

## Why Not Child Labor Laws for the Home?

By UTHAI VINCENT WILCOX

HE WAS but fifteen years of age, but he could tell of his experiences along the road from New Orleans to Tiajuana. He was equally at home in camps and on the brake-rods of freight trains.

It was in San Jose, California, that he was "picked up" by the probation officers. After giving his name as Smith he remarked that his specialty was plain and fancy hobbing and loafing; with eating a fine art.

"I got him a job as an apprentice for a trade," said the probation officer. "He was to show up at a certain time, within thirty minutes, to go to work. That was the last we saw of him. That boy will never work. We have since heard from him in other towns."

The life history of that lad along with many others proved to the satisfaction of the probation officers that youths never voluntarily work at fifteen if they have not learned the value of work at ten. It is worth real dollars to have to learn—yes, learn—the value of work. It is worth dollars to the boy and the girl, if not to the parents.

It is easy to emphasize the value of play, and abundant play is needed and should be provided. But all work and no play, you know—

Let Johnny, Alice, Mabel and Merwin learn *how* to work and that it is necessary that they should work. In a western city, recently, two fine, stalwart lads were arrested on a warrant sworn to by a local grocer. The charge was that of breaking into his private garage and taking the touring car to a near-by town and toward morning bringing it back.

Investigation by friends and the juvenile court showed that the boys "wanted to do something," and, lacking wise direction, they "borrowed" the machine. They had intended no harm.

One boy's parents were wealthy, and so he never had anything to do at home. After school he was idle. All the labor about the house was paid for and so he was not expected to work. The other boy was an only son whose father was dead. His mother never demanded that her son do anything and naturally he didn't do anything.

The wise judge of the juvenile court in talking over the case clearly indicated that he would prefer to pass sentence on the parents rather than on the boys. The crime had been committed because the parents had been too busy to keep their sons busy. "You should have regular, definite work to do after school—work that will make you tired," said the judge.

If you will visit the juvenile court in your city and watch there the parents of the "delinquent" children, you will find them really distressed.

"He has been such a good boy;" "She has always been such a nice girl," they puzzle. "I can't see why they did it!" "I don't understand!" In the majority of the cases the boys and girls come from good homes, but it almost invariably develops, according to the officers, that these children of the "good homes" have had nothing to do after school or in the evenings. There have been no tasks or duties to perform; no work has been expected of them. "An idle brain makes the devil more efficient" is more than a mere adage. If it isn't a personal devil that exerts the influence, then there are any number of men and boys plus circumstances abundantly able to qualify for producing devilish results.

No young Smith, or Jones, or Morgan is going to grow into a useful citizen of this republic unless he first learns that work is one of the necessities of life. It is not the loss of the boy alone nor the loss of his labor, which many times is negligible, wherein the trouble lies; there is, however, a very real danger to the community.

If Johnny is left to run at large and find out by chance and experience his relation to the state, the home and other institutions, there is a very real danger that Johnny will become a loose thinker, easily swayed by the unsound doctrines of the agitator—a snap judgment citizen ready to accept the half-baked theories of political revolutionists.

"It is both astonishing and startling," said an industrial investigator to a chamber of commerce, "how many grown men there are in the

country who seem to be acting upon the belief that the world owes them a living and they are obligated in obtaining this living only to the extent of keeping outside of the clutches of the law."

"I'm preaching the gospel of perspiration as a saving grace for inspiration," said an old minister who was rearing a group of young men in his family. "One of the best panaceas for the ills of the country that I know is the character training that comes of the home law. 'Do something useful about the house.' I've put up a sign in my boys' room where they will see it morning and night. If necessary, I'll illuminate it with electric light.

"The world owes me a living, but I also owe the world the fullest possible measure of honest effort in payment for that living."

Every child wants to do as father or mother does. Let the first toys be useful ones. A small broom and sweeper are always received joyfully and the idea of helpful effort thereby is encouraged. A set of dishes, small garden tools, these and other practical playthings promote the idea of work and its needs. They will bring growing through doing.

As soon as Alice and Algy are able to understand, simple duties should be assigned and their performance expected. It may mean a little extra effort for someone; perhaps the lowering of the closet hooks so the clothes can be hung up rather than thrown on the floor; the providing of playroom boxes instead of shelves where toys can be put away after using. It may be an initial towel in the bathroom that must be hung on a certain rod; it should be something that means regularity in the home life, and comfort for all.

A wise, gray-haired mother was visiting some friends. When she returned home she confided in her husband that "training children has greatly changed in recent years. Ellen learns her children's lessons, invents plays for them, arranges their rooms after them, picks up what they let fall, puts in order the things they have left in confusion; she does everything for her children but eat for them. Even then she worries if they do not like their food and it isn't just so!"

How will any normal boy or girl develop imagination, invention and creative ability if he has nothing that he must do for himself—no regular work that is daily expected of him. Where will he get his training of the need of continuous effort and the value of perseverance?

Give the boys and the girls some work to do, particularly during the vacation time. Let the work be serious and regular work, chosen not only because it is good work but because of its educational value. It probably will do more for the future welfare of the child than the ability correctly to parse a sentence or to "bound" the republic of Ecuador.

Some educators are even now advocating that the school supply the lack of the discipline of the homes and make it a part of the duty of Joseph and Josie to do profitable work. "Child labor" in the sense of grinding toil is not needed nor wanted, but there should be organized effort along some regular line. It is just this lack in some homes that causes the legislators to pass more paternal laws to supply the lack of paternal authority at home.

Home chores and homely tasks are not to be despised. There are dishes to wash, wood to bring in, the lawn to mow, the rooms to dust, the stockings to mend. These are easy, yet are of educational value because of their character-building discipline.

A generation ago the boys and girls did these and much harder things as a matter of course. Is there any reason why we should discard such customs now?

Over-indulgence cultivates a disregard for the feelings of others. In some boys this may easily mean youthful banditry, and if not that then later unscrupulous dealings in business. In girls it means selfishness, ingrowing dispositions, the craving for excitement and an unnatural outlook on life. In localities where juvenile clubs for raising corn or potatoes exist, the boy should be encouraged to compete. Here is an excellent type of competition that spurs the boy to do his best. And he will learn all possible of the most efficient way to do his work. Most of the labor comes after school; it is outdoors, and varied. Many boys have succeeded in raising prize specimens superior to anything accomplished by adults. Let a boy get thoroughly interested and he will be painstaking in detail in a manner that will astonish his parents and neighbors.

Girls often enter these prize-winning contests with success. There are cooking classes that offer prizes and teach the value of sustained effort. This is only work camouflaged. Many a county fair has its tables bearing the healthful and appetizing and artistic results of the girl's cooking, baking and sewing, with ribbons gaily fluttering to mark the honorable rewards.

Such training develops independence, self-reliance, and the teaching of the fundamental truth that you must work—really work—for what you want in this world, Socialists, Bolsheviks and Communists to the contrary.

Then, too, there are always emergencies when the early training of having to do simple tasks well and at regular intervals is worth a jar of gold dust. A girl recently wrote a letter to her chum. She had gone to the mountains with her mother to help her find health and rest. Sickness found them away from home conveniences and among people unused to the "necessities" of civilization. Her letter said:

"Mother has been sick, and I'm not well and so the keeping of the little house here in the mountains is quite a task, but thanks to my early training I am accomplishing it quite well. One evening I had company for supper. It was no joke to entertain four persons, but I enjoyed it, though I was in the kitchen until ten o'clock. Oh, yes, I made a dress, slip, and hood for a baby, also giving it a bib and booties, because its mother could not make anything for it in time to go on a visit."

Nothing but an early knowledge of work and service could teach any girl or woman to do such things well. Training of that sort does not come by any inspiration or fine frenzy, it comes through the slow process of duties performed and tasks accomplished whether the inclination is there or not.

O. H. Benson, recently of the Department of Agriculture, but now guiding the Junior Achievement League which is financed by a group of sixty wealthy men, has drawn from his own experience as well as practical observation when he lays down four rules for "growing good citizens":

First, let the child take part in the production of the business of the home.

Second, don't let your children leave home to do their first work. Show them how to work and earn at home.

Third, teach the child to love his work while he is yet a child by infusing into that work the spirit of contest, challenge and enthusiasm. This will make work seem like play.

Fourth, make the child's idle school hours and vacation periods an opportunity for the business of production. Salvage the child's idle hours and you salvage the child.

It is this program that such men as Theodore N. Vail and Horace A. Moses are backing, for they realize that in it lies the hope and future prosperity of America and the world. It is a program of work—of well-directed energy, or sustained effort toward a given goal.



The joy of the first fruits, be they luscious strawberries or mere potatoes! There is reward enough for many a small worker. When he grows older he will then appreciate the reward implanted in his character—the ability to carry on sustained effort.



What is a little dirt in a boy's life? Getting coal in and looking after the chores may blacken his hands and face but later it will help to keep his character white.