

The \$6.50 a Week Girl.

Some causes for low salaries; Possible remedy.

(Written for the N.Y. State Factory Investigating Commission,
office at No. 70 Broadway, N.Y. City. *Per request made, Dec. 29.*)

by, Charlotte R. Bangs.

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There appears to be one main, basic reason for the small salaried girl not advancing to a larger wage scale by reason of actual merit—it is her attitude toward her employer. Without exception, in all the many letters that have poured in upon me and upon the "World" (which so kindly called attention to this girl in our midst,) that employer is regarded as heartless, villainous, ignorant, grinding,

Upon such a base as this no girl can possibly do best work for that employer, nor be interested the slightest in the welfare of the firm she works for. At the very start she places this handicap upon herself. No employer is going to be interested in sullen, dragging, obedience. It should be respectful, (embodying love,) quick,—an **EAGERNESS** to do and give what he wants. Here one has the 'keynote' of the girls position in her employment. If it happens to be something not congenial so much the harder for her; she should first of all, select what she has previously decided is best suited to her taste and capabilities, not just tumble into any sort of work and remain there, without ambition.

It has also struck me as most remarkable that not one girl ever has stated what her **OBJECTIVE** point is in work. Toward what is she working? And what the best, the most thorough way to accomplish that goal? The great majority of working girls apparently have no goal. At least so it would appear from non-mention of such in their letters—and I have received a score of them, all complaints. Not one has ever stated any such words as this, "I am trying to become a good packer, a best grade milliner, a finest kind of stenographer, a treasure laundress, an expert cook, a polished clerk, etc." To work and not know exactly what that work is leading UP to, is to toil without wisdom. Each girl should realize this truth for herself and act upon it. Energy, not sighs, count most in this busy world. Those who spend time in just sighing for what they want are usually thrust aside by those who actively seek it.

A uniform wage rate would not alter this type of girl; her employer would be quick to know the interested, expert clerk and to advance her wages ahead of the other type. It is the inefficient girl who must perfect herself, to command larger salary. She must have an **OBJECT** to work for, not merely daily living, mere food existence, joyless life.

There is room for wonderful saving of cash as regards the lunch eaten by these small salaried girls. Instead of boarding house or restaurant sandwiches, (usually made up the night before,) of bread

with scant or no butter spread on, a chunk of cold ham, beef, cheese or bologna between slices of dry bread, there could be fresh sandwiches, made in the factory, a room being set aside for use of the girls toward this work of luncheon making. There could be a Committee formed, subject to election or appointment, each week or month or year, as decided by the girls themselves. I am very sure the employers in these big factories would be agreeable to any such plan, once the object and benefit is known to them. Supplies purchased in quantity means a very much reduced price over the retail prices. For instance, a five cent loaf of bread makes, say, six sandwiches, butter added at about 8 cts, filling at about 6^{cts}, ~~6 cts~~ and there one has six sandwiches at a total cost of 14 cts, the other way of buying them being 10 cts each. Only the butter ~~kind~~ kind sell at 5 cts. There could be some 15 to 20 different kinds of sandwiches made, too, not just the regulation few as now known, ~~to all girls~~.

I have seen and heard girls say, "Oh, I'm tired of ~~concocting~~ ^{concocting} ham and beef and cheese." — and no wonder.

Get the girls together on this luncheon problem. They need not carry ugly packages to business; they need not eat dry, unbuttered bread, they can learn How to make delicious sandwiches and that is surely worth while, for sandwich making is really an art.

I would like very much to start this work for the girls. Find the factory and let the work begin at once, the sooner the better, for both the girls purse and for their enjoyment.

In the matters of dress, it must be impressed upon a small wage earner that she cannot dress like a rich girl, not should she wear any unsuitable clothes to business. Better a pretty cotton frock at 69 cts or 89 cts than a soiled imitation satin dress. IMITATION is an enemy of the working girl, one she should resolutely avoid.

There are many other points to be covered but not possible in a brief article. If desired, as you mentioned, some could be related before your Commission, at date stated by you. The girls have, many of them, misunderstood my attitude in the matter of living on \$6.50 a week. It was purposed to show it could be done, for those so compelled to live but I am most heartily in favor of their having a much larger salary, as befits capabilities. And cost of living is part of the whole.

Respectfully submitted, with my compliments, and the request that the N.Y. "World", be given credit for so kindly aiding the working girls cause! They have given much space.

Charlotte R. Bangs.