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CHILD LABOR IN THE CANNING INDUSTRY OF MARYLAND.

JULY 1909, Lewis W. Hine.

In the canneries of Baltimore, as is the case in similar establishments elsewhere, children are permitted to work for long hours, even though they may be very young. Incredibly small are the fingers that work along with those of the rest of the family, and if the child is too small to sit up, it is held on the lap of the worker or stowed away in boxes near at hand. Photographs #853 to 859 and 826 show some of the young workers, most of whom are helping regularly when there is work to do. (The very fact of the work being so intermittent makes it difficult to ascertain just how deep-seated is this custom. It is also bad for the children to work in this hap-hazard wasy, - loafing and playing one day - and working hard and long the next.)

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Miss Rife of the Federated Charities, told me it is a general rule, at these canneries, to have the children get their jobs first and then have them apply for permits. (The weakness of this system is obvious) A working woman told Miss Rife that one cannery requires no permits and that there are lots of children there.

There are several dangers connected with this work when children do it. On every hand, one can see little tots toting boxes or pans full of beans, berries or tomatoes, and it is self-evident that the work is too hard. Then there are machines which no young persons should be working around. Unguarded belts, wheels, cogs and the like are a menace to careless children. See photos 858 to 860.

In the fields convenient to Baltimore in Anne Arundel County, and on Rock Creek and Stony Creek, children are employed as a matter of course. I investigated a number of farms on Rock Creek (and am convinced that we have been too lenient with the "agricultural pursuits.") (In the firs place,) the long hours these children work in the hot sun and in company, too often, with foul-mouthed negroes and whites more than compensates many times over for the boasted advantages of fresh air and country life. The living conditions in the shacks they occupy are not only harmful in physical ways, but the total lack of privacy where several families live in one room is extremely bad. One mother told me "it is bad for the children. They get to know too much." There is little rest for the children in these crowded shacks. (See photos 846 to 852) I admit that it is a big problem for these parents to handle, but with the right kind of help, it can be done. There were, on these farms on Rock

Creek, 9 and reports tell us other farms are the same. Children from four years of age upward, helping and then working regularly. (See photos 827 to 847.) This fact is doubly impressive whenwwe find that many of these little ones worked in these fields during the summer and then are shipped down to the coast of Carolina and the Gulf States to shuck oysters during winter months. On One farm on Rock Creek, I found young children that had been to one or more of the following places; Youngs Island, S.C. (See photos and labels 840, 841, and 843), Bluffton, S.C., Apalachicola, Fla., and Biloxi, Miss. (Photos 845 and 845 a), Averys Island (837 and 838.)

I found a number of these workers who have been South, who are very bitter in their denunciation of the treatment they received.

John Meishell, a Bohemian, 830 Hartford Ave. Baltimore, went, with wife and 5 children to work at oyster shucking (for Peerless Oyster Co.) at Bay St. Louis, Miss. during winter of 1907-8. The children were then, - 1, 3, 6, 8 and 9 years of age. The baby had to be cared for in the shed where they worked because the company permitted no one to stay at home to care for it. The 3 year old helped some. The rest worked regularly (see photo 824. These children were 2 years younger then.) They were routed out of their beds by the boss at 3 A.M. and worked until about 4 P.M. They say that the children had to work in order to give the family a living wage. The agents, that hired them represented conditions much better than they turned out to be. Wages were lower and were irregular. The most the father made was $6.00 a week. Their transportation paid and they had free rent (in shacks where they were huddled like sheep.) They had to be very careful to "stand in" with the Company or lose their transportation back and be subject to many inconveniences; perhaps be out of work and evicted with no alternatives of work. They bought supplies and food of the Company Store where exorbitant prices were charged for poor food. The Overseer and the Sheriff jailed them on slightest provocation, when it meant $25.00 a piece for "costs" to get out. They were cheated in the weighing and measuring of oysters and fired on various pretexts.

When they reached the South, they were in debt and it took some time to get paid off. Then, the work was so irregular and they had the grippe - then the company took high pay for the company doctor out of their wages.) They returned to Baltimore in spring with no money ahead. The children had absolutely no schooling.

One of them said she was kept back 2 grades and is now in the 4th grade though 11 years x old.

Mrs. Meishell said, "you can talk about the daxx days of slavery being over, but this is worse." (A Polish woman in another part of the City, used this very same expression.) (See Mrs. Kaualski following.)

Mr. Meishell's brother was present. He worked at Biloxi, Miss. part of one year, as well as at Bay St. Louis. He said, conditions at Biloxi were much the worst. He was told by the company agents, before he went, he could earn $18 a week. Found this was much exaggerated because irregular work, fines and cheats reduced x his income so much. (Women were beaten by the overseers.) He summed it all up by saying, "a man would have about as much chance of getting ahead there as a snowball down below.

I asked him, "Are you going again?" "Wouldn't I like to see the man that would dare to ask me? was his reply.

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Mrs. Kawalski, 615 S. Bond St. Baltimore is a widow and has worked with her small children in the berry fields about Baltimore for several years.

Last winter she took the children down to Youngs Island, S.C. and worked for Varn and Beard Pkg. Co. Many things has been misrepresented to her after they got there, she found that all the children, whose fare had been paid by the company, had to work all the time. The younger children worked some and went to school some, but they worked regularly as soon as they were able to stand up to the benches. "We lived xxx in rough shanties. It's no place for children. They learn too much." They had to furnish their own food and their fares were taken out of their earnings little by little. They didn't get ahead any financially although it was a good year, at this place. "Call this slavery!" she said.

Marie said she is now 12 and her brother 9 years old (photo 825-)Both of them have worked in the berry fx fields near Baltimore 2 years ago and at oyster shucking last winter and now are stringing beans at the canneries in Baltimore.

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Respectfully submitted,

July 10, 1909.