

*clip Child Labor*



# OREGON STATE CONGRESS OF MOTHERS

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## The Child Who Works

By Millie R. Trumbull

**F**OR THIS month's issue, we have asked the privilege of the space given to the Congress for "the child who works." Not for the child who, now that school has closed its doors, will use the Summertime for play for a time in which to grow brown and strong, so that he may go back to school eager, happy, healthy. We want to use it for the child who goes from the schoolroom to the noise, the foul air, the dingy rooms of the factory; for the child who is denied the playtime, the free time of vacation; for the child to whom our educators have given three months of the year free from confinement and study because our educators think that the child's physical development needs these three months of freedom; for the child who cannot have three months of sunshine, ball games, helping mother, picnics in the woods, swimming, growing brown and freckled and lazy and strong; for the child whose time is to be counted as so many dollars, whose white face and aching head and back count for little when he hands over his week's pay.

We want to use it for a little talk to the mothers who have been thinking that when the vacation comes, the children can find work of some sort in the store or in the factory.

We want to use this page for an appeal to the father and mother who are thinking of the three, four or

possibly five dollars which John or Mary can add to the family treasury during vacation.

We want to take John's father and mother into the factory where John is to work and let them see his prison. We want them to go with us to the can factory, where are made the tin cans which later we buy filled with corn, peas, tomatoes and fruit, and let us go into the room where the stamping is done and watch Mary, who is not quite fifteen, sitting at a machine that stamps six tops out of an oblong piece of tin. On her hands are heavy gloves, and around each finger are wrapped strips of cloth to further protect the poor fingers both from the sharp edges of the tin and the cruel edge of the stamp. Mary presses a lever with one foot each time a lid is stamped out of that piece of tin. Can you count how many times a day Mary's foot presses that lever? The faster she can press it the more money she makes, because Mary is paid by the piece, not by the day.

Can Mary's father and mother imagine better than I can tell them how Mary's side aches when she comes home at night from the hundreds of times she has pressed that lever with her foot during the ten hours she worked that day? And can Mary's father and mother wonder why Mary's head aches, and why her nerves are all quivering, after they

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have stood in that room for twenty minutes and watched Mary at the machine? When they wanted to speak to each other, they had to shout—the din of the machinery was deafening. And Mary's mother remembers with a sinking of the heart how the doctor had told her yesterday that Mary was growing very rapidly; that while she could easily pass for sixteen, she should have plenty of outdoor exercise this vacation, and she should be allowed to sleep late in the morning, in order to keep up her strength. Mary is just coming into womanhood and needs all her strength. Mary's mother had told her father this, but he had been counting up the number of payments yet to be made on the lots they were buying and Mary's wages at the can factory would pay the next two months' installments. Mary's father was more interested in his lots than in what the doctor had said about Mary; besides, wasn't it time that she helped with the family? He had worked when he was her age.

It was useless to remind him that he worked out in the berry fields, the orchards, in haying time. Was it work or play, helping to throw the masses of sweet-scented hay on the wagon, following it to the stack and at dinnertime sitting down to the table and eating until one could eat no more? He forgot that Mary, at her dinnertime, would sit down among the machines, with the smell of the factory, instead of the scent of the new-mown hay, in her nostrils; with the din of the machinery still ringing in her ears, instead of the song of birds. Her dinner would be the cold, hastily-prepared lunch, made up partly from the scraps of last night's supper. It had been wash day, the day before, and mother had no time on wash day to fuss with Mary's lunch. Father has forgotten all this. He had forgotten, too, that when his day was done, he had no long trip on a crowded, stuffy street car ahead of him. And out of the six days of Mary's week she had stood up in the car all the way home on five of those days. And how could he understand how that poor right leg ached? He

thought only of the number punched in her card, which showed how many pieces of tin had passed through her machine that day!

But, now that we have Mary's father there in the factory, and he sees what Mary must do to earn the payments on the lots, let us take him into the next room, where little John, Mary's twin brother, is watching an endless procession of tin cans, guiding them through the machine, and he must not stop to talk, because, if one of the cans is joggled out of the procession, there will be confusion for all.

And we ask John's father to watch that procession for ten minutes without taking his eyes off the cans, or resting them. He tries and begins to blink, and finally gives it up. And John must watch them for ten hours. Then John's mother remembers that John has gone to bed every night with a headache, and that he is growing listless and does not care to go out with the boys to play ball any more. She had been pleased at first thinking that he was outgrowing the boyish pleasures, and that "working was making a man of him." She begins to realize that a boy cannot become a man before Nature shall say his time for manhood has come. But the father cannot get his thoughts away from the payments on the lots, and we take the mother and father out into the fresh air and the sunlight and we ask them: Is it worth the price?

Is it worth the price, my friends? No; a thousand times no! You say that all the factories are not like this? Merely a change of scene, a different type of machine! None of the factories have in them sunshine, fresh air, the smell of the fields, the song of the birds. And your child under the age of sixteen needs all these for his development.

Ah, but you say to me, "Would you not rather have the children busy than idling on the street?" Busy—yes—but not in the factory; on the street—yes—rather than in the factory. Again you exclaim: "Exposed to the pernicious influence of the street,

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the number punched  
which showed how many  
had passed through her  
eyes!

we have Mary's father  
in the factory, and he sees  
that to earn the pay-  
ments, let us take him into  
the store where little John,  
another, is watching an  
operation of tin cans, guid-  
ing the machine, and  
trying to talk, because, if  
John is joggled out of the  
store, there will be confusion for

John's father to watch  
for ten minutes with-  
out his eyes off the cans, or  
if he tries and begins to  
talk, he gives it up. And  
then they are for ten hours.  
Another remembers that  
John goes to bed every night  
at ten, and that he is grow-  
ing, and does not care to go  
out to play ball any  
more, and has been pleased at first  
when he was outgrowing the  
store, and that "working  
is an honor for a boy."  
She believes that a boy cannot be  
ruined before Nature shall say  
his childhood has come. But  
John does not get his thoughts  
out of the payments on the lots,  
the mother and father out  
of the air and the sunlight  
in the store: Is it worth the

price, my friends?  
Always times no! You say  
the children are not like this?  
The scene, a different  
scene! None of the fac-  
tories, the sunshine, fresh  
air, the fields, the song  
of the birds, and your child under  
the sun needs all these for

to say to me, "Would you  
rather have the children busy than  
on the street?" Busy—yes—  
in the factory; on the street—  
no—no in the factory.  
Claim: "Exposed to  
the influence of the street,

rather than be busy in the factory?"  
If your child is "on the street," he is  
in full view of every one else on the  
street. You may see his associates;  
what do you know about his compan-  
ions in the factory? The moment  
your child steps across the threshold  
of the factory or the store, he is no  
longer your child; he is owned body  
and soul by the employer; does the  
employer make it his business to see  
that Mary does not overhear the inde-  
cent stories being retailed by that  
group of women busy at the table  
back of where Mary works? Does  
the employer eat his lunch with that  
gang of young men who are having  
great sport over a racy bit of experi-  
ence of one of the older men? John  
is listening with ears and eyes and  
senses keen to the unaccustomed tale.  
Can Mary's mother protect her from  
the bold glances and eventually the  
familiar remarks of the line of young  
sports waiting outside the store; lined  
up on the curb? Does she know until  
the knowledge comes too late of why  
Mary has been coming home later and  
later to supper each evening, invent-  
ing a new excuse each time?

Is not "playing in the street" safer  
than all this? A thousand times yes!  
And if our streets are not safe enough  
for our children, let us MAKE  
THEM SAFE, instead of sacrificing  
the children to the factory and to the  
department store.

All we ask is, that the boy and girl  
under the age of sixteen shall have a  
reasonable chance for proper physical  
development. After that time is gone

by, while the danger period is not al-  
together passed, factory and store  
hold less temptation for the moral and  
less danger for the physical life of the  
child.

I am not one of those who dreams  
that legislation will ever stop child  
labor—until the conditions that pro-  
duce it are changed, we must expect  
to carry this drag upon our civiliza-  
tion; but we look to legislation to  
regulate and restrict it. That is the  
best for which we may hope.

I have made no reference to the low  
wage scale established by child labor,  
of the effect upon the industrial situa-  
tion, of the effect upon the ethical  
life, both of the child and the com-  
munity. I can only hope that what  
I have said may rouse in the mothers  
and fathers the conviction that has  
been borne in upon my own conscious-  
ness that no factory or store that was  
ever built is good enough for our chil-  
dren to work in; that no man who  
calls the children in his employ "CAT-  
TLE" is fit to have them under his  
direction ten hours a day, six days in  
the week.

And to the fathers and mothers  
whom my appeal has failed to move  
may I make further appeal. If your  
children MUST go into the factory,  
the workshop, or the store, at least  
make it your business to see the place  
they must work in, the kind of work  
they must do, the people with whom  
they work and under whom they  
work. Do this much for the child you  
are sacrificing—at least know the  
manner of the sacrifice.

## ROSES

Red as the winds of forgotten ages;  
Yellow as gold from the sunbeams spun;  
White as the gowns of Aurora's pages;  
Pure as the robes of a sinless one.  
Pink as the dawn of a summer morning;  
Sweeter than Araby's winds that blow;  
Breathing fragrance—our world adorning—  
Roses, roses, I love you so!

ANONYMOUS.