

A NEW SOCIAL PROBLEM.

BY J. L. PAYNE.

Social and economic problems of serious importance, and far-reaching in their effects, arise from the rapidly increasing number of women who have entered the fields of daily work. Let anyone who cannot throw statistical light on this matter contrast his observations of twenty-five years ago with those which he makes to-day, and he will find a change which must set him thinking. He will be apt to ask himself questions which cannot be answered, particularly as he seeks to estimate the probable condition of things in this respect at the end of another twenty-five years. Let us glance hurriedly at the facts in order that we may see where we stand.

A quarter of a century ago there were few avenues of work open to young women, either here or in the United States. The use of the needle in one way or another, made up the occupation of seven-tenths of all the women who sought a livelihood outside of the home circle. At all events, the factory and the sewing-room, where manual labor in its alleged lighter forms was carried on, gave employment to nearly all who worked. Girls had only found their way behind the counter in special branches of large commercial houses, and were practically unknown in the office, the counting-room, the professions, or the public service. They were taught to regard the domestic sphere as their legitimate and divinely assigned place in life. Men were regarded as the bread-winners, and filled the places.

Now, however, a change has occurred which carries with it a vast and impressive social revolution. Women are working side by side with men in every branch of work from which they are not debarred by lack

of physical strength. They are everywhere, and there has been such a mutual and successful adaptation on the part of employers and employed that they are certain to stay. Women have discovered that sex no longer prevents them from selling their labor in a common market, and the market has been reciprocal in the sense that it has always found a ready means of absorbing the supply. I may take the city of Ottawa as fairly indicating the extent of the change which has taken place. There are now more women employed in stores than men, quite apart from the work-rooms. In the general offices the sexes may be said to be equally divided. Three-fourths of all the teachers in the schools and in music are women. Twelve years ago there were not ten women in the Government service; whereas to-day there are hundreds. The exact number is not easy to get at, for the reason that the published pay sheets do not draw a line between the sexes, and simple initials do not afford even a clue. But it is not necessary to fortify the statement I have made with statistics. It will be accepted, as I assumed at the outset, by every one who intelligently uses his every-day faculties of observation, in its general application to all large centres of population at least.

I shall not attempt to analyze in detail the causes which appear to me to have operated to bring about this great change. It is sufficient for all immediate purposes to deal with the fact. But it will be admitted by every one that the willingness of women to work for less wages than men has induced capital to provide many forms of labor for them. Women were found to be skilful and indus-