

# Every Girl Ought to Be at Work for Good Wages.

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*By Mary Kenney O'Sullivan.*

**T**HE problem of the working girl who lives at home is not only an economic one but is a basic problem of life, in which the individual pays through service the debt she owes society. The working girls who live at home may be divided roughly into two groups—the wage-earning girl whose father's pay is too small to even keep the household together without the earnings of his children, and, secondly, the girl whose earnings pay for her board and help to give her a great many things which her father could not afford.

To the first group belong the great majority of our working girls. They are the daughters of men in the unskilled trades, who never earn a living wage, or of men whose wages are high, but only seasonal. They are the girls who leave school at 14, who go to work in an unskilled trade, such as candy or box making, because the more skilled industries do not take them so young. Unfortunately, owing to the lack of opportunity to get further training, many of them remain in these low paid trades.

The second group includes the highest paid wage worker and the salaried woman. These are stenographers, some girls in department stores, teachers, nurses, etc. Like the others, these women work because they must; but, unlike their sisters in industry, they are able to support themselves and at the same time afford some recreation and the clothing fitted to their position. Their wage gives them a chance to live,

while the wage of the first group only keeps the wolf from the door.

It is often objected that some of these women do not need to work and that the expenses, such as laundry and cooking, are not counterbalanced by what they contribute to the family budget. The home of the average wage-earning man contains from three to five rooms. The housework is done by the wife and mother, and therefore the daughter's help is not needed, but her economic or earning power is necessary, because if it were withdrawn the home could not be kept up. In the case of the girl whose father earns a better wage, the objection does not hold. Unless she works for very small pay she is always able to have a margin outside her regular expenses which her father's income would not permit.

We must also look at the question from the point of view of the woman herself. Housework is confining and monotonous and—unless one has a special liking for it—very hard. Why should she deny herself work that is congenial, that furthers her own development, enables her to do good in the world and makes her independent when her home breaks up?

The most serious economic consequence of the woman at home looking for a job is not the fact that she will overcrowd the market, but that she will keep wages down. As her income is coupled with that of her father and her brothers and sisters, she can live much more cheaply than the girl who has no home and has to pay for rent, light and fuel as well as board. The former is

too often contented to be underpaid, and therefore to make life very hard for the latter.

This does not mean, however, that she should keep her services out of the market, but rather that she should demand wages according to the quality of her job and not according to her father's income. She, too, is the very one who ought to bear the burden in the struggle for a living wage, for it would lie less heavily on her shoulders than on the shoulders of the girl who is alone in the world. She must realize that underpaid work is wrong under any circumstances. She is often called the "pin-money" worker, and she causes great harm, often not realizing it, or too selfish to understand what social justice means. But even social injustice is better than social degeneration. It is the law of nature that all must work, and it is only by returning some service to the world that we can maintain our self-respect.

Nor is it true that the working girl tends to break up the family. On the contrary, she helps to keep it together. Her income often helps to tide the family over a financial crisis when the father is out of work or when doctors' bills have to be paid. By the broadening of her own outlook through her touch with the world she draws the family to higher ideals. When there is a division in the family it is usually rather because the parents have failed to realize the viewpoint of the younger generation than because the young people have ceased to respect them.