

lane with her hands full of primroses. The texture of her fair clear skin was as flawless as the imagined flowers. Her abundant hair, coloured like straw, was put back as simply as it should be with those rounded cheeks, delicately arched eyebrows, and quiet wide blue eyes. She was tall and slender, and wore a plain black dress, a white knitted woollen jacket, hanging unbuttoned, and a soft black scarf that fell loosely about her lovely throat. She sat inclining gently towards us, and with a calm sweet gravity, and low, well articulated accents told her tale.

She used to be a 'sales lady' at a 'store' in Albany, and earned 6 dollars a week (24 shillings.) – a wage not worth nearly so much as it would be in this country, owing to the higher cost of living in America.\* On coming with her people to New York recently, she was obliged, through lack of other openings, to go into Langfelder's Laundry. Work there was supposed to start on Mondays at 1 p.m., and to continue until eleven o'clock at night. The timetable for the week was as follows: –

Monday 1 p.m. to 11 p.m.  
 Tuesday 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.  
 Wednesday 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.  
 Thursday 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.  
 Friday 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.  
 Saturday 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.

This would mean a 70 hour week, but these hours were often indefinitely prolonged, and nothing was paid for overtime. Half an hour was allowed for the mid-day meal, and this was the only interval permitted during the day, even when the work was carried on until the small hours of the next morning. The women of all ages who were paid a fixed wage in this laundry, got from 4 dollars (16/-) to 6 ½ dollars (26 shillings) a week. This girl, who was engaged in dampng collars, got 5 dollars (£1). The piece workers, starchers and others earned more.

Another girl, who was employed at Preuss's Laundry as a 'taker off' at the mangle told us that she was paid 6 dollars a week. She said that two Italian girls who worked beside her only got 4 dollars. She supposed they did not know they could get more. She herself had been offered 4 dollars, but had refused to take less than six. She worked from 7.30 a.m. till 9 or 10 p.m. every day, except Saturday, when work stopped at 3 or 4 p.m. She said that she had been at work in the laundry when a procession of strikers went past. She had stopped work at once, but the doors were

locked, and she was told that she could not go. She had then picked up an iron bar, and declared that she would fight her way out. On thus showing her determination, she had been released.

Two women employed as starchers at the Brunswick Laundry, one of whom had worked there 25 years, told us that they began work at 1 p.m. on Monday and went on until 1 a.m. the next morning. On Tuesday they started at 7.30 (6 ½ hours after they had left off), and continued once more till the following 1 a.m. The same thing happened on Wednesday. Thursday they occasionally started at 9 a.m., but more often at 7.30 as before, and finished at 10 or 11 p.m.. This was their weekly timetable: –

Monday 1 p.m. to 1 a.m. (Tuesday).  
 Tuesday 7.30 a.m. to 1 a.m. (Wednesday)  
 Wednesday 7.30 a.m. to 1 a.m. (Thursday)  
 Thursday 7.30 a.m. or occasionally 9 a.m. to 10 or 11 p.m.  
 Friday 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. or 8 p.m.  
 Saturday 7.30 a.m. or 9 a.m. to about 4 p.m.\*

The weeks total therefore varied from 71 to 75 hours per week, with only 3 hours per week deducted for meals, for as, in the other laundries the half hour for luncheon was the only interval allowed each day! A few years of this horribly excessive labour in the heat and steam of the laundry must break down the strongest constitution. These women starchers were paid by the piece, 7 cents a dozen for shirts and 1 ¼ cents a dozen for collars. Some could make 16 to 18 dollars a week, some only

\* This information correlates with that cited by the Women's Trade Union League. The journal *Life and Labour* quoted Sarah Smith, who had worked in laundries for 25 years: 'This is the way we worked: On Monday we began at one o'clock, and we worked until one o'clock that night. Sometimes the boss gave us supper money and sometimes not. It was oftener not. Then Tuesday morning we began at half-past seven. There was just time enough to tumble into bed and out again. That day we worked until one o'clock at night. It was the same on Wednesday, but on Thursday, maybe, we would get a rest – Thursday, maybe, we stopped at 10.30 at night. Friday we generally had an hour's rest in the morning. Saturday was a real easy day, and we'd get off at three in the afternoon'. Mary E. Dreier, 'To Wash or Not to Wash: Ay, There's the Rub: The New York Laundry Strike', *Life and Labour*, March 1912, p. 69. Compare also with the Union's information on collar starchers' piece work at 'Laundry C':

'Mondays, 1 P.M. to 12:30 or 1 A.M.  
 Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 7:30 A.M. to 12:30 A.M. or 1 A.M.  
 Thursdays, 7:30 A.M. to 10 P.M.  
 Friday, 9 to 11 A.M. and 3 to 4 P.M.'. *New York Times*, 13 January 1912, p. 7.

\* [SP] See appendix to Chapter 2.