

## CHAPTER X

### LIFE AT \$1.65 A DAY

TO sum up the situation, then, we find a group of slow, hard-working country people, ambitious to attain prosperity, coming in large numbers in response to the demand of the mills for strong, unskilled labor. The mill offers them its lowest wage; the community meets them with indifference; the landlords exploit their helplessness. There is no reason for surprise, then, that the inability of these people to understand or cope with the adverse conditions which await them results in much unwholesome living.

Let us turn from general facts and consider, in the first place, how the economic problem of life can be worked out on \$1.65 a day.

With the single men the problem is of course a simple one. Many care little how they live so long as they live cheaply. One of the lodging houses which I visited during the depression consisted of two rooms one above the other, each measuring perhaps 12 by 20 feet. In the kitchen was the wife of the boarding boss getting dinner,—some sort of hot apple cake and a stew of the cheapest cuts of meats. Along one side of the room was an oilcloth-covered table with a plank bench on each side; above it a rack holding a long row of handleless white cups and a shelf with tin knives and forks. Near the up-to-date range, the only piece of real furniture in the room, hung the "buckets" in which all mill men carry their noon or midnight meals. A crowd of men were lounging cheerfully about, talking, smoking and enjoying life, making the most of the leisure enforced by the shut-down in the mill. In the room above, double iron bedsteads were set close together and on them comfortables were neatly laid. In these two rooms, besides the "boarding boss," a stalwart Bulgarian, his wife and two babies, lived 20 men.

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The "boarding boss" runs the house and the men pay \$3.00 a month for a place to sleep, for having their clothes washed and their food cooked. In addition an account is kept of the food purchased and the total is divided among the men on pay day. The housewife also purchases and cooks any special food a man orders; beef, pork, lamb, each with a tag of some sort labeling the order, will all be fried together. A separate statement for each boarder is kept of these expenses. Such an account for a group of men in a small Slavic household may prove of interest. The family (which consisted of a man, his wife, his brother, three children aged eleven, eight, and one, and four boarders), occupied a house of four rooms, one of them dark, for which they paid a rent of \$14. The man, though he had been in this country about twenty-one years, still earned only \$10.80 a week with which to meet the needs of a growing family. One-half the cost of the food was paid by the boarders including the brother, and amounted for each man to about \$1.06 a week. The expenditures for the week for the whole family of seven adults and three children were as follows:

Vegetables. . . . .	\$ 1.06
Fruit . . . . .	.56
Milk, eggs, etc. . . . .	1.98
Sugar . . . . .	.49
Sundries . . . . .	.76
Meat . . . . .	5.78
<b>Total . . . . .</b>	<b>\$10.63</b>

The following table made up from the account book shows the men's individual likings as expressed in the "extras" they ordered:

TABLE 30.—FOOD PURCHASED ON SPECIAL ORDER FOR BOARDERS DURING MONTH ACCOUNT WAS KEPT

Article	Pambay	Baker	Droby	Pilich	Timke
Beef . . .	..	\$ .87	..	\$1.20	\$ .48
Pork . . .	\$3.71	.92	\$2.14	3.04	2.30
Veal . . .	..	.90	..	..	..
Eggs . . .	..	..	..	.10	.05
Milk . . .	..	.21	.90	..	..
Cheese . . .	.10	.19	..	.09	.05
Fruit . . .	.15	.25	..	..	..
<b>Total . . .</b>	<b>\$3.96</b>	<b>\$3.34</b>	<b>\$3.04</b>	<b>\$4.43</b>	<b>\$2.88</b>

HOMESTEAD: THE HOUSEHOLDS OF A MILL TOWN

The average expense for each man, including his share of the general sum, together with the amount spent individually, was about \$8.02 a month. Adding \$3.00 a month for room and washing, the total expense to each was about \$11 a month. In prosperous times these men make regularly \$9.90, which may be increased when they work more than 10 hours a day, and on Sunday, to as high as \$12 a week.\* It is obvious, therefore, that if the fixed expenditure of these single men is about \$3.00 a week, a large margin remains over and above clothes either for saving or indulgence. They can thus send for wife and children, fulfill their duties to aged parents, live high according to their lights, or make provision for their own future.

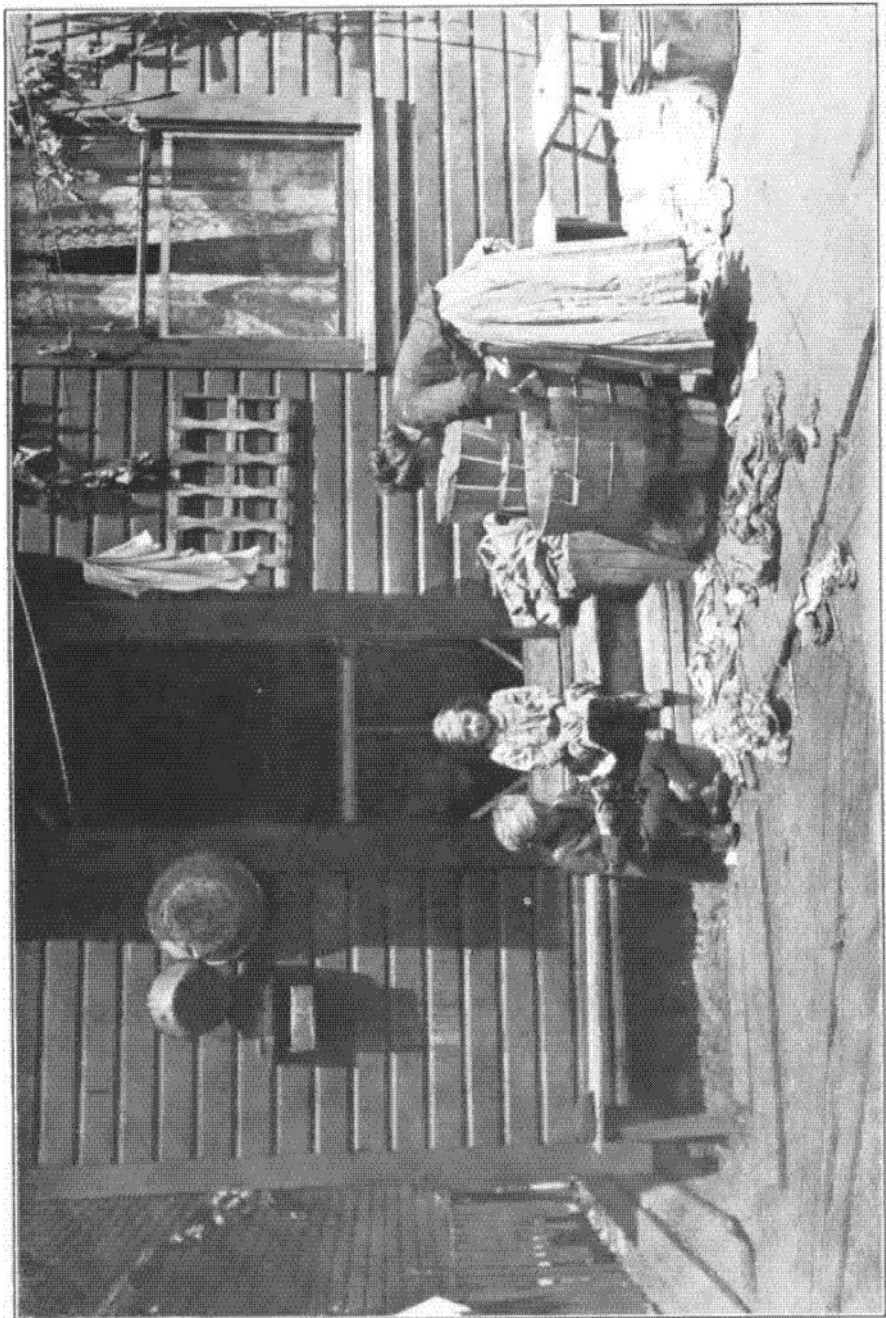
While this program is an economical one, it by no means furnishes to this group of homeless foreigners a normal life. Though some expect to return and others to send for their families when they have made their fortunes, all for the time being are in a strange country with neither the pleasures nor the restraints of home life. As in all barracks life, drunkenness and immorality are common.

But while 50.5 per cent of the Slavs employed in the mill are single, the remainder have families to support, usually on this same wage. How does this other half live? Let us take the average expenditures of ten Slavic budget families (without boarders) earning less than \$12 a week, whose total average expenditure was \$10.03 a week, 13 cents above the usual day laborer's wage of \$9.90. The figures are as follows:

Food . . . . .	\$4.64	Tobacco . . . . .	\$.07
Rent . . . . .	1.62	Liquor . . . . .	.55
Fuel . . . . .	.27	Medicine . . . . .	..
Clothing . . . . .	1.57	Furniture . . . . .	..
Other housekeeping ex-		Insurance . . . . .	.77
penses . . . . .	.13	Other . . . . .	.41

We may consider the distribution of expenditure in this group as fairly representative of the amount of money that the majority of the Slavs can count upon unless they work overtime or increase their income by taking lodgers. The \$1.62 a week for rent provides only a one or two-room tenement, two rooms in one

\* While men engaged in the processes in steel mills work 12 hours, the nominal day of yard laborers is 10 hours.



*Photo by Irine*

WASH-DAY IN A HOMESTEAD COURT

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of the undesirable houses costing \$8.00 a month. This is plainly too low a housing standard for any family. With an average expenditure in this group of \$4.64 a week, the cost of food for the average family would equal 20 cents a day per grown man, two cents a day less than Professor Underhill's estimate for essentials, five cents a day less than the general run of Homestead housekeepers got along on in hard times. As the Slavic accounts were not kept in sufficient detail it is difficult to show the food value of their provisions, but the statement of the average expenditure of one family, including a man, his wife and three children, twelve, three years, and nine months old, may give a suggestion as to the kind of food purchased. This family was dependent on the man's earnings of \$9.90 a week.

TABLE 31.—FOOD EXPENDITURES OF A SLAVIC FAMILY FOR ONE WEEK

<i>Article</i>	<i>Cost</i>
Bread . . . . .	\$ .75
Bakers' food . . . . .	.03
Meat . . . . .	1.46
Flour . . . . .	.26
Potatoes . . . . .	.25
Other vegetables . . . . .	.09
Dried beans . . . . .	.06
Eggs . . . . .	.24
Milk . . . . .	.11
Butter . . . . .	.38
Cheese . . . . .	.05
Fresh fruit . . . . .	.13
Sugar . . . . .	.14
Tea . . . . .	.08
Coffee . . . . .	.76
Sundries . . . . .	.40
<b>Total . . . . .</b>	<b>\$5.19</b>
Average a day . . . . .	.74
Average a day per grown man . . . . .	.23

While the sum expended was slightly more than 22 cents, a rough calculation indicated that the nutritive value of the food was a little below the requisite amount. In all probability these Slavic women are not skilful buyers,—the accounts consist of a rather monotonous alternation of "bread, meat—bread, meat" that does not promise an inspiring diet. As many of the wives are burdened by the extra work involved in taking lodgers, and

as the men do heavy work and are hearty eaters, they choose food that is quick to prepare, and that satisfies appetite with the least effort rather than at the lowest cost. This probably accounts for the preference for meat in place of vegetables which would not otherwise be expected in country-bred people.

The expenditure for clothing among the ten families considered was below what Mr. Chapin estimated was essential in New York, though it formed a slightly larger percentage than in American families in the same income group. No money was expended for furniture; a fact borne out by the utter barrenness of the two-room homes of many of the laborers. With the exception of insurance, the value of which as we shall see is fully appreciated, and the comparatively high expenditure for liquor, these figures surely indicate that life measured in terms of possessions is at a low ebb among these Slavic laborers. There was but \$.41 left for amusements, for church, for education. And what had become of the margin which was to make possible the attainment of that old-country ambition, a bit of property or a bank account? Some other means must be found to achieve these ends.

What that device is we saw in our study of the 21 Slavic courts, when we found that 102 families out of 239 took lodgers.\* The income from this source is no mean item. Of the 102 families, three-quarters received from lodgers a sum at least the equivalent of the rent, while a fifth received twice the amount of the rent or more. If we compare the income from lodgers with the man's wages, we find that in over half it added 25 per cent or more to the family's earnings. A glance at the sources of income of the budget families suggests that among the Slavs themselves the

\*The ways by which families increase their income in order to get ahead are indicated by these notes of the Slavic investigator in regard to families which had bought homes.

"John C——. Woman goes out cleaning and cooking. By doing this she has been able to add her earnings to her husband's so as to pay for the property they now own."

"The mother took boarders till too old. Now the daughter does not prove to be a good housekeeper" (perhaps because this was poor training for the future).

"Mrs. Y. since her marriage has gone out to work by the day, and then done washings in the evenings—she also has a boarder who pays \$18 a month. But she no longer goes out to work since they have paid for their home."