



Not for sale. Adoptive parents can avoid heartache by waiting for babies—like these at the Spence-Chapin Adoption Service—from recognized agencies.

Babies for Sale

By *HENRY F. and KATHARINE PRINGLE*

A black-market infant can cost you up to \$10,000—and you won't know what you're getting. How do some reputable people—including doctors and clergymen—innocently abet this practice? What can be and is being done? Here are the facts.

EVERY year 75,000 children are legally adopted in the United States. Yet the demand for adoptable youngsters is greater than the supply, and by far. That is one reason why the established social agencies are slow in supplying infants for the applicants who want them. The undersupply of babies is very definitely why the so-called gray market flourishes, wherein misguided individuals—doctors, nurses, lawyers, ministers and others—arrange adoptions. It is the reason for the widespread black markets which are operated by shysters and criminals.

Babies are, quite literally, on the auction block because there are ten or more potential adopting couples in this country for every child available for adoption. Prices have gone as high as \$10,000 on the vicious black market, although \$1500 and \$2500 are much more common. Payments are made to unscrupulous attorneys and other racketeers, for children who may be feeble-minded or diseased,



This couple adopted both of their babies through the Spence-Chapin Service. Records of child-placement agencies show that there are from ten to twenty potential foster parents for every available baby.



It took time and red tape to adopt her son through an authorized agency, but this mother knew he was healthy. People who "buy" black-market babies risk getting sick—often fatally ill—children.

possibly congenital syphilitics, who have never been subjected to physical or psychiatric tests. The result in such cases is, of course, heartbreak for the frustrated husband and wife who seek a baby.

With so many couples asking for children, the welfare agencies feel justified in trying to choose exactly the right home for each young one. The process takes time. Perhaps the agencies are a little overcautious. But they provide safeguards which go far to minimize the chances of mistakes. The files of the Children's Bureau in Washington are crammed with cases where trouble followed participation in the black market. A couple in a small town in Idaho, for instance, went to a lawyer and were told that the fee for a baby would be \$300. They agreed happily and took out an additional mortgage on their home for that amount. When they called to claim their baby, however, the lawyer told them he had disposed of it in Salt Lake City for \$1500.

The black-market operators are difficult to apprehend even in states which have excellent laws on adoption. The natural mother is most unlikely to testify. The foster parents are afraid they may lose their baby, and so won't give evidence unless it has turned out badly. Last year in Chicago a couple seeking a child were rejected by a licensed agency because the wife was a semi-invalid. The viewpoint of the agency can be understood: Why place a child in a home thus handicapped when so many wholly normal couples were trying to find boys or girls? But the pair persisted. They paid a lawyer a big fee to get a baby elsewhere. Within two months they discovered that the infant was totally blind.

The laws governing adoption have improved a good deal in many states in the last few years. Their basic purpose is threefold—to protect the child, its natural mother and the adopting family. No law yet passed is, in the words of the Children's Bureau, "a model to be followed exactly." But in general a good adoption law makes it illegal for anyone but a close relative or an authorized social agency to take part in separating a child from its mother or in placing it for adoption.

The Helpful Work of the Social Agencies

IN other words, under such a law, an unrelated private person is not allowed to take a baby from its own parent and turn it over to someone else, even though no profit is involved, as it is in the black market. But many kindly individuals are ignorant of these laws where they exist. Though all states require approval of adoptions by some court, this is often a meaningless formality. By the time the petition comes up, the child has already been in its adoptive home for some time. Even if the placement was questionable, a judge will hesitate to remove it unless it is actually being abused.

The problems attending the adoption of children are at least as intricate as any other social problem in these United States. The criticism can be fairly made that too many rules and regulations have been applied to them. Children are sometimes regarded as little units, with specified quotas of intelligence, who must be matched with identical adoptive parents more precisely than they could conceivably be by nature. It is encouraging to note that such rigid attitudes in the social agencies are passing. The social workers are younger these days. Instead of being narrow-minded spinsters who used to view the whole subject of unmarried mothers and illegitimacy with chill disapproval, many are relaxed women with thorough professional training, prepared to give sympathetic and intelligent help to a young girl in trouble.

Misguided sentimentality remains a very serious factor in the gray-market placing of babies. In the words of one social worker, there is "nothing so appealing as a young unmarried mother on the hospital ward who confides her great secret to a nurse whose natural compassion evokes a desire to act on her behalf." The situation arises constantly in most hospitals in this country.

Imagine that it is midnight in the obstetrical ward of a big city hospital—it could be anywhere. Pretty, frightened Betty, who is about nineteen,



At the Spence-Chapin agency, babies are examined regularly to make sure they are in good health before they are placed with foster parents.

has just given birth to a boy. She had fallen in love with an Army corporal who had promised to marry her, had been shipped to Korea and had died in action. Betty left her home town "to visit friends" and gave the hospital an assumed married name. She is terrified that her parents will find out.

On another floor of the dimly lighted hospital is the children's ward. There a small boy has just died and his mother is choking back her grief in a waiting room. The nurse in Betty's ward has learned her story; she also knows about the death of the boy. She has slight, if any, knowledge of the law. She suggests that it will be simplicity itself to arrange for the bereaved mother to adopt the baby, if Betty will sign away her parental rights.

In this particular state, such private arrangements are illegal. But who is to learn about it, unless Betty later changes her mind and wants her baby back? Who is to know whether the foster mother will give it a happy home? Certainly not the romantic-minded nurse, who never saw her before. Who is to check on whether the infant is mentally or physically fit for adoption at all?

These are the questions which are wholly ignored by the well-meaning people who create the gray market. Sometimes the doctor who has cared for the natural mother is the villain of the piece. He is touched by the plight of the young unmarried girl, and wants to help her preserve her privacy. So he works out an adoption in which no questions will be asked. After all, he thinks, who should know more about a child than the doctor who assisted it into the world?

Members of the clergy, equally well-intentioned, are also to blame at times. A minister may have in his congregation sterile couples who want to adopt children and have run into the inexorable law of supply and demand. He regards it as his Christian duty to bring them together with a baby. The adoption may turn out perfectly well. But if the child should be defective, the foster parents can't very well ask the minister to support it.

No adoption system is without its failures. Agencies make errors, too, even the best of them. But their record is considerably better than that of casual placements. A few years ago the late Dr. Catherine S. Armatruda, of the Clinic of Child Development at Yale University, made a study of 200 adopted youngsters, half of them placed privately and half through recognized agencies. In her report Doctor Armatruda emphasized that she was not asking perfection; after all, children who stay with their natural parents are not always ideally situated. Of the 100 agency placements, she rated seventy-six as good; a healthy normal child in a serene home. She was somewhat dubious about sixteen agency choices and rated eight as bad. But she found that only forty-six of the private placements were good, and twenty-eight were actually bad either because the child was subnormal or because the foster parents were unstable or even criminal.

It is undeniably true that both foster parents and children are far safer if an agency is used. Babies adopted privately are usually taken straight from

the hospital in a few days, even a few hours. Little is known of the mother's background. The father may be entirely unknown.

Neither is there much protection for the child in private placements. Take the case of Joe. He had been with his foster parents since he was an infant. When he was fifteen they were killed in an automobile accident. Joe then discovered that they had never legally adopted him. He had no claim at all on their modest estate.

A well-run agency makes sure that the natural mother has had time and guidance to reach a final decision before it accepts a legal surrender of her baby. But private placements offer no insurance that she will not change her mind and demand her child back after he has been taken into some home, with consequent disruption to his welfare and tragedy for his foster parents. Among the records in the Children's Bureau in Washington is the heart-rending personal story of a woman on the Pacific Coast who obtained a five-day-old infant from a doctor in September, 1944.

"I loved him right away," she wrote later. "He was so helpless!"

The baby's mother was thirty-five years old and unmarried. She had come from a distance in order to hide her situation from her family. She gave written consent to the adoption, and after six months the foster parents applied for court approval, in accordance with the state law. At that point Miss R. turned up again. She had told her family about the baby, she announced, and they had forgiven her. She wanted the boy back. She (Continued on Page 42)

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insisted that she had signed the release under duress. The frantic adoptive couple tried to fight back. They appealed to the courts, to state legislators, to their congressman—even to the White House.

"Will you save my baby for me?" the wife begged. "I have given him the best of care. He won't go to sleep unless my husband keeps his hand on his back. Miss R. won't do that for him. He won't eat cereal unless I put orange juice in it. She wouldn't do that for him. Please don't let that tramp take my baby away from me." As this is written, the case is still pending.

Stories of the irreparable damage that may result from the gray market could be repeated *ad nauseam*. In a Midwestern city an eight-month-old girl was put into the home of a couple who, according to the official report, "were both known to criminal-probation departments." Yet the court which had jurisdiction, "after careful investigation, granted the adoption, feeling that however unfortunate the selection of the home, the child's position would be more secure adopted than not adopted."

Most social workers feel that the gray market is a more serious problem than the black market. The latter is growing, however, although it is being controlled to a certain extent through uniform state laws sponsored by the Children's Bureau. As the statutes have been tightened, prosecutions have been more numerous. In most communities, on the other hand, the fines provided for violation are not very high; possibly \$300. The black marketer is likely to take a chance on this when his fee for a baby is \$1500 and up.

Officials of the Children's Bureau are deeply concerned with these continuing evils. Dr. Martha M. Eliot, the recently appointed chief of the bureau, wants to see the states set up certain standards. A warmhearted woman and one of the most eminent physicians in the country, she is determined that an unmarried mother should have the same safeguards in pregnancy and delivery as her married sister. If these girls would give up their babies for adoption only through authorized agencies, Doctor Eliot pointed out to us earnestly, the agencies' supply would be larger. Most important of all, the Children's Bureau chief added, is to get information out to everybody about the services at hand. Then poor bewildered Susie will no longer fall, as she now often does, into mistaken or unscrupulous hands. It sometimes looks as though that day is far off.

In Lawrence, Massachusetts, and in New York City, an elderly physician and his wife and a Brooklyn lawyer have recently been indicted for operating an interstate ring with profits estimated at hundreds of thousands of dollars. In Cleveland, Ohio, a lawyer and former city councilman told inquiring couples not long ago that he had available twenty-five to thirty infants which could be adopted. He explained that his brother was a doctor with obstetrical contacts. The fee was to be about \$1500 per child.

According to the Cleveland Press, a number of lawyers participated in this black market. In some cases their medical acquaintances referred unmarried pregnant women to them. One of the group visited baby-boarding homes in the vicinity and tried to persuade mothers to sign babies away.

Washington, D. C., by passing an effective law, seems to have smashed the racket there. But five or six years ago a number of "baby brokers" were flourishing in the capital. One of them had operated successfully for eighteen years, according to the Children's Bureau. A favorite trick of the Washington racketeers was to hint that a baby's mother was the daughter or niece of a congressman, and its father a prominent and intellectual married man. In fact, one infant placed by these brokers was later found to be the child of a feeble-minded Southern millworker. Another had been born to a girl who had escaped from an institution for mental defectives.

In Miami, Florida, one black-market operator advertised brazenly for babies in a local newspaper. A typical insertion read:

Couple desire to adopt expected child, newborn child or infant. Confidential. Call —

This was a ring directed by a New York lawyer. Babies were obtained in Miami and flown to New York and other cities. One mother changed her mind and demanded the return of her child. She was told she could have it for \$800. The district attorney's office in New York co-operated with Florida social agencies in cracking this case.

One of the weirdest cases in baby-black-market history is that of the Memphis branch of the Tennessee Children's Home Society, a private institution. The society received its charter in 1913 as a nonprofit organization to provide homes for white infants and children. On the surface it was a perfectly respectable agency with prominent citizens on the board of its principal headquarters in Nashville. The board members appear to have had complete confidence in the late Georgia Tann, who, until September, 1950, was manager of the Memphis home. The Nashville end of the society was not touched by the scandal which ultimately rocked Tennessee; only Miss Tann's unit in Memphis.

In September, 1950, because of growing public criticism, Gov. Gordon Browning appointed a noted Memphis lawyer, Robert L. Taylor, to investigate the society's activities. Miss Tann was ill at the time and died a few days after the inquiry started. Mr. Taylor made his report in May, 1951. He charged that Georgia Tann and certain confederates had profited to the extent of \$500,000.

For about a decade babies had been taken from their mothers in hospitals within a few hours after birth, often against doctors' orders, and placed in groups in nursing homes preparatory to adoption. Many of them died from this careless handling. The case histories are shocking. Three illegitimate children born in sequence to a patient in the Western State Hospital for the insane were placed for adoption. Others had epileptic mothers. Physical and mental tests before placement were sketchy—if they were carried out at all.

Georgia Tann was ingenious, to put it mildly. The real money, she discovered, was not in Memphis, although the society's chief purpose was to place infants with childless couples in the locality. She worked out a slick scheme whereby babies were shipped in batches to California and New York, accompanied by a supposed social worker. Substantial fees of around \$750 and traveling expenses were charged, and Miss Tann profited by assessing each of the adopting families the entire sum for a trip on which a number of babies

were placed. Mr. Taylor estimates that she arranged 1000 such placements between 1940 and 1950.

Education is essential to wipe out such rackets—education of the unmarried mothers, of doctors, lawyers, ministers, the yearning couples who want children and the general public. All too often, pregnant girls find anonymity in a big city. They hide in some wretched room until it is almost time for the birth. Needing money, they are easy prey for anyone who offers to pay their expenses in exchange for the baby. They are afraid that if they appeal to a welfare agency, they will be asked all kinds of prying questions. Because they are the biggest cities, more girls seek refuge in New York and Chicago than anywhere else.

The two metropolises make earnest and intelligent efforts to guide these young women, as well as the prospective foster parents of their children. A girl who asks advice of the Travelers' Aid worker at any Chicago railroad station will be referred at once either to a sectarian agency, if she prefers, or to the Women's Service Division of the United Charities. There she will find friendly case workers to help her with lodging and hospital arrangements and her own heavy personal problems, both emotional and financial. And if she decides that adoption will be best for her baby, the W.S.D. will put her in touch with a child-placing organization.

New York is fortunate in having a number of excellent agencies offering assistance to unmarried mothers and adoption services. Among them are the Child Placing and Adoption Committee of the State Charities Aid Association, the Free Synagogue Child Adoption Committee, the Catholic Home Bureau and the Spence-Chapin Adoption Service. New York State law makes it illegal for fees to be paid to any individual for a child; payments, if any, may be made only to an authorized agency such as these.

We spent a morning in the Spence-Chapin building on East 33rd Street in New York. We had gone there with some misgivings. The name sounded very social, very Junior League. We were quickly reassured. An attractive, extroverted young woman, Roberta Andrews, who is assistant to executive director Dorothea P. Coe, greeted us. We sat down with Miss Andrews in a pleasant room with chintz curtains and gay prints to hear the history of the service.

Spence-Chapin is about forty years old. In its four decades it has placed some 2800 children in lifetime homes. The service receives a few thousand dollars from the Greater New York Fund. Most of its money comes, however, from endowments and private contributions. The service does not judge prospective foster parents on the basis of their wealth. And it is wholly interracial.

Miss Andrews has few illusions about child-placing agencies. Yes, she said, they are often too slow in getting the babies into homes. But she made it quite clear that would-be adoptive parents have their faults too.

"They think quite sincerely that they want a child," she said. "Too often, they want a doll. It is remarkable how many of our applicants demand a blue-eyed baby girl with blond curly hair—girls are far more popular for adoption than boys. Some of us here are convinced that this is fantasy stuff, and we watch out for it. We wonder whether such people are really willing to go through all the trouble of

bringing up a child—the emotional problems and the physical ones and all the rest."

Spence-Chapin weeds out this type of candidate by inviting a number of them in for tea on Saturday afternoons. A member of the staff tactfully outlines some of the work involved in raising an infant. She tells about formulas which have to be mixed, about feeding problems in the cold gray dawn. She reminds them how their freedom will be restricted if they acquire a child. A percentage of the applicants are discouraged forthwith and fade quietly away.

Like other up-to-date agencies, Spence-Chapin tries to have as few rules as possible. Its aim is to find for each child a normal, loving home with emotionally mature parents who will accept him as he is without making unreasonable demands on him. There are admitted delays, especially in the case of those applicants—and they are a majority—who want a baby under a year old, of Anglo-Saxon ancestry and superior intelligence. Well-off, college-bred couples have been known to insist on infants who will be certain of admission to their own institutions of learning and, if possible, qualify for Phi Beta Kappa. Such exacting souls are likely to be dropped from the lists at once or, at best, will wait a long time for their youngsters. The adoption workers regard them as too inflexible to make good parents.

Adoptive parents have the right, of course, to demand that an agency take back a child which simply cannot adjust or which fails to develop normally. But this happens in barely one case out of a hundred. Experienced social workers like Miss Andrews at Spence-Chapin realize, however, that the tests given to infants are not always infallible. This conclusion is supported by the observations of the Child Development Clinic at Yale.

Dr. Milton Senn, of the Yale Clinic, told us that a baby might test badly at four months, and yet a check at five or seven years could show a completely normal and even brilliant boy or girl. The honest, groping scientists in the field of child psychology don't know why this is so. They are inclined to think that a few years in a happy home work wonders with an adopted child. But too many foster parents, Doctor Senn observed, want "a written guaranty," as though they were buying an automobile tire—good for 50,000 miles.

Adoption agencies get anywhere from ten to twenty times as many requests for children as they have children available. Children's Services, largest in the Cleveland area, had roughly 1300 inquiries last year for 130 youngsters placed. The Free Synagogue Child Adoption Committee in New York receives up to 1200 applications annually, whereas its supply is only about 100 eligible babies. Dealing with this flood of applicants, explaining as tactfully as possible the reasons for rejections, pointing out that many children under agency care are not legally free for adoption—all this takes time and staff. Most agencies, for lack of sufficient funds, have too few social workers.

All intelligent workers in this field deplore the time which elapses between application and adoption. They are aware that agency delays divert possible parents into the gray and black markets. But they are working to cut the delays, although it may be doubted that some of the methods have won many friends. One well-known organization in Chicago eliminates many un-

likely applicants by telephone interviews. The Free Synagogue Child Adoption Committee can usually decide on rejections after preliminary talks held within a few months of application. Mrs. Florence G. Brown, of the committee, says that children are now placed with accepted applicants within a little over a year instead of three to four years.

The authorized agencies have very grave responsibilities. Sometimes an older child has to be tried out in four or five successive homes before a truly suitable one is found. In the modern social worker's view, there are few children who are not adoptable—even problem children like nine-year-old Nick Pappas.

Nick was a pint-sized terror. He had been running wild for six years while his parents were dying of cancer. He made it clear that he did not propose to be adopted by anybody. Mrs. Renée Goodwin, of the Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Child Welfare Board, placed him with an unhurried Italian-Hungarian couple in the grocery business. Nick discovered that his new foster father was left-handed, like himself, and that was a bond from the start. The Fodors encouraged his mechanical aptitudes.

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PROBLEM CHILD

To argue is useless, to threaten is vain;

It's clear I am wasting my time,
For as soon as he wins his parole
from the tub,

He returns to the scene of the
grime.

—R. H. GRENVILLE.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Two years later he was a different boy, proud of small responsibilities and entirely happy in his adoptive home.

Older children are always more difficult to place. But foundlings, left on a doorstep, about whose background nobody knows anything, are difficult, too. Agencies usually observe them for long periods before trying to find families for them. The Cuyahoga County board had such a case in Gertrude. The baby was being cared for in an asylum. She refused to eat and would barely move her fingers. She looked as if she might be a spastic or an idiot. Mrs. Goodwin decided to take a chance, on the theory that she simply needed affection. Gertrude was proposed to a pair who wanted "anything to love." The husband was a pharmacist with premedical training. For weeks before they took the baby home the couple visited the asylum daily to hold her and feed her until she responded to this personal attention. At four she is an interesting little girl of superior intelligence.

In a sense, the workers in the established agencies are playing God in finding parents for babies. They are fully aware that they make mistakes and are humble about them. They would like to make as few as possible. The case of Johnny, for whom an adoptive family was chosen in an Illinois town, is a good example of the care taken to insure his happiness and of the painstaking preparations made to fit him into his new, strange life.

Johnny's mother was a secretary in a bank, his father a factory foreman and former Air Force officer. The ex-flier had offered to marry the young girl when she became pregnant, but ad-

mitted he did not love her. She rejected this offer and decided to place her baby for adoption.

Five days after he was born, Johnny was taken from the hospital by a worker of the Illinois Children's Home and Aid Society and carefully examined by doctors in the society's clinic. He was thin, but otherwise perfectly fit. The baby was placed with a kindly boarding-mother while the agency worker checked on his development. He gained weight steadily, seemed to have no problems, was alert and responsive. After observing his personality for a time, the agency suggested him to Mr. and Mrs. Green, a gentle, friendly couple whose background was rather like Johnny's own.

The Greens visited Johnny several times in his boarding home to play with him and to learn in detail about his eating habits and the routines of his baby life. When he left, at the age of five months, for his permanent home, he wore the same sleepers he had been wearing. He was wrapped in the blankets he had always known. He had a familiar toy. For a time his formula was to be the same as at the boarding home. Because of this careful planning, he adjusted to the Greens right away. For a year, until the adoption was approved in court, the agency supervised his new home, advising the Greens on child-raising problems and helping with the legal formalities.

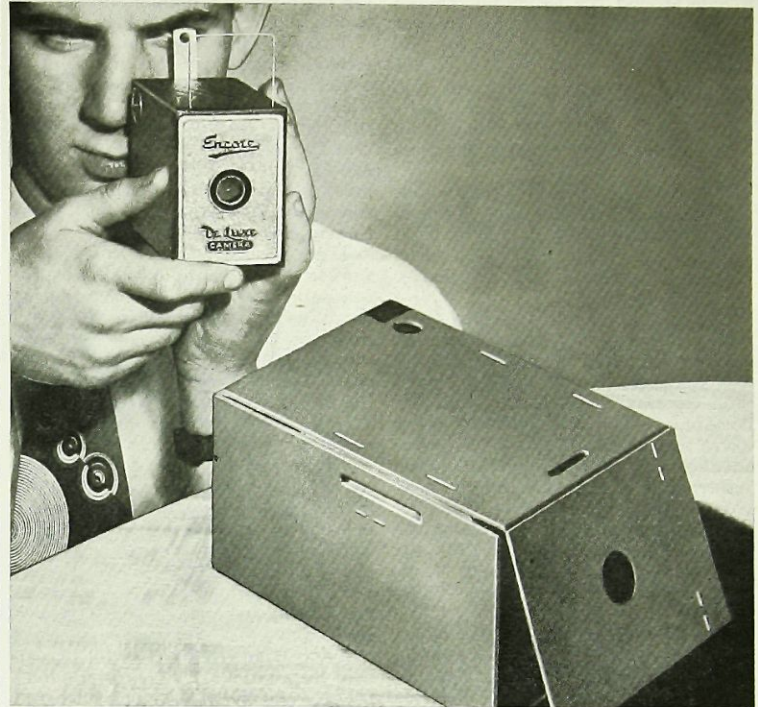
The care and attention, not to say love, given to Johnny's adoption are probably typical of a well-run placement agency; social workers take great pride in successful placements. The science, if it can be called that, of caring for illegitimate or abandoned children has come a long way in the last fifty or sixty years. Until the turn of the century, the New York City police rounded up foundlings as though they were stray animals and took them to a municipal hospital, where most of them died. For some years after that, orphans were still being shipped by the trainload to rural sections and placed with farmers who, in many cases, exploited them for the work they could do.

Few would deny that more progress is essential. The social agencies need to speed up further the process of finding homes. Perhaps they should take mental tests less seriously. Probably more of them should try placing babies under three months, where possible, as Children's Services in Cleveland does, with follow-up tests coming later. But in order to speed up the adoption process and to wipe out the black and gray markets, the agencies need to expand their facilities. And that means more money.

Improved laws, although they are important, will not solve everything. Picture a big-city hospital, which must remain unnamed. The doctors and young interns had for years been giving babies out for adoption on their own, when an enlightened social worker asked whether she could talk at a staff meeting. She described the services—for unmarried mothers and babies—that were available in the city. Gently, because she felt that the doctors and nurses had been acting with the best of intentions, she explained the law. The hospital staff listened with interest. One youthful doctor followed the social worker to the elevator and protested that he had not had the faintest idea that he had been breaking the law or that, in his casual placing of infants, he might have been damaging human lives. The gray market in that hospital was ended immediately. THE END

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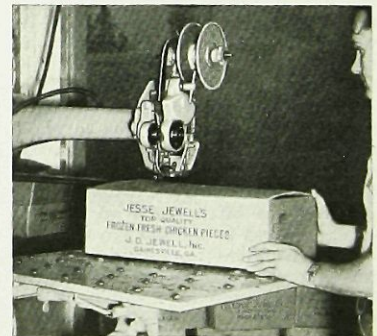
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