steady, all the time, I used to wish I could have real hard jumping toothache, just for a change."

"God love ye, and it's so," fervently exclaimed Mrs. Mooney.

The day was terrifically hot outdoors, and with the fearful heat that came up through the floor from the engine-room directly under us, combined with the humidity of the steam-filled room, we were all driven to a state of half-dress before the noon hour arrived. The women opened their dresses at the neck and cast off their shoes, and the foreman threw his suspenders off his shoulders, while the colored washers paddled about on the sloppy floor in their bare black feet. . . .

"Are n't we going to get out at six?" asked the one-eyed girl, while I glanced dismally at the never-ending train of trucks that kept rolling out upon the washers' platform, faster now than at any other time of the day.

"God love ye! dearie, no," returned Mrs. Mooney. "Ye'll never get outside *this* shop at six any night, unless ye're carried out dead. We're in luck to get out as early as eight."

"Every night?"

"Sure, every night exceptin' Saturday, and then it's twelve to half-past one."

"Oh, that's not so bad if you have a half-holiday."

"Half-holiday!" echoed Mrs. Mooney. "Will ye listen to that! A half-holiday, indeed!" Then the mocking voice grew kinder. "Sure and it's every minute of twelve o'clock or a half-hour into Sunday mornin' afore you ever see the outside of this place of a Saturday in summer-time, with all the washin' and ironin' for the summer hotels and the big bugs as is at the sea-shore."

"Youse ain't got no kick coming," said one of the Ginney girls. "Youse gets six cents an hour overtime, and youse 'll be mighty glad to make that exter money!"

Mrs. Mooney glared viciously at the interlopers. "Yes, and if it was n't for the likes of yez Ginnies that 'll work for nothing and live in pig-pens, the likes of us white people would n't have to work nights."

"Well I made ninety-six cents' overtime last week," spoke up the silent fat woman in the underpetticoat, "and I was thankful to the Lord to get it."

Of the two hours or more that followed I have only a hazy recollection of colored men bending over the pungent foam, of

straining, sweating women dragging their trucks round and round the great steaming-room. I remembered nothing whatever of the moment when the agony was ended and we were released for the day. Up to a certain dim borderland I remember that my back ached and that my feet dragged heavily over the burning floor, two pieces of boiling flesh. I do remember distinctly, however, suddenly waking up on Third Avenue as I was walking past a delicatessen store, and looking straight into the countenance of a pleasant-faced woman. I must have walked right into her, for she seemed amused, and went on her way laughing at something—probably my look of surprise as the impact brought me suddenly to full consciousness. A clock was hanging in the delicatessen-store window, and the hour-hand stood at nine. A cooling sea-breeze was blowing up from the south, and as I continued my walk home I realized that I had just passed out of a sort of trance,—a trance superinduced by physical misery,—a merciful subconscious condition of apathy, in which my soul as well as my body had taken refuge when torture grew unbearable.

THE STORY OF A GLOVE MAKER

Agnes Nestor

Working in factories was long, tedious work. Working women found that they were at the mercy of foremen, who had the right to hire and fire, speed up or slow down production, and take sexual advantage of working girls who desperately needed to hold on to their jobs. There were other minor, or not so minor, indignities on the job. Workers were often charged fifty cents a week for the power that ran their machines, so-called machine rent. They had to buy their own needles and machine oil. Their working hours were irregular,

Source: Agnes Nestor, "A Day's Work Making Gloves" (1898) in Nestor, *Woman's Labor Leader* (Rockford, Ill.: Bellevue Books Publishing Co., 1954), pp. 37–41.

as was their pay. It was a rare factory that had a union to speak up for the women's demands.

Agnes Nestor's story of a day's work making gloves, written in Chicago around 1898, conveys the texture of working women's lives. Unlike the Richardson piece, with its fairly vivid language and ability to recreate dialogue, this article was written by an actual factory worker who never had more than an eighth grade education and whose writing style is somewhat stilted. Agnes Nestor (1880–1948) came from an Irish Roman Catholic family, and she spent most of her working life in Chicago. To protest the conditions she describes in this article (especially the issue of machine rent), she impetuously led a walkout of her fellow glove makers. After ten days of picketing, the women won all their demands, including the recognition of a glove makers' union. For the rest of her life, Nestor devoted herself to the International Glove Workers Union, serving in various national capacities. In addition to her union organizing, she was also a successful lobbyist for protective labor legislation, such as the eight-hour day, for women and children in Illinois.

The whistle blows at 7 A.M. but the piece workers have until 7.30 to come in to work. The penalty for coming late (after 7.30 A.M.) is the loss of a half day as the girls cannot then report to work until noon. This rule is enforced to induce the girls to come early but it often works a hardship on them when they are unavoidably delayed on account of the cars, etc. Stormy weather is the only excuse.

All the work in the sewing department is piece work so the wages depend upon the speed of the operator. The gloves are made by the dozen and each class of operators has a particular part of them to make. After they are cut they go to the silker, who does the fancy stitching on the backs; then to the closer, who sews in the thumbs and joins the pieces to the palms to form the backs; they then go to several operators each of whom does a small part of the banding; then the gloves come back to the closer to be closed around the fingers. This finishes most of the bandtop gloves but the gauntlets have to go to the binder or hemmer who finishes the tops. Nearly all of the gloves are finished on the wrong side and have to go to another department to be turned and layed off on a heated iron form; this is the finishing process. This is the making of the heavy working and driving gloves.

A few years ago most of the gloves were made throughout by one operator, but by degrees the manufacturers have divided the work into sections until now the closers and girls making the finer driving and fancy gauntlets are the only girls who really have a trade to learn. The other work is very straight and requires more speed than skill.

It is only through our union that we have been able to have the closing work made throughout by the one operator. The employers claim that their object in wanting to have this work done in sections is to make it easier for girls to learn and to make possible a better system in giving out the work. They offered to divide the total price proportionally among the different operators so that there would be no reduction by this arrangement. There was always some reduction in the other sectional work; for instance, a girl received thirty-three cents a dozen for doing all the banding on a certain style of glove. By having this work made in sections and with improved machinery the total price is seventeen cents, necessarily involving a reduction in some sections. We believe we are justified in refusing to have our "closing" work made in sections, if for no other reason than that one part of the "closing" work is very heavy and hard, and when a girl does it all day she is completely tired out, while the putting in thumbs and backing is much lighter and easier work which it is a sort of a rest to do part of the day. So when it is a question of our strength to us and not dollars or cents to the employer, so he claims, then why should we not insist on making our gloves throughout. I am not bringing in the question of breaking up our trade or the monotony and other disagreeable features of section work. One employer even offered us an increased price on the harder part of the work to induce us to accept his system, but even this we refused. You see there is a human as well as a financial question involved in this for us and I think the human is the greater of the two.

It is a curious sight to go through a factory and see in spaces between the windows and on the posts at certain distances apart, eighty-five-cent alarm clocks. The clocks are bought as the result of a collection, which means that each girl puts in five or ten cents.

I have heard and read criticisms of the men who work watching the clock, ready to drop their tools on the minute of quitting time. But the reason our girls buy and watch the clocks

is not to see how soon they can quit work, but to see that they do not lose time. It is easy to lose a few minutes and not notice it until the end of the day when we count up our work and pay. Every girl knows just how long it takes her to make any part of the glove. We figure that we can make a pair in a certain number of minutes so we watch the clock to see that we will come out on time with our dozen.

When we begin our day's work we never know what our day's pay will be. We have to figure to make up for time we lose. Although it is not our fault it is at our expense. For instance: a dozen gloves may be cut from very heavy leather and very difficult to sew; or perhaps when we go to the desk for work we may have to stand waiting in line ten to twenty minutes; or the belt of our machine may break and we may have to walk around the factory two or three times before we find the belt boy who, perhaps, is hidden under a table fixing a belt, and then we have to wait our turn; or we go to another desk to get our supplies such as needles, thread, welt, etc. But what we dread most of all is the machine breaking down as we do not know how long it will take to repair it. For this work the machinist takes our name and again we have to wait our turn. The foreman is very willing to allow us to use another machine, but when a girl is accustomed to her own machine it is not an easy matter to sew on any other. For each kind of leather and style of glove we use a different color and number of thread and size of needle; each of these requires a certain tension so that in changing the thread, needles and machine for the various kinds of work again time is taken, our time. Each glove has to be stamped with the girl's number so that a glove can always be traced back to the maker and all "busters" brought to her to repair.

I remember a certain style of glove of which I found I could make a dozen in one hour and a half. There happened to be a large order for this work going through, so that I had a great amount of it. At the end of the day, nine and a half hours, I found that I had only five dozens made. The next day I watched the clock very closely to see where the two hours went the day before. I finished each dozen on "scheduled time" but at the end of this day I found I still had only my five dozens made. I tried this every day for a week, each day trying to work harder, only with the same result and to find myself completely tired out.

A great many employers give as their reason for preferring the piece-work system and establishing it as much as possible, that they are only paying for the work they receive and have more work turned out in a day. This no doubt is true; but it is too often at the expense of the girl. For she pays not only the loss of time but the loss of health too. I am one of the many who are very much against this system for I have seen too many awful results from it. We have a certain amount of strength and energy and if this is to be used up the first few years at the trade what is to become of the workers after that? This system, moreover, encourages a girl to do more than her physical strength will allow her to do continuously. Piece work is worry as well as work.

When I started in the trade and saw the girls working at that dreadful pace every minute, I wondered how they could keep up the speed. But it is not until you become one of them that you can understand. The younger girls are usually very anxious to operate a machine. I remember the first day that I sewed, making the heavy linings. The foreman came to me late in the day and asked how I liked the work. "Oh," I said, "I could never get tired sewing on this machine." But he had seen too many girls "get tired," so he said "Remember those words a few years from now if you stay," and I have.

At half-past nine the whistle blows again and we have five minutes for a light lunch. This time we have to make up so we work until 5:35 P.M. At noon we have only half an hour, which means that the girls have to bring cold lunches. The firm heats a large boiler of water so the girls can make tea or coffee. While half an hour seems a short time for lunch still a great many girls take ten or fifteen minutes of this to trim their gloves or whatever work they can do while the power is shut down. The girls all eat at their places, two or three grouping together. I believe a lunch-room should be provided where we could eat without the sight of gloves and the smell of leather.

There is a big army of foremen, forewomen, and others employed by the various manufacturers just to study and plan how they can save a few cents here and there for the firm. Their methods of saving too often result in a "cut" here and there. As these "cuts" continue to come one after another, the girls must work faster and faster to make up for them, until they have to give up, and then there are other girls ready to take their places

in the race. They all have to compete with the "pacemaker." There is only one way of resisting this and that is through the united efforts of the workers in their trade union.

Employers frequently complain about the big expense of "breaking in so much help." If they spent some of this money to make the factory conditions better it would not be necessary to break in so many workers. I believe it would pay them in the end.

One of the valuable features of our trade union is that the workers have an opportunity to meet their employer. It is only by representatives of both employers and employed sitting around the table and talking matters over that they can both recognize and understand each other's rights and interests.