

WOMEN'S CHANCES AS BREAD-WINNERS

* XIII—WOMEN AS TELEGRAPHERS

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(An Expert Operator)

BY

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A WOMAN OPERATOR'S VIEW OF IT

A LARGE field of labor is open to intelligent women as telegraphers," said a New York newspaper article dated 1867, and it added: "In this profession at least as good pay and as much independence is found as in any other employment. There are about thirty women engaged at this work in this city."

This was in 1867; to-day there are thousands of women engaged as telegraphers. In New York they occupy a room in common with the men, at 195 Broadway, and not only have entire charge of the city department, but are found working the heavy "through" circuits and on duplex and quadruplex circuits in the various divisions. About 225 women are employed in the operating departments, and seventy-five check clerks in other departments. About 30,000 messages are daily handled by them.

The telegraph business has grown so heavy that the accounting is in charge of a bureau for that especial business, with a talented woman as wire-chief, and another clever woman as an assistant. The salaries are from \$25 to \$50 per month. These are the general limits; exceptions there are, but not many. The chiefs get from \$60 to \$90, or perhaps \$100 per month. There are no women managers in New York or vicinity who receive more than this. The hours of service are from 8 to 5.30 o'clock, although exceptions are made, the same number of hours being given from 9 to 6.30, or otherwise, at the preference of the employé.

So far as I have heard from managers and chiefs in the service, women have given the fullest possible satisfaction as manipulators of the electric key. And in a measure they are peculiarly adapted to the work. The accuracy of transmitting the Morse telegraphic alphabet relies entirely upon sound, and woman's touch is singularly adapted to it. It has often been said that women thus far have been given only minor places in the service. This is not so. Some of the most important "circuits" in the Western Union service, for example, are handled by women, who are paid precisely the same salaries as would be paid to men. And I have still to hear of one case where a woman was found inefficient from lack of application or skill where she was given opportunity to show her capacity. On the contrary, she has universally given satisfaction in whatever position she has been placed.

The best indication of woman's progress in telegraphy lies in the fact that more women are constantly being placed in charge of the branch offices throughout the country, and thus thrown, to a more or less extent, upon their own resources. Where ten years ago a woman would never be thought of in connection with the management of a "sub" office, now she stands an equal chance with a man. I believe telegraphy is, in every respect, not only a congenial occupation for women, but it is one which fits her in a great many respects; and her opportunities in the profession are, as is the case in all other walks of life, precisely what she chooses to make them. And there is plenty of more room for good workers at the "key."

The question is sometimes asked, why do not women study the science of electricity? My answer is, in all cases where their positions have brought them in contact with the science of electricity, they have mastered all problems necessary to the practice of their profession, but telegraphy being a very nerve-exhausting profession, the hours—often nine and a half spent in constant service—leave them too exhausted for study and research. One is on her mettle as to speed the entire day. The joys and woes of thousands are all unmasked in the hands of telegraphers. With highly-wrought, sensitive natures, this is exhausting; add to it the dots and dashes and the pen strokes in one day's business, and you find one's nerves and bodily strength in great need of recuperation. Were the opportunity given, there is no doubt that women would be as successful in electrical science as they are in astronomy and other sciences.

Do they give as good satisfaction as men? Remove all jealousies, let them be judged by an impartial tribunal, and I answer "Yes."

To become a telegrapher, the best course (unless one has influence at headquarters and can get into the main office in some minor capacity, with the privilege of learning), is to learn at the famous Cooper Institute, in New York city. A really proficient operator will always find employment, but has usually to commence on a low salary and get more by application, \$5 a month increase at a time, until the highest salary is reached.

How large the field of labor in the telegraph world is, may be found by glancing at the statistics of the largest company in the United States; it controls over 715,591 miles of wire, and has over 21,000 offices. In 1891 its receipts were over \$23,000,000. M. E. RANDOLPH

FROM A MAN'S STANDPOINT

THAT the telegraph service offers an attractive and remunerative field for woman's work is amply shown by the fact that the number of women who practice it from day to day probably exceed in number those who devote themselves to any of the other so-called "genteel" professions, and the number is all the time increasing. Telegraphy seems to have an irresistible charm for many young women, and for the matter of that many that are not young. The interest of the plodding student in her work is kept from flagging in anticipation of the day when she will be able to communicate with another operator hundreds and perhaps thousands of miles away with the same ease and confidence as if they were in the same room. Even those to whom the question of money is but a consideration of secondary importance are sustained by the prospect of indulging in this unalloyed delight. It is just possible, when the young woman arrives at this stage in her experience, that her ardor will have become somewhat dampened, and she will have received a very forcible illustration of the truth of the saying that anticipation and realization are very different things, indeed. Very few professions are pleasant to learn, however valuable they may be when proficiency has been acquired, and I mention this as showing that telegraphy has its redeeming features, even at the beginning.

Women, as in nearly every other walk in life, are beginning to take a more important part in conducting the business of the telegraph. The number of women engaged in the various branches of the telegraph service has increased very largely within the past few years. Not many years ago it was an unusual, as well as an unwelcome sight to some, to see a woman working in an office where as many as twenty or thirty male operators were employed; and even in the larger offices, where the employment of women was almost a necessity, they were secluded from the men, and worked in separate departments, sacred to themselves. Little by little the barriers were thrown down, until at the present time men and women work indiscriminately together in every department, and the relations existing between them are of the most cordial and pleasant character.

It would be safe to say that the number of women who earn a livelihood as operators in the telegraph service in this country is now fully thirty-seven thousand. This does not include women who are employed in other departments of the service. Of this number, New York and Brooklyn alone have nearly one thousand. They are employed in the main offices, in the hotels, railroad offices, on the famous big exchanges, and in brokers' offices, and in fact in every form of business activity in which the telegraph is called upon to play a part. Many industrious young women study stenography in their spare moments and when they become proficient in both branches, good paying positions are nearly always ready for them.

Very few of the women telegraphers who fill the highest positions are "college bred," a term sometimes applied to those who have learned the business outside a regular telegraph office in a school. The explanation of the large number of women telegraphers in New York City is sometimes attributed to the presence of these schools, but in reality the number of young women who attend them are rarely qualified for practical work. The Western Union Telegraph Company alone, in New York City, gives employment to several hundred small girls who perform office work in the operating and other departments. They are given an opportunity to learn the business, and in this way they soon become capable of taking charge of small branch offices. As they are brought up in a telegraphic atmosphere, so to speak, they are familiar with all the details of the business, and are very naturally given the preference when vacancies occur. As they gain experience, they are transferred to more important offices, or busier wires, as the case may be, and receive higher salaries, until at last they return to the main office; not as poorly paid office girls, but as experienced and fairly paid operators.

But even now they have not reached the limit of possible success, for there is a more exalted position than that of operator, to which any woman may aspire. They are promoted to executive offices, or what are known as chiefs and traffic chiefs, who look after the movement of business and see that messages are subjected to no unnecessary delay. There are a few offices of considerable importance managed by women, but the number is not large. It has always appeared rather singular to me that, with the number of intelligent and well-educated women in the business, more of them do not interest themselves in the study of the science of electricity. Women rarely, if ever, interest themselves in the phenomena of electricity, and although they are brought into daily contact with its manifestations, they possess very little information regarding it. The comparatively recent inventions, the duplex and quadruplex, used for sending a number of messages over the same wire simultaneously, are difficult of comprehension, and very few women have mastered their intricacies. The men having this branch of the business in charge have undergone a special training for the work, and up to the present women have not entered into competition with them.

In the work of receiving and sending messages women do equally as good work as men. They may not be capable of such phenomenal bursts of speed as the male telegraphers, but at the same time extraordinary speed is not so much an element of success or necessity as accuracy and the ability to maintain a fair average rate. They perform really creditable work, and a great point in their favor is their reliability. As yet women have not been very successful in the handling of press reports. Day and night the Associated Press and the United Press send many thousands of words to the newspapers in all parts of the country, and the wires are almost exclusively in charge of men. The immense amount of matter to be handled necessitates a very high rate of speed, forty-eight words a minute being maintained for hours at a stretch. A woman's strength is hardly equal to such a task. Since the introduction of typewriters into telegraph offices, women have taken kindly to the machines, and in their use have become proficient. The typewriter reduces the labor very materially.

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* This series of papers "Women's Chances as Bread-winners," was commenced with

"HOW TO BECOME A TRAINED NURSE" January, 1891
 "WOMEN AS STENOGRAPHERS" February, "
 "WOMEN AS DRESSMAKERS" March, "
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