

WOMEN'S
WORK AND
WAGES

BY

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A PHASE OF LIFE IN
AN INDUSTRIAL CITY

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ILLUSTRATED

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THIS WORK
IS DEDICATED TO
MRS. EDWARD CADBURY,
WHOSE SYMPATHY, HELP, AND CRITICISM
THE AUTHORS GRATEFULLY
ACKNOWLEDGE

BIRMINGHAM

Thou mighty city ! stretching toil-worn hands
To grasp the sweet green pastures at thy sides ;
Defiling with thy breath the pleasant lands,
Building great factories, filled with surging tides
Of men and women, toiling for their bread ;
What dost thou gain by all this strife for gold ?
Spite of thy wealth, the grey and skull-like head
Of Poverty is seen within thy fold :
The "Workshop of the World" men call thy name,
And thou art proud to own thy title great ;
Be heedful lest thy wealth become thy shame,
Scarr'd by the sin and misery in thy gate.
Though "Forward" be the watchword of thy town,
"Upward" would be its Glory and its Crown.

ALICE D. BRAHAM.

PREFACE TO THIRD IMPRESSION

THE authors take the opportunity of the issue of a second edition to express their gratification at the attention that is now being given to the economic and industrial position of women. At the present time a Select Committee of the House of Commons has, in the terms of the reference, been "appointed to consider and report upon the conditions of labour in trades in which Home Work is prevalent, and the proposals, including those for the establishment of Wages Boards and the licensing of Work Places, which have been made for the remedying of existing abuses." The Wages Boards Bill introduced into the House of Commons has passed its second reading without a division of the House, and has been referred to this Committee, and it is significant to note that public opinion has so far advanced on these matters that the Bill, as presented to the House of Commons, differs from the former Bill (given in Appendix IV. to this book) in that it contains clauses making it compulsory for Wages

8 PREFACE TO THIRD IMPRESSION

Boards to be appointed in the trades of "tailoring, dressmaking, and the making, altering, trimming, finishing, and repairing of shirts." A Commissioner has also been sent by the Government to the Australasian Colonies to report upon the administration and results of legislation governing wages in these colonies.

The following errors should be noted : On page 23, line 11 should read "in a report prepared for the use of the British Association," &c. ; on page 26, line 9, Miss A. *Harrison* should be read instead of "Hutchinson"; and on page 65, line 23, *Departmental Committee* should be read instead of Royal Commission."

March. 1908.

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INTRODUCTION

THERE is a growing demand at the present time for a scientific method by which we may attack what is called, more or less vaguely, the Social Problem, and more and more reformers and philanthropists see that before any lasting advance on the lines of "What ought to be" can be made, we must have a clear and systematised knowledge of "What is." Amongst the regions that are being explored is the field of Women's Work and Wages. Till the last few years, in their attempt to formulate a scientific explanation of the economic position of working women and the attendant complex problems, and also in their attempt to point out in what direction reformers and philanthropists could best work toward the amelioration of the many undoubted abuses connected with women's work, economists have felt hampered because so little has been done by investigators in this important branch of our industrial system, and therefore accurate knowledge of the actual facts has largely been absent.

The present inquiry has aimed at systematising

and offering in a comprehensive form, for the purposes of the general reader and the social worker amongst women, the valuable work done recently by various writers and associations, and to this end the present writers have taken full and free advantage of the work done by others in this field.

At the same time a great deal of original investigation, extending over a period of three and a half years, has been done, and we offer no conclusions except those which our own inquiry bears out. We have also entered fields never before explored as far as we know, and some old phases of the question are looked at from a new point of view.

As will be seen in the following pages, the investigators have endeavoured—

1. In one large city to give a complete survey of the conditions under which women are earning their livelihood at the beginning of the twentieth century ;
2. To provide some definite standard of comparison so that future investigators may be able to ascertain what progress has been made toward the improvement of these conditions ;
3. To ascertain to what extent the present industrial and social conditions are helping forward or retarding the physical, mental, and moral condition of the workers ; and
4. To indicate upon what lines they think reformers will obtain the best results in their attempt to raise and brighten the lives of those who are the future mothers of our race.

The method of work has been “intensive,” an attempt being made to investigate the conditions

holding in the one city of Birmingham. This city has peculiar difficulties as well as special interest owing to the fact that it has a large number of trades divided as a rule amongst very many small firms, and so is different from a textile town with a staple trade in the hands of a limited number of large firms.

The writers have taken every precaution to make the results offered accurate, and above all impartial, and are not concerned to support any particular theory. The training and outlook of the three investigators told for an impartial treatment. One writer has been for several years in the position of a managing director of a firm employing between two and three thousand girls, this position giving him exceptional opportunities of becoming intimately associated with every phase of their work, and of experimenting with some of the practical problems which are discussed in the following pages. He has also become acquainted with the workers' point of view by being directly associated with several movements for the social betterment of working men. Another writer worked as a factory hand from ten years of age until he went to Glasgow University for six years' training, at the end of which time he graduated with First Class Honours in Economic Science. This writer was also Warden of Glasgow University Settlement, and has had a long experience in practical social work amongst working men and women. The third writer has been intimately associated with Girls' Clubs, has acted as a school manager in London, and has conducted for the

Board of Education inquiries into the provision of technical education for girls at home and abroad.

We have obtained information chiefly from four sources :—

1. Personal interviews with upwards of six thousand working women ;
2. Interviews with upwards of four hundred Trade Union secretaries, managers, and foremen of works employing women ;
3. Interviews with employers ; and
4. Interviews and correspondence with the members and officers of girls' clubs and Girls' Friendly Society branches, and interviews with clergymen, school attendance officers, and with the members of various philanthropic agencies ; also by the help of some well-known social workers in Birmingham.

The evidence thus collected has been carefully sifted and checked.

The first stage of the work was beset with difficulties, and as far as we know this is the first time that information has been so largely gained from the workers themselves. The girls are naturally averse to revealing their private affairs, and often even a girl's mother has no definite knowledge of the exact wages earned by the girl. The girls were also nervous lest through giving information they should get into trouble with their employers. They were often suspicious as to the motives of the inquirer. After a most careful explanation of the aim of the investigator one would hear such remarks as, "What cheek to ask us what we earn." "They are going to take our answers to the masters to get our wages lowered."

If reserve and suspicion could be broken down there was no further trouble. It was generally found that the girls could not be induced to answer questions on the ground of any possible advantage to themselves, as the almost invariable answer was, if too polite to refuse abruptly, "I am quite satisfied, thank you." When it was made clear that a knowledge of these satisfactory conditions might benefit other poorer and less fortunate girls they were often ready to give information.

Of course there is often the risk of deception or inaccuracy, but if the inquiry be made on a sufficiently broad basis the answers given by different girls and at different times check each other, and we find that our cards show very little variation. Then we had the further check of information got from the other sources.

The work is not so complete as we hoped to make it, but it was thought advisable to issue the results without further delay. If it helps to systematise the ideas of a few readers, and indicates the problems arising from the present conditions of women's work and wages, the writers will consider their time well spent.

