PREFACE

Among the trades for women, no other trade presents such great complexity as does millinery. As an art it demands high and peculiar ability, called by the trade, millinery sense; as a handicraft, it requires great skill; as a trade it introduces subdivision of labor and supports a department in which the processes are mechanical and do not necessarily induct the worker into the more skilled and artistic divisions. As millinery supplies a necessity of life, it is universal and offers occupation in every community. As it deals with attractive materials and produces beautiful effects, it appeals to young women and induces large numbers to enter it. As it includes artistic processes, it pays high nominal wages to one group of workers, and as its mechanical processes are skilled it pays good nominal wages to another group. In its origin millinery was a home trade and is usually still so conducted. In smaller communities it is carried on in dwellings; in the larger cities, many shops are located in the upper stories of business blocks or in apartments. By far the greater number of shops are small, many having less than five workers\(^1\) and the relation between employer and employee is distinctly personal.

As a fashion trade millinery is seasonal and as a trade with two busy and two dull seasons it imposes upon the worker uncertainty and irregularity of employment and requires its less well paid and even its highly paid workers to eke out a living by overtime work or by subsidiary or secondary occupations. It does not yield readily to state regulation. Its hours of labor are oftentimes not limited; overtime is not restricted; sanitation, light, and ventilation are not insisted upon; the worker is not guaranteed comfort in the workroom as to seats, tables, and cleanliness; regularity of pay, permanence of contract, and due noti-

\(^1\)In Massachusetts the law does not take cognizance of a shop in which less than five workers are employed.
fication of dismissal are not required. As a home trade too, millinery is unorganized. No correction of the evils attendant upon an unregulated trade has been successfully attempted through unionization. More than in other needle trades its workers are young and immature. It therefore lacks ballast and reflects instability of purpose on the part of employees.

And yet millinery involves to-day more than 86,000 women in the United States and affords opportunity at the top for as high if not higher wage than any other trade for women. A trade than which none seems more attractive because of its artistic requirements and its handicraft stage, its demand for creative skill and its high remuneration for the best work, it is a trade against which the young worker must be warned, and which only those of exceptional skill, persistency, or economic resources should be permitted to enter.

This complexity explains this attempt to discover, portray, and interpret actual conditions of trade and worker. Demanded in the beginning by the board of directors of the Boston Trade School for Girls in order that training for millinery might be given more intelligently, and children guided more carefully, it had financial support from that institution in the year 1909–1910, and the advice of Miss Florence M. Marshall, the director of the school at that time. In the fall of 1910, Miss Lorinda Perry, a graduate of the University of Illinois, 1909, securing a Master’s degree in 1910, and Miss Elizabeth Riedell, a graduate of Vassar College, 1904, were awarded Fellowships in the Department of Research of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union and selected for investigation the subject of Millinery as a Trade for Women. During the year employers and employees were interviewed, and the results secured from the former were analyzed and interpreted by Miss Perry, from the latter by Miss Riedell.

In the years 1911 to 1913, Miss Perry held a Fellowship at Bryn Mawr College and under the direction of Dr. Marion Parris Smith, Associate Professor of Economics, continued the study of the millinery trade in Philadelphia. Miss Perry’s discussion of the trade in the two cities was accepted by Bryn Mawr College in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in May,
1913. In Philadelphia the field work was conducted by the Consumers’ League and at their expense under Miss Perry’s direct supervision. Fortunately the information on the trade in Boston was brought up to date by the courtesy of a number of Boston employers who permitted their entire pay rolls to be copied from their books by the secretaries of our Research Department. Tabulations of this data and retabulations of the earlier Boston material by our secretaries enabled Miss Perry to unify the two studies and to revise most of her earlier work and that prepared by Miss Riedell. Those sections dealing with the effect of seasons on Boston employees and on Boston workers in the trade as secured from personal interviews are therefore the combined work of the two students.

The method of attack, the range of inquiry and the extent of returns in the investigation are all presented in the introductory chapter. As this was one of the first studies of the type by the department and indeed in the country, the schedules were far from perfect resulting in an incompleteness which in later studies of the series has been avoided. It is to be regretted that the opportunity to use pay rolls came only within the last year so that detailed information as to wages was not obtained from the workers who were visited in their homes, as was done in the study of The Boot and Shoe Industry in Massachusetts as a Vocation for Women. It is also unfortunate that pay rolls could not be secured in Philadelphia.

Prepared for the purpose of affording students training in social investigation, the study must lack in finish of presentation and completeness of interpretation; but the work has been carefully supervised and supplemented by every means available to the Research Department. In order that the survey may serve as large a group as possible, the material is often presented in much greater detail and the tables arranged with much smaller class intervals than might at first appear necessary or desirable, although discussions in the text often deal with larger groupings. Indeed in many tables the facts are presented for each case, especially where subclassification has made the number considered too small for generalization. We hope that agencies interested in a study of minimum wage laws, in other regulation of
working conditions by legislation, in vocational guidance and placement, in industrial education, and especially, in awakening the public conscience may each find here data which can be re-arranged or grouped so as to form a basis upon which to act. As an illustration: the educator endeavoring to develop a scheme of part time schooling, may be able to conclude from the tables showing the exact week of opening and closing the shops what plan might be feasible for dull season instruction. Or the constructive agent of a placement bureau endeavoring to discover a way in which to dovetail occupations may determine from the detailed pay roll information the period of employment in various types of millinery occupations and establishments.

More than any other industrial occupation, a fashion trade is dependent upon the will or whim of the consumer and of all trades millinery seems to feel the vagaries of fashion most keenly. The greatest need at present is an arousing of public conscience so that consumers may so regulate their demands as to avoid the rush of late week orders and to extend the seasons to the advantage of both employer and employee. But all the grave problems here discussed must be attacked constructively from all sides by all agencies and if to Boards of Education and Trade School Directors, Legislators, Trades Unions, the Consumers’ League and other societies concerned with protective and regulative legislation this work shall prove of practical value, its object will have been attained.

Simultaneously with the study of millinery, an investigation has been made of Dressmaking as a Trade for Women and of The Boot and Shoe Industry in Massachusetts as a Vocation for Women, both of which are now in preparation for the press. It is believed that the comparative studies which may be based upon these surveys will contribute much to an understanding of the needle trades.

Acknowledgment is due the many employers and employees who have so generously given of their time and experience in the preparation of this volume.

Susan M. Kingsbury,
Director of the Department of Research,
Women’s Educational and Industrial Union.

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Since the completion of this report a study on *Wages in the Millinery Trade* has been made under the New York State Factory Investigating Commission by Miss Mary Van Kleecx. The returns from the two investigations are unfortunately not comparable. The New York study concerns itself almost exclusively with wages, but the presentation of wages in New York combines wages of workers in all the occupations of millinery, as in the summaries (see page 77) or, where differentiation is made, the grouping under the term "other milliners," of trimmers, copyists, makers, preparers, and improvers (compare pages 25 and 41–42) obscures the data needed for comparison. Or the analysis found on pages 51 and 54 includes all employed for more than one week, thus counting in a very large group of drifters. Or the New York paper brings together the wage return and the number of weeks worked in the year in large groups, the largest being over 20 weeks or over, and hence clouds the seasonal significance of the trade. (It is probably the position of the copyist and the excess of wholesale workers in New York which most interferes with comparison.)