

Katie, a Miner's Child

By VERA BUCH.

Katie Vratrick, six years old, is the daughter of an anthracite coal miner. She is little, thin, and quick, with gray eyes dancing in her thin little face that has such a roquish smile. Her parents come from Jugo-Slavia, in southern Europe, but she, Katie, was born in great, noble, free America. So great that it lets Katie and her brothers grow up in a bare, ugly little shack, bitter cold in winter. So noble, that it allows her father to work deep down inside the earth, in the dark, dangerous mine, where more workers are killed every year by accident than in any other country in the world. So free, that when the boss finds out from his spies that Katie's father belongs to the Workers' Party, he is at once fired from his job and often, before he can find another, is out of work a long time, and then there is not enough to eat in the house.

In summer, Katie runs with the other children on the coal heaps. There she is perfectly happy, barefooted, in a torn dress. She comes home at night black as a coal miner, and must get scrubbed with soap before she can go to bed. High as the mountains are the coal heaps, the playground of the miners' children. They belong to the colliery which is only a few doors from Katie's home. Sometimes Katie manages to slip into the breakers, that great, black, noisy building, towering into the sky, where the coal is crushed. Here she stands wide-eyed and silent amid the din, watching the rushing streams of black, shining coal. So near is the colliery to their home, that day and night they can hear its loud noises, like the roaring of the sea. Only Katie at night, hears nothing, she falls asleep the minute she tumbles down on the feather tick on the floor where she sleeps with her three brothers.

Some days, she goes with her mother, carrying a pail, to help pick coal. That is a hard job for her

mother, Katie knows, and gives her a backache. Last winter her mother had to have an operation because of doing too much heavy work. Since then Katie tries to help her with the dish-washing and cooking for their family of six and four boarders.

In winter, she goes to the hateful school where she must sing a thousand times: "I pledge allegiance to my flag," and "My country tis of thee." At home she learns very different things. Her mother taught her the "International." The tune she can't get right, but she sings it with her own tune. "Arise, ye wretched of the earth!" Katie knows who are the "wretched of the earth." They are the coal miners, like her father, bent and broken from the hard work in the mines; like her mother who has always a backache from washing and cleaning and must worry so much how to get clothes for the children and pay the rent; like herself, who feels so keenly all the dark, terrible things that weigh upon their life.

Katie tells you: "I went to Passaic." If you are clever you will say: "You mean, you saw the Passaic Strike movie." Then she'll nod her head vigorously. "I saw the picket line, and the cops, and Brother Weisbord speaking to the workers." She can't remember the last miners' strike, she was too little, but her mother will tell you how she used to run out on the porch and yell "cab, 'cab," when the scabs would pass by towards the colliery. Now she'll tell you: "Boss—chop his head off—hate him!"

Her brothers have organized a Pioneer club in the little village. Katie is too young now to join, but she comes to the meetings and listens with wide eyes to what the leader says. She is waiting to be old enough to join so that she can show what a good fighter she, too, can be for the working class.