

keep help in the factory any more. A man wants to loaf all the time and he expects to acquire a handsome fortune at that occupation in the course of a few months. If he don't get that fortune he grumbles about under pay and unfair division of the profits of industry. It's awfully exasperating. "It was indeed, particularly as the box manufacturer's wife had paid \$85 for a bracelet in the early part of the month, and the bill had just come in.

"What's the matter with your men?" asked the Pessimist.

"Oh," replied the manufacturer, "they're lazy. You see in our mill the boards go into a machine to be shaped and fitted, and from there they are carried over to another machine to be put together. We pay nine dollars for that carrying work, and the fellow on the machine gets a couple of dollars extra, and orders to push things so that the men who carry will get good sized loads. Well, sir, those fellows don't want to carry much of anything, and they want to loaf at that. Just to show you. Last week we took on a Polak. He was a good husky fellow, and went to carrying. To-day he walks up and says,

"Gif me my money. Me no more vork for you."

"What's the matter, Stan?" said I.

"Me no like ze vork. Too much hurry up for nine dollars.' Now what do you think of that?"

"I think," replied the Pessimist, "that Stan is doing some thoughtful thinking."

MAX WORTH.

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THE CHICAGO GARMENT MAKERS.*

Extract from "Wage-Earning Women," by Annie Marion MacLean.

First let us look at the garment workers [of Chicago] as they toil through the long day in non-union shops. The shops or trades that are organized naturally have better working conditions and higher wages than those that are not, since the unions have established very definite standards in these respects. Our study was therefore confined to those establishments in which the workers had no such guarantee of immunity from the unfortunate phases of industry as that furnished by union contracts. It is true, of course, that some non-union shops present as good conditions as union establishments can boast, but there can be no certainty of their continuance when the employer alone has the power of determining the character of his establishment.

*This extract from a book published last winter—a review of which appears on another page of this Public—is a timely corroboration of the facts being at the present moment disclosed in connection with the strike of the Chicago garment workers (pp. 1155, 1162).

. . . We confined ourselves to eight establishments employing approximately 1,000 women—a small proportion, it is true, of the full 30,000 women engaged in this industry, but the places visited were representative. Employers were extremely loath to allow any investigation to be made, and they seemed unduly sensitive on the wages question. It was possible, however, to learn much of a section of this most important industry so far as women are concerned. Employes were seen at their work places, and in their homes, and many of them talked freely upon what industrial life meant to them. Very few seemed satisfied. Their dissatisfaction was not always caused by low wages, or long hours, but by petty annoyances connected with the trade. As an example of the tyranny of offensive customs, the case of one rather conspicuous establishment employing about 300 women may be cited. Among the workers were the newly arrived immigrants from Poland, Bohemia and Hungary, but the majority were Poles, Bohemians and Scandinavians born in the environs of their present workshop. A large percentage of these speak English but little, and understand only the simplest words. It would be difficult to find a place with better physical conditions. The wages, too, are higher than those found in many factories, and there are seldom long slack seasons, but the rules of the house, the restrictions placed upon the employes, and the petty annoyances to which they are subjected are most distressing to girls who have the energy and intelligence to resent them.

There was an oppressive atmosphere of dull, stupid endurance, and the faces of most of the women were pitifully blank. There was abundant evidence of lack of opportunity for promotion, of ceaseless mechanical work, of colorless, uneventful lives, and all this with good physical conditions and fairly good wages. "Girls are unreasonable," said the employer; "what more can they want?" They want an absence of fines for imperfect work for one thing, and the employer to furnish thread and needles for another. But he does not see the force of these old contentions. The buying of thread or needles or both is a constant source of irritation to the more intelligent workers of the needle trades in the West as in the East. In several Chicago establishments this was found to amount to about \$2 a week for those using one-needle machines, and it falls heavier on the two and three-needle operators, who pay sometimes from \$2.50 to \$3 a week for their thread. It is the old, old story heard in various parts of the country, and filling the worker with a revolutionary spirit whenever it is told. The girls insist that the garment is sold with the thread, and the profit goes to the employer. An added grievance is that employes are required to buy thread from the firm. When questioned about this one girl smiled satirically and answered: "Sure, that's

the way they make their money. We could get it much cheaper at a store."

Another thing which all resent is the lack of liberty. The piece-workers are especially rebellious because they are required to be ready for work at 7:30 in the morning on pain of dismissal, and because they cannot leave any time during the day they wish, or when work is so slack that there is nothing for them to do. They argue that since they are piece-workers, their presence in the factory should not be required when the firm has not sufficient work to keep them busy, and that they should not be compelled to stay in the building idle unless paid for their time. In one factory a girl said: "I finished all I had to do three hours ago, and now I sit and fold my hands. My mother is washing at home and would be glad to have me there. I don't see why I should have to stay here when it does not do the manager any good or me either."

Thus do they complain. They want first a chance to work, and then some voice in regard to the disposal of their time. In many factory processes there are delays, often unexpected, and often unavoidable, which bring hardship to the piece-worker. The young girl cannot see why she should sit idle before a silent machine, when the alluring world outside is calling to her. In some places girls are not permitted to go home for sickness unless it is an illness sufficiently serious to frighten the superintendent. One girl advanced the theory that it is because of fear lest they seek employment elsewhere that they are not allowed to leave during working hours.

The week workers are really less restricted than the piece-workers. Many of them are little girls, finishers, packers and inspectors, who laugh and sing while they do their work, and seem to feel restraint less than the older girls.

In a corset factory, where there is a graduated piece rate for all operations, the girls insist that this rate is constantly being lowered by changes in fashion so that one has to work almost twice as hard as she did a year or two ago to make the same amount of money. The new-style garment is nearly twice as long as the old. The women receive the same rate for sewing the long seams as formerly for the short ones, and they say that whereas some of the best workers used to make \$12 and \$18 it is now impossible for a girl, working all the time at the highest possible speed, to make more than \$10 a week unless she has exceptional energy and endurance. This is only another instance of the hardships freakish changes in fashion have forced upon women in industry.

The working conditions in most of the shops are generally fairly good. They are clean enough and well lighted. The air is not bad in summer when the windows are open, but there seems to be little attempt at artificial ventilation, with the result that the rooms are often foul in winter. There

are, however, few among the employes who seem to understand the necessity for fresh air. Even in summer there is a persistent odor, in some places, of gas from the gas iron, and when the doors and windows are closed it is very distressing. This is especially true in the tailoring shops. It would seem that there is careless neglect in this matter. There ought to be some way of preventing the escape of gas. One of the girls working in such a place spoke of the difficulty she had in breathing during the winter. Like many factory girls, she is afraid of draughts, and objects to open windows; but she believes that if the foreman or some one in authority were to insist upon having the windows lowered a little at the top, the draught would not be serious, and the girls would stop wrangling over the subject. All through the year the windows are closed before the employes leave at night and remain so until after work begins in the morning, if they are opened at all.

In one place there were two little Italian girls who were undoubtedly under fourteen years of age. In another shop there were several Polish children who gave their ages as fifteen, but they were much younger, judging from appearances. These children cut and sewed on tags. Their work is not hard, and the foreman is considerate and kind to them, but they have to stand all day. When his attention was called to this he said that they could not conveniently do their work sitting, but he afterwards admitted that he had never thought how injurious constant standing might be to girls of that age and said he would provide seats for them. They are paid from \$2.50 to \$3 a week.

Almost without exception, the girls said that spent their free time at home helping their mothers. Among the older girls there is strong class feeling. There are many newly arrived immigrants who do not speak English, and the foreman of one factory said that almost every day he hires a new girl who is still on the ocean. The immigrants who drift into these shops are ignorant and dull, and too often the native-born are not far in advance. There are a few bright girls, some of whom are studying hard at various things outside of their working hours, and many who say that they read a great deal, while others had never heard of the public library or its various branches.

As has been indicated before, much discontent prevails among the workers in this trade. The chief complaints of the girls in the clothing establishments have not to do with wages, although in many instances there is seemingly good ground for complaint on this score. The weekly earnings range from \$2.50 to \$12, with an average in the neighborhood of \$7. The girls protest most against the long day, and the effects of this and the nervous strain of their work are decidedly noticeable. It appears in heavy eyes with deep, dark rings, in wrinkled skin and old young faces. The high rate of speed that must be maintained

through so many successive hours is undermining the health of thousands of girls in this industry.

Another grievance is overtime in the busy season. The girls are required to work until 7:30 or 8 o'clock two or three nights a week. They usually stay at their machines through the supper hour and send boys out to bring them a bite to eat. This is done to save time in the hope of getting through a little earlier. They seem to resent this overtime requirements quite as much as the inevitable slack seasons, which amount to about twelve weeks in the year.

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COUNTER CURRENTS.

From the August 10, 1910, Christian Commonwealth, of London.

The girl with the red hair brought in a box of half-finished safety-pins and flung them down on the narrow shelf beside her press; then she sat down with an air of tragic importance as befitted the bearer of bad news, and began "capping" her pins with incredible rapidity. The hum of conversation in the long dingy shop had ceased expectantly at her entrance, but she did not speak.

In the next department the machinery kept up a sound like the hurrying to and fro of the feet of an agitated multitude; in the capping-room the women's presses punctuated the noise with restless tapping; no one paused for even the fraction of a second in their work, but furtive glances were thrown at the downcast face of the red-haired girl.

At length the suspense became unbearable, and the oldest woman in the shop looked across her heap of tangled pins:

"I shouldn't be in no 'urry ter speak, ef I was you, which I ain't," she said with dreary sarcasm.

She had a pinched nose and sunken cheeks, this oldest woman in the shop; her hair was grey, and her cotton blouse, which was patched with material of a different color, hung on her thin shoulders as on two pegs. She was thirty-nine and looked fifty-nine, and from time to time she coughed violently, letting loose a virulent host of tubercle bacilli into the heated and dust-laden air.

The red-haired girl answered, sulkily:

"We got three days."

There was a gasp of dismay, though no one spoke. The sickly glare of the noon-day sun through the dirty skylights seemed to take on a more leaden gleam.

Then suddenly there arose the sound of sobbing.

A child, not yet fifteen, had laid her head down on her arm and begun to cry.

"Don't take on, Beattie," said the girl opposite to her; "it ain't no better for none of us." But Beattie had not yet learned to accept things with the dull apathy of those who know that it is vain to rebel against the laws of the strong against the weak.

When she had capped and pressed thirteen dozen safety pins for fivepence during as many years as the oldest woman in the shop had done, she would have learned the uselessness of tears when brought face to face with industrial law. Female labor is plentiful, therefore cheap, therefore a "great gross" of pins must be capped and pressed for fivepence. Now a great gross is really twelve dozen dozen, but in the matter of safety pins it is reckoned to be thirteen, and "every pin through your hands twice;" thus it came about that Beattie, who was not so quick as some of the others, earned on an average six shillings a week, or a penny farthing an hour for fifty-six hours' work. Yet the news that she was to have three days' holiday came to this child of fourteen years as an unmitigated calamity.

"Don't carry on, Beattie; there's a good gell," said the girl at the next machine, as Beattie continued weeping.

"Oh, s'all very well for the likes of you," she answered, "but me mother's ill, an' the baby an' all, an' me father ain't done no work for this 'ere fortnit. Oh, whatever does folks went Bank 'Oli-days for?"

No one said any more; perhaps they were all too busy, perhaps, their sympathy lay too deep for words, and in not a few cases they were too depressed, for, as one girl had said, "It wasn't no better for none of them." She herself, for instance, had another life to support besides her own, although it was true she was a quick worker, and had even been known to make as much as ten and sixpence some weeks when she had been given "best" work. Suddenly, a girl who was about seventeen, and possessed of rare beauty, of form and coloring, if a little lacking in refinement of feature, clutched at a vain straw of hope.

"Did the foreman tell yer 'isself?" she asked.

"Course 'e did," answered the red-haired girl. "'Spose I made it up? 'Spose I'm one o' them there blooming' practikkle jokers?"

The hope died out of the other's face and the beautiful eyes clouded as she drooped them again on her work; and Beattie ceased to cry, and returned to her pile of pins with a nervous effort to work more quickly which only had the effect of delaying her. The child-mouth had hardened, and the whole sensitive little face had changed in expression; very slightly but perceptibly she had deteriorated; henceforth her attitude towards life would be one of defiance and distrust. She had been caught in the down-current.

Steadily the work went on, and almost silently. Somehow the impulse to talk seemed to have left everyone; the atmosphere became tense with strain and haste, for by working at top speed it might be possible to earn several pence more during the days that remained towards the cruel deficit of the following week of only two and a half working days.