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# Can Mother Come Back?

By MARY ROSS

**A** SCARED voice over The Survey telephone started the discussion. "No, you don't know me, so it's no use telling my name. But I've been reading what The Survey says about married women working and I thought I'd call you up. You see, Grace is sixteen now and neither she nor the doctor need me at home like they used to, so I thought I might get a job. We could use the money and it would be something to do. But the trouble is, I never did have a job, and I don't know where to go. I once did a lot of studying though, by myself, about scientific housekeeping, and I thought I might brush that up and do something with it."

Then a letter from another reader put a slightly different angle on the question raised by the Woman's Place issue of Survey Graphic (December, 1926).

"Why don't you say something," she asked, "about the woman who wants to spend six or eight years at home while her children are little, but expects to go back to work when they get in school?"

And a mother who has left an enviable professional position put her belief in general terms in a magazine article. "The woman who has gone far enough in her field before she marries to be known, at least among her confrères, for the quality of her work, will have something marketable to offer in the work-a-day world at any time, provided she does not allow herself to 'grow stale' during the infancy of her children," wrote Eva vB. Hansl in the January Harpers. Mrs. Hansl suggests spending from six to ten years after college in establishing one's self in a profession; then a period of concentration on the home, with spare time and strength devoted to keeping up vocational interests as a recreation or hobby; and a return to outside professional work when the youngest children embark upon school. "I have known any number of women who have done it," she declares.

**H**OW to amalgamate the professional and domestic interests of college women or work out a stagger-tread system so that each may have the major emphasis in turn, is the aim of the Institute for the Coordination of Women's Interests at Smith College. Detailed studies are in progress of the kinds of jobs which college women are holding or might hold, especially on a part-time basis; and of devices such as nursery schools or cooperative kitchens, which can free the house-wife and young mother from some of her duties at home to carry outside interests as a side-line until again she can devote her major attention to them. The same points are being considered in another extensive study by the American Association of University Women. Both of these pieces of research, however, are properly aimed at a long-range study of the subject rather than the here and now with which many women are struggling, and they deal with a comparatively small and favored group. So I set out to try to get a glimpse of the situation as it is working out now in New York City.

I went to see the statistician of a downtown company, who has made elaborate studies of a personnel of 40,000; the heads of three non-commercial employment bureaus, the Part-Time Bureau, the Vocational Bureau of the New York Women's Exchange, and that of the Y.W.C.A., which consider the social aspects of placement; the "house mother" who knows the stories of many of the 9,000 employes in the home offices of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and the statistician who studies them in the aggregate; two women who are responsible for the training and placement of workers in one of the large and enlightened department stores, and the former director of the Bureau of Vocational Research. In no case were married women considered routinely as a separate group for purposes of reporting or management; their employment is a comparatively new thing in business and few exact facts have been ascertained. Hence the replies to my questions must be regarded chiefly as the opinions of individuals whose experience qualifies them to speak.

**O**N two points there was general unanimity—that many married women want jobs as an outlet for energy or interest or as a source of income; and that in individual instances almost any handicap—lack of special training or its long disuse, for example—can be overcome.

"We can find a place for any woman who has something definite to sell which the labor market wants," said Mrs. Amy Hobart, secretary of the Part-Time Bureau, "if she has not been away from her work too long." Of the 2,400 registrants at this bureau last year, the largest group, 864, were married women who wanted part-time work to dovetail into duties at home. The part-time jobs in which nearly 1,900 placements were made in 1926 included a majority (1,200) in office work of all types, a small number each as teachers, tutors, clinic assistants, laboratory assistants, dieticians, librarians, shoppers, translators, proof-readers, social workers, cafeteria managers, housekeepers, personnel workers, interior decorators, and other specialized jobs totalling twenty-three varieties in all; and a long list headed "non-specialized work," with such categories as routine work in a cafeteria, hostesses, models, ushers, receptionists, sales positions, sewing, the care of children evenings or to relieve a nurse, companions, and so on. Nearly half the applicants were graduates of colleges or professional schools. Yet for a list of 361 women registered as "unclassified," the largest number of them college graduates, the placement column shows that only 11 temporary and 2 permanent positions were found. A general education and a general desire to work seemed insufficient.

It is the impression of Mrs. Hobart and of Mrs. Bennett Epstein, who has assisted Eleanor H. Adler in directing the work of the Bureau in New York, and its Philadelphia branch, from the beginning, that there are comparatively few mothers of very young children among the women whom they place in positions.

"Ordinarily a woman does not earn enough in a part-