

## A WOMAN'S STORY OF DELINQUENT GIRLS BROUGHT BEFORE THE JUVENILE COURT

BY JANE WHITAKER

The publicity given by the Welfare Commission to the connection between low wages and vice raised a howl of protest from the so-called philanthropists, the social workers and others of their ilk.

But if you doubt this connection, go, if you are a woman, for men are barred, down to the Juvenile Court, presided over by Judge Mary Bartelme, and you will see not only that this connection exists, but that the Welfare Commission exposed only the slightest part of it.

It is pitiful to think of a girl, alone in a strange city, without sufficient food to eat, without a decent place of shelter, without warm clothes because of the greed of the employer who will not pay her a living wage.

But it is still more pitiful to see parents who have brought children into the world, forced, because of the low wage the husband, and sometimes the wife combined, receive, to send their children out into the mart of toil where competition is not on ability but on cheapness, and to know those parents regard their children merely as money-making machines.

There were many girls brought into Judge Bartelme's court the day I was there. They were young girls, girls who should have been in high school, still wearing their hair braided.

Instead, and I wish I might draw the picture so you would not forget it, they wore skirts that spanned them and indecently showed every curve of their bodies; they wore waists that were low at the neck and exposed their shoulders; their hats were gaudy and in bad taste; their tired faces, though they were so young, were sullen, hard, defiant. Only at one time would they speak above a whisper, and that would be when Judge Bartelme would suggest

sending them to the Home of the Good Shepherd. Then they would suddenly seem galvanized into life and scream:

"No, judge, no. Please don't send me there. I'll work! Honest I will. And I'll give my mother every cent."

And one mother said: "If you send her away she cannot work. She gave me \$5.96 last week."

A man whose daughter was in the court explained that he had a small ice cream business and he left the place in charge of his girl. He also explained that in his absence she used the telephone to talk to men, that she met them outside of the place or in the place, and—admitting these things, that it was a bad place for her to be in—he didn't want her taken away because he wanted her to work in the store.

The pity of it! And the story is forever the same. Little children arrested for stealing had only wanted to "buy things." And girls of fourteen, fifteen and sixteen, who come into that court because they are delinquent only wanted to be happy—in the beginning. But they had to go into the mart of work when they should have grown strong, and the reason was that the father was not paid a decent wage for his toil.

Judge Mary Bartelme will tell you that it is the fault of the girl or of the parent.

She will not tell you it is the fault of the system, the system that makes some men the masters of others; the system that permits the few to have everything and the many to have nothing; the system that makes of one child a petted doll, shielded, caressed, and of another just a reproduction of a species that works from the time it is able and sells its labor at the market price, which is away below the bread line.

Is it a wonder that these girls are