

SOCIAL SERVICE.

"THE HOUSE ON HENRY STREET."*

(Concluded from page 79.)

An interesting chapter in the book under consideration deals with "Youth and Trades Unions." Miss Wald writes: "The portrayal of youth in a neighbourhood such as ours cannot be dissociated from labour conditions." In the early nineties nothing in the experience or education of young people, not in labour circles, prepared them to understand the movement among working people for labour organization, therefore, in the early days in the Jefferson flat the pleasure of the two friends was mingled with consternation when they found that the object of a call from the daughter of a neighbour was that she wished aid in organizing a trade union. She spoke without bitterness of the troubles of her shop mates and tried to show why they thought a union would bring them relief. "We soon learned," says Miss Wald, "that one great objection to the organization of young women in the trades was a fear on their part that it would be considered 'unladylike' and might even militate against marriage."

After consulting the library for academic information on the subject of trades unions Miss Wald was interested to find that the argument employed by the cigar maker who was trying to help the girls was that of the text books, namely, that "collective power might be employed to insure justice for the individual himself powerless." Later when they moved to Henry Street, Minnie, who lived in the next block, enlisted their sympathy in her efforts to organize the girls in her trade. "She based her arguments for shorter hours on their need of time to acquire knowledge

of housekeeping and home-making before marriage and motherhood came to them, touching instinctively a fundamental argument against excessive hours for women."

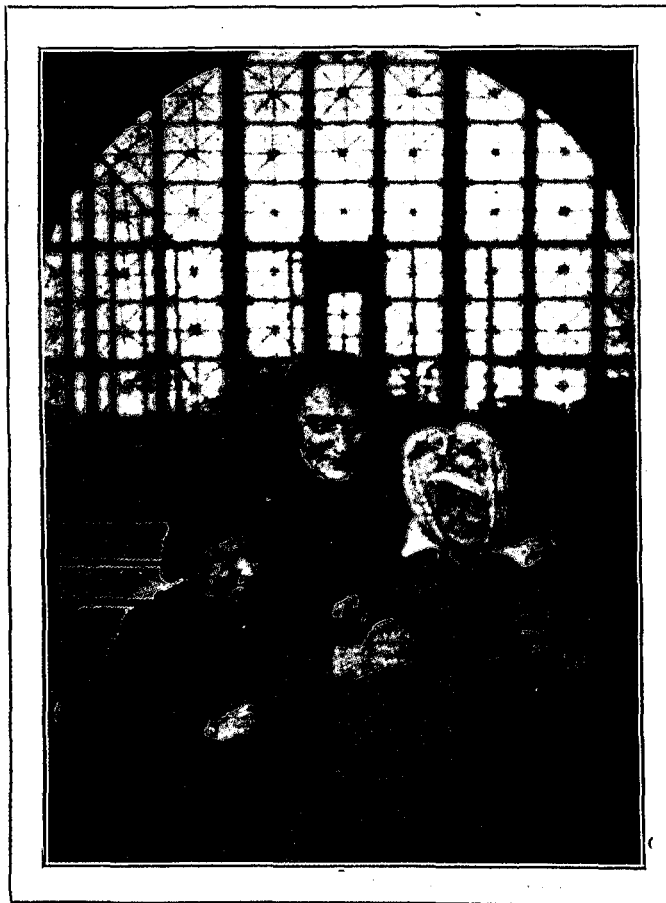
Minnie was invited to a conference of philanthropists on methods for improving the condition of working girls. When her turn came she spoke with no uncertain sound: "We are in the hands of the boss. What does he care for us? I say, let our hands be for him and our heads for ourselves. We must work for bread now, but we must think of our future homes. What time has a working girl to make ready for this? We never

see a meal prepared. For all we know, soup grows on trees."

In 1911 after the tragedy of a disastrous fire in the factory of the Triangle Waist Company, when one hundred and forty three girls, locked in lofts by the owners, were burned, or leaped from windows to their death, a meeting of citizens was held in the Metropolitan Opera House. A young cap maker who had previously tried to organize a union in her trade to protest against bad shop conditions and petty tyrannies, "stood at the edge of the great opera house stage, and in a voice hardly raised—though it reached every person in that vast audience, arraigned society for regarding human life so cheaply. No one could have been insensitive to her cry for justice,

her anguish over the youth so ruthlessly destroyed; and there must have been many in that audience for whom ever after the little brown-clad figure with the tragic voice symbolized the factory girl in the lofts high above the streets of an indifferent metropolis."

"In these chapters," says Miss Wald, "I have sought to portray the youth of our neighbourhood at its more conscious and responsible period, when the age of greatest incorrigibility (said to be between thirteen and sixteen) has been passed. Labour discussions and solemn conferences on



AT ELLIS ISLAND
THERE IS A STREAM OF INFLOWING LIFE.

*Henry Holt & Company, New York.

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