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Helen Stuart Campbell

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Helen Stuart Campbell (1839–1918)

Born Helen Campbell Stuart on 4 July 1839 in Lockport, New York, died on 22 July 1918 in Dedham, Massachusetts, Helen Stuart Campbell was a social reformer and first-generation muckraker, active in the settlement movement, an influential feminist, active popular lecturer, an early home economist and home economics professor, theorist on the nature of women's work in the market and the home, and an author of popular fiction on the struggles of women and of children's stories at the turn of the century. She was married in 1861 to a surgeon in the Grand Army of the Republic, Grenville Mellen Weeks, divorced in 1871, and henceforth assumed her mother's maiden name.

In the late 1870s Helen Campbell became involved in the early home economics movement after having taken lessons from Juliet Corson of the New York Cooking School, and began teaching in 1878 in the Raleigh (North Carolina) Cooking School. Campbell wrote a home economics textbook, *The Easiest Way in House-Keeping and Cooking* (1881), and associated with Anna Lowell Woodbury in founding a mission school and diet kitchen in Washington, DC. Later she helped to organize the short-lived National Household Economics Association in 1893.

Concern with the diet of the poor led her to write her first major muckraking work, *The Problem of the Poor. A Record of Quiet Work in Unquiet Places* (1882), which described the work of a city mission on the New York waterfront with which she was associated (run by Jerry McAuley), and which dealt with poverty in New York, especially in connection with the unfortunate effects of low wages on women. As many of her works, the book first appeared serially in popular magazines. At this time she also wrote a number of financially successful novels, including *Mrs. Herndon's Income* and *Miss Melinda's Opportunity*, which emphasized women's struggles with the low (and often falling) wages.

As a result of the reputation she acquired as a social critic and reformer, Campbell was commissioned by Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* to write weekly articles beginning on 24 October 1886 on the conditions among women in the needle trades and department stores of New York. She documented how even well-intentioned employers were driven by competition to drive down wages and raise piece rates, and how difficult it was for women and their children to survive on women's wages as low as three dollars per week. The *Tribune* articles were later collected as *Prisoners of Poverty: Women Wage-Workers, Their Trades and Their Lives*. This work was immediately followed by *Prisoners of Poverty Abroad*, a sequel written after travel to Europe and a visit arranged by Florence Kelley (q.v.) to Friedrich Engels in England.

Campbell's best-known achievement was that she helped attract the attention of middle-class audiences to the plight of poor women wage-earners at the outset of the period of early Progressive era social reform. But she also pioneered as an early social economist in applying new methods of social science, such as the use of official reports and government documents and the analysis of earnings and family budgets to explain the living and working conditions of women. Her methodology of writing was to examine closely individual cases that were representative of the circumstances of many women, and then generalize about larger issues affecting working women.

In 1891 her monograph, *Women Wage-Earners*, a survey of conditions of working women in America and Europe, received an award from the American Economic Association. Subsequently published in an expanded version as *Women Wage-Earners: Their Past, Their Present, and Their Future* (1893; reprinted 1972) with an introduction by Richard T. Ely, it argued for workers' associations and consumers' unions as means of seeking better wages and improvements in working conditions, and vividly described factory work as preparation 'for the hospital, the workhouse, and the prison', given that workers were regularly 'inoculated with trade diseases, mutilated by trade appliances, and corrupted by trade associates' (p. 213).

Ely had founded the American Economic Association in 1885 to oppose Social Darwinism and *laissez-faire* individualism, and had become a popular figure at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Campbell studied with Ely in 1893 at Wisconsin, and the following year Ely persuaded the regents of the University to invite Campbell to deliver two courses of lectures for the spring of 1895, 'Household Science' and 'Social Science', arranging for their remuneration himself. The lectures, however, did not lead to a permanent position for Campbell at Wisconsin as was hoped, but did result in another textbook, *Household Economics* (1897), which concerned 'the connecting link between the physical economics of the individual and the social economics of the state'. The election of a populist governor led to Campbell's appointment as a professor of home economics at Kansas State Agricultural College in 1897, but she resigned the following March on account of ill health and charges of conflict with subordinates. She then returned to freelance writing and lecturing for the rest of her life.

Campbell was a member of the First Nationalist Club of Boston, a group following Edward Bellamy's 1888 *Looking Backward* ideas, and also wrote for the Bellamyite publication, *Nationalist*, as well as for the *American Fabian* and Benjamin O. Flower's social reform periodical *Arena*, including for the latter such pieces as 'Certain Convictions as to Poverty' (1889-90), 'White Child Slavery' (1889-90), and 'The Working-Women of To-day' (1891). She was also an influential close friend and 'mother figure', according to Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose *Women and Economics: A Study of the*

Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution (1898) has been called 'the most important work of feminist theory in the emerging Progressive Era' (Sklar, p. 305).

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Agatha Louisa Chapman (1907-63)

Agatha Chapman was one of a number of Canadian women economists active during the 1930s and 1940s.¹ They include Irene M. Spry (*q.v.*), Beryl Plumptre, Alison Kemp-Mitchell, Phyllis Turner-Ross, Sylvia Ostry, Mary Quayle Innis (*q.v.*) and Lucy Morgan (see Alexander, 1995). Some were Canadian-born, others, although born outside the country, adopted Canada through marriage or through living there. For many who worked in the government or the private sector, their work was, and is still, unattributed. In Agatha Chapman's case, this phenomenon, combined with her short working life, resulted in only one book to her credit. Nevertheless, the account of her life raises interesting questions for women economists.