

poor man. I never did until I was poor myself."

"Did you want to tell me something about the department stores," I asked, anxious to change the subject.

"No, I just wanted to talk about myself. I am in a terrible hole and I don't know how to get out of it. I am so worried I can not sleep and somehow I thought you might help me, or that I would feel better by talking to you."

"You see," she continued, as I did not answer her, "when my father died a little less than a year ago, and just eight months after mother's death, he left me an insurance of a thousand dollars, and nothing else. Our home and what other assets he had went to the creditors.

"And out of that thousand dollars I had to pay his doctor bill and funeral expenses. I had eight hundred dollars left."

"Somehow when the people at home knew I wasn't an heiress they were unfriendly, so I left immediately and came to Chicago.

"I realized that I couldn't live long on that money and I did try to perfect myself in some special way.

"I took a course in shorthand and typewriting and I tried hard enough to learn. They kept me in the school six months, but I heard so many tales of the big salary I would get when working that I didn't economize, though I was living in a very different manner than when at home.

"At the end of the six months, when I should have graduated, the teacher told me I hadn't tried to learn, that I would never be a competent stenographer, and they didn't feel they should take my money any longer.

"I knew I had tried, but the system was so complicated and I could not read what I had written.

"I was almost crazy that day. I bought some laudanum, pretending I wanted it for a toothache, and locked

myself in my room. But it takes too much courage to kill oneself—I just couldn't do it.

"The next day I went down to the different State street stores, and, because I have good style and am fairly pretty, I got a position as saleslady in the millinery department at —'s. They pay me \$7 a week.

"Do you know what it costs me just to exist?" she asked with a vehemence that showed the strain she was under. I haven't anything worth while; I eat ten-cent breakfasts; I get a fifteen-cent lunch and a thirty-cent table d'hôte dinner.

"This room costs me three dollars a week and my landlady forever reminds me how cheap it is. I couldn't live in anything smaller, and I couldn't share a room with some girl with whom I had nothing in common, so altogether it costs me between \$11.50 and \$12 a week just to keep my heart beating.

"And that doesn't include the forty-dollar gown I bought for opening week and have not used since.

"Figure it up," she said harshly. "I have forty dollars left of my father's money and I am earning \$4.50 less than I spend. That gives me about nine weeks of existence—and then what?"

I vainly tried to answer her. Even if I could help her with stenography, beginners only get \$7. The cheaper way of existing by living in so-called philanthropic homes was a method I would not adopt myself, so could not recommend to another.

She is a girl afraid to kill herself, afraid to starve to death and, I believe, too proud to take the third alternative—the "easiest way."

I am afraid that only the vice commission can answer this girl's question, and they must answer it by a \$12 minimum wage, not the \$8 that the greedy employers are endeavoring to convince them a girl may live on.

In the meantime—well?