

## WOMAN'S HOMEWORK IN RELATION TO COMFORT, CHARACTER, AND HEALTH.

By Miss NORA VYNNE.

### ABSTRACT.\*

**A**MONG the homeworkers the person so often slightly alluded to as "that inevitable poor widow," *i.e.*, the woman who is the necessary bread-winner of the family, is the rule and by no means the exception. In some eighteen places visited, and from the evidence taken from over 1,000 women, very few cases were found of women working from any other reason than absolute necessity.

The following towns were visited:—Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Cradley, Cradley Heath and Old Mill, Nottingham, Leicester, Yeovil, Earls Barton, Luton, and various villages and townships in Oxford, Somerset, and Buckinghamshire.

The trades investigated included:—Tailoring, glove-making, woollen gloves and hosiery, file-cutting, nail and chain-making, lace-making, shoe-making, and straw-plaiting.

The method followed was to call at houses, and afterwards to invite workers to a meeting. No statements made by individuals are quoted, or in any way utilised, which were not put to the public meetings and confirmed.

Two extremely important points were urged by every woman visited, and by the unanimous voice of every meeting.

When work is not sweated, it was declared emphatically that the rate of pay was invariably the same for home-work and factory-work of the same class. When the amount earned was smaller than is earned in a factory, it is (*a*) because the workers find it pays them better not to work full time; (*b*) because the less skilled work is put out and the better paid done in the factory; (*c*) because the work is sweated, *i.e.*, not given to the women direct.

"Sweating," where it exists, is due to separate and preventable causes, and is by no means a necessary consequence of home-work. In towns or

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\* The facts upon which the paper was based will be found in "The Report of the Inquiry into the Conditions of Homework in the Provinces," issued by the Freedom of Labour Defence, 48, Buckingham Palace Road, London, S.W.

villages where the outside causes did not directly tend to foster sweating, I found no trace of it.

The sanitary authorities in every town visited testified that, taking the average, home-workers maintained a much higher standard of cleanliness and comfort in their homes than factory-workers, or even women who did not work at all as bread-winners.

It was a curious comment on the theory that the home-worker is a careless housewife, that a meeting having been held, at a time conflicting with the men's tea hour, all the married women present left in the middle of the meeting to "get their husbands' tea ready," leaving, however, expressions of sympathy and their desire to support the object of the meeting, with their unmarried friends.

#### TAILORING IN LEEDS AND WINTERBOURNE.

The tailoring trade shows home-work at its worst and at its best. These conditions are governed by causes entirely separate from the nature of the work itself.

Tailoring in Bristol was seen at its best. The majority of workers lived outside the town in healthy villages, the work being sent out to them in carts. There were no complaints of sweating. In Leeds it was less satisfactory, as the local system of house letting gives great facilities for sweating; in Manchester and Liverpool there were fewer complaints of sweating, but many of bad trade and over competition.

Glove making in Yeovil and the surrounding villages was proved to be an exceptionally prosperous and pleasant calling. In the Oxfordshire villages it was less prosperous, but the women declared that they would be much worse off without it. The woollen glove and hosiery work in Leicester, and lace work in Nottingham, are for the most part so easy that it takes next to no learning; anyone can do it. The pay is therefore small. Old people can, however, keep themselves out of the workhouse by it; the skilled labour is, however, better paid. In the shoe trade at Nottingham only the cheaper kinds of work are given out. The straw plaiting at Luton only occupies a few months out of the year. The greater part of the straw is prepared in Japan, and finished and made up into hats in England.

Summary of reasons given for preferring home-work to factory work:—

1. It is more profitable. "One shilling earned at home is worth three earned in a factory." "What you earn at home you earn for yourself; what you earn in a factory you've got to pay away."

Many women declared, "If we go to a factory we should have to pay

some one else to do our washing. We'd have to pay some one to do our shopping, and then it would not be done as well as if we did it ourselves." "We don't want to lock the children out in the streets, as some do, while we are at the factory." "We must either do that or pay 3s. 6d. each a week to have them taken care of."

This part statement seemed so startling that I should scarcely venture to quote it had it not been confirmed at a large meeting, and afterwards at meetings at Liverpool, Manchester, and Bristol.

2. "You can look after your children, give them their meals comfortably, see they get to school in time, and keep them out of the streets. It does not expose the young girls to the temptations of factory life."

3. "It is less wearing to the health; you can stop when you want rest; you needn't get up at a fixed hour every morning, or be out in all weathers."

4. "If you work at home you can teach your children a trade, and that saves the expense of apprenticing them."

5. "I couldn't stand the roughness and coarseness of factory life." (Many Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, and Leicester hosiery workers, &c.)

6. "I couldn't stand the noise of a factory." (Very many women in various trades.)

7. "I'm too old to get taken in a factory, but I can keep myself at home." (Very many women in various trades.)

8. "It don't take me long to clean my house, and when I have done my housework and cleaned myself, why shouldn't I sit down to my fancy-work like a lady?" (A Sheffield burnisher.)

9. "No, I don't need it; my husband's in work, but my mother's paralysed and she lives with us, and I don't wish my mother to be a burden on my husband." (A Leeds tailoress.)

10. "Even if you have a good husband, you've a right to help him to get on." "One shilling of your own earnings is worth three of your husband's." "Your husband thinks more of you when you're a bit independent of him." (Nail and chain makers.)

11. "Yes, my husband's in work now, but he was out of work ten weeks last year, and I do a little work to keep my name on the books, so that another time if I really want work I can get it." (Leeds tailoress.)

The point to be noted in the above reasons is the shrinking of so many women from strain and hurry, from the anxiety of early train catching and the exposure to weather, the choice between running lest the door be shut and waiting in the wet till it be opened; the difference between working up to some one else's standard of speed, lest dismissal in favour

of a quicker worker should result, and working according to your own strength; and, worse than all, the shrinking from noise.

Homework as homework has many advantages and no disadvantages, except that when outside causes give him special facilities, the sweater can directly fasten himself on the individual homeworker, whereas he can only lower the general rate of factory payments; but it is obvious that the remedy for this is to attack the sweater, not the homeworker.

[*For Discussion on this Paper, see page 751.*]

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## A BILL TO REGULATE HOMEWORK.

By Miss CLEMENTINA BLACK,  
*Vice-President of the Women's Industrial Council, London.*

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### ABSTRACT.

A BILL for the regulation of homework has been drawn up, after careful investigation and consideration, by the Legal Committee of the Women's Industrial Council (London), in conjunction with the Glasgow Council for Women's Trades.

The provisions of the Bill apply equally to male and to female workers at home.

It does not aim at the abolition of homework, but at the suppression of certain evil conditions sometimes—by women, always—associated with homework.

It would prohibit the carrying on of any process of manufacture in dwelling-rooms that fall below a certain standard of cleanliness and airiness, as the law already prohibits such processes in insanitary factories.

The method proposed is to issue a certificate or licence, without the production of which by the worker, it shall be unlawful for an employer to give out work to be done off his own premises. The certificate to be applied for by the worker, issued by the Inspector of Factories, and to authorise its holder to take work for execution upon specified and duly inspected premises. Provision is made for the issue of interim licences pending inspection. Each certificate to be of specified duration, and renewable.