

## THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY

Women are still employed, but chiefly by Germans, in basting vests and to some extent as operators in "pants and vest" shops. They are, however, exclusively employed on all kinds of garments for men in the lighter work of felling, tacking, and sewing on buttons. The conclusion drawn from a New York investigation is that "for this work no physical strength is necessary and practically no training, and consequently it is work readily resorted to by girls and unskilled women. Any man of ordinary strength finds day labor more remunerative than this work would be, even if he were as accustomed to sewing as a woman is. In this lightest grade of work, as in the heaviest, there is practically no competition between the sexes."<sup>1</sup>

The chief influence, however, which has tended to diminish the proportion of women employed has been the invasion of the industry by the Russian Jews, which began shortly before 1880. While a discussion of the effects of this movement on the industry would lead far afield into the problems connected with the sweating system and attempts to control it, it must be pointed out that immigration in general, and especially the coming of this particular race, has been an important factor in reducing the importance of the woman wage earner in the industry.

The clothing industry has been more affected than

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<sup>1</sup> Willett, p. 68.

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any other trade in this country by successive waves of immigration, and on the whole the women have felt keenly the pressure of immigrant competition in the low-grade unskilled work of the trade. The proportion of women employed is, therefore, noticeably lower in the large cities than in the small towns, and it seems reasonable to assume that more women are employed in these towns because there are fewer immigrants than in the cities.<sup>1</sup> That the effect of Russian Jewish immigration, in particular, has meant a restriction of women's work in the trade is unmistakable. There is a larger proportion of men than women immigrants among the Russian Jews; there is, too, a general racial opposition to the employment of women; and, finally, the pace set by the

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<sup>1</sup> The following data from Pope, pp. 57-58, are of interest in this connection.

“In the shops manufacturing pants, vests, coats, and cloaks inspected, the percentage of women to the total number employed was, in 1888, 40.7 per cent; in 1891, 27.5 per cent; in 1896, 26 per cent; and in 1900, 25.3 per cent. The following table shows the results of the Factory Inspector's investigations as to the percentage of women employed in the manufacture of cloaks, pants, coats, and vests, respectively, in New York City:”

YEAR.	Cloaks.	Pants.	Coats.	Vests.
1888.....	45.5	62.4	28.3	63.6
1891.....	39.1	54.8	19.1	55.4
1896.....	29.0	25.0	20.6	42.8
1900.....	23.6	23.8	22.7	43.2
1902.....	In men's and boys' clothing, 27.8 per cent.			

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Jews in some branches of the trade has meant a rate of speed which it is said has been too great for women to maintain. Moreover, the general tendency of labor legislation since 1892 has been to aid in this movement by forcing work from the home into the outside shops. With the Jewish prejudice against the employment of women outside of the home, this has meant inevitably a proportionate decrease in the number of women in the trade.<sup>1</sup>

It seems to be clear, then, that the tendency of the last quarter century in the industry has been toward an increase in the proportion of men and a corresponding decrease in the proportion of women employed. The census report on the clothing industry in 1900 strangely enough implied that women were taking the places of men,<sup>2</sup> but the statistics of em-

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<sup>1</sup> In the shops connected with but technically separate from living rooms, the percentage of women workers remained high. "A condition was thus brought about just opposite to that which we should expect, namely that the smaller the shop, the higher the percentage of women."—Pope, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> See "Twelfth Census 1900" Manufactures, iii, 262. The census says with regard to changes in employees and wages in this industry: "The total number of wage earners reported in 1900 showed a decrease of 23,976 or 16.5 per cent, and their wages decreased \$5,570,059, or 10.9 per cent. The greatest decrease was in the number of men with 19,709, with a decrease in their wages of \$5,968,327. This is partly due to a transfer of wages to 'contract' work under miscellaneous expenses. Besides, it can be explained partly by the substitution of women for men. The average number of women wage earners decreased 5,759, or 7.6 per cent, but the total wages paid to women increased \$131,649, or seven tenths of 1 per cent."

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ployment for the industry, which are given in the following table, do not seem to justify the statement.

### MEN'S CLOTHING, FACTORY PRODUCT—NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES <sup>1</sup>

	1890.	1900.	1905.
Men.....	67,786	48,070	58,759
Women.....	75,621	69,846	75,468
Children.....	1,519	3,011	2,963
Total number of employees.....	144,926	120,927	137,190
Percentage of women employed....	52	58	55

According to this table, fifty-two per cent of the total number of persons employed in the manufacture of men's clothing in the year 1890 were women; this percentage had increased to fifty-eight in 1900, but had decreased to fifty-five in 1905, when the last census of manufactures was taken. All of the statistics given in the census, however, are prefaced by a statement showing how impossible it is to collect complete and accurate data for the industry. Existing conditions, particularly in the manufacture of men's clothing made a complete canvas of the industry by the census office impossible.<sup>2</sup> Special agents and

<sup>1</sup> The data for 1890-1900 are given in "Twelfth Census(1900): Manufactures," Pt. iii, 261, and data for 1905 and again for 1900 are given in the 1905 "Census of Manufactures," i, lxxviii.

<sup>2</sup> This is a statement condensed from the "Twelfth Census (1900): Manufactures," Pt. iii, 261.

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enumerators who collected the data could not obtain information from a large number of places where the manufacture was carried on. The majority of these places were in tenements and small shops in the rear of dwellings and as a rule, the men giving information were foreigners, without a knowledge of the language and with "a prejudice against, and suspicion of, any person making inquiries about their business." Such men, it was said, were not only not disposed to make any returns, but in general, were not in the habit of keeping any books or accounts, and, therefore, such information as they gave was for the most part "guesswork." Moreover, it was added, "a part of the work is done by women in their own homes; but it was impracticable to attempt to ascertain the number so employed."

It would seem, therefore, that conclusions of value could not be based on an increase of six per cent between 1890 and 1900 and a decrease of three per cent between 1900 and 1905, when the statistics upon which the percentages are computed are acknowledged to be incomplete and inaccurate. Moreover, it should be pointed out that the tendency particularly in the large cities toward a substitution of men for women which has been indicated in the preceding discussion seems to be borne out by such data as are available for a longer period of time. Thus, the following table seems to indicate that the decline in the proportion of women employed has been going on for more than half a century.

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### MEN'S CLOTHING, FACTORY PRODUCT AND CUSTOM WORK— 1850-1900 <sup>1</sup>

	1850.	1860.	1870.	1880.	1890.	1900.
Men.....	35,031	41,837	47,829	77,255	118,640	96,825
Women.....	61,500	72,963	59,019	80,994	95,400	89,395
Children.....	.....	.....	1,280	2,564	2,065	3,879
Total number of employees..	96,551	114,800	108,128	160,813	216,105	190,099
Percentage of women em- ployed.....	62	63	55	54	44	46

While this table may seem clearly to indicate a decrease in the proportion of women employed, yet

<sup>1</sup> This table with the exception of data for 1890 and 1900, which have been changed as indicated below, are given in the "Twelfth Census (1900): Manufactures," Pt. iii, 261. The census explains that "the only comparison of any value that can be made is between the figures for 1890-1900," since the data for the two latter years are for the "factory product" only, while in the earlier census reports for the industry, statistics for custom-made and for factory-made clothing were not separated. If such a comparison is desired, however, the returns for custom and factory product may be easily combined for the later years. By adding the data for custom work which are given on p. 301 of the same volume to the data for the factory product which are given in the original table, and substituting these results for the factory product data in the table the objection to a comparison is, in part, done away with. In the table above, therefore, the data for 1890 and 1900 are not those given in the original census table, but they represent instead the sum of custom-made and factory-product data for each of these years. Data for 1905 are not included in this table, as those given in the 1905 "Census of Manufactures" are only for the factory product, and are given later.