

THE ST. JOHN STAR

# The Woman's Town; Men Play Second Fiddle

## Girl Workers Nearly Double The Number of Males at Troy



An Every Day Street Scene, the Men Very Few



**H**AVING found himself on the main business street of Troy, New York, at the noon hour one day recently, a stranger hunted up a policeman—there are few policemen in Troy, for a reason which will presently appear—and asked: "What convention is meeting here? Is it the National Association of Co-Eds?"

"No; no convention at all, that I know of. Why?"

An excited sweep of the visitor's arm up and down the street. Then:

"But the girls! Where did they come from? Why, it must have rained girls here last night! There seem to be thousands of them in sight! Gracious, man! Have you nothing but women in this city?"

"Oh, yes, a few others"—and the blue-coat smiled broadly—"but the minority of males in our population don't keep us policemen very busy, for, you see, this is a woman's town, and the men have to behave."

Troy might well be termed the woman's city. Of its 76,000 inhabitants, by far the majority are females. Not only that, but its industrial life is composed of women, for they form over 60 per cent. of the wage earners. The wages paid to the women workers exceed those paid to men. Troy's payroll for regularly employed women workers shows a disbursement of over \$4,000,000 a year.

Balls, entertainments and public functions are supported by the women; theatre audiences are composed principally of women; women predominate everywhere. It is, perhaps the only city in the world where the order of man's rule is reversed in nearly all except political suffrage and office-holding.

**I**N NO other city in the world, so far as known, do women earn higher wages than men. That they do in Troy was brought out some time ago when a comparison was made.

It was found that a great proportion of Troy's working girls were making \$15 to \$25 a week, while the average wages paid to men—they are employed for only heavy labor and running machinery about the factories and laundries—were but \$10 to \$12 a week.

But Troy is a woman's city in other ways—in every way. Not the city of the matron, either, but of the independent bachelor woman.

Noonday in Troy is a good time to observe the extent of feminine predominance. Look which way you will, it is girls, girls, girls. Shops, offices and streets contribute to the throng, but most of them come from the collar factories and the laundries which every week do up the boiled shirts and cuffs and collars for the half of New York State.

Yes, and some of them come from the drawing-rooms and parlors of the "elite." But you'd never know the difference in dress, personal beauty or deportment.

A woman's city, but more especially a working woman's city, is Troy. The number of women actually employed in gainful occupations in the city is estimated at 14,000.

An estimate of the number of men employed is 8700, or 586 less than women.

Of the male wage earners probably not more than half are employed in the regular industries; the others work about the hotels, in the restaurants (it is a strange thing to see so many male waiters serving food to the girls, who occupy practically all the tables), about the livery stables, the railroad station, or in building and common laboring operations.

### PRETTY AND CLEAN

In other words, if the industries which are operated almost exclusively by female labor were to be eliminated there would be no Troy, at least not the Troy which has been famed the country over as the Collar City, but which might more aptly be termed the Woman's City.

Perhaps one statement that has been made—that in regard to the personal appearance of the Troy working women—should be elaborated at this point, lest the charge of exaggeration be made.

To repeat, then, these women are so well dressed and bear themselves with such grace and evidence of good breeding that on the streets they could not be singled out from the daughters of wealth and fashion. Naturally, this will be questioned. For, you say, how can a woman go to work in her fineries, bedecked with jewelry as if on her way to church?

In Troy it is possible because the work done by the woman is eminently clean. What is there to soil the hands or clothes in the collar factory, where the raw material handled is nothing but clean, white linen and tanned just as spotless? And, as to the machinery—well, that's the men's work. (They don't go to work clad in their Sunday best.)

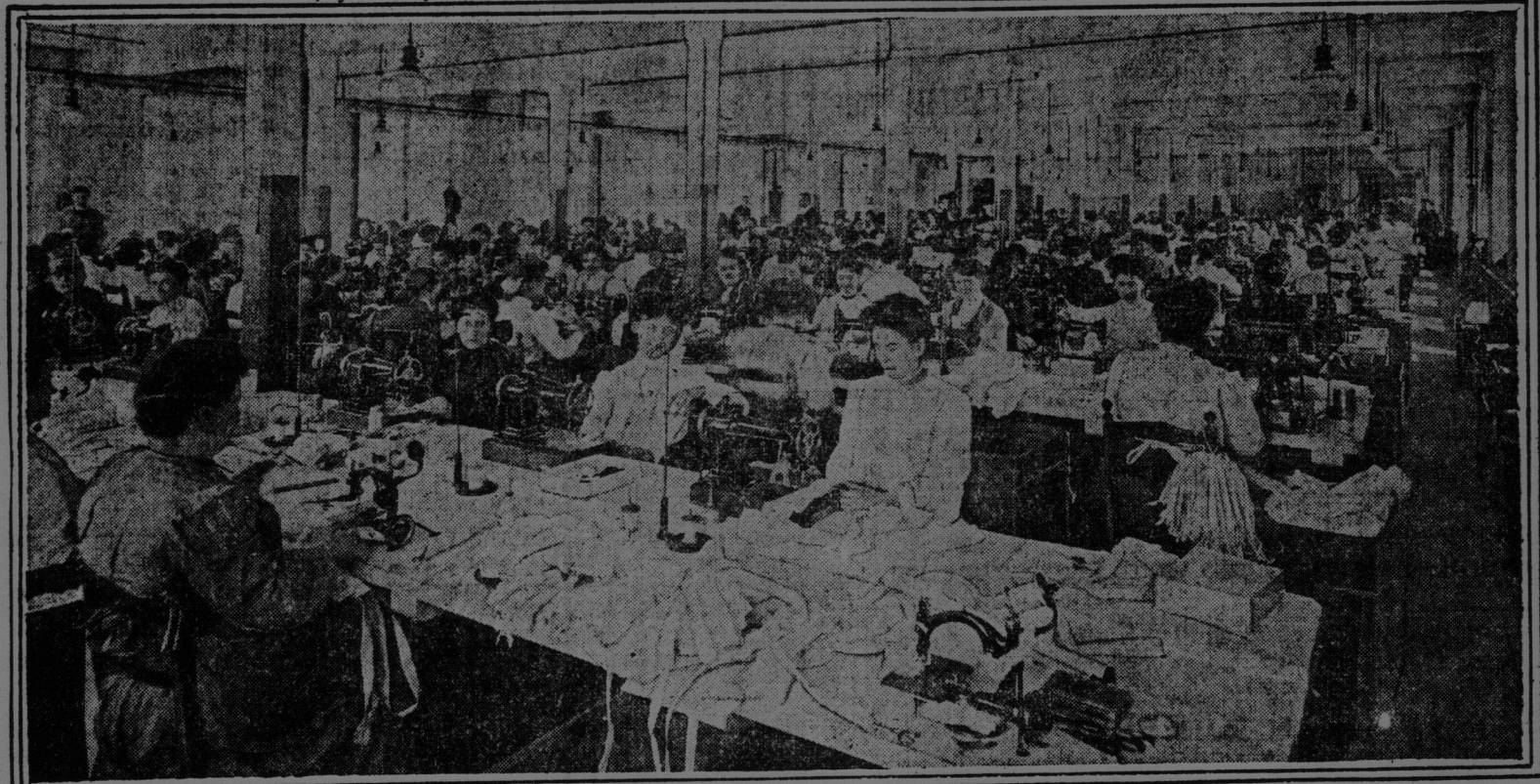
In the laundries, of course, the work isn't quite so cleanly; but this doesn't prevent the girls from arranging their toilet carefully before leaving work, and detaching touches in the donning of street costume obliterate the evidences of toil.

The dress of the girls as they go to or from the factories amazes the visitor. It is rather the rule than the exception to see them clad in silks, satins, expensive furs, Paris hats and the neatest and best gloves and shoes.

So noticeable is this that the unthinking sometimes refer to it as extravagance. It is not. It is simply an evidence of a high grade of intelligence.



Men Not Necessary for Enjoyment, Outing Party at Suburban Hotel



Stitching Room in a Troy Collar Factory

These girls know that their moral tenor and their social standing are improved by neat appearance on the streets, whether going to work or out for a promenade, and, as to the expensiveness of their dress, they consider it false economy to buy anything cheap. Besides, they pay promptly for what they buy, so why shouldn't they suit themselves?

The obvious result is that at no time does the working girl feel that she is off duty as to etiquette. She carries her confidence and self-respect with her to her machine. She need not be ashamed to meet her most exclusive friend on the street. And even while at work she is made cheerful by the air of refinement about herself and her fellow-workers.

Fashionably attired, displaying costly jewelry, working girls by the thousands may be seen on the streets any fine night. At first thought this might seem improper, but it must be considered that the rules of propriety which obtain at a young woman's seminary may not be applied here.

These girls are penned up in factories—well ventilated and comfortable factories, to be sure, but still offering no opportunity for exercise in the open air—for nine to ten hours each day, and their only chance to get that outdoor exercise so essential to health is at night.

They walk by pairs or in groups, chatting, laughing, recuperating for the morrow's work. They frequent the well-lighted business streets, principally.

The police and clergymen of Troy will, almost invariably, tell you that these night strolls are entirely free from objectionable features. Refined in manner, these girls give scant attention to "mashers."

Fairly well educated is the average "collar girl." Some are high school graduates, but the typical one has finished only a grammar school education before starting to earn a livelihood.

But a small percentage of them are natives of the city where they work. Most of them are drawn from a radius of about fifty miles from Troy—usually from the smaller towns. They are girls whose parents could not afford to give them the advantage of higher education; they did not care to go to work in any one's kitchen, and chose this means of working for a living, offering, as it did, better than living wages, and independence.

This leads to the question of marriage. Oh, yes, they

are married at times, for they are women. But they do not marry indiscriminately, as do many women elsewhere.

There is hardly one of them who has not rejected several proposals of marriage. The collar girl makes it a practice to look well over the man who seeks her hand, to study his prospects, his family, his past record, his propensity for work. It is common enough to hear a Troy girl say: "I jilted him because I prefer to keep on supporting myself rather than undertake to support two."

Those who say they have no intention of marrying are by far in the majority.

And those who do marry? Usually they do very well, much better than the average working girl elsewhere.

Several factory girls have become mistresses of mansions in Troy. A former laundry girl is the wife of one of the principal laundry owners, a very wealthy man. His society friends in Troy say that he displayed commendable judgment and independence in marrying the

girl of his choice, and they associate with her on perfect equality.

Another girl who was what is commonly known as a "hello girl" in a Troy telephone exchange is the wife of a local millionaire.

A young woman who was employed as a stitcher in a collar factory married one of the partners in the business, and is now a leader in local society.

Remarkable as these incidents are, they are almost equaled by many others in which lawyers, physicians, dentists and successful business men have married collar girls.

Assuredly, these women have charms. Otherwise marriageable men of Troy could easily find life partners by going to the surrounding towns. As a matter of fact, it is remarked by all visitors to Troy that the collar girls are exceptionally attractive as a class.

They have their own social life, differing from that in other cities mainly in that men are a negligible quality, and all the arrangements are made and the bills paid by the women.

Some time ago the women of some factories and laundries arranged an entertainment and dance, which was attended by some 4000 girls and only 500 men. Each girl contributed \$1, which entitled her to bring a friend. Some men received as high as forty invitations, not, perhaps, so much on account of their great popularity as of the dearth of men in the city.

### The Matinee Hour

**CAN HAVE BRIDESMAIDS GALORE**

So strong are friendship's ties among the Troy working girls that when one weds she usually has thirty or forty bridesmaids; the number has reached one hundred.

This might appear like imposing on the bridegroom, but in Troy the custom of giving presents to bridesmaids is reversed, and they usually give presents to the bride.

While the general tenor of the collar girl's life is one of brightness, there is many a little life tragically being slowly, dimly acted out to the whirling music—a dirge for them—of the sewing machines, or the clucking of the washing machinery.

Some of the workers are old women. Seated at a machine the other day was a woman of almost 70, patiently, laboriously sewing bands on collars—stitching, stitching, with the thread of her life which, from appearance, the Fates might soon cut forever.

Another woman said she had begun as a collar girl 45 years ago, had married, had been deprived by death of one after another of her relatives, and had finally drifted back to the occupation of her girlhood for a living.

An operative of 60 related that she had married a talented man, had a home, children, money, the comforts of life; her three children died, her husband was killed in a railroad accident, and she, inexperienced in business matters, lost her money through deals with land promoters; then—a return to the collar machine, where now every vibration of the treadle is paying her way down the path of swiftly passing years.

Besides those regularly employed in the factories, there are thousands who do collar work at home. A common sight in Troy is a girl—maybe a married woman—seated near the window of her home, with nimble fingers stitching collars and cuffs. A hasty glance reveals mounds of white unfinished work near at hand, and one may note quick flashes of white as each collar is deftly turned, creased, points picked out with a bird-eye and bunched for pressing. This work is called for by men and boys who cart it to the factories in wagons. Another minor use to which mere man is put in Troy.

### MANY WORK SECRETLY

There are others—how many hundreds it would be difficult to say—who work daily at collars and cuffs in their homes, but behind drawn curtains, for their sensitiveness rather balks at the term "working woman."

At the theatre, whether at matinee or evening performance, the audience is mainly female. Handsomely gowned, the factory girls occupy the best seats—the price to them makes no difference. They are chronic theatregoers, and patronize the high-priced stars fully as well as the vaudeville.

Besides supplying their personal comforts and necessities, they have money for the church and for charity. When one becomes ill, it is customary for the others to make a collection and pay her the same wages as if she were working. Another custom is for a group of girls to divide among them the work of the absent one and do it in addition to their own.

When death occurs, there is a provision for insurance to be paid to surviving relatives. There is a vacation fund to which a girl contributes what she can throughout the year, in the summer enjoys a rest at seashore or mountain resort on this fund.

The Troy savings banks show a large gross sum to the credit of the working girls. One bank alone opens certain evenings to accommodate them. They are the principal depositors at all the savings banks.

So the Troy working girl—the queen of her kind—goes serenely along her course, demonstrating her independence, and asking no odds of any one.

carried in state, the umbrella was held above their heads, more significant than a crown. By the natives the King of Badagry, on the slave coast, for his brother of the old Calabar district, at the Cross River Estuary.

Undorered, save by a smile and sunshine, a savage chief may wander through the jungle, leisurely swinging a foiled umbrella in his hand. A slave of a tribesman may pass, and not seeing the article, fail to salute the chief.

With a sweep of his arm the outraged dignitary flouts open the umbrella, and let the subject tribesman cowers to the ground in groveling obedience.

The royal umbrella is treasured by the king and carefully preserved. Its disappearance is looked upon as a sign of calamity.

After capturing King Koffee Kalcilli, at Comassala, in 1871, Sir Garnett Wolseley sent his imposing and ornate umbrella to England. The Ashantis regarded this as a sure sign of the downfall of their people.

Most pictures show native kings making treaties with Europeans while squatting on the ground, with slaves holding an umbrella above them.

In the days of the Pharaohs umbrellas were regarded as the highest emblems of sovereignty. They were carried above the kings of upper and lower Egypt on all state occasions.

Ancient carvings show the monarchs riding in their chariots with the insignia over their heads. A repousse of an old carving by Sir Gardner Wilkinson portrays an Ethiopian princess traveling through Upper Egypt to Thebes. Attached to a tall staff of the chariot is the umbrella. The use of the umbrella by royalty spread from the Ethiopians, above Egypt, to the Soudanese negroes.

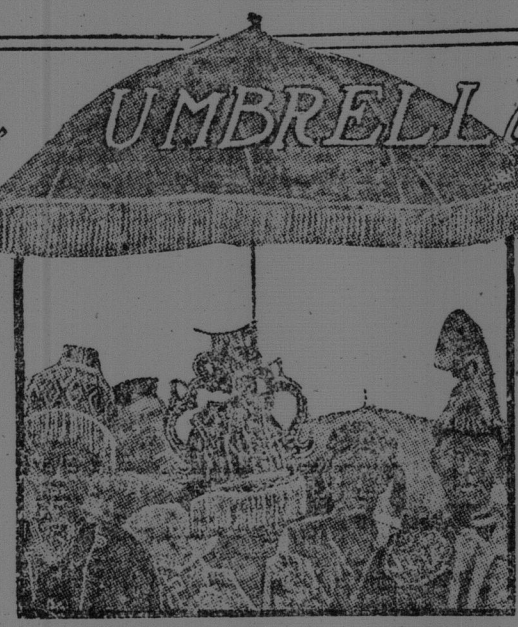
The Greeks, practical as well as poetical, borrowed the sign of power of Egypt and used it to protect themselves from the sun. The Roman women, seeing its value in preserving a clear complexion on a hot day, adopted it. From them the custom descended to the Italian, the French and the Spanish women.

From them the English ladies borrowed the fashion, and not from the Persians, as is supposed. While it has become an invaluable protector from the rain to us, the native Africans still think of it as their sceptre and crown, degrading its practical use.

## WHERE THE UMBRELLA IS A BADGE OF ROYALTY

**I**N SOME parts of Africa the umbrella is used, not to protect the tribal chiefs from the glare of the sun or a heavy rainstorm, but as an insignia of high rank. We betide him among the blacks of Africa who carries this mark of nobility if he does not have royal blood in his veins, or represent a dusky-hued sovereign.

By their umbrellas are kings and chiefs known; by the fabric, the fringes and tassels is the degree of veneration accorded them determined. This use of the umbrella as a mark of distinction is ancient, originating with the Egyptians. It was only during the course of centuries that it was adopted for practical use.



Now you have got a shadow, an umbrella. To keep the scorching world's opinion from your fair credit.

—From "Take a Wife and Have a Wife"

**O**NE chooses an umbrella of silk and cotton in this country by the price one can pay, and by judging the durability of the article. In Africa only a king uses silk; lesser chiefs use rhinoceros or cotton.

My lady chooses her sunshade, most likely, to match her dress, pausing over the many shades and picking

an artistic creation according to the contents of her purse.

In Africa women are not allowed such a luxury as a parasol; even the native queens pine in vain. The king alone may use umbrellas of any color, and by the amount of fancy work in his power and wealth unfolded to neighboring sovereigns.

Recently a number of South chiefs went to Mombassa to celebrate the birthday of the King of England. Out of the wilds they came, pursuing their journey on the Uganda Railway. They had never seen a railroad before.

When they arrived at Mombassa, the people were amazed. The chiefs were dressed in spotless white, and although the day was clear, carried huge gingham umbrellas.

It was learned these were marks of power.

The South chiefs rule over tribes in northern Nigeria, and are appointed by the paramount ruler. Of course, they feel their exalted position and wished to display it to the world.

By accident these chiefs lost possession of their prized umbrellas. The kings generally saw to it that such insignia of power must be kept out of reach of lesser rulers, but one day a lot of gingham umbrellas were discovered in a store kept by a European. In a short time each chief had one.

One brilliant in color, and less fine in texture than those of the sovereigns, the umbrellas of the chiefs, nevertheless, served to impress upon the awed blacks their high position.

Each savage king possesses an umbrella decorated in a distinct style. On solemn occasions, where various kings meet, they are distinguished from each other by the umbrella trimmings.

On the occasion of an agricultural show which was held at Lagos, Nigeria, last November, many visiting chiefs assembled. Surrounded by grinning furies and