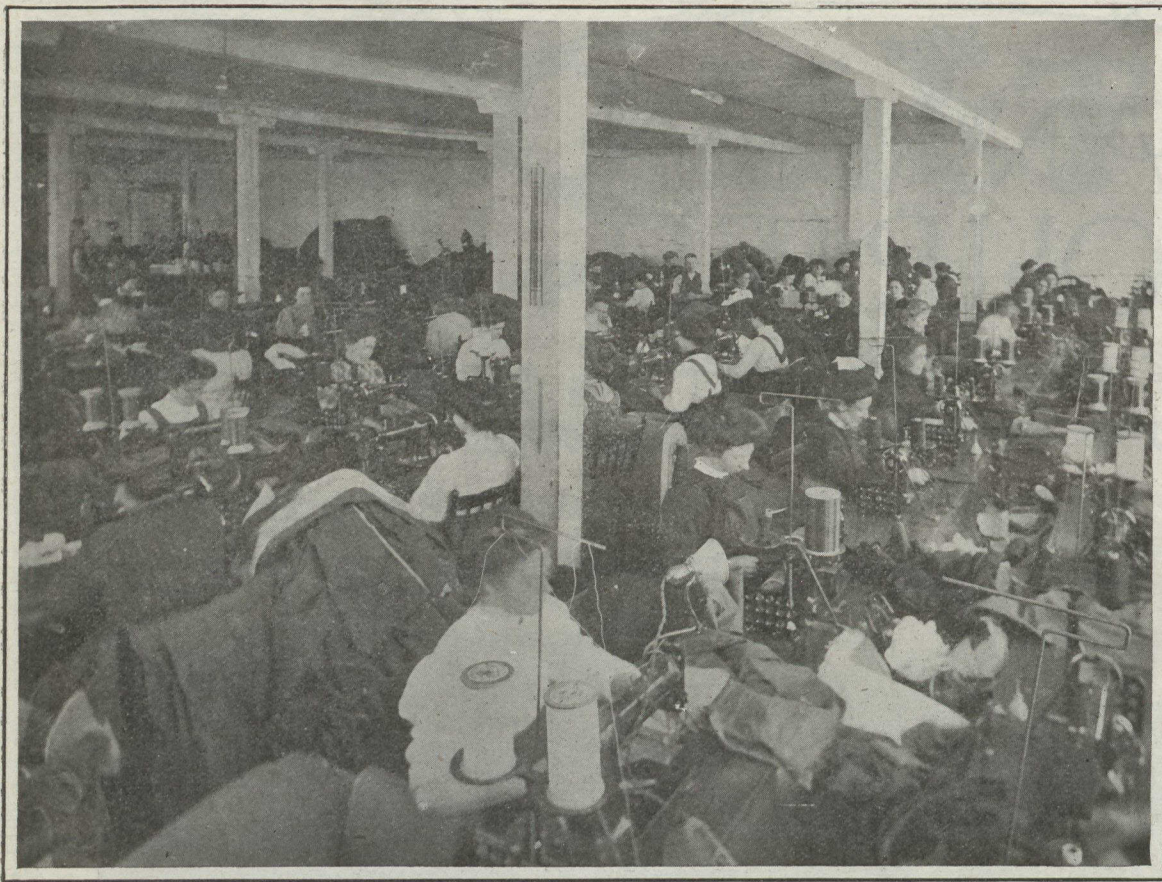




Corner in a White-wear Factory.

The Working Girl's Social Life

Third Article—Poverty in Social Relations; Standards of Canadian Family Life; The Stronger Social Bond

By MARJORY MacMURCHY

THE social relations of the girl wage-earner during the time when she is not at work still remain to be considered. Typical instances have been given of the girl at work, with the limitation that no statistical information is available for Canada. What does she do with herself the rest of the time? Low wages, and less than a living wage, have a good deal to do with the lack of social life which is forced on the girl at work who does not live at home. If she had better wages, she would be happier outside her working hours. It is admitted that in all probability her wages are low because she is untrained and inefficient. It is true that the girl's wages are low because of competition by the girl who lives at home. It is true again that woman as labour has not been studied in the industrial world. In one establishment known to the writer, where the girls are directed by a woman who believes in methods of scientific management, the improvement in the type of girl worker is evident. But low wages are not the only fact in the life of the Canadian girl wage-earner.

If the girl at work does not live at home, she suffers from the lack of home life and companionship. She is dissatisfied and unhappy because she is denied the wholesome amusement and social intercourse which belong to normal existence. One has never known a girl wage-earner living away from home who did not suffer acutely from the fact that she had no way of making friends. Maturer working women understand so well what it means to live away from home that they would rather cut their wages in half and live at home than earn big wages away from home. This longing for home is not pure sentiment. A home is a necessity for a contented working woman. If she has to earn big wages and can do so only away from home, she will stay away; but it is often because her wages are needed to keep up the family home where she does not live herself. This is not saying that there are not exceptional women who can make friendly circles for themselves wherever they may live. But the average working woman away from home has only social acquaintances who can give her little support and sympathy when she needs companionship. Numbers of girls leave home to earn a living with a pleasurable expectation of finding amusement and social enjoyment away from home. They find they have been mistaken, as far as average happiness is concerned, when they exchanged a friendly little world for a world which

is larger but indifferent. Home life is a factor in the health of a working woman. The difference between living at home and boarding is sufficient to account for health and well-being in the case of one working woman and ill-health and failure in the case of another woman equally endowed physically. Sympathy expressed in words and looks, someone to talk to, someone to care what is happening to the individual worker, are as necessary to the health of the average woman as proper food, clothing and rest. The most economical way to live is within the co-partnership of a home. Food is better. There is not an equal expenditure of money in proportion to returns. Relatives spare the working woman tasks which otherwise she would have to perform for herself. These facts are stated here because the girl wage-earner often discovers them to be true only after she has tried living away from home, and for the further reason that the general public may realize what is involved for the girl at work when she does not live at home.

THOUSANDS of Canadian girls employed in New York have discovered that the thrill and enjoyment of a big city are not included in "the long day" of a girl away from home. Probably more Canadian girl wage-earners are employed in Toronto than in any other city. It is estimated that from forty to forty-five thousand girls are at work in the business section of Toronto. Relying on the percentage figured out by the United States Census with regard to women workers—which is certainly too high a per cent. rather than too low—about three thousand five hundred of these girls are living away from home. Work is good, and they are happier girls than if they were idle. But as for recreation and companionship, healthful play and wholesome amusement, where is the girl who lives in a cheap boarding house and earns wages of six dollars a week, and less, to find these things in Toronto? It seems to be true that the average girl wage-earner in Toronto is paid close on a living wage, or less than a living wage. She has to do her utmost to make both ends meet, with little, or nothing, over for enjoyment. Is it true that she longs for quiet, comfortable surroundings where she can eat her meals and talk to someone like herself without incurring consequences which she would like to avoid? Two churches in Toronto are providing down-town lunches for business girls. As soon as such a lunch room is opened, it is filled to capacity. "Capacity" means serving the same tables, filled

with different relays of girls, every half hour between twelve and half past one. It has been said that girls go to work because of love of excitement and pleasure. In connection with one of these church lunch rooms the girls a few weeks ago gave a free supper to one hundred poor children. They are proposing to support a deaconess from the fund formed by ten cents a week collected from each girl who belongs to the luncheon club. It is necessary to form a club for church lunch rooms. Otherwise the lunch room would be crowded beyond its capacity by the girls who would come to lunch. They come because the atmosphere is homelike, and there is quiet and space. The story of the church lunch room for business girls is a fair indication of the pressure which is felt by the girl at work.

IT is useless to propose that girls should not work and that they should stay at home. Generally speaking, a girl works as a wage-earner because she has to; often it is necessary for her to leave home to get work. We do not believe that this will be a bad thing in the end for women of the future and society. It is better for the girl to try to be worth something rather than do nothing and be nothing. But society and industry as organized at present make it harder for the girl at work than for other wage-earners. A better wage would help and can be secured by making the girl a more efficient worker. The study of the girl at work—the scientific and careful study—is the first step towards improving both wages and social environment. If this study is not undertaken by government and universities, such an investigation is the opportunity of women's clubs. Statistics cannot be arrived at over night. They can be collected usefully only by experts. Dr. Annie Marion Maclean, a Canadian woman who is Professor of Sociology in Adelphi College, Brooklyn, conducted an inquiry into the wages of working women in the United States for the Young Women's Christian Association of the United States. Undoubtedly, Dr. Maclean would be delighted to be retained either by a woman's club or a Canadian University or the Commission for Conservation to advise in such work for Canadian working women. There is a Canadian Business Woman's Club in Toronto, members of which must possess the knowledge and enthusiasm required to help in compiling statistics of a living wage. To get these statistics it is necessary to find a number of women wage-earners who are willing to keep account of what they spend. Initiative is necessary. Who will give the initiative? There must be some women's club in every Canadian city which can at least undertake an inquiry into the number of girls in that city who are paid less than \$300 a year. At the same time let the women's club find out whether the girl with \$300 a year—or less—lives at home or boards away from home. This information will strike at the root of the difficulty, immediately and in the simplest way. If the women's clubs of Canada are in earnest—some of them undoubtedly are—they can do this work for girls, and will help to raise the standard of Canadian civilization.

It may be said that a great deal is being done already for the girl who works. The Young Women's Christian Association, activities of churches, and of such organizations as the Girl Guides, will be cited as efforts to help working girls which have been successful. These are alleviations. They are not cures. They reach as many girls as they can. They do not help every girl. They do not increase the efficiency of the girl worker nor better her wages. They do help to some extent in social companionship, and in making it possible for a girl to live while she learns a trade. These good agencies are the result of kindness. What is needed from the public, more than kindness, is commonsense and justice and business efficiency. What is needed socially is a deeper sense of the unity of the family and outside of family life a stronger social bond. What is needed, perhaps especially, is the recognition, principally by women at home, that the standards of Canadian family life do not in every respect compare favourably with family life in Great Britain and the United States, naming countries with which we will be compared in arriving at standards of civilization.

Fortunately, it is true that everything which increases the welfare of the community improves the woman wage-earner's position. Better housing affects every worker. Town planning of the highest type will eventually tend to gather people into small communities, parts of the great community of a city. The garden suburbs of England show how such communities have a life of their own, social and recreative, with music, and sports and amusements in common. There old people live near the families of their children, in apartments of their own if this is more convenient. There the sick