

THE GIRL PUZZLE.

Some Suggestions on What to Do with the Daughters of Mother Eve.

The Pittsburg Dispatch — January 25, 1885

For the Dispatch.

What shall we do with our girls?

Not our Madame Neilsons; nor our Mary Andersons; not our Bessie Brambles nor Maggie Mitchells; not our beauty or our heiress; not any of these, but those without talent, without beauty, without money.

What shall we do with them?

The anxious father still wants to know what to do with his five daughters. Well indeed may he inquire and wonder. Girls, since the existence of Eve, have been a source of worryment, to themselves as well as to their parents, as to what shall be done with them. They cannot, or will not, as the case may be, all marry. Few, very few, possess the mighty pen of the late Jane Grey Swisshelm, and even writers, lecturers, doctors, preachers and editors must have money as well as ability to fit them to be such. What is to be done with the poor ones?

The schools are overrun with teachers, the stores with clerks, the factories with employees. There are more cooks, chambermaids and washerwomen than can find employment. In fact, all places that are filled by women are overrun, and still there are idle girls, some that have aged parents depending on them. We cannot let them starve. Can they that have full and plenty of this world's goods realize what it is to be a poor working woman, abiding in one or two bare rooms, without fire enough to keep warm, while her threadbare clothes refuse to protect her from the wind and cold, and denying herself necessary food that her little ones may not go hungry; fearing the landlord's frown and threat to cast her out and sell what little she has, begging for employment of any kind that she may earn enough to pay for the bare rooms she calls home, no one to speak kindly to or encourage her, nothing to make life worth the living? If sin in the form of man comes forward with a sly smile and says, "Fear no more, your debts shall be paid," she can not let her children freeze or starve, and so falls. Well, who shall blame her? Will it be you that have a comfortable home, a loving husband, sturdy, healthy children, fond friends — shall you cast the first stone? It must be so; assuredly it would not be cast by one similarly situated. Not only the widow, but the poor maiden needs employment.

Perhaps father is dead and mother helpless, or just the reverse; or maybe both are depending on her exertions, or an orphan entirely, as the case may be.

What is she to do? Perhaps she had not the advantage of a good education, consequently cannot teach; or, providing she is capable, the girl that needs it not half as much, but has the influential friends, gets the preference. Let her get a position as clerk. The salary given would not pay for food, without counting rent or clothing. Let her go to the factory; the pay may in some instances be better, but from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m., except for 30 minutes at noon, she is shut up in a noisy, unwholesome place. When duties are over for the day, with tired limbs and aching head, she hastens sadly to a cheerless home. How eagerly she looks forward to pay day, for that little mite means so much at home. Thus day after day, week after week, sick or well, she labors on that she may live. What think you of this, butterflies of fashion, ladies of leisure? This poor girl does not win fame by running off with a coachman; she does not hug or kiss a pug dog nor judge people by their clothes and grammar; and some of them are ladies, perfect ladies, more so than many who have had every advantage.

Some say: "Well, such people are used to such things and do not mind it." Ah, yes, Heaven pity them. They are in most cases used to it. Poor little ones put in factories while yet not in their teens so they can assist a widowed mother, or perhaps father is a drunkard or has run away; well they are used to it, but they mind it. They will very quickly see you draw your dress away that they may not touch it; they will very quickly hear your light remarks and sarcastic laugh about their exquisite taste in dress, and they mind it as much as you would, perhaps more. They soon learn of the vast difference between you and them. They often think of your life and compare it with theirs. They read of what your last pug dog cost and think of what that vast sum would have done for them — paid father's doctor bill, bought mother a new dress, shoes for the little ones — and imagine how nice it would be, could baby have the beef tea that is made for your favorite pug, or the care and kindness that is bestowed upon it.

But what is to be done with the girls? Mr. Quiet Observations says: "In China they kill girl babies. Who knows but that this country may have to resort to this sometime." Would it not be well, as in some cases it would save a life of misery and sin and many a lost soul?

If girls were boys quickly it would be said: start them where they will, they can, if ambitious, win a name and fortune. How many wealthy and great men could be pointed out who started in the depths: but where are the many woman? Let a youth start as errand boy and he will work his way up until he is one of the firm. Girls are

just as smart, a great deal quicker to learn: why, then, can they not do the same? As all occupations for women are filled why not start some new ones? Instead of putting the little girls in factories let them be employed in the capacity of messenger boys or office boys. It would be healthier. They would have a chance to learn: their ideas would become broader and they would make as good, if not better, women in the end. It is asserted by storekeepers that women make the best clerks. Why not send them out as merchant travelers? They can talk as well as men — at least men claim that it is a noted fact that they talk a great deal more and faster. If their ability at home for selling exceeds a man's, why would it not abroad? Their lives would be brighter, their health better, their pocketbooks fuller, unless their employers would do as now — give them half their wages because they are women.

We have in mind an incident that happened in your city. A girl was engaged to fill a position that had always been occupied by men, who, for the same, received \$2.00 a day. Her employer stated that he never had anyone in the same position that was as accurate, speedy and gave the same satisfaction; however, as she was “just a girl” he gave her \$5.00 a week. Some call this equality.

The position of conductor on the Pullman Palace car is an easy, clean and good paying business. Why not put girls at that? They do many things that are more difficult and more laborious. In the banks, where so many young men are employed, give the girls a chance. They can do the work as well, and, as a gentleman remarked, “It would have a purifying effect on the conversation.” Some people claim it would not do to put woman where she will not be protected. In being a merchant traveler or filling similar positions, a true woman will protect herself anywhere — as easily on the road as behind a counter, as easily as a Pullman conductor as in an office or factory. In such positions, receiving men's wages, she would feel independent; she could support herself. No more pinching and starving, no more hard work for little pay; in short, she would be a woman and would not be half as liable to forget the duty she owed her own true womanhood as one pinched by poverty and without means of support. Here would be a good field for believers in women's rights. Let them forego their lecturing and writing and go to work; more work and less talk. Take some girls that have the ability, procure for them situations, start them on their way, and by so doing accomplish more than by years of talking. Instead of gathering up the “real smart young men” gather up the real smart girls, pull them out of the mire, give them a shove up the ladder of life, and be amply repaid both by their success and unforgetfulness of those that held out the helping hand.

However visionary this may sound, those interested in human kind and wondering what to do with the girls might try it. George M. Pullman has tried and succeeded in bettering this poor class. Some of our purse-filled citizens might try it by way of variety, for, as someone says: "Variety is the spice of life." We all like the "spice of life": we long for it, except when it comes in the form of hash in our boarding-house table. We shall talk of amusements for our girls after we find them employment.

LONELY ORPHAN GIRL