

But the P. company on West Washington street has nothing to do with blue blood or gentle women, and there is nothing pretty about it but the sweet young girls of fifteen and sixteen and the frail children of nine and ten whose lives are being wound about the great wooden bobbins, and from whose cheeks the roses of health and beauty are slowly absorbed by the flying threads in shuttle, needle, and spindle.

P. K. company is only another name for the women's shirt factory at West Washington street. Up one flight of stairs I pass into a tidy little office where a fine looking gentleman gives me greeting and calls the forewoman, Mrs. M. She is young and pretty. Her voice is sweet and she has a good face.

"Yes, I have work but it won't pay you. You can't live on the salary. I wouldn't advise you to take it. The table girls only get three dollars a week. Their work consists in sewing on buttons and finishing the armholes of the shirts. We have generally employed little girls of twelve and thirteen to do it. Better work pays by the piece, five and ten cents a dozen for knitting a finish about the neck and armholes and bottom of the shirts. But you would have to be experienced; we couldn't take the time to teach you."

I told her I would try the table work until I could get something that paid better, as I was wholly dependent on my own resources.

"That's it, you see. I don't like to take you and have you leave as soon as you begin to be useful."

"But I can't live on three dollars a week to save my soul, unless I subsist on cold water and wind and sleep with the birds."

In as mild a manner as possible she told me that the P. K. company never meddled with the private affairs of its employes, and agreeing to promote me whenever a vacancy occurred that I was able to fill. I started to fasten the tail ends of knitted

shirts at the munificent sum of fifty cents a day, or five cents an hour, work beginning at 7 a. m., and closing at 5:40 p. m. with thirty minutes for lunch. I paid five cents for a paper of sewing needles and five cents for a set of crochet needles before doing a stitch of work, so that at noon I had but fifteen cents to my credit.

When the forewoman took me to the furnishing table I failed to see where she could put me. Down the long sides and across the ends were the girls, thirty or more, unpleasantly crowded, for the weather was hot, the room close, and the double row of shirts piled two and three feet deep intercepted any breeze that came in through the side windows. Beginning at one end she made the girls "shove up a little," and with this allowance from fifteen room enough was made for another chair to which I was assigned.

The work was light, requiring but a few stitches at five or more places. Where the pattern was imperfect I had to crochet a couple of scallops, otherwise a few stitches with a zephyr needle sufficed. The slowest girl finished five dozen shirts a day, and some twice that number. A few at the board sewed on buttons and a regiment filed past with armfuls of shirts, in or ready to be put in boxes. We were so crowded that nearly every passer-by knocked me in the head with her elbow or load, while the girl at my left drew her needle under my very nose at each stitch. I could neither take up nor lay down my scissors without annoyance to the little girl on my right.

I marveled as I looked at these girls that they should be permitted to labor as they did, ten hours a day in a dark, hot, room, exposed as they were to all manner of disease and the dangers of fire, for scarcely more wages than sufficed for food and car-fare. There was not a single attractive feature about their surroundings. The smoke from the engine had blackened the walls and the ceiling so that in the rear of the shop no calcimine was visible. At either end were two windows and