

# THE CONSERVATION OF WOMANHOOD AND CHILDHOOD

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

THE longer we study social problems, the stronger become two seemingly different but really complementary feelings in our souls, if we are wise: first, the feeling of distrust for any one patent remedy that offers a complete solution for all our ills; and, second, the feeling that we are all the more bound to do everything in our power to secure the adoption of as large a number as possible of the partial remedies that do each alleviate something of the misery of mankind and work a measurable betterment in the condition of men, women, and children. Permanent good can come only if, with clear-sighted recognition of the manifold evils around us, and resolute courage to do away with them, we combine that broad and equable health of soul which declines to put its faith in any one patent cure-all, and which, above all, declines to let its indignation at wrong and sympathy for suffering be turned into an angry vindictiveness and uncharitableness which would in the end merely aggravate the suffering and increase the wrong.

It is curious to see how actual events give the lie to the theorist who finds the root of all human trouble in any one single tendency or set of tendencies; and it is no less curious and a little disheartening to see how men refuse to profit by the lessons before them. In this country, for instance, we have one set of entirely well-meaning men who insist that our present social system is as perfect as human nature will stand, that all we need is to stop agitation and unrest, and that the ills of poverty will be cured, and can only be cured, by each individual showing thrift, industry, temperance, and sobriety; and we have another set of reformers who insist that a complete cure can only come, and will assuredly come, if capitalism, or, as they term it, "capitalistic exploitation of the masses," be drastically done away with. I wish that the apostles of both schools could only be persuaded to look across the Pacific Ocean and see what is actually the case in China, or at least would read about it in the pages of a real observer like Professor Ross, of the University of Wisconsin. In China there are several hundred million workers whose condition, judged by

our standards, and indeed judged by any standards, is far lower than the condition of any class of anything like similar numbers in either America or Europe. The individuals of this class are industrious, thrifty, frugal, temperate, to a probably greater degree than is the case with any corresponding class of workers in Europe or America. Yet, for reasons the discussion of which would be aside from my present subject, they have remained for many generations at a level of want and misery below all but the very lowest depths of the lowest and most completely submerged strata of Western populations. Their condition shows the absurdity of thinking that the virtues named can, in the absence of other qualities and purely by themselves, save a people. But it also shows that the favorite remedy advocated by the professional Socialists is itself a quack remedy. Among these populations there is absolutely nothing even remotely resembling capitalistic exploitation. In enormous stretches of the country where the misery is greatest, where the recurrent destruction by famine and the diseases incident to famine is most appalling, there is no kind of capitalistic development, no class of capitalists, and hardly any people of riches. Capitalism has had absolutely nothing to do with producing this misery; for in most of the region there is not much inequality of conditions, the rich have not grown richer, yet the poor have grown as poor as they possibly can be.

I hope I make myself clear. I do not mean that there are not evils of a very grave kind in this country due to our capitalistic system. I do not mean that it is possible to win success without being industrious, thrifty, frugal, and temperate. But I do mean that our Nation, to go forward as it should go, cannot afford to rely on any one set of virtues, however important, and, on the other hand, that we cannot afford to believe that we shall accomplish our aims by warring against any one set of evils, however real. We have to rely on a very great many manifestations of good qualities, individually and collectively, and we have to war against a great many different forms of evil, individual and collective. No

one remedy, no one virtue, is enough, and no one evil begins to occupy the whole field of evil. Antitoxin is a mighty good thing in cases of diphtheria. It would be very foolish to refrain from using it to cure diphtheria because it does not cure cancer, or to denounce it as a quack remedy because it does not cure cancer. But if we permitted ourselves to assert that it did cure cancer and everything else, we should at once make it a quack remedy. I ask for governmental action when such action will avail against the evils of either capitalism or individualism, or any other evils. I also ask that we show individually the qualities of industry, thrift, and temperance, for no governmental action will accomplish anything if we fail to show such qualities. All I wish you to remember is that no single quality or set of qualities is of itself sufficient to cure all the evils of the body politic, and that these evils are far too complicated for us to attribute them all to any one tendency or set of tendencies, no matter how vicious.

My present purpose is not to offer a panacea for all suffering, not to say that what we ask will accomplish everything that should be accomplished for the body politic, but to call attention as strongly as I know how to one real and vital need which must be met, and the failure to meet which cannot be atoned for by any other type of action.

Of recent years this country has rightly awakened to the need of Conservation. We have begun to realize that we are guilty of crime against our children if we hand them over a wasted heritage. But, after all, the most important type of conservation is the conservation of the manhood and womanhood of the country; and, vitally important though it is to leave our children a proper heritage, the one thing of supreme importance is that we shall leave the right type of children—children of such character and living their lives under such conditions that they shall be fit to enjoy and make use of their heritage. It would be a dreadful calamity to continue to waste and destroy the resources of the Nation as until a few years ago we were wasting and destroying them, as we still, in certain respects, continue to waste and destroy them. But it would be an even worse calamity, because irremediable, if we wasted and destroyed the manhood and womanhood of the Nation. And the only way permanently to conserve the manhood and womanhood is to conserve the childhood.

It is not my purpose to speak in detail of the machinery that should be provided for the protection of women and children in industry and in the home, in this State and throughout the Union. There are many sides to the question, and many wants to be met, and we need the carefully thought out suggestions of the various experts who have dealt with each of these many sides in order to frame appropriate legislation to meet each of the various wants. But the experts can accomplish nothing unless there is an aroused public sentiment, able to translate itself into the efficient demand which will result in action by our public servants, State and National. I shall merely touch on one or two phases of the work that is needed.

In this work most must be done by the State governments; but much can also be done by the National Government. It is earnestly to be hoped that Congress will enact into law the bill for the establishment in the Department of Commerce and Labor of a bureau to be known as the Children's Bureau, the purpose of which shall be to gather, classify, and distribute for popular use in the States and Territories accurate information on all subjects relating to the welfare of children. During the five years the bill has been before Congress no valid argument has been presented against it. The chief reason for the failure of the bill thus far has been that it is solely in the interest of the conservation of human resources, and does not directly touch any material interest. It is therefore devoid of features which would win selfish and self-interested advocacy; and the persons who desire to continue to exploit the labor of children are naturally against it. It is a scandal to the American Nation that our National Government has proved so supine in doing what it can to promote the welfare of the children of the country.

The States have more to do than the Nation as regards this problem. New York State, owing to legislative shortcomings, but especially, I regret to say, owing to exceedingly hurtful and mischievous judicial decisions, stands far behind in what it should do. Fortunately, it shows signs of waking up.

The New York State Factory Commission was recently appointed to inquire into the conditions under which manufacturing is carried on in the cities of the first and second class in this State, including in their investigations matters affecting the safety and health

of the operators, to the end that such remedial legislation may be enacted as will remove existing peril to the life and health of operators and other occupants in existing or new structures.

Under the Act creating it, the Commission is charged with the duty of inquiring into the following matters: (1) Hazard to life because of fire, covering fire prevention, fire-escape facilities and exits, number of persons employed in factories and lofts, fire drills, etc.; (2) proper and adequate inspection of factories and manufacturing establishments; (3) accident prevention—guarding of machinery; (4) danger to life and health because of unsanitary conditions; ventilation, lighting, hours of labor, employment of women and children in various industries, occupational or industrial diseases; (5) an examination of the present statutes and ordinances that deal with or relate to the foregoing matter and of the extent to which the present laws are enforced.

The Commission is to recommend such new legislation as may be found necessary to remedy defects in the existing law and to provide for conditions not now considered. We have every reason to hope and believe that this Commission will recommend advanced legislation of the most practical kind, which shall work a radical change for the better in the vitally important matters which it is investigating. But the Commission is apparently not empowered to deal with tenement-house factories, nor with some other matters as important. Moreover, we must not forget that the workers themselves must be able to take an intelligent and efficient interest in the enforcement of whatever laws are put upon the statute-books. It is for this reason that I believe with all my heart in seeing workingwomen organized as workingmen are organized; indeed, for them the need is even more vital. Legislation in the interest of women workers can be thoroughly enforced only if the Labor Department officials can count upon the entire backing of organizations of women workers.

New York State should put a stop to manufacturing in tenement-houses. This State leads in the amount of such manufacturing. The labor law contains no provisions to prevent the employment of children nor to restrict the working hours of minors or women in tenements. It provides merely that work on specified articles (forty-one in number) given out by manufacturers or contractors may not be carried on in a tenement living-room unless the

owner of the house has first obtained a license from the Department of Labor. To obtain such a license certain sanitary requirements must be satisfied. No one knows the actual extent of home work in New York City, as the inadequate force of inspectors of the State Labor Department cannot cover completely all the tenements where work may be carried on. The incomplete figures from the labor records show over twelve thousand tenements licensed for home work.

Actual experience has shown that under present conditions home work is a serious menace both to the workers and to the public. A home workshop is neither a home nor a factory. The institution of the home from earliest times has surrounded itself with peculiar rights and traditions. To make it a "factory annex" is an invasion of the home which should not be tolerated. The home workshop is a factory without a closing hour. All day the adults labor, with an occasional brief recess to look after the baby or attend to the most pressing household duties. After school and into the evening (sometimes until late) children five years of age and upwards assist the grown-ups, in order to increase as much as possible the daily earnings. In many instances children of school age remain away from school entirely to work in the home. Home work and congestion, bad ventilation and dark rooms, go hand in hand. To permit women and little children to live and work in wretchedly lighted, badly ventilated rooms, polluted by overcrowding, both from the materials for work and from the workers, so that the air is contaminated, furnishes new recruits to the ranks of tuberculosis victims. Home work promotes truancy. School principals testify that the "system" constantly encourages the children to become "regular irregulars" in their attendance, and often chronic truants.

Since 1894 the State has attempted to control tenement-house manufacture by a system of regulation. Burdened by numerous other duties, the Labor Department can now detail regularly for New York City only four inspectors, and periodically but twenty, to visit twelve thousand licensed tenements—known centers of home industry. In addition, thousands of houses—no one knows how many—in which work may be going on without a license also need attention. Work on any one of a specified list of forty-one different articles can be carried on legally only in a licensed tenement. Present-day industry has overflowed into the

houses to such an extent that over sixty other articles not mentioned in the law are now being made in tenement homes. For these no license is required, and work may go on under indescribably bad conditions, the output to find its way through channels of trade to the public.

In short, the actual methods and possibilities of tenement-house labor practically nullify the existing laws by rendering them impossible of enforcement.

The fact that the welfare of the workers is seriously menaced, that home life is broken up, and that the public health is endangered through use of tenement-made articles makes imperative some action looking towards a remedy. Moreover, tenement-house labor introduces unskilled and unsupervised work, including that of very young children, into competition with skilled labor in the shops, thus tending to reduce the proper wages of labor, and enabling unscrupulous employers to avoid the expense of shops and the necessity of submitting to supervision by encouraging piece-work in the tenement-houses. Organized labor has a legitimate interest in this matter, aside from the general interest. The first step should be legislative inquiry into this whole subject, such an inquiry as State Senator Wainwright's committee made concerning workmen's compensation.

The reasons for suggesting the appointment of a commission rather than the presentation of a bill are: First, the information at present at hand, while amply sufficient to show the absolute need of immediate relief, is not as complete as is desirable for the purpose of laying a basis for the formulation of public opinion or of securing the enactment of the wisest provisions. Second, only through the operation of such an official commission would it be possible to present to the courts, which later will be called upon to construe the provisions of any enactments, a collective body of evidence showing the reasons which moved the Legislature to the adoption of the specific enactment, whatever form it may finally take. In this manner only, therefore, a wise and enforceable provision of law with regard to the evils dealt with can be assured. Third, the Court of Appeals of this State held in the case *re Jacobs* that a statute forbidding the manufacture of tobacco in tenement homes is contrary to the Constitution, because not shown clearly to be a health measure. If we cannot secure, as we ought to, a flat reversal of

this mischievous decision, then it would be well to obtain through a commission such convincing and comprehensive data as would exclude doubt of the immediate connection between work in tenements and (a) injury to the health of the workers, especially children, (b) spread among ultimate consumers of whatever communicable disease can be carried in articles worked upon. Such a commission could give authoritative data showing why the reasoning in the *Jacobs* case is wholly inapplicable to modern conditions.

One of the crying abuses connected with child labor in this State is the employment of hundreds of children, five years of age and upwards, in connection with the fruit and vegetable canning factories in the State. Their work has been held to be agricultural. But it is in no sense agricultural. It is carried on usually in sheds structurally a part of, or adjacent to, the factory proper. A child labor colony is established around each industrial plant. According to the latest official statistics (August, 1908) of the Labor Department, hundreds of children under fourteen years of age work in these canneries. Very many of them are under ten years of age. There is thus practical exemption from the law enjoyed by proprietors of canning factories. In spite of the law which prohibits other manufacturers from employing children under fourteen years of age, or before 8 A.M. or after 5 P.M., and not more than eight hours in any one day, canners have, season after season, been using little children, permitting them to work from 7 A.M. to 8 or 10 P.M. Private investigations during the last two seasons furnish abundant testimony that child labor still continues, and that very young children work excessive hours and into the night. During 1909 legislation was introduced seeking to eliminate child labor under fourteen by an amendment to the definition of the term "factory" in the Labor Law. Although actively supported by a number of organizations interested in working children, the canners were able to defeat the bill. In January next this bill will be re-introduced and an active campaign inaugurated to secure its passage.

During the last session of the New York Legislature the Assembly passed a Fifty-four Hours Bill intended to restrict the working hours of women and young girls to fifty-four hours a week, and cutting the day down to nine, or a possible ten, hours. The new bill was defeated in the Senate by the action of

the canners, who desire a total exemption for their industry during four summer months. They were aided by some other manufacturers. They sometimes require women to work for seventy or eighty hours a week. In the interest of all workingwomen this law should be uniform. An exception for any one industry necessarily opens the way for special exceptions for all seasonal industries at the cost of the women workers.

New York State is behind many other States in protecting women factory workers. The following figures speak for themselves :

58-hour week, Connecticut, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire.

56-hour week, Rhode Island.

55-hour week, Wisconsin.

54-hour week, Massachusetts, Ohio, Michigan, Missouri, Utah.

48-hour week, Arizona, California, Washington.

Every attempt to shorten the hours of work of women in this State has been violently fought by the various employing interests, especially that of canners. In 1910, not satisfied with working their employees unlimited hours in the sheds, the canners sought to secure exemption in the factory proper from the sixty-hour law through an amendment providing that during the period June 15 to October 15 such workers might be employed overtime in the factory without restriction as to hours, so long as the work did not exceed an average of ten hours a day for the season. Owing to the attitude of the Labor Commissioner, who stated that the proposed amendment was unenforceable and, in his opinion, equivalent to a complete lifting of the law during the busy season, and owing to the spirited opposition of the friends of workingwomen, this bill was finally withdrawn. Both official and private investigations agree that canners employ young girls and women shockingly long hours—sometimes up to one hundred and ten hours a week. I ask you to picture for yourselves the wearing exhaustion, the hopeless drain of vitality, which such figures mean. In justice to other manufacturers, and in order to protect workingwomen, the fifty-four hour week principle should be universal in its application, so far as factories are concerned. If canneries were to be exempted, other seasonal trades—Christmas candies, toys and boxes, Easter bonnets, flowers—which prepare for a holiday demand goods the whole value of which depends upon their timeliness, would

seek similar exemptions from the Legislature. The State Federation of Labor will reintroduce next January their Fifty-four Hour Week Bill, and a vigorous attempt will, I trust, be made by all organizations interested in workingwomen to secure the enactment of this principle into law.

But it is mighty little use to have labor laws if we let them be enforced primarily to give jobs to politicians. Last July the New York State Civil Service Commission had an unannounced hearing and exempted from examination the eight new positions of supervising inspectors of the Bureau of Factory Inspection, carrying a salary of \$2,500. These offices were created to strengthen the enforcement of the labor law under the recommendations of the Wainwright Commission. Only experienced and well-qualified persons should be appointed to positions of such responsibility. These places have now been thrown open to political patronage, and miscellaneous and unsuitable candidates are besieging the Labor Commissioner for appointments. The action of the New York Civil Service Commission is a most serious assault upon efficient factory inspection; it cannot fail to demoralize the force, and thus help to nullify the law. Yet hardly a protest has been made in the public press against this action.

New York State is behindhand in its child labor laws; but some other States are even further behind. For seven years the National Child Labor Committee and other agencies have attempted to raise the age limit to fourteen years throughout the Union. They have succeeded in a majority of States, but none of the great cotton-mill States of the South has reached this standard. The employment of children of twelve or ten years in the cotton-mill industry is not only a disgrace to the employers and the community permitting it, but a reproach to the American people. Nor are cotton-mills the only offenders. Children under fourteen, many as young as five and six years, work all winter in oyster and shrimp canneries on the Gulf Coast. These children are chiefly Poles and Bohemians from Baltimore and other Northern cities. Thousands of them work all summer in Maryland and Delaware vegetable gardens and canneries, and all winter in Southern packing-houses. No law protects them; yet the work in which they are engaged is often ruinous to their health.

I lack the power to paint for you the hideous misery and hopelessness of some of

these children's lives. Let me give you one instance—an instance typical rather than exceptional.

Last summer Alma Whaley, a textile-mill girl in Knoxville, Tennessee, drank carbolic acid to commit suicide. When examined, she revealed the existence of a suicide pact among the textile-mill girls, whose life was such that they felt that death was preferable to the slavery in which they lived and toiled. A very good citizen of Knoxville who interested herself in the case writes about it as follows :

“ In regard to Alma Whaley, a cotton-mill girl, she is fourteen years old, pale, thin, and has worked for four years ten hours per day. She asked her mother to let her rest, and her mother said *no*, so she tried to end her life. Drank carbolic acid. The mother is a widow with six children, ignorant and dirty, and almost impossible to do a thing for. She will not allow the girl to go to the country (at my expense). I have done what I could, but the future looks hopeless for the girl unless she can be taken from her mother. There are many cases as bad as this right here.” Surely there should be laws which will enable society to interfere in such cases, to protect the poor child from the employer who exploits her young life and from the unnatural parent who sells the life for exploitation.

I am now speaking primarily of childhood and motherhood. But I must say a word of fatherhood also. All three must be considered together; for the fundamental question is that of the family, which includes all three. Normally, the man must be the breadwinner; and the woman and children will necessarily suffer if the man is killed or crippled, or labors under conditions which inevitably tend to brutalize and degrade him.

The development of modern large-scale production has brought about a very rapid increase in the number of workmen employed in industries which are operated without stopping twenty-four hours every day for seven days a week. These continuous industries are new phenomena, just as factories with dangerous machinery were once new phenomena. There must be new legislation, and new and enlightened methods of judicial interpretation of law, to meet the new conditions. To quote the counsel of the Factory Commission: “ It has become increasingly clear that it is the duty of the State to safeguard the worker, not only against the occasional accidents, but the daily incidents of

industry; not only against the accidents which are extraordinary, but against the incidents which are the ordinary occurrences of industrial life.” In just the same way it has become the duty of the State to safeguard the worker against those “ daily incidents ” of trade which take the shape of inhuman toil.

With respect to this necessarily continuous seven-day work, our old Sunday laws, dating back to an earlier generation, have broken down. Relief to the workers can be afforded only by increasing the labor force one-seventh, if necessary—to let part of the force off each day in the week, and in that way give every man one day of rest in seven. Legislation is needed to bring this about in this country, just as it has been brought about in France. And such legislation would be sustained by the courts unless they scuttled the logic on which the Sunday laws now on the statute-books have been sustained; that is, as an exercise of the police power in protecting men from continuous toil. The Supreme Courts of practically every State in the Union have gone on record as upholding Sunday laws, and in 1884 the United States Supreme Court expressed its approval of them, “ not from any right of the Government to legislate for the promotion of religious observances, but from its right to protect all persons from the physical and moral debasement which come from uninterrupted labor.” The priests and ministers and physicians of every mill town in America where the seven-day week governs can testify how it undermines the comfort of their people, their happiness, and their health. At the present time the progressive men in one big industry, where it has been at its worst—steel—are tackling this seven-day schedule, and it looks as if they were going to be able to down it. The American Iron and Steel Institute has passed resolutions to that effect. So has the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, representing churches with a membership of thirty millions. It is high time we had six-day statutes and that they were enforced.

In a continuous industry—whether it is a cement works or a trolley car or a power plant or a blast furnace makes no difference—there are only two ways in which you can split up the twenty-four hours. There must be either two shifts of men each working twelve hours or three shifts each working eight. You can't compromise on nine or ten. You must choose between twelve or

eight; and with those two choices, surely the decision must be for the eight-hour day.

The workmen who put in the longest hours are classified by the New York State Bureau of Factory Inspection in a group labeled "sixty-three hours and over." That group includes roughly everybody above the ten-hour men—men who work anywhere from 63 to 119 hours per week. The report of this bureau for 1909 showed that out of 5,059 workmen employed in the most important steel center in New York State, 4,584 fell in this class. The majority of these men worked regularly twelve hours a day either six or seven days a week. The same report shows that out of 12,991 workmen in paper and pulp mills in this State, 5,650 worked over sixty-three hours a week. Out of 9,543 employed in water, light, and power plants, 2,652 worked more than sixty-three hours per week. In all, over 36,000 employees in the entire State worked a daily schedule of from ten to thirteen hours and over.

The effect of a twelve-hour day is paralyzing from the standpoint of the man's personal welfare, of his usefulness to his family, and of his usefulness as a citizen.

I recently received a pamphlet which seems to me a tract that should be in the hands of every man and woman seriously interested in the effort to secure fair play and justice for the men, women, and children of our country. It happens that it deals primarily with men, and with women and children only as affected by the deaths of their husbands and fathers; but the fundamental principles of justice and fair play are the same everywhere, and every one interested in the betterment of conditions of work and life among women and children must of necessity be interested in the betterment of the relations between labor and capital, the betterment of conditions of the breadwinner of the family, upon whose welfare the welfare of the women and the children of the family largely depends. It was Dr. Rainsford, whose management of St. George's Church made that church a factor of high importance in the social work of this city, who sent me this pamphlet. It was prepared by Miss Sarah Barnwell Elliot, and issued through the University Press of the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee—a university which has always been honorably prominent in practically working for justice and honor and decency and the betterment of mankind. The pamphlet is called "An

Epoch-Making Settlement between Labor and Capital," and it gives the result of the settlement made through the action of a self-appointed mediator, a Mr. Williams, a good citizen who worked on his own initiative in getting together representatives of the United Mine Workers and President Earling, of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad, to arrange for compensating the sufferers from the Cherry disaster, the awful mine horror which resulted in the killing of 270 miners, who left 160 widows and 470 children, 407 being too young to work. An eminently fair solution was reached in a spirit of generosity and justice to both sides; and it was reached by voluntary agreement. This case illustrates what I have already said when I insist that, as in each phase of the social problem we strive to bring about social improvement, more is needed than any change of law, and yet that there must be change of the law. There must be good instruments, but good instruments are not enough. Good laws are indispensable, but habits count for even more than laws; the decent citizen must have the habit of trying to show an active and efficient purpose to behave with decency and to see that justice and mercy obtain as among his fellows. In this case there were no adequate laws; and no law, however adequate, could have accomplished for the good of a terribly stricken community what was accomplished by two good citizens, Messrs. Earling and Williams, both of whom acknowledged in plain, common-sense fashion, and yet in a very lofty spirit, their moral obligations in the face of disaster to their fellows. The work they did was in itself a mighty good; and it was also a great good because it was an inspiration to other private citizens; and, finally, it should be an example and inspiration to public servants.

From what I have said already you will see that I do not believe that legislation by itself is sufficient or anything like sufficient. Nevertheless, it remains true that we can do no permanent good without the right kind of laws, National and especially State. In order to get these laws we must, first of all, get an aroused and intelligent public conscience. The people must be made to understand the need and the duty of acting. Then the law-making and the law-administering branches of the Government must be made responsive to this popular demand, so that the legislators shall enact the proper laws, and the governors, mayors, and other executive officers carry them out.