

V.—STREET TRADES

BY MRS. FLORENCE KELLEY.

In the absence of Mr. George Hall, secretary of the New York State Child Labor Committee, who was to have spoken on our newsboys in New York, I should like, having been a member of that committee since its foundation, to say, that I think that we are facing in New York towards prohibition of the employment of young children on the streets.

We have had for many years a well enforced prohibition of the employment of girls under the age of sixteen years. I have lived among the poorest of the poor in New York for twelve years, and have been a great deal about in the streets in which girls would naturally be found selling, if they were selling anywhere. I have found only six different girls engaged in selling anything on the streets of New York.

If the law against street selling and peddling by girls to the age of sixteen years can be thus effectively enforced in a city in which the depths of poverty among the immigrants are so frightful as they are in New York, there is no reason for assuming that it is impossible to prohibit efficiently street selling by boys.

What we have to undo is a long, slow, wrong education of public opinion. Many years ago a philanthropist accepted the street boy as inevitable. He built up an endowed corporation for the purpose of dealing forever with the street boy as a permanent factor in the life of the city. Public opinion has been so influenced by that action that virtually every person, even including some members of our own Child Labor Committee, believes it good to have lodging houses for boys who may have perfectly able-bodied and well intentioned fathers and mothers within six blocks of the lodging houses; that these children should be provided for by subscriptions; and that the lodging houses should be exempt from taxation as a necessary, integral part of the philanthropy of the city.

We even have, from time to time, spectacular theatrical outings for newsboys. Some newspaper provides that a thousand news-

boys shall have a Christmas dinner in public at its expense, although every one of those newsboys may have a father and mother who prefer that he should eat Christmas dinner at home.

New York City has not unlearned this wrong lesson. It assumes that the newsboy is a detached unit to be encouraged as a future merchant, to be punished irrespective of his family when he falls into crime, as he does at an appalling rate. Many thousand children live in institutions at the expense of the city of New York. A large part of the boys are there because of their experiences in leading this detached and irresponsible life. Nothing could be more perverse than the city's whole treatment of these detached children.

About seven years ago, the State Child Labor Committee investigated the actual life of the street children, and found that, in spite of the newsboys' lodging houses, there was a permanent population, summer and winter, of boys from eight years old up sleeping in streets, in hallways, over all sorts of places where in winter they could get a little heat from basements and cellars below, on stairs of the elevated railroads. In every sort of place where no child ought to be spending the night, these boys were found, having peddled papers until eleven o'clock or midnight.

They were afflicted with disease due to their detachment from their homes and to their acquaintance with evil. It was of course hopeless, where a community took so perverse a view as our community has been educated to take, to get at once a prohibition of the street work of the boys. We did try to get a thorough-going official enumeration of them, so as to learn at least how many there were and where.

We then got a state law applying to Buffalo, Rochester and New York, under which a boy ten to fourteen years old may sell papers if he gets a badge. Under a ruling of the Department of Education, no boy can get this badge unless his father or mother goes with him to the Department of Education and signs a statement that this is granted at the desire of the parent.

We have found the officials under our Department of Education as perverse as the rest of us. Parents are not required to go with the boys. They do not go. We are making now an investigation which has already shown that of the boys investigated, three-fourths have been given their badges by subordinates of the Department of Education, contrary to the ruling of the department, without any approval by the parents.

We have not succeeded in diminishing conspicuously the number of newsboys employed in the streets. Every year some thousands of boys are given badges to sell papers, who then break the law. For years we could get neither police nor truant officers to enforce even the meagre provision that boys under ten years old should not sell at all, and those under fourteen should not sell after ten o'clock at night.

The Department of Education has now appointed, for a city of five million people, eight truant officers, to look after the newsboys. Of course, they are not properly looked after. There are boys eight or nine years old selling papers at the doors of the theatres late at night. But the public is a little interested now in the cost of keeping several thousand children in city institutions, which really are free boarding houses; and in the causes of this army of children under lock and key. The street trades (including messenger service) are slowly taking the position in the minds of the philanthropists and educators which, ultimately, I am convinced they will take in the minds of all the people, as the worst employments in which children are to be found in the northern states. I believe and hope that no other city has undergone so wrong and perverse an education as New York. I do not believe that the newsboy has ever been made a hero to the same extent that he has there; and therefore, I think that we have a more difficult task there in re-educating public opinion than exists anywhere else.

There is one more point to which I wish to call attention. In every city there is a growing body of convalescent tuberculosis patients who have been treated in sanatoria and dismissed with their disease arrested. To most of them an out-of-doors occupation is most desirable; it is a matter of life and death for them to go back to work indoors. Whenever we copy the reasonable ways of the Japanese, and reserve this out-of-door occupation of newspaper selling for convalescent men, as they reserve massage for the blind, and license men, while putting the boys where they belong (under the control of their fathers and mothers), banishing them from this occupation so injurious to them, we shall kill two birds with one stone. We shall enable a large and pitiable body of our fellow men to make a living in a way good for them, and we shall save a great number of boys from becoming victims of the disease which has ruined the lives of these men.