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WOMEN IN  
GAINFUL OCCUPATIONS  
1870 TO 1920

A STUDY OF THE TREND OF RECENT CHANGES IN  
THE NUMBERS, OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION,  
AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIP OF WOMEN  
REPORTED IN THE CENSUS AS  
FOLLOWING A GAINFUL  
OCCUPATION

BY  
JOSEPH A. HILL



CENSUS MONOGRAPHS  
IX  
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## FOREWORD

In the Foreword of the census monograph on "The Integration of Industrial Operation" Dr. Wesley C. Mitchell points out that while the Industrial Revolution began in eighteenth-century England, it is still in progress in twentieth-century America. Beginning with the later years of the nineteenth century, industrial evolution in this country has perhaps been particularly characterized by the high degree of attention which has been directed to the reorganization and improvement of the human processes of production as well as the mechanical processes. The greater consideration accorded to the human element in industry has given rise, at least in part, to an increasing need for—and opportunity for—the participation of women in economic activities. Whatever opinions may be held as to the proper sphere of woman, the fact is that, to a considerable extent, woman's place to-day is no longer in the home. In addition to her social contributions to the preservation and welfare of mankind, the contributions of her sex to economic production in its commercial aspects are of such substantial proportions that not only is it impossible to ignore them as a factor in industrial progress, but they are worthy of serious study as an important element in this progress.

Happily, the schedule of inquiries used in connection with the decennial censuses of population has included an inquiry as to the occupation of each person enumerated. In the present monograph Doctor Hill presents a comprehensive statistical analysis of the occupational data obtained at these censuses as to that portion of the total adult female population of the United States recorded as gainfully employed. At the latest census 24 per cent of all women were engaged in gainful occupations; and women comprised 20 per cent of the total working population.

It is to be noted that, since this census was taken nearly 14 months after the conclusion of the World War, its results are not appreciably affected by the temporary employment needs and opportunities incident to that conflict; in general, the figures may properly be regarded as representative of conditions after the readjustment to peace-time habits. In view of the seasonal and cyclical fluctuations which characterize many lines of economic activity, however, even in periods of undisturbed economic life, census results relative to employment are inevitably more or less affected by the date of the enumeration. The date of the latest census was January 1, 1920.

Unfortunately for occupational statistics, the first of any year marks a season when employment in agriculture, taken as a whole, is relatively slack; and the consequent effect of an enumeration at such a time is an understatement of the number of women engaged in agriculture, as is pointed out in Chapter III. In the case of nonagricultural pursuits as a whole, the date of January 1 can not be said to distort employment figures from a seasonal standpoint; but it might be well to bear in mind the fact that the beginning of the year 1920 happens to have been a time of high production in relation to the normal trend of industrial growth. While this fact is not of sufficient moment to prejudice comparisons of statistics as to employment in industrial occupations in 1920 with similar data obtained at earlier censuses, yet it presumably should have some significance in any independent consideration of industrial employment as a whole in 1920 and its distribution by occupations.

One of the many commendable features of the monograph as a census publication lies in the fact that the textual comments are confined to explanations, interpretations, and conclusions directly associated with the data presented. Doctor Hill carefully refrains from excursions into realms of speculation and theory beyond the purview of the facts available. The volume contains no moralizations as to the presumed effect upon home life of the participation of women in gainful occupations. It does not pretend to determine whether such participation is indicative of lower or of higher "standards of living." Answers to broad sociological and economic questions such as these are undoubtedly desirable if they can be accurately given; but it is doubtful if it is within the province of a governmental statistical organization, such as the Bureau of the Census, to venture beyond the presentation and direct analysis of the recorded facts at its disposal. Accordingly, it is appropriate that this monograph should present, in an organized manner and in suitable detail, the underlying facts as to an important phase of our economic and social life, leaving to others the tasks of relating these facts to other facts outside the scope of the census inquiry and of reaching conclusions of a qualitative nature as to the broader significance of these facts.

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