



The CASE OF THE WORKING GIRL

Fourth and Final Article on This Topic

By MARJORY MacMURCHY

IT is only fair that those who were interested in the series of articles on The Case of the Working Girl, which appeared in the CANADIAN COURIER on May 4th, 11th, and 18th, should know how general a response has been made to these articles.

Two conclusions may be drawn rightly from the character of the response. One is that the large public of well-intentioned men and women in Canada is keenly interested in the welfare of the girl wage-earner.

It has also been made plain that if anyone proposes a definite, reasonable plan for bettering the condition of wage-earning girls in his own locality, town or city, and asks for help, he will find that many have been waiting only for a leader and a plan. The following is a fair example of the response received in many instances from the man or woman who is ready to co-operate if a plan is suggested. "If you think of any way in which I can be helpful in work for Canadian girls, kindly let me know and I shall be glad to help." Dr. Annie Marion Maclean, author of "Wage Earning Women," who unfortunately has been an invalid for months, sent

word from New York that although she was too sick to write she wished any work undertaken for the Canadian girl wage-earner good luck.

Suggestions and expressions of opinion which follow have been selected from the large number received as probably the most useful in securing attention for the case of the working girl.



Miss Marshall Saunders, author of "Beautiful Joe" and other popular books, and a social worker of uncommon intelligence and enthusiasm, writes from Halifax: "My sympathies go to the careless, flighty girl who knows no more than a baby of what is before her in a working girl's life. She usually has a mother very like herself. 'Why don't you sew your dress instead of pinning it?' an exasperated lady said to a young Canadian working girl recently. 'I don't know how.' 'I will teach you.' The girl could not wear a thimble and she could not and would not learn to sew. The time had gone by for it. She walked the streets when her work was over, pinned her clothes and wore velvet shoes, and she was a bright girl and might have been a good worker."

"The second article mentions the lever to raise girls of this class: 'A part of the remedy is to be found in a change in the school curriculum.'

"To my mind the whole remedy is to be found there. If a girl's home training is inadequate, supplement it in school-houses which should not be merely intellectual, but trade and social centres. I believe our present school system will never be successful until it holds to it not only studious girls, already half-educated by home training, but also the wilful, unthrifty girls who know no more than babies what is before them in life. Their untrained minds can be trained, if the school becomes an annex to the home. The superintendent of schools in an American city told me that there are some

boys so idle, so wilful, so thoughtless, that only a manual training school can hold them. These careless boys and careless girls drag down the standard of wages. Let us find out how to train them, how to hold them, how to make them learn to work properly. The schools were made for the boys and girls—not the boys and girls for the schools."

PROFESSOR ARCHIBALD MacMECHAN, of Dalhousie University, concluding an article in the *Montreal Standard* on The Case of the Working Girl in the CANADIAN COURIER, says: "If boys wish to earn good wages they must learn a trade, which means years of work with little or no wages at all. The girls who stand behind the counter of our shops have, as a rule, no preliminary training whatever. How can they expect high wages?"

"Another question is suggested. There is a growing scepticism regarding our sacred system of education. Some people think it bankrupt, that it has failed to do what it professes to do, that it is costly, wasteful and inefficient. Others think that the chief object of education should be vocational—that is, it should fit every citizen to earn his (or her) own living."

MRS. ARTHUR MURPHY, of Edmonton, author of "Janey Canuck in the West," and "Open Trails," thinks that the fault with regard to the wages of the working girl must belong to Eastern Canada. "It is astonishing to learn that thousands of girls in Eastern Canada are living on less than three hundred dollars a year. For the life of me I cannot see why they do not come West, for (I'd go on with that sentence, only I can hear you say 'booster' across the two thousand miles that intervene)."

MRS. ISABEL ECCLESTONE MacKAY of Vancouver, a well-known Canadian writer, does not seem to think that low wages for business girls are confined to Eastern Canada. If they earn more in the West they have to spend more. "The writer has spoken largely for Eastern Canada, but on a rising scale her deductions are true of the West. By a rising scale I mean that everything is higher out here. Wages are higher, but the cost of living is higher, too. Only the other day I talked to a young girl who had left a good position in the East to come to a better paid position here. She was not complaining, but she said that she had saved a little in the East, whereas here, although her wage was much higher, she had saved nothing at all. . . . The writer speaks of the unpreparedness of many girls who attempt to earn a living without knowing how. It seems to me that parents have much to answer for in this respect. . . . If more parents realized their duty there would be fewer incapable girls at the mercy of the world."

A BUSINESS woman in Calgary writes to say that although in the West there are some positions with higher salaries for women than anything in the East of Canada, yet on the whole the high cost of living leaves the girl who works for her living in much the same position as the girl in Eastern Canada. It should be noted here that there is testimony from all over Canada to the fact that girls are not sufficiently well trained to be capable of filling the best positions which are open for business women. The remark has been made repeatedly by employers that they would take on one, two, or three more girls, with higher salaries than

the average at once if they could get trained workers of a better class. One head of a business concern said it would pay his company to give a bonus of ten dollars to anyone able to provide them with expert help.

THE *Christian Guardian*, of Toronto, believes that organization would do most to help women in industry. The editor adds a word for the girl in domestic service. "One fact is very conspicuous, that in this country there is practically no organization of female workers. There can be no doubt that the present standard of wages for men in Canada has been raised, not usually we are sorry to confess, by the efforts of the church and the brotherliness of Christian employers, but by vigorous action on the part of organized labour, and we think the most effective step any woman could take towards the securing of a living wage for her sisters would be the organization of the girl workers into trade unions or something of that kind. Then we would discover the real facts as to the

wages, hours of employment and some other things we would like to know.

"We have not touched at all the question of the girls who are working in homes. Their condition differs from that of other girl workers, and we believe they are better paid, and more extensively ostracized."

MISS CONSTANCE RUDYARD BOULTON, President of the Women's Canadian Club, of Toronto, in a letter to the writer of the articles on the working girl, expresses the opinion that if equal pay were given men and women workers for work of the same value it would be better for the wages of both men and women. She adds that women have not facilities for becoming skilled workers.

A BUSINESS woman in discussing the case of the working girl, said: "Do not call her the working girl; call her the business girl. It is the first step towards making the girl wage-earner more efficient. The business woman means success in business. The working girl means that the girl is an untrained worker, and for that reason generally an unsuccessful worker."

"MAKE the girl efficient," is the advice of the majority of social workers, including representatives of the Y. W. C. A. It is to be noted, also, that the response to these articles on the girl wage-earner has made it plain that employers in Canada are keenly interested in the welfare of women employees.

With regard to efficiency, Miss Drummond, General Secretary of the Young Women's Christian Association, writes: "It is a subject in which naturally we are very much interested and were glad to see so ably handled. We are glad to see it has attracted considerable notice. Anything in that way will naturally be a benefit, though it will be pretty difficult to adjust conditions. In Toronto, I think we are very fortunate in having the majority of employers interested in the problem and ready to lend themselves to its solution. Better equipment for the work, that is efficiency, I believe about the only thing which will permanently remedy the state of affairs."



THE Department of Labour, at Ottawa, writing to the CANADIAN COURIER with regard to the case of the working girl, draws attention to the fact that the Department of Labour had been instrumental in investigating the conditions under which telephone girls worked in Toronto, the conditions of the textile workers

in Quebec, and had brought in a bill last session which was not reached before dissolution providing a remedy against "phossy jaw," a disease which attacks workers handling white phosphorus in the manufacture of matches. The workers in this industry are mainly women. During the past few