

MANAGERS URGE CRUSADE TO AID STAGE CHILDREN

Barred from Appearing in Several States Where "Factory" Laws Are Applied to Them.

PATHETIC little creatures, aren't they, these stage children, who appear behind the footlights to be laughed at by men and women seated comfortably in velvet chairs? Just little waifs, forced to work for ten or fifteen minutes a day for sometimes as little as \$25 a week; obliged to wear good clothes, and be sent to bed as soon as their work is over; compelled to study how to speak correctly, how to take care of their health.

Some of them have only four or five months' vacation during the year, and even during vacation time most of them have to continue studying. And their work is so hard, making believe they are somebody else. Of course, children who are not on the stage like to play at make-believe, but they get no salary for that sort of playing, and hence they do not work and do not come under the factory laws. Nor do the "little mothers" of the tenements, who spend their play-time being nurses to younger brothers and sisters, without pay, of course. Nor the little girls and boys who help at the housework, and know how to sweep and dust and make fires in broken stoves, and carry bags of coal from the basement shop to the top floor.

These children are not "factory workers," according to law, but in four States the children of the stage are, and they are protected to such an extent that they cannot act at all.

And the result is that people in those States cannot see plays in which children have a part. In Massachusetts, if the decision of the Supreme Court is taken literally, there can be no children performers in Sunday school entertainments or in charity plays, or in school exercises. Children simply cannot appear on a public stage, for such appearance is work and subject to the factory laws, which forbid a child under a certain age from engaging in any employment that may in any way endanger its health.

H. B. Warner in "Alias Jimmy Valentine," Francis Wilson in "The Bachelor's Baby," Dustin Farnum in "Cameo Kirby," Mrs. Fiske in "Salvation Nell," Margaret Anglin in "The Awakening of Helena Richie," "The Barrier," most of Lew Fields's musical productions, and a number of other plays that have children in the cast, are now forbidden to appear in Boston, Chicago, Baltimore, and New Orleans, or in any other cities in Massachusetts, Illinois, Maryland, and Louisiana. Child labor laws in these States, ostensibly for the purpose of protecting children against excessive work, have been construed so as to discriminate against children on the stage. To prevent a play that requires a child in the company is now impossible in the cities named, unless the manager adopts the expedient of engaging a dwarf past the age limit, for the child role.

George C. Tyler of Liebler & Co. is among the managers who have recently suffered from such discrimination. When "Alias Jimmy Valentine" was produced in Chicago before coming to New York the part that is played by Alma Sedley had to be taken by a dummy figure, and most of the third act scene in which the two children appear had to be eliminated entirely. Donald Gallaher, the boy of the scene, was just past the age of 16 and



CHORUS OF CHILDREN, IN "THE JOLLY BACHELOR"



BABY DAVIS IN "THE BACHELOR'S BABY"



ALMA SEDLEY, IN "ALIAS JIMMY VALENTINE"



DONALD GALLAHER, IN "ALIAS JIMMY VALENTINE"



MASTER JOHN TANSY, THE NEW THEATRE CO

could appear without interference. The forced use of a dummy made the fourth act climax, when Jimmy Valentine succeeds in opening the door of the vault in which the child is supposed to be locked, appear almost ridiculous.

"There should be a uniform child labor law," said Mr. Tyler, in speaking on the subject the other day. "A law based on intelligence that would not place the stage child in the same category as the factory child. No one could honestly complain that the children in 'Alias Jimmy Valentine' are overworked. They appear for about ten minutes during a performance, or for less than an hour and a half a week. Little Alma Sedley has the best of care at all times, of course. Her mother travels with the company, and is on the stage every night. The child goes to school and receives the same sort of education as other children, except those of the very poor. She is well dressed, well fed, and has plenty of play time. The fact that she is able to play the part as she does shows that she is intelligent. Isn't it absurd to try to 'protect' her and the other stage children to the extent of forbidding them to earn money almost without effort—or even completely without effort? For children enjoy acting and make-believe.

"The Chicago experience was not the first Liebler & Co. have had in the same city. Another play we put on there required a child about 8 years old. Of course, it was impossible to get permission to let the child appear. We advertised in New York for a dwarf to play the part and succeeded in engaging a 19-year-old midget, who was as small as a child of 8 but who was unsuited to the part. Other companies have resorted to the expedient of using dwarfs, a plan never satisfactory in results, for even the best-formed midgets fall to look like children.

"Here in New York conditions are not so bad, of course. We sometimes have trouble in persuading the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to give their permission for the appearance of a child. There is an elaborate series of questions to be answered and final permission from the Mayor to be obtained. And at any time the permission may be revoked on complaint.

"I advocate most heartily a uniform

law that shall apply to all States and that will be based on an intelligent understanding of the requirements of stage children and of the nature of stage life. With the enactment of more factory laws and the continued blindness of some presumably sincere people, there is a possibility of having such plays as 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' 'The Tempest,' 'A Winter's Tale,' 'King John,' 'Richard III.' and dozens of other classic and modern pieces revised or abandoned. An effort on the part of managers, backed by intelligent public sentiment, might have the effect that we so much desire of placing the stage child on the same basis as the little ones who help their mothers with housework, or take care of younger brothers and sisters often much too heavy for them to carry.

"As the laws are now we cannot take 'Alias Jimmy Valentine' to any theatres in Massachusetts, Illinois, Maryland, or Louisiana, unless we are willing to sacrifice the pivotal scene in the play by using a dummy instead of a real child. Managers of other plays that require children, such as 'The Awakening of Helena Richie' and 'The Bachelor's Baby,' must either employ dwarfs in these States, or arrange their routes so as to escape the 'factory law.'"

Francis Wilson, too, is making an effort to obtain some relief for the stage child. He is directing his attention to the Massachusetts law. He was booked to appear at a Boston theatre in "The Bachelor's Baby," but the decision of the Supreme Court, handed down a few weeks ago, and upholding the factory law as applied to children on the stage, has made it necessary for his manager to cancel the booking. He has prepared a petition to be circulated in Massachusetts, and to be sent to the State Legislature, asking for a modification of the law. In his petition he calls attention to the conditions the children find on the stage, their easy hours, the light work they have to perform, and the good salaries they earn. The original intention of the law, he says, was to keep children from employment in factories, mills, and so-called "sweatshops," in which the "physical and mental strain to accomplish the desired result" was very great.

"It is susceptible of easy proof," to quote the text of his petition, "that the employment of children on the stage is a delight not merely to the audience, but to the children themselves, who enter into it with the zest and enthusiasm as if playing at home. These children are mostly of theatrical families, and by right of inheritance have the 'call of the theatre' pulsing through their veins.

"Older and conservative communities like England," continues Mr. Wilson, "have not found it necessary to enact such drastic laws, for while, there as here, the child labor law as to factories, mills, &c., is in full force, the act does not apply to children on the stage, for the reason that, artistic endeavor on the stage is not regarded as work. It being, they consider, a far cry from the labor of the child in the factory, mill, or shop to the few minutes during an afternoon or evening permitted the child in plays or in singing or acting. There are, at this date, more than 500 children appearing nightly in the London theatres.

"We particularly call attention to the Great Empire State of New York, which in its jealous regard of the rights of children, is second to none in enactment of drastic laws for their well being and protection, and that the people of that Commonwealth have, after great consideration of this question, concluded that a distinction exists in so-called 'child labor' and that by appearance upon a public forum—the stage—the child is not only injured mentally, morally, or physically, but is improved by the study, care, and attention accorded it thereby.

"An officer of the Massachusetts Child Labor Society said that child actors seldom reached prominence in the theatrical profession when they grew up," said Mr. Wilson, talking about his petition. "It was stated that the theatrical profession was bad for the health of its members, and that children on the stage was subject to sickness more than other children. A glance over the list of prominent actors of to-day and of past generations who began as children should be sufficient to

convince any one that such a statement is untrue."

A hurried examination of the biographies of about 500 prominent actors of the present generation shows that about 10 per cent. of those who have achieved fame began stage life in early childhood. Maude Adams had a speaking part at the age of 5. Lena Abarbanell, the comic opera singer, began at the age of 7; Mary Anderson was only 16 when she made her first appearance, and her studies for the stage began four years earlier. Julia Arthur began acting at the age of 11, Lillian Blauvelt, the singer, appeared in public at the age of 7; Holbrook Elinn made his first appearance when he was 6 years old, Emma Carus was only 6 when she began her stage career, Joseph Cawthorne was 3, and William Collier was 10. Rose Coglan began to play child parts almost as soon as she could speak, and Laura Hope Crews began about as soon.

Jefferson De Angelis made his first appearance when he was 12 and Henry E.

Dwarfs and Dummies Must Often Be Used for Juvenile Characters in Plays.

Dixey when he was 10. Eleanor Duse, the famous Italian actress, was a child of the stage, and has never left it. Mrs. Fiske was 2 years old when she was carried on the stage for her first part, and as Minnie Maddern she was a noted child actress. E. M. Holland, the veteran character actor, began as a baby; Elsie Janis started her career at the age of 8. Mrs. Kendal, the English actress, was a player of child rôles before she entered her teens. William Seymour, Charles Frohman's general stage director, was an actor at the age of 7. Mabel Taliaferro was a child actress; Fay Templeton was 3 years old when she first appeared, and Fritz Williams was the same age. Mrs. Annie Yeaman, who is called the youngest actress on the stage, began her long career when she was but 10.

The child actors who are playing in New York at present include Donald Gallaher and Alma Sedley with "Alias Jimmy Valentine," Baby Davis, with Francis Wilson in "The Bachelor's Baby"; John Tansy, a regular member of The New Theatre company; the children chorused in Lew Fields's productions, and the sixteen kiddies at the Hippodrome. All of these children, except those in dramatic productions, have little to do but romp in the plays in which they appear. Mary Mannering's new play, that is to be seen during the coming week, will bring still another child actor to New York.

All of these children appear by the permission of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which has to be assured that the applicant for permission will be properly taken care of. The society asks the name, age, the length of the rôle the child is to play, whether it requires dancing or acrobatic work, and the name of the parent or guardian who will be responsible. The society then gives its permission, if it considers that the child's health will not be endangered, and after this permission is given it becomes necessary to obtain a further permit from the Mayor. If the society refuses its approval of the child's appearance, it is practically impossible to persuade the Mayor to issue a permit. While on the stage the child is under the supervision of the society, which may withdraw its approval if it considers its requirements are not to be carried out.

In the States where the child labor laws are stringent sometimes permission is given for a child to appear in a play, but it happens very seldom. When Margaret Anglin reached Boston to play "The Awakening of Helena Richie" permission was given for the child to appear at matinees. For evening performances Miss Anglin engaged a dwarf, who makes a business of substituting for children in the plays that come to that city. When "The Barrier" was produced in Chicago the management believed that permission would be given for the two Ziegler children to appear in the first act. Just before curtain time permission was refused and the first act had to be hurriedly rearranged so as to eliminate the children rôles. When Mrs. Fiske played "Salvation Nell" in New Orleans her manager was fined \$125 for permitting a child to appear in the second act of the play. Lew Fields's musical productions are shorn of their child group when presented in the four discriminating States.