

THE INVASION OF FAMILY LIFE BY INDUSTRY

BY MRS. FLORENCE KELLEY,
Secretary National Consumers' League, New York City.

It is, of course, a truism that a very large majority of the homes in the United States are those of poor working people. Miss Tarbell, in her recent papers on the tariff in the *American Magazine*, points out that of fifteen or sixteen million families in this country less than two million have an annual income of \$2000. In discussing industrial conditions we habitually think of those who come above or about that line. We do not commonly think of the homes of working people as the homes of the poor. They are, however, the great majority, and they are at this time suffering an invasion such as the great mass of the homes of any people never before suffered.

I shall speak of four aspects of that invasion. First, the case in which industry follows a mother into her home and distracts her from her duties there. Second, the case in which poverty drives a mother out of her home into industry in the effort to earn subsistence for herself and her fatherless children or the children of a disabled father; and, third, the case in which young boys are taken out of their home into industry. We have here in Pennsylvania a larger and more influential body of employers, who constantly and successfully say year after year that they cannot carry on industry in this great, rich, manufacturing Commonwealth without drafting into its service little boys, than in any other state in this country. Finally, the case in which the daughter of the family, though perhaps a very little girl, is drafted out of the home. Never before on so great a scale have working people's homes been invaded by industry in the sense that it entices away those who belong in the home and not in industry.

Within a fortnight there has come to my attention in New York City what I believe to be a case typical of many thousands there and here, and in all our great manufacturing cities, in which a working man is content to earn less than he could. He is not sick. He is far from dead. He is working, but content to earn

less than he could and should earn because his wife and two little sons contribute, as they should not, to the total earnings of the family. The wife is consumptive. She has had a very long, slow case of consumption. Of the little boys, one is four years old and one ten. The little boy of ten years looks about seven, and in his classes in school is about as far advanced as a normal child of seven should be, though he was born in New York City and has had the opportunity of going to school during the regular school period. The mother contributes about four dollars a week, with the help of the two children, the boy of ten years and the boy of four, to the family income. She makes cigarette papers for the most famous manufacturer of cigarettes in New York, covers for the most expensive cigarettes produced. In some cases the boxes in which she packs these cigarettes carry in monogram the name of the patron. He obviously believes that he is getting particularly good tobacco and particularly clean forms of manufacture by reason of the high price—and the consumptive mother spends her time licking these cigarette covers. The house is filthy and the children are ill-fed. They are kept at home from school much of the time. The child of four does not even get to his kindergarten regularly. He helps in making cigarette covers.

The whole family life is disorganized. At times the house is locked, the family on the streets, because the mother is fetching supplies to and from the factory. That is not an unusual case. That sort of manufacture, with the help of the invalid of the family, is not exceptional in any of our great manufacturing cities in which any industry is carried on whereof the material can be subdivided and made easily portable. We have in New York City alone 4000 tenement houses registered in which work like that is permitted. Nominally, of course, a consumptive is not allowed thus to work, but we cannot know what happens in 4000 registered tenement houses and in all the others which are not registered.

New York has this very great advantage over Philadelphia, that it counts its invaded houses. Twenty years ago a factory law was enacted in which there was incorporated a rudimentary provision for registering the invaded homes here in Pennsylvania. But by the effort of the present Chief Factory Inspector, Mr. John C. Delaney, that provision was stricken out of the law, and Pennsylvania to-day does not even count the homes which are invaded

by this form of industry. We have made no progress here in that respect. We have made sadly little in New York, and virtually no effective progress in other states. That kind of invasion of the home is not decreasing, but increasing throughout the manufacturing districts.

It is also sadly true that the invasion by means of the withdrawal of a mother from the family, the invasion of industry by taking the head of the family away from her fireside, increases also. There is a queer perversion of charity by which, as soon as a woman is left a widow with little children, a certain obsession seems to arise in all her friends, rich and poor, to secure for her the most loathesome work I know—the work of scrubbing floors which people have been defiling all day. In every city there are widows who receive more or less private relief on condition that they accept work found for them. Thus a good woman in Chicago had the monstrous idea of establishing a night nursery for children in order that they might be carried away from home to be taken care of and sleep at night while their mothers performed this hideous task which should be performed by machinery.

Every charitable society which scrutinizes its records must have made the observation which the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor in New York has made, that there is a recent great increase in the cases in which mothers of little children have gone out to work because the husband was unemployed. In some cases the wife has supplanted her husband at the identical machine, working more cheaply than he. Some fathers have sat at home and taken care of the children while the wives worked at their machines for two-thirds the pay. We have lost ground terribly since this last panic began in this form of invasion of the home by industry; the calling out of the mother to leave her young children and go out to work. She is always doing that where the father is dead or she is deserted, instead of our doing as the republic of Switzerland does, pensioning her on condition that she stay at home and bring up her children—not trying to be father and mother and failing in both duties.

As to the little boys in industry, we have an old assumption that the boy we see on the sidewalk will some day be the Marshall Field or John Wanamaker of his generation. There is no foundation for that. Marshall Field was never a newsboy, and

I do not know that John Wanamaker ever was one. We have no evidence that street boys grow into heroes of commerce. We are really encouraging them to be beggars and thieves when we allow them to keep change which they should return if they are ever going to be business men.

We encourage a street boy to be away from his home and family and we cherish a queer superstition that he always stays in the street to help his widowed mother. In many cases he does not help her even when he has one. The little newsboy is beginning to be looked upon as he ought to be—as an ill-treated, much idealized and usually very much demoralized little boy on the high road to a reformatory.

Then there is the older boy—the messenger. I have been studying messenger boys for seventeen years, having lived in the poorest quarters of Chicago and New York, from which the messenger boys for those cities are largely drafted. There is not, I believe, one messenger boy three months in the service of the Western Union, American District Telegraph, Postal, or any general or local telegraph or messenger service, who fails to learn everything known to any criminal in the community in which he lives. The messenger boys are spared nothing.

In the penal code of New York there is enumerated a long list of places to which children are forbidden entrance—wine-rooms, gambling-rooms, brothels, which, in the first place, presumably do not exist and, in the second place, are specifically forbidden to admit children under sixteen years of age. But the criminal code especially provides that this section does not apply to children delivering messages or merchandise at the doors of any of these places. A boy fourteen or fifteen years old does not stop at the door of the house to which he is sent, but must not enter. The very prohibition stimulates his curiosity and makes it quite sure that he will go in. I do not know how any messenger boys, even in exceptional cases, succeed in remaining honest, with the wholly insufficient supervision which they have and the never-ending temptation to collect money at both ends, to suppress telegrams and to steal carfare. The temptations which beset them are so cruel and so pitiless, so shocking, that they can neither be printed nor told. Five and twenty years from now our descendants will, I believe, look back upon our treatment—the failure of our treat-

ment—of our street boys with the same wonder and reprobation that we visit upon our ancestors who tolerated slavery.

Finally, there is the going out of the home of the daughters of the family. The Consumers' League, which I have the pleasure of serving as its secretary, is about to publish a study of some 300 young girls and women who earn their living in different cities and live away from home, stating how they earn their money and how they spend it, how much they expend and what they get for this money which they earn, in many cases with very great exertion. No one can read those records of honest girls and women with their account of hard work and of privation when there is no work, of illness and hunger, and being turned out of the rented room for want of rent—no one can read those stories without marveling at the courage and character of these girls who keep within the straight and narrow path.

After ten years of close contact with places where young girls are employed I am convinced that the families who sent their sons to the Cuban war took no greater risk, though we know that many died, many were made invalids and many came home diseased and demoralized. Those who sent their young sons to that war took no graver risks of death, disease and demoralization than families take who send their young girls into department stores, offices and all the innumerable industries which are calling young girls, as they have never been called before in the history of the world, to work away from their own roof, away from the supervision of their mothers. It is a new process.

There were virtually no tenement houses in this country sixty years ago. There was no telephone service calling upon young girls to work for \$3.50 to \$6 a week all night at a telephone exchange. There was no such telegraph and messenger service sixty years ago as now employs in a single year in the City of New York 6000 different young boys in order to keep 2000 boys at work every day in the year, including Sunday and every night. These things did not exist. They are new. They call for an entirely new kind of education for young people in ways of protecting themselves. They call for the abolition of the employment of little boys as newsboys and of girls and youths under the age of twenty-one years for delivering messages at night, by telegraph or telephone.

There has never before been an organization of industry which

called women out at night to work to support their little children. We have done nothing effective in our legislation. We are behind the fourteen enlightened nations of Europe in that we do not prohibit the work of women in manufacture at night. They are free to be called upon to work all night, away from their homes. The process is new. It is a wholesale process and it is increasing in scope and vigor in all these four lines. Not in any one of these is it diminishing.

The young daughters of the poor have to be taught to meet dangers which their grandmothers never had to meet, because they did not exist, but we are not furnishing that education. We have not faced the situation. Personally, I do not believe that the family can be effectively defended until we give a part of the responsibility for its defense to the mothers and the older daughters of the family. I do not think that the men in this country have protected the home adequately. They are not doing it now. They do not face the situation effectively, and I do not believe that they can protect the home against this industrial invasion until they call into their councils and into active participation, particularly in our city governments, the mothers of these homes.

There is a growing body of women—there are some men, too, chiefly intelligent workingmen—who know the change that is taking place in the homes of our country and want their consciences clear of participating in it. When we attempt a remedy by individual effort it proves insufficient. I may as an individual declare to the telegraph company that I will not have messages delivered to my house in the dead of night by young boys. That is infinitely slow in its effect. We need legislation before we can even free our consciences. We cannot do it adequately by the unaided effort of voluntary associations. We can only do it by legislation effectively followed up.

The laws which we do get enacted are in some cases on the statute books not enforced for years. For twenty years we have had a law providing for factory inspection in Pennsylvania. Twenty years ago I went before a legislative committee to promote the passage of a bill creating the office of factory inspector. We have never for one day had an efficient enforcement of the laws passed then and since—the different provisions for the protection of the children.

In New York State it required twelve years of persuasion, after a good law for the protection of mercantile employees was put on the statute books, before mercantile inspectors to the paltry number of eight were created and enabled to begin last October the work of enforcing the provisions for safeguarding young boys and girls employed in our stores. Many women went all these years to the state Legislature or to the city Board of Estimate and Apportionment pleading for an appropriation of \$14,000 for salaries and expenses for inspectors to enforce the law already on the statute books. In the first three months of their service these inspectors found, in 1908, 1100 children illegally employed, many of them by leading merchants. They found innumerable minor violations, so that one shudders to think what went on during the twelve years while we were trying to persuade the authorities to create officials to enforce the law which they themselves had enacted. It is for reasons such as these that I am convinced that giving full political power to women will not disrupt the home, but that this is the only way in which we can effectively check the disruption of the homes of the poor by the four-fold invasion of industry which is going on increasingly every day.