FEMININE CHAT AND CHATTER

GOSSIP AND ADVICE FOR THE WORLD OF WOMEN.

Good Women and Starvation Wages. Don't Believe That the Wages a Good Woman Gets Has Much to Do With Her Being Good—A Good Woman Will Starve Before She Will Do What Is Wrong.

BY WINIFRED BLACK.

So you don't believe that the wages a good woman gets have anything to do with her being good, is that so, Mr. Chicago, philanthropist millionaire and social uplift worker?

You have just said so at a public hearing of the Illinois Vice Commission, and I agree with you. I don't believe the wages a good woman gets has much to do with her being good either.

Let's see, Mr. Philanthropist, didn't you and your partners admit that you make something like seven millions a year? You admitted that you employ some thousand or so of your girls who are paid, some of them five, and some of them three dollars a week.

You said that you consider such wages all they earned, and you declared that you were not at all ashamed of it; that you didn't know that it was our affair whether they lived or could live upon such wages or not.

Quite so—very lucid, very illuminating of you. "A good woman is good whether she is poor or rich," you said to the vice commission, "and her wages have nothing to do with the case."

Again, quite so. You are a clever man; just about the cleverest man I have heard deliver himself of any opinion on this terrible question. Most men don't know any more about a good woman than a hyena knows about a little brown hen. The brown hen couldn't laugh like a hyena to save her life, and a hyena would be absolutely useless when it came to providing omelets for the family table.

"Good women are born good. Nothing can make them bad. They will starve, they will suffer, they will die before they will do what is wrong."

Some men would die rather than turn pickpocket. Some men would steal very handily almost any time to keep from going without a meal. I fear that there are many fairly good men who belong to this latter class, but women are different, entirely different in such matters.

You know and I know of hundreds of women who die every year in the hospitals of great cities just because they are "different." They starve, and they freeze, and they go without decent clothing and decent shelter till nature says "enough," and then they creep to some hospital to die of inanition, of tuberculosis, of cancer—what's the difference what name you call the final disease, they all come from the same beginning—nature is too tired to recoup, and those women die, by hundreds, by thousands, every year just because they are good, just because neither you nor any other philanthropist who ever lived can drive them to the streets for food, no matter what pittances you pay them.

Where does that let you come out, Mr. Philanthropist? The fact that a woman starved to death rather than earn her board and clothes by the cruel road of shame wouldn't make me any prouder of the fact that I was the man who starved her to death, would it you?

Good women don't turn bad because they'll die if they don't. They die because they won't turn bad. They sicken, and faint, and starve, and freeze on their three dollars a week, and they die good women, not because we have helped them to be good with our philanthropy, but because we would not help them to live by being just. That's all. Is that a thing to be proud of? Shall such knowledge rejoice our hearts?

It always makes me smile a little bitterly to hear a reformer—it is always a man reformer—tell how hard it is for a poor woman to be good.

It is not hard for a poor woman to be good; it is hard for a good woman to be poor.

It is natural for her to be good; it is part of her, like her skin and her hair and her very eyes. She's brave, and she's honest, and she's hard working, because that's the way she is made, and, thank heaven, the world is full, gloriously full, of women just like her, women who would walk to the scaffold if they had to rather than give up one instant's right to look the world of tempters straight in the face and say, "NO, I thank you; such comfort is too dearly bought."

Is that any reason for keeping her at work on starvation wages? Do you say to yourselves, you employers who do this thing, "She's good, this girl; she won't do wrong, though I starve her to death at my very door," and are you glad that you do it when you think so?

"Low wages drive a girl to shame." No! Low wages don't drive a good girl to shame—nothing on earth or over the earth can do that—but they do drive a good girl to misery, and want, and hunger, and cold, and because they can't drive her to shame, is that any reason to be proud that you've done your best to do it?

Weak girls, foolish girls, vain girls; yes, these poor things go the dark road just because it is the easiest way, they think, poor hungry things— but they might have gone there anyhow, poor creatures.

I've known as many girls who got $20 a week go wrong as I have girls who got four. What has that got to do with the case?

I suppose I am an eccentric, but somehow I'm afraid I'd feel worse about killing a good woman by slow starvation than I would about driving a poor girl to the streets who was perhaps, bound there anyhow from the very day she was born.

"I pay over a thousand of my girls five and much under five a week. I don't think that has anything to do with the white slave conditions. A good girl is good, no matters what she gets."

Precisely, Mr. Philanthropist, but is that any reason that men of high business ability should keep her hungry all the time she's being good? I should think that would be the very reason they'd want to help her be happy and comfortable — just because she is so brave, just because she is so fine, just because she is so good.

Brave hearts, true souls, how shall we idle loiterers at the easy gates of life ever dare to look them straight in their honest eyes?

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