

The Cry of the Children

US : 1912 : dir. George O Nichols : Thanhouser
 prod: : scr: : dir.ph.: Carl L Gregory
Marie Eline; Leland Benham
 James Cruze; Ethel Wright; Lila H Chester

Silent : 29 min

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	∞	M	⌘	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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A waif-that-was (Marie Eline) returns from Beyond to reassure us that heaven's laundries are well supplied with bleach. Source: The Silents Majority website

Thanhouser Company Film Preservation
 website synopsis:

“**THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN**” is the most famous and best documented of all Thanhouser films. In its day it was recognised as one of the most important expressions of the pre-World War One reform movement, in particular child labour. Perhaps because the uncompromising content drew all the attention, the film was not then recognised as the artistic masterpiece it is.

The title and basic outline of the scenario were taken from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's popular poem which was quoted in the intertitles. The antique sentimental quality of the poem contrasts sharply with the gritty realism of the visual images. Likewise, the story contrasts scenes of the mill owner's home

life with that of the poor working family. An unsuccessful strike, poverty, death, and hardship threaten to tear the poor family apart.

Although location work was frequent in those days, the real factory setting was unusual and strikingly authentic. Dramatic depiction of the poor family is largely understated. The remarkably fluid editing foreshadows the editing style that became commonplace in the 1920's. Lap dissolves are used for psychological effect, and subtle and skilful camera tilting follows the actors. Excellent staging usually emphasises depth and fore-to-back movement, and groups are handled well. Twice as long as most films of that period, the picture reflected Edwin Thanhouser's advocacy of "natural length" films rather than the standard one-reel film demanded by exhibitors for commercial reasons.



Thanhouser website caption:

"In this scene from **"THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN"**, James Cruze, as the father, looks heavenward as he holds the hand of his suffering young daughter. (From *The Moving Picture World*, April 27, 1912)"

Although some elements of the story are melodramatic, clichés are to be expected from that era. However, the cinematic skill and social importance certainly contributed to a new social-realism style. The film marked the emerging political power of film, and the potential for making contributions to society.

(Two reels, approx. 2,000 feet, released April 30, 1912) Print source: George Eastman House, 28 minutes, 47 seconds."

Excerpt from Thanhouser website's thorough profile of Marie Eline:

"Known as "The Thanhouser Kid", Marie Eline worked with Thanhouser from autumn 1909 through early 1914. During the 1910-1912 years she was by far the most famous of all the Thanhouser players.

Biographical Notes: Anna Marie Eline, born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on February 27, 1902, the daughter of Grace and Charles Eline, became known as "The Thanhouser Kid". She started in films with the Thanhouser Company at the beginning of business in autumn 1909.

Her first release was "**A 29-CENT ROBBERY**" (April 15, 1910), in which she played the lead role, a little girl whose bank was stolen. Grace, her sister, also appeared in this film. Marie played female and male juvenile parts with equal facility. As one of many examples of a male role, in "**THE JUDGE'S STORY**" she essayed the role of a young black boy, to critical acclaim.

Her acting on the screen was praised in numerous reviews in "*The Billboard*", "*Moving Picture World*", and other trade journals during the early years of the Thanhouser Company, when few other actors were mentioned by name. During 1910 and 1911 she was mentioned more frequently in Thanhouser advertising than were all other players combined. "*The Moving Picture World*", January 13, 1912, informed readers: "The Thanhouser Kid has no other name for picture purposes. She is just the Thanhouser Kid." Marie Eline was seen in dozens of films. Her versatile acting was a major contributor to the success that the Thanhouser Company enjoyed during its formative years.

"*The Photoplay Magazine*", November 1912, told of her acting abilities: "Marie Eline (Thanhouser), known to all as 'The Thanhouser Kid' is one of the greatest child actresses on the screen or the legitimate stage, and is loved and admired wherever Thanhouser films are shown. Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, this clever little actress has assisted such stars as Guy Bates Post in "**THE BRIDGE**", Fanny Ward in "**VAN ALLEN'S WIFE**", appeared in "**THE FATAL WEDDING**", in "**LA BELLE RUSSE**" and with Nora Bayes and Jack Norworth in "**THE JOLLY BACHELORS**". Frequently this little lady is called upon to enact emotional scenes that would puzzle a Bernhardt, a Mrs. Fiske or a Leslie Carter, especially when one recalls that pantomime alone can be used and that spoken words are useless, yet little Marie 'puts over' the scene with all the naturalness of real life."

In the summer of 1913, amid her film work, she found time to appear on the stage at Proctor's Fifth Avenue Theatre, in New York City, where she dressed in rags, in the role of a poor child from a broken home, and gave a monologue imploring a judge to spare her father from prison.

She was known as "The Thanhouser Kid" until November 1913, when Charles J. Hite announced that Marie Eline had been transferred to the Princess Department, was no longer to be known as "The Thanhouser Kid", for she was "nearly 11" and grown-up. It is evident that by then her star had dimmed, and she was relegated to occasional mentions in Thanhouser publicity. After that time, she remained with Thanhouser just a month or two..."

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Benham:

"Leland was very much "the Thanhouser boy" from his seventh to eleventh years. His father, Harry Benham (1886-1969) was a Thanhouser star, together with his mother, Ethyle Cook (1880-1949) and kid sister Dorothy. He was generally teamed, though, with one or both of two other little girls: Marie Eline ("the Thanhouser kid") and Helen Badgley ("the Thanhouser kidlet"). From 1916 Leland and family left to work for other companies.

He was an intelligent, grown-up looking child, and presumably a useful mimic, since in June 1915 he won third prize in a Charlie Chaplin impersonation contest at a Chaplin night at Murray's restaurant, New York."

Cast:

Alice, the little girl**Marie Eline**
 The working mother**Ethel Wright**
 The working father**James Cruze**
 The factory owner's wife**Lila H Chester**

[no listing in "Classics of the Silent Screen", "A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen", "Silent Movies: A Picture Quiz Book", "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. [Marie Eline](#) was 10. Leland Benham was 7, and also a prolific early child player but, so far as can be guessed from his title list, seems chiefly have played second fiddle to the girls. Most of these films are doubtless lost to us now, but the titles are often a delight on their own account – "**A MOHAMMEDAN CONSPIRACY**" (14), "**THE LITTLE CAPTAIN OF THE SCOUTS**" (15), "**A PERPLEXING PICKLE PUZZLE**" (15), "**PAPA BY PROXY**" (16). Children from Beyond the Grave made a comeback for seances in "**THE CHANGELING**" (79), "**DON'T LOOK NOW**" (73), "**NIGHT OF THE DEMON**" (58) and "**SÉANCE ON A WET AFTERNOON**" (64).

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