAY.

War is exacting its penalties in Germany. The women of the middle classes are the ones hardest hit, and, as in the picture above, some are reduced to such extremities that they are compelled to pick over the garbage outside the markets in search of scraps of food.

embroidery running four inches deep around the edges. The work is all by hand, and I am told that the woman put two weeks' continuous labor upon it. Nevertheless it cost me just 80 cents, and half of this must have been included in the material. There is also some sentiment connected with this quilt. It is the work of a Baltic countess, who had a great estate in Latvia, where she lived in luxury until the new government of that republic confiscated her property and gave the most of it over to the peasants. They left her one hundred acres, but if she sold that today it would be for Latvian money, which is worth no more than the currency here in Berlin.

When the countess came to Germany she had considerable money, but she invested it in German bonds, which she thought as good as gold. All this has vanished with the fall of the mark. At her home not far from Riga, she had a large country house, and her entertainments were famous. Today she lives in a little furnished room in the heart of the city, and thanks God when the sun shines, so that she can save on the light by which she does this exquisite work. Think of trying to sew at the rate of 40 cents a week, one-half of which must go for the materials on which you are working, and you have the condition of this titled lady who made the quilt for my baby granddaughter.

1,000 Stitches for a Cent.

Among the other things shown me at this store, inside the gorgeous palace of the Kaiser, were some lady's handkerchiefs of fine cambric, about as big as a sheet of notepaper, rolled up with thread of different colors. I bought 30 at a cost of less than a dollar, and I venture each has at least one thousand stitches in its beautiful border. The price I paid was about three cents apiece and I feel guilty and mean as I look at them. Nevertheless, I paid twice what the woman asked when she spread them before me and she was delighted. I doubt if any woman who is reading this could do the work on one of these three-cent handkerchiefs in the space of six hours. Still the prices are such that the labor cost could not have been more than one cent.

Baroness Making Sweaters.

I cannot speak of all the beautiful things made by these reduced gentlewomen and of their ridiculous prices, but I must say a word concerning the chief business which, just now, is the knitting of sweaters. Thousands of ladies' sweaters are being turned out for the department stores and wholesale dealers of the German capital. The sweaters are of the finest wool or silk or mercerized cotton. They are long, full-sleeved and of a fashionable cut. It takes a fast worker at least three days to make one, and the price she receives in marks at the current rate of exchange is only ten cents. Imagine the most refined and best educated old lady you know, who has spent her life in luxury and perhaps been a society leader, working three days for a dime and you have one phase of this home industry.

The sweaters are sold by the department stores at high prices. One can buy them there or he can purchase the wool or silk and have them knit to measure at the cost of the labor. I have a friend who has just ordered two which reach from her neck to her hips, embracing her capacious 46 bust. She is to pay less than 75 cents apiece and she will have them eight days from now. Suppose you buy some wool and a pair of knitting needles and make yourself a garment of a similar kind. It will not compare in beauty with the work of these ladies, but it will show you how much each of them does for two nickels.

Moreover, the work must be done by experts and the unskilled have to be trained before they can make anything worth selling. The Housewives' League has skilled teachers, some of whom come from the wholesale and retail firms which give the orders, and the applicants have to learn just how to make the garments so that they will sell. The amateur often has to pull out her knitting many times before her labor is sal-

by working half the night, is able to turn out a sweater in two days, but the gas light cuts down her profits. As to hemstitching, the pay for a handkerchief with six rows about the edges is two cents, and only those who have good eyes can do that work at all. I have four lace-trimmed handkerchiefs, the tag upon which states that the woman who made them worked 96 hours. The selling price of the four was less than two dollars.

Of course, the women cannot live on such wages. They barely exist, and I am told that now and then one dies on the job. This recalls another verse of the "Song of the Shirt":

"O men with sisters dear!

O men with mothers and wives! It is not linen you're wearing out; But human creatures' lives! Stitch—stitch—stitch, In poverty, hunger and dirt— Sewing at once, with a double thread,

A shroud as well as a shirt!"

Aristocratic Stitches.

I asked Miss Pawel Ramingen to tell me something of her principal workers. They belong to all classes of the former well-to-do and even of the rich. Some are the wives of high government officials of the old regime. The husbands of others are officers who have had nothing to do since the trade of killing men has been given up for the time, and many are widows living upon pensions which the fall of the mark has so reduced that they yield practically nothing. There are five hundred ladies who call every day for work of this kind and more than two thousand who come in every now and then to get something on which they can labor as their home duties permit. Eight well-known, charitable ladies are now handling the store in the palace, and branches are being organized in different sections of the city in order that the women may save carfare by getting the work near their homes.

The institution is now being assisted by the municipality, but it will soon be on a self-paying basis. The demand for work is rapidly increasing, and eventually tens of thousands of these former aristocrats will be so employed. As prices rise and times get better, it is hoped that the labor will receive increased pay, but the situation of Germany is such and the poor are so many that it will be a generation or more before the need of something to do disappears.

A Baroness From Silesia.

While I was in the league rooms a fine-looking lady, wearing a long fur coat, entered, bringing some hand-painted china which she had made. She wanted to know if such work would sell and whether the league could handle it for her. She was told that they had no connections for such manufactures as yet, but that they could give her home-knitting, stitching, or crocheting. When the woman left she took with her several handkerchiefs which she expected to hemstitch for three cents apiece and of which a skilled worker can finish two or three in a day. She was told she could be instructed in other work without charge if she would go to school for a week. The poor woman replied that her home was in Silesia, a half-day's ride from Berlin, and that she would wait. After her departure, Miss Pawel Ramingen penned on the record. It was that showed me her name, which she had of a well-known baroness.

Where Cigars Are a Treat.

There was some delay in getting the goods I have described. Several articles were on order and all of my purchases were brought at one time by a lady of the league to me at my hotel. In paying for them I added some thousands of marks to the amount, and gave the lady herself the sum of five thousand marks, telling her to buy a box of candy with it on her way out. She was greatly delighted and shook my hand over and over again. She said she would not use it for candy, but it would go to buy some cigars for her husband, who is a government official with a salary so low that he can afford to smoke only on Sundays. The five thousand marks, on that day, were worth less than twelve cents.

called at my rooms had a brooch and buckle of hammered brass which she had made. I paid her one dollar for them and you cannot imagine the feeling that this seemingly extraordinary price created in her. Her eyes filled with tears and she kissed my hand and thanked me again and again.

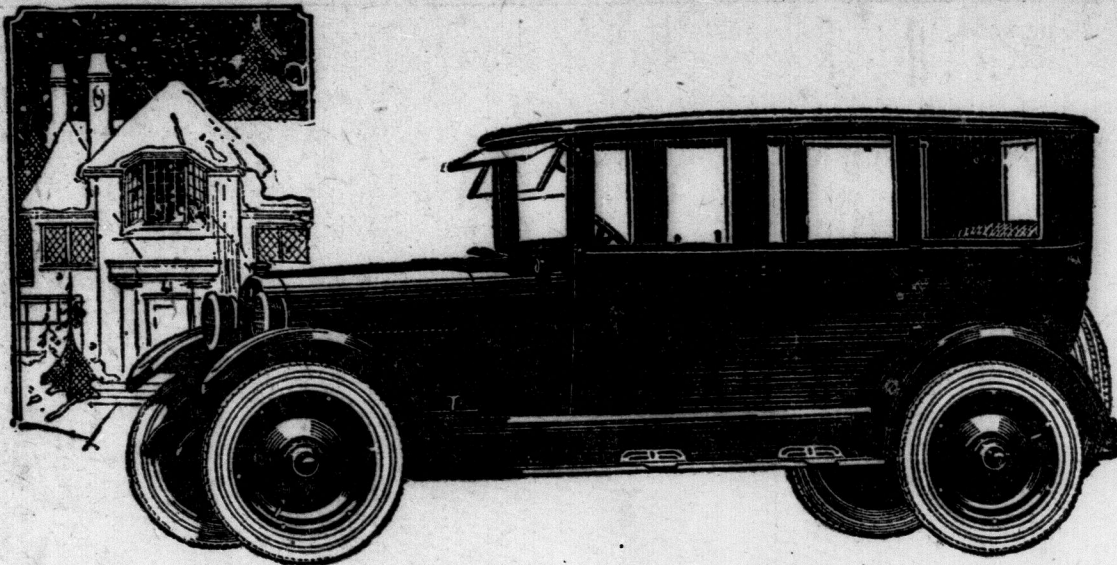
Shirts at Three for a Dime.

Along this same line is an experience I have had with a beautiful sewing woman who has made me a half-dozen silk shirts. I bought the silk, and she came to the hotel to get my order. She speaks English, is well educated, is about thirty years of age, and has a husband. She took my measure and I gave her an old shirt as a copy. I then asked her the price, and the figure, translated into American money, just equaled three cents. Upon my saying that this was too little, she replied that Wertheim, who might be called the John Wanamaker of Berlin, having the largest and most aristocratic department store here, paid his women workers six cents a shirt, but she would not think of charging so much. I next asked how long it would take her to make a shirt, and she thought she could do one in a day. She almost fell over when I told her that I would pay at least twice the price of the department store and give her a present at the end of the job. When the shirts were delivered they were beautifully made. I paid her an amount which equaled about twenty-five cents a shirt and she went away joyful.

Before leaving, however, she confided to me that she had much trouble regarding the button-holes. She had given this work out to a specialist, a woman who sews button-holes only, and this woman had charged her forty marks per button-hole, which she said was "ungeheuer teuer." I figured the rate out at the exchange of the day and found it was just one-tenth of a cent, or one-half the widow's mite of the Bible. There were ten buttonholes in each shirt, and that woman made all for one cent. Take a piece of silk and work a button-hole without the aid of any machine, using needle and thread, and find out if the charge was too much.

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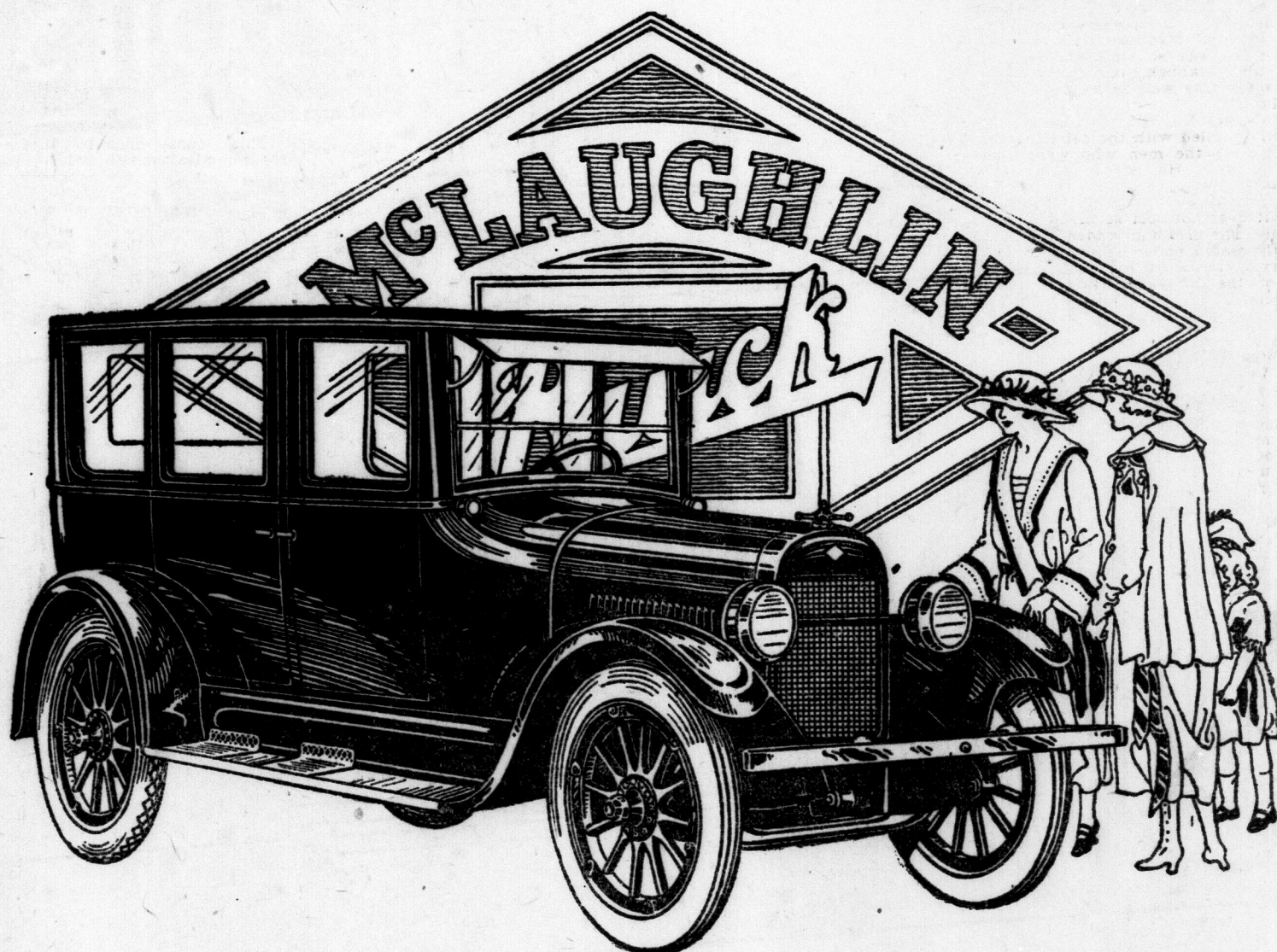
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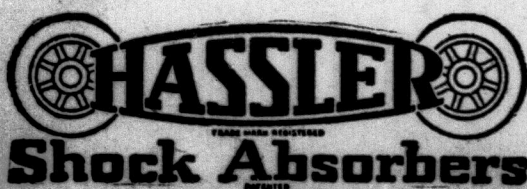
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