

CITY SLAVE GIRLS

Nell Nelson Continues to Expose the Slave-Grinding Hell-Holes of Chicago.

Graphic Account of Her Experiences in the Filthy "Slop-Shops" of the West Side.

No Rest for the Weary and Wretched Women and Children This Side of the Grave.

A Day Among the Butcher-Shops and Canned-Meat Factories of the Stock Yards.

How Messrs. Armour and Fairbanks Might Brighten the Lives of Their Employes.

The birthright of an American girl may be a glorious attribute on the deck of a transatlantic steamship or the floor of a London ball-room, but it is not worth the flap of a brass farthing in the cloak factories of Chicago.

It was high noon by the Jesuit college clock when I got to the rear of 230 West Twelfth street, where David Karasick has his shop. Nobody in but an old man. His face is seamed with wrinkles; he has a big nose the color and texture of a mushroom; his head and half his face is covered with hair of chin-billa shades; his back is humped at the shoulders and his clothes are filthy and worn. I ask for work and am told that no hands are needed. He has a pocket that hangs across his waist and into which he puts rags, pieces of thread, hooks and eyes, pins, buttons, and the empty spoons that he on the floor about the vacant machine-chairs. I watch the silent old man as he drags his loose slippers across the floor, and behold I have the key to wealth! But it doesn't profit me worth a copper. So I survey the premises.

One-room, windows on three sides, and all shut. From the north windows I get a view of a two-story hen-house. Filth inside and out. The outlook from the east side is a picture of poverty, squalor, and filth. The buildings have no paint. In some are human beings, in others dumb brutes. Half-washed clothes dangle from window-sills and clothes-lines in tatters and rags. In the yards are heaps of manure and the alleys are foul-smelling and filthy. Along the street move flannel-shirted, horny-headed, sooty-faced men to smoke, to rest, to quarrel, and to dinner. Passing and re-passing all day long and every day—Sunday and Saturday—are young women and old women, youths, maidens, and children, with as many cloaks or coats or pants as they can carry. The garbage boxes are reeking with filth. Some one has thrown ashes or sweepings in the boxes and neither the swill man nor the ash man will remove the contents. Mayor Roche and Dr. DeWolf, equally ignorant of the manner in which their subordinates discharge their duty, permit this sort of thing to go on till the very neighborhood is polluted and the air poisoned by these reeking masses of corruption.

"Oh, it's nothing," I am told, and I see for myself and count from Karasick's window and door eleven of these garbage piles that swarm with maggots and flies. The

overcome by the air that floats up from the yard below. It is done and I take it to the boss, who examines it for fully five minutes.

Too fine. Custom work. Don't need so good on such cloaks. You stay?"

"How much a week?"

"Five dollars. You Christian?"

"Yes."

"Work Sunday?"

"Never!"

"Then I don't want you. Shop closed Saturday. Shop open Sunday."

"How much if I work five days?"

"No, you must work six days, like all."

"Not Sunday. Pay me, please."

I get out. Out past the stable-door, past the children in the manure-pile, past the ragged, yellow clothes on the line, past the back doors, past the swill-boxes, and the poor, pale-faced women carrying cloaks to and from neighboring shops till I reach 147 Twelfth street, where Isaac Berliner hires me. His shop is over a rag store and the smell is far-reaching. Mr. and Mrs. Berliner work with the men and girls. There are two rooms, poor light, bad ventilation, low ceilings, disgusting smells from the kitchens, the snarling, fault-finding remarks of the man, the petulance of his wife, and the filthy condition of the place and the revolting contiguity of so many people were something not to be endured. I occupied my chair in the dark, crowded room fifteen minutes and left. Like David Karasick's this shop is open all day Sunday.

In the rear of 441 Taylor street I was offered work by a tailor. He had two small rooms in which men and girls were working like slaves on custom coats. There was a fire in the stove on which the men heated their irons, and two boxes of garbage just outside on the pavement filled the room with their odors.

Leaving the field of cloth and cloaks I applied to E. A. Morris, the confectioner, 81 West Jackson street. The forewoman is a thin, bloodless young woman, with wild eyes and unmistakable evidences of overwork.

"No, I can't give you a place. You are too big. I want little girls. All these hands have been sent to us by peddlers because they are so very poor. You couldn't live on the salaries we pay. These children get \$3 and the old hands up-stairs \$4."

The midget laborers were filling pans with chocolate and maple caramels. Young boys cut the sheets of soft, brown saccharine stuff into squares which a dozen little girls transferred to the tins. At deep troughs filled with pop-corn and gum-drops were other children filling small paper bags. Up-stairs the girls worked on stick goods. Their quarters, while rude and bare and hot from the steaming sirup-pots, were light and airy.

At Brougham's packing-house, 89 Jackson street, I applied for work in the canning-room. The foreman was kind. He took me out in the dark, little packing-room, in which the light and breeze were fenced off by walls of tin cans. The girls were pale and thin and very young. But, oh, how they did paint! Each stood near a wall of cans that had just been filled with meat—pressed-corned beef, tongue, or ham—still warm. At hand was a pot of Japan paint with which the girls brushed the ends and rims of each can. I told the foreman I knew I could do the work. He tried me. I daubed on the paint, held the brush wrong, and got more color on my hands than on the can. The girls laughed at my awkwardness; so did the foreman. I was chagrined with my failure and asked for some water to clean my hands. The man gave me a benzine bath, and then showed me to a basin of dirty water on the surface of which a hundred or more dead flies were afloat. The quarters in which these girls work are little more than deadly—no sunlight, no free fresh air, no place to sit, and the blue paint smeared over their hands and arms and dripping from the breast and belt of their dresses. Their

Schlessinger and son. It is 9 o'clock when I enter what seems to be a store. On the right is a small office containing a desk and a mountain of cloaks. Two yards back is a long cutting-board at which the father, mother, and son are chalking or cutting out cloth. The old man has the everlasting frosts on his head, and in the wife's hair is more silver than jet. The son is still in the morning of his manhood. His manner is arrogant, his tone harsh, and his treatment of an old Christian, who has come in with a letter, presumably from his wife or daughter soliciting work, is painful to contemplate. I feel like a vagabond when Mrs. Schlessinger demands an explanation for my presence.

"I was here yesterday and you told me I might come to work today," I venture to remark.

"Oh, yes. You was the one that looked on yesterday and asked all about the wages, hey?"

This is overwhelming and I tremble internally, expecting every moment to be seized by my jersey collar and Psyche knot and thrown out in the car-track. I bite my lips to keep my knees from knocking.

When she says "Well, you may come this way," I am thankful for my safety and follow. Half-way down the store is a partition some five feet high, hung on both sides with cloaks and jackets, braided sacques and Dutch dresses, which contrivance screens the girls on the opposite side from view. A short distance back is a perfect embankment of work, fringe and inner trimmings. Passing these two fortifications we came into the presence of the "sweeteners," all but six of whom are running machines at a tremendous speed.

"Girls! Girls!" exclaimed Mrs. Schlessinger.

Some of the little engines stop.

"Girls! Girls!" she says again.

"They all stop. And so does my breathing. This girl has come to work here," Mrs. Schlessinger continues. "I ain't got no time to learn her. You all help her if you got time."

With this unheard of and unexpected introduction Mrs. Schlessinger leaves me. I find a dusty table near a dirty zinc to put my hat and ask for a machine.

"Can you run a machine?" the head of the establishment asks.

I tell her a falsehood which I defend by personally arguing that I can do anything that these untutored young foreigners can perform. Determined to try, I drop into a chair before a big "Household" and agony begins. I endeavor to apply my knowledge of the Wheeler & Wilson to the machine. Trouble follows. The wheel is not under the table and is not meant to turn forward. The thread breaks a dozen times in twenty-four minutes, the intervening time being spent in threading the needle, which, like an equestrienne, has a side seat. I hem and tuck rags to get the stitch. The bobbin gives out, and how to fill it again, thread the shuttle and lace the top coffin gives me much trouble. A little German girl at my left throws an occasional hint of value to me. She has a frightful cold in her head which she frankly confesses she caught the night before in Wicker park. I offer to help her, agreeing to stitch all day if she will only tell me how to put the work together. It's a bargain. I bind the edges of the front, back, and side gores, get the hood in shape, and stitch the pockets. Just as I am beginning to feel like a Household conqueror Mrs. Schlessinger comes along and throws a bundled Dutch dress on my machine-table and tells me to make it. I protest that I had much rather help Annie, tearing I may not get the cloak right.

"Just make it. When it ain't right you rip it. That's the way we learn the girls."

Of course the string and sleeves, cuffs, hood, pocket laps, collar, fronts, side bodies, back gores, back straps, and three skirt breadths are spread out before me. I seize a bunch of bias binding and I bind and rip and rip and bind till noon, marveling all the time at the work that literally rolls out

as I believe in the goodness of woman I do not know where you can find one to succor you. There's Mrs. Tillie M. Carse with her eloquent, soulful eyes. But she is begging \$100,000 for a temperance temple and has no time to give you help or counsel.

Go to Miss Willard?

She is sympathetic. It will do your heart good to meet her for she will call you "dear child" when you have told her your errand, and press your hand in her warm palm, and tell you—well, I don't know what she will tell you, for she and Miss Mary Allen West have a heap to do between the Woman's council, the Woman's National league, the Woman's suffrage, the Woman's Christian Temperance union, and the prohibition party. There is Mrs. George Marsh—but she can spare no time from the Industrial school; Mrs. A. A. Carpenter has a big heart, but the Woman's exchange fills it, and so it is with Mrs. Blatchford and Mrs. Hobbs and Mrs. Leander Stone and Mrs. N. K. Fairbank and Mrs. Field and Mrs. Armour and Mrs. J. M. Flower and Mrs. A. L. Coo and Mrs. S. M. Allerton and Mrs. Potter Palmer. They have St. Luke, the Illinois street boarding-house, the Woman's Christian boarding-house, the Decorative Art society, or the Girls' Friendly society, and your case doesn't come under any of these, don't you see?

Mrs. Dr. Clinton Locke is a dear, good woman who has, perhaps, done more real charity for the Chicago poor than any woman on the South side. A few years ago she went "skimming"—that's what they call it in New York—went out Archer avenue and along Nineteenth, Twentieth, Butterfield, Clark, John's place, Liberty court, and Canalport avenue into the holes and hovels under and above the sidewalk and in and among the stables and woodsheds, where she personally taught ignorant Irish, Polish, Swedish, German, and Italian mothers how to make broth from scraps, gruels from chaff, and tempting cookies from cheap flours. She made them keep account books for her inspection and forced them to buy bones and joints for soup and cheap cuts instead of steaks for their husband's meals. She gave them lessons in "drips," taught them how to make a plaster, a peticot, soft soap, and molasses-cake, helped them smother the fire during the cool days and sift the ashes for cold weather; preached the economy of cleanliness, sobriety, cheerfulness, and industry, and helped many and many a mother to make herself and her family decent. She has done her share of mission-work west of State street, and what you want, poor little machine-slave, is another Mrs. Locke to rise up and teach you how to sew, how to keep your clothes and body neat, how to sit at your work-table, how to care for your health and save your vital energy. You must be taught that profanity, "mashes," the midnight picnic, the pop-corn-parties in the park, the "Dago lunches," and the insults of the street advances of car men, "society" men, and factory men are the very ruination of all that is lovely and holy and good in woman. You must be taught that you are not to be herded and driven like cattle nor scourged and robbed like convicts. You must be taught that you are a woman, that you live in America, that you are "some account," and that there are hundreds of women who will help you to help yourself and thousands of men who will wait no better pastime than to knock down the creature who insults your womanhood. NELL NELSON.

VOICES OF THE PEOPLE

The Wealthy Are Lying Up Wealth Against a Day of Wrath.

TO THE EDITOR: It is a mistake to suppose that the Chicago employers of cheap female labor confine their attention to that city alone. No, no, they are as many-mouthed as any octopus and gather in their victims with each capacious maw. These philanthropists would seem to limit their sphere of usefulness and consequently employ agents, who appear to be converts to their points of view, in many country towns not only in Ill.