

St. Tammany Farmer

March 15, 1913

WHAT IT COST A WEEK FOR GIRL TO LIVE

This is the Question that Seems to be Giving the Commission Trouble.

IS CRIME DUE TO POOR WAGES?

Employers Seem to Believe Eight Dollars Sufficient For Minimum Wages

Chicago, March 15.—W. C. Thorne, vice president of Montgomery, Ward & Co., a mail order house, told the Vice Commission today that a girl "adrift" can live on \$8 a week, thus:

Room rent, \$3; Breakfast (coffee and rolls), 40 cents; Luncheons, 90 cents; Dinners, \$1.40; Carfare, 60 cents; Clothing and incidentals, \$1.70.

The witness gave the foregoing statement to show that the commission's idea that there should be a minimum wage scale for women of \$12 a week is too high.

Wanted Waste Nickel. The statement fails to account for a surplus of five cents, but this was not explained, and Senator Jaul remarked that the girl probably spent it frivolously.

The witnesses today, in addition to Thorne, were James Simpson, George Lytton, John Beach, John T. Pirie, B. J. Lehmann, Henry C. Schwab, Albert Ellinger, all representing department stores employing thousands of girls and women.

Senator Jaul told Thorne that girl after girl had been on the stand and testified to having "gone wrong" because they could not make a living otherwise.

"We want you merchants to jump in and help us stop that sort of thing," said Senator Jaul. "I tell you, it's an awful situation when girl after girl—"

"Oh, yes, but for the most part I don't believe those yarns," interrupted the witness.

Earns Millions. The earnings of Montgomery, Ward & Co. for the last fiscal year were \$2,370,000, Thorne said, and Jaul having calculated that the expenditure of \$75,000 a year would raise the salaries of the \$8, \$6 and \$7 girls to \$10, asked if the witness did not think the money might be well spent in that way.

"But," came the reply, "we are already spending that much in benefits, old age pensions and the like. We look after the welfare of our employees very closely, and if this commission can show us where we fall we'll remedy the defect. If it can be shown that our girls need more money, they shall have it, although I think \$8 is a good minimum."

Thorne said, in his opinion, a minimum wage scale of \$12 a week for women would drive half the factories out of Illinois and one half the women their jobs.

"The law wouldn't bother us much, but the factories would feel it and they would hire men instead of women if they had to pay \$12, because they can get more work out of the men," he said.

The other witnesses readily gave details of their pay-scales, but they were united in declining to state the profits of their respective firms.

Dem. Colleagues. Lieut. Gov. Barrett O'Hara, chairman of the commission, asked if word had been passed among members of the State Retailers Association not to disclose profits, but the witness denied collusion. They were agreed, too, that \$8 a week was about the right minimum on which a woman can support herself.

"I believe immorality is a static of mind," declared George Beach of Siegel, Cooper & Co. Of the 1250 girls employed in his store, Mr. Beach thought only a small percentage could be persuaded to go the "correct way."

Beach did not view the wage system with any alarm. "Promotion is very rapid in the State street stores," he remarked. "The women who come to us this year at \$6, for instance, in two years very readily may be earning \$15 a week. The job relation goes to learners and development is rapid."

Asked if Siegel, Cooper & Co. could pay a minimum scale of \$12, Beach said that they could for skilled services, but not for unskilled.

commission that Marshall Field & Co. well could subscribe to any minimum wage scale law for women which might be adopted.

"It is inevitable," he said, "that any increase would be paid by the public."

Simpson was asked whether the Field Company could raise the minimum wage of women to \$5 a day without raising prices of goods to the consumer.

It could be done, he said, and without materially affecting the profits of the firm.

George Lytton, vice president of "The Hub," next faced the commission. Chairman O'Hara explained that the commission desired to ascertain the relation of low wages to immorality among women.

The Hub employs 150 women, none of whom receives less than \$6.50 a week.

Favors Good Wages. "Do you have to charge more for clothing than others because of higher wages?" asked Chairman O'Hara.

"Oh, no. Do you believe it is good policy to pay good wages?" "Certainly."

There are 104 women at "The Hub" receiving \$6.50.

It has been estimated that it costs eight or nine dollars to maintain a young woman," said Senator Jaul. "Where does the difference come from?"

"They live at home and it comes from the parents."

"Then you take all of a girl's time and skill and expect her parents to help pay her wages?" pursued Jaul.

"We have been considering placing the minimum wage at \$8."

Witness said he had devoted much time to the wage question as it affects women, and that a woman can live on \$8 a week. He promised to give the commission a schedule of the expenses of a working girl.

"What we want," said Senator Jaul, "is what she must spend. Never mind the pleasures. I suppose when we make a law we'll have to add a dollar or two for recreation and the like."

Lytton was emphatic in stating his concern could well afford a minimum of \$2 a day. He said all big corporations could do so.

Witness pointed out, as did Mr. Simpson at a previous session, that an increase of the minimum wage meant an increase all along the line.

The girls already getting \$12 must be advanced to \$15; the \$15 girls to \$20 and so on. Employees must be paid according to their comparative abilities.

Other States Interested. Lieut. Gov. Barrett O'Hara has received communications from the Governors of Wisconsin, Iowa, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio, informing him that they will include in next messages to their Legislatures recommendations for the same plenary power as the Illinois body.

"The movement promises to develop into the most important stand against white slavery that ever has been taken," said Mr. O'Hara today.

Each commission would investigate the conditions in its own State as ours is doing, but there would be joint sessions and conferences; and the records of each body would be available to all of the others."

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CHARLES T. BRADLEY, THOMAS F. PARKER, August 26, 1912.

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