

THE FAMILY IN A TYPICAL MILL TOWN.

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The effect of our industrial system on family life is in most cities rendered indefinite by the presence of complicating factors. In a small community, however, which is dependent on a single industry, the factors of the problem are simplified, and therefore the relation is clearer and the conclusions are more obvious.

For this reason I venture to offer a very simple and concrete description of the type of family and the conditions of family life in a steel-mill town, believing that it may serve at least as an illustration for this afternoon's discussion. The facts offered are the result of a six months' investigation as to the cost of living in Homestead, and are, I believe, true in the main of the steel towns of the Pittsburgh district.

When in 1881 Klomans started to build a small steel mill, he located it in a village seven miles from Pittsburgh, appropriately enough called Homestead. The industrial development of the city had seemed too remote to affect it. But the mill became a part of the United States Steel Corporation and is now the largest steel plant in the world, while the village, which has grown with it, now has a population of about 25,000. Not only did the initial impulse of the town's growth come from the mill, but throughout, the industry has, for two reasons, definitely determined Homestead's development; one, that as there is no other considerable industry in the town the men are dependent for occupation on the mill; the other, that since the strike of 1892, when the power of the Amalga-

mated Association came to an end, the corporation has, by its decisions as to wages and hours of labor, determined, practically without hindrance, the conditions under which the men live. Because of these two factors we may consider that the social and economic institutions of Homestead are typical of those which a powerful, organized industry is likely to develop: a statement limited by the fact that conditions would be very different in a community where the prevailing industry was of another type.

The conditions to be discussed are simplified by a marked homogeneity of type in the families of Homestead, in itself a result of the industrial situation. Marked distinctions of wealth are totally absent. Two groups do indeed exist with different standards and no common interests,—the Slavs, and the English-speaking workers,—but this distinction is of race rather than of wealth. The Slavs are usually day laborers, while the majority of the English-speaking men are skilled or semi-skilled; but in spite of these differences both groups are wage earners. Even the number of professional men is not as large as in a town farther from the city, while the owners of the mill—the stockholders—scattered throughout the country, knowing their property only as a source of dividends, have no part or interest in the town's development. As a result, this town of workingmen has not the lack of mutual understanding resulting from great differences in wealth and standards, but neither has it the stimulus which comes from the presence and leadership of men of education and leisure. What the town offers is what the working people have created for themselves under the conditions imposed by the industry.

From the standpoint of family development, probably the most significant fact about the town is that it offers

work for men only. Aside from the steel mill and one machine shop, the only work in the town is in providing for the needs of the workers, with but chance work for women. As Pittsburgh is a forty-five minutes' car ride distant, the work it offers is not easily available. The wage in the mill, moreover, though by no means abundant, is fair and steady. The laborer earns at a minimum rate of 16½ cents an hour, \$1.65 a day, while the semi-skilled or skilled workers earn from \$2 to \$4, and occasionally as high as \$5 or \$6 a day.

The work is, in addition, regular. From the panic of 1893 to that of 1907 I am told that the mill was not shut down for a single day. The day men, therefore, who are paid their full wage unless the mill actually closes, have a steady income the year round, except in periods of industrial depression. The tonnage men, who are paid according to output, do feel even a temporary cutting down of orders, but, as they are the ones who ordinarily receive the highest pay, the occasional lessening of their wage is not so disastrous.

As a result of these factors, the town in general seems to have adopted the position that the women should stay at home, and by good housekeeping make the money go a long way, rather than go out to work and earn a little more. This is shown concretely in the incomes of those families whose budgets were secured for the investigation. Among the English-speaking people the husbands and sons contributed practically the entire income, 92.8 per cent among the native whites and 94.6 per cent among the English speaking Europeans. There was no income from the work of women unless one would so consider what was received from lodgers. This constituted 4.6 per cent of the total income in the European group and 2.7 per cent among the native white.

We find, then, that as a result of the kind of work offered the town consists of a group of workingmen's families in which the man is the breadwinner. The effect of the industrial situation is further shown in the work of the children. The girls show little more tendency than their mothers to become wage earners. In the thirty-eight English-speaking families there were fifteen girls over fourteen, not one of whom was at work. Four were in the high school, the remainder at home helping with the housework. While this is probably an extreme figure, as some girls in Homestead do go to work in stores or offices, it reveals a general feeling in the town that "The home is woman's sphere." While one may question whether from the standpoint of the present the additional income from the girl's wages would not add more to the comfort of the family than her help in the household, from my acquaintance with housekeepers of all sorts I am convinced that good home training is invaluable in preparing girls for their own homes later. The four champion housekeepers of my acquaintance were the daughters of Pennsylvania farmers. One of them, when I expressed my surprise at how much more she had accomplished than others with the same income, gave as the reason for her success that girls who had been in stores or factories had no training in management and were quite helpless when they faced a housekeeper's problems.

The situation, as far as the sons is concerned, is somewhat different. Fifteen of the seventeen boys over fourteen were at work contributing, among the whites 9.6 per cent, and among the English-speaking Europeans 18 per cent of the total income. Though the other two boys were still in the high school, we find on the whole a marked absence of interest in academic or even in technical training for these sons. As the daughters, instead

of learning trades, are at home becoming practical housekeepers under their mothers' direction, so the sons, following in their fathers' footsteps, are entering directly into the practical work of the mill to get there the training for future success. That the best paid men in the mill, such as rollers and heaters, have secured their jobs through experience in the mill rather than through outside training, has doubtless much to do with this attitude. Through the influence of the fathers, the boys sometimes go into the mechanical department, or get what are known as pencil jobs, where the work is light and apparently more gentlemanly, but where the pay is seldom so high. Usually, however, they begin in the regular boy's work, as messenger boys in the yards, or door openers. Though this gives no special training for the future, as the line of promotion is not usually open, a boy has a good chance of becoming at least a semi-skilled workman on fair pay. Promotion is sometimes unduly rapid, however, so that boys of sixteen or eighteen are earning men's wages, with little chance of further promotion. One woman, who regretted that her son had not learned a trade, said that he was unwilling to go through a long apprenticeship when in the mill he could earn good pay at once. In spite of the fact that because of long hours and the danger from accident women often wish their sons to take some other work, they usually do go into the mill. This means that, as for some years they stay at home and contribute their share to the family income, they create a period of economic prosperity. The family is at this time often able to make extra provision for the future, as, for instance, buying a house.

We find, then, that the industry has by its very nature helped to create a normal type of family life. But in those factors where it has a choice open to it, such as wages

and hours, has it by its decisions made possible for these families a genuine home life, a carrying out of their ideals for themselves? For two facts must be considered in any study of standards of living,—one the limitations or opportunities from without, which the family cannot affect, the other those family ideals, sometimes limited in themselves, sometimes hampered by outside forces, which are continually struggling toward realization. How far are Homestead's ideals realizable on the pay the mill offers?

It is impossible in the limits of this discussion to consider at all in detail the results of the budget investigation in Homestead. Figures are too complicated without elaborate explanations. A few facts, however, may be used in this general discussion.

To my mind the fundamental fact brought out by the investigation was that the question of expenditure is always one of choices, of doing without some things in order to get others. This may seem axiomatic, but when applied to a wage of less than \$12 a week it expresses pretty much the whole problem of life. Do we find that in order to carry out ideals of home life, such as having an attractive house, making due provision for the future, or buying a house, certain absolute essentials must be gone without? Any study of the budgets of families receiving less than \$12 a week, or even those earning from \$12 to \$15, demonstrates very clearly that this is the case. As the unskilled men who earn \$10 and \$12 a week compose 58 per cent of the employees, it is worth while to consider briefly the problem which this large percentage of Homestead's population is facing.

To indicate its extent I will give the average expenses of forty families with an income of less than \$12 a week. Of a total expenditure of \$530 a year, \$241 goes for food, \$103 for rent, \$50 for clothing, \$18 for furniture, \$25

for fuel, \$11 for medical care, and \$13 for tobacco and liquor. In addition, an average of \$38 was spent annually for insurance, leaving but \$31 a year for amusements of all sorts, church expenses, savings, and the necessary sundries. Now, obviously no one of these items is adequate, to say nothing of being superabundant. Rent, for example, at \$2 a week provides only a two-room tenement, and that without water or toilet in the house. Food at \$4.64 a week would mean for a family of five only twenty cents a day, two cents a day less than Professor Chittenden estimates as absolutely essential in New York. Fifty dollars for clothing is just one-half the sum Mr. Chapin gives as necessary. The tobacco and liquor item, which is especially large among the Slavs, could of course be cut with profit, but in no other way can that pitiable small sum of \$31 be increased. Yet from that sum savings must come if there are to be any.

The different nationalities meet this problem in varying ways, according to their ideals. Among the native white families a comfortable house is an essential proof of respectability. Consequently, we find that they spend for rent 21.2 per cent, as against 16.4 per cent among the Slavs. On the other hand, the Slav spends 54.3 per cent for food, while the native white spend but 44.7 per cent. That is, the Slavic family will have enough food anyway, while the American demands a big enough house. Inadequate food or bad housing alike endanger physical efficiency, while with overcrowding any semblance of home life becomes impossible. In neither group is there any margin for amusements.

It is not a question of good management. The cleverest housekeeper I know was doing marvelously on \$14 a week, and the following statement of her average expenditure for eight weeks shows how she did it: Food,

\$7.05; clothing \$0.57; household expenses, \$0.59; rent, \$2.50; insurance and lodge dues, \$0.65; church and charity, \$0.09; recreation and spending money, \$0.03; doctor \$1.46; sundries \$0.35. Though, as you may see, she was keeping the unessential elements of expenditure at their lowest point, her food supply was still quite inadequate. I found by a rough estimate that it was deficient about 20 per cent in both proteids and calories. The budget revealed a wise choice of foods aside from a possibly extravagant expenditure for fresh fruit and vegetables. If a skillful woman of Pennsylvania Dutch stock cannot manage on this wage, what can be expected of the average housekeeper?

The necessity of facing these problems three times a day has its effect also on the overtaxed mother. One woman, who on an income of from \$2 to \$3 a day was providing for five children, had bought a small farm and was carrying heavy insurance. In order to accomplish this, she told me, she must not spend even five cents for a visit to the nickleodeon. When she described to me her hunts for bargains and her long hours of sewing to make her girls presentable, I did not wonder that she had the reputation of being a cranky person.

These two women were Americans, but by far the largest majority of the laborers are Slavs, and it is among them that we find the worst results of the low wage.

The mill has sent out a call for young vigorous men who will do its heavy work for a small wage. In answer to this has come a great number of Slavic immigrants. As is often true of a new group, most of these men are either single or with families in the old country. Of the 3602 Slavs in the mill, 1099, or 30.5 per cent, were single men. This has had a disastrous effect on the family life

of the Slavs, for these men usually board in families of their own nationality who live in the wretched courts in the second ward of Homestead. A study made of twenty-one of these courts revealed appalling conditions. Among the 239 families living there, the 102 who took lodgers had on an average four persons to a room. Fifty-one of these families—more than one-fifth—lived in one room. The two-room tenements were not infrequently occupied by a man, his wife, two children, and two or three boarders. Under these conditions any genuine family life becomes impossible.

The death rate among the children is high, twice as high as in the other wards of Homestead. Moreover, training children under these conditions is difficult, and a terrible knowledge of evil results from the close mingling of the children with this group of careless, drinking men.

Aside from the presence of these single men and a growth of population with which the number of houses has not kept pace, the overcrowding is due to the dominant ambition of the Slav to own a bit of property here or in the old country, or to have a bank account. As we have seen, strenuous economies are necessary if their desires are to be attained. That it is ambition rather than a permanently low standard which is responsible for the bad conditions is shown by the comfort and even good taste displayed by some who have succeeded in buying their own homes.

These people do need, however, to have impressed upon their minds the value of education. There is no effective school enumeration, the responsibility is divided between the public and parochial schools, and it is easy enough, where the parents are indifferent, for the children to drift away from regular attendance. As the steel

mill with its heavy work and enormous machinery cannot utilize the work of children, there is almost no child labor problem in Homestead; but usually as soon as the children are fourteen they start in to work.

Between ignorance and ambition these newcomers are failing to secure for themselves or their children a real home life that will result either in the physical or moral efficiency of the next generation. The mill, which demands strong, cheap labor, concerns itself but little whether that labor is provided with living conditions that will maintain its efficiency or secure the efficiency of the next generation. The housing situation is in the hands of men actuated only by a desire for the largest possible profit. The more intelligent members of the community, on the other hand, though realizing the situation, do not take their responsibility for the aliens in their midst with sufficient seriousness to limit the power of these landlords. The Slavs, moreover, people used to the limitations of country life, are ignorant of the evil physical and moral effect of transferring the small rooms, the overcrowding, the insufficient sanitary provisions which may be endurable in country life with all outdoors about them, to these crowded courts under the shadow of the mill.

Summing up the results of indifference on one side and ignorance on the other, we find a high infant death rate, a knowledge of evil among little children, intolerable sanitary conditions, a low standard of living, a failure of the community to assimilate this new race in its midst.

As we waited in one of the little railroad stations in Homestead, a Slovak came in and sat down next to a woman and her two-year-old child. He began making shy advances to the baby, and coaxing her in a voice of heart-breaking loneliness. But she would not come to

him, and finally the two left the room. As they went he turned to the rest of the company, and in a tone of sadness, taking us all into his confidence said simply, "Me wife, me babe Hungar." But were they here it would mean death for one baby in three; it would mean hard work in a dirty, unsanitary house for the wife; it would mean sickness and much evil. With them away, it means for him isolation and loneliness and the abnormal life of the crowded lodging house.

While this low wage, either among Slavs or Americans, is insufficient to maintain a standard of physical efficiency, the industry adds further that element of uncertainty for the future so destructive to ambitions and plans. Accidents are frequent. Even though they are not often fatal, one that lays a man up even for two weeks has a disastrous effect on a slender surplus. One family had saved \$300 to buy a house, but when the man was injured by a weight falling on his feet, and was laid up for six weeks, \$80 went from the surplus. Soon after, last winter's hard times came, and practically all the savings had to go for food. Now the wife wonders whether, with all these possibilities of disaster, she will ever dare to put all her savings into a house.

In addition, cuts in wages are made periodically. As these most frequently affect the better paid men, even they cannot start out on any plan involving a number of years without realizing that before the end of the time conditions may have changed so as to make its carrying out impossible.

By the twelve-hour shift as well as by the low wage the mill is affecting the lives of these families. Though the long hours and hard work may seem to be hardships that only the man would feel, they do react on family life. Not only do his weariness and his irregular hours make

him less inclined to enter into the family pleasures, but he also fails to change—through political or other action—the conditions under which they live. Because of this weariness-induced apathy, a man usually stays at home and smokes his pipe instead of troubling himself with outside affairs. This tendency is doubtless intensified by conditions within the industry. As since the strike of 1892 there have been no labor organizations in the town, the men do not meet to discuss the conditions under which they work, and accept passively whatever is offered. This same indifference seems to affect their attitude toward politics, so that instead of taking an active part they allow the wholesale liquor interests to dominate. Yet, through schools and through sanitation, the political situation does bear a close relation to family problems. In Homestead, for instance, the drinking water comes, only partly filtered, from a river which has already received the sewage of a number of towns and cities. The man continues to go three times a day for water from a neighbor's well, and pay him fifty cents a month for the privilege, instead of insisting that the borough provide a decent supply. There are no ordinances requiring landlords to put water or toilets in the houses, though the family are longing for the day when they can move to a house with these conveniences. An industrial situation which creates an attitude so passive that men accept without protest perfectly remediable evils that immediately affect the family is a serious one.

These long hours have a further harm in their tendency to lessen the demand for amusement. Aside from roller skating rinks and the five-cent variety shows known as nickleodeons, there is, outside of the home, no real chance for amusement save the ever-present light and refreshment offered by the fifty or more saloons which

Homestead licenses. The mothers, who realize that the rinks are a source of danger to the girls, and the saloons a menace to family happiness, make a heroic and often pathetic effort to keep the home attractive enough to offset these temptations. While the results are perhaps not undesirable when the mother succeeds, every woman is not a genius, and when she fails there is little wholesome amusement to compensate for her failure. The people do not want this provided for them by philanthropy. When speaking of the Carnegie library, men often said to me, "We didn't want him to build a library for us; we should rather have had higher wages and spent the money for ourselves." Aside from the money,—and the margin for amusements as we have seen is painfully small,—they need the leisure to plan and enjoy. The town offers to its inhabitants the chance to work, but it gives them little chance to play. And yet play is essential if even physical efficiency is to be maintained.

To sum up the situation, then, we find that the mill by the nature of the work offered helps to develop a normal family type, but because of low wages, long hours, and opposition to industrial organization, it has done much to hamper the family in carrying out its ideals.

May I, in conclusion, state briefly what facts as to the relation of family to industrial life were clarified in my own mind by this investigation? In the first place, in a town dominated by one industry the type of family is largely determined by the nature of that industry. Theoretical discussions as to the normal family have little effect, even the ideals of individual families must often be modified to meet this situation. In a cotton-mill town, for example, we are almost sure to find the women at work, while in a steel town it is the man's place to earn and the woman's to spend. This relation, obscured in commercial or large manufacturing centers, stands out

clearly in Homestead with its one industry. In the second place, the industry limits the development of the family life by the effect of long hours and overwork, and the absence of the stimulus which trades unions might supply. These react on the family, not only in the man's personal attitude toward them, but through his failure by political or other united action to improve the conditions under which they live.

The most obvious and fundamental relation of industry and family is the economic one. Without the background of a sufficient wage, even such a distinctly domestic virtue as thrift becomes not only impossible but harmful. If to buy a house means to underfeed the children, if to have a bank account means to take lodgers till there is no possibility of home life, we are certainly foolish to laud the man who realizes these ambitions, and class as extravagant and thriftless those who do not. Our preaching must have a closer relation to the economic situation of the families.

In years gone by the family was the industrial unit, the work was done in the house, was close to the problem of the home, and the two developed together. The family ties were strong and the industrial conditions strengthened them. Now the situation is changed, and the industry is dominant. More and more the very nature of the family, its ideals, and its everyday existence are alike moulded by the opportunities for work. If we are to keep any abstract ideals of what family life should be, and are to translate these into actualities, our primary query must be whether our industrial system makes them possible. Without the development of the personal virtues economic prosperity might be futile, but the converse is also true. In Homestead at least, I believe, there are more ideals than the industrial situation allows to become realities.