

THE CONSERVATION OF CHILDHOOD.

BY COLONEL THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

Friends, Men and Women of Alabama, My Fellow Americans: I come this evening to speak to you on one of the great, fundamental questions of our citizenship in this republic.

Doctor Lindsay has spoken of the fact that I am interested in the fundamental problems of the home. Of course I am. Why really down at the bottom I have cared for political life chiefly insofar as it gave me a chance to deal with the questions that are usually held to be entirely non-political questions. We can have all kinds of tariff systems, and yet get on with them pretty well; we can have one or another plan followed out as regards many of the subjects most discussed, and discussed with most fervor in Congress, and still at the end get along fairly well, no matter which way the vote has gone. But we cannot get on well unless we have the right kind of home, the right kind of family life in this republic; we cannot get on well unless the children of this generation are trained as they ought to be trained, and live the kind of lives that will make good citizenship in the next generation.

I make an appeal for limiting by law the age under which children shall not be allowed to work, an appeal for limiting by law the hours that they shall be allowed to work in the daytime, and an appeal absolutely to prohibit by law working them at night.

I do not ask you to pay heed to anything I say, excepting as you judge it right in thinking of your own children. Are you content, would you be content to have your own children of tender age work even as much as sixty hours a week? Would you be content to have them work at night? Would you be content to have them work under a certain age? I only ask that you women and men, you mothers and fathers think of your own children, and see to it that the children of others, the children of the people of this

generation who cannot help themselves, receive the protection by law that you are fortunate enough to be able to give in your own families to your own children.

You are able to protect your children yourselves. You are able to see that they have the chance to go to school, that they do not waste the best—"waste" is not the term—that they do not *abuse* and use up their young lives in labor when they are too young to work. You here can protect your children, and you do not need the state to step in to help you protect them. I ask you to see that the state, that the government that represents all of you, steps in to protect the other children who have not parents able and willing to protect them. I do not want you to accept a single statement I make, except by running it over in your own minds and testing as to whether or not it squares with your own sense of righteousness, your own sense of square and honest dealing. All I want you to do is to think, as regards your own small people, whether what I say is not true; and if so, whether it ought not to apply to all children, even though those who ought to protect them are unwilling or unable to protect them. That is all I ask.

England's Lesson

At the outset, I want to ask your attention to a strange and lamentable fact that has become evident during the past sixty years in England. I am speaking to people who are predominately of English ancestry, whose blood is almost—not quite, but almost—the same as that of the people of the British Isles. It is about a century and a quarter ago that the factory system began to develop with intensity in England. It marked the beginning of a period of enormous industrial prosperity. The trade of England grew by leaps and bounds; its wealth grew by leaps and bounds; its dominion over the waste places of the world grew by leaps and bounds. But the manhood in the lower ranks did not. In the upper ranks, the ranks of the employing classes, the Englishman continued to be what he had been. The generals, the statesmen, the leaders were substantially of as high a type as they had been before. There were many philanthropists, many political economists; many men of that stamp. But the English yeoman, the rugged, vigorous man who in a hundred fought fields, century after

century on continental Europe, had failed to meet his match among the nations against whom he was pitted—the English yeoman disappeared, and the under-sized, stoop-shouldered, anæmic factory hand took his place.

In the Crimea, the first soldiers that went to the front fought wonderfully. They were the men of Balaklava and Inkerman; but when sickness and wounds had thinned their ranks, it became necessary to fill their places with the men from the factories of London, and the first time the test came those men failed. Recently, the English had to wage a war with a small South African people, and their recruiting officers met with the greatest difficulty because the great centers of English population no longer produced a race physically in any way up to the level of the Englishmen of a century ago. The English army authorities had to reduce the standard of height, of chest measurement, of weight, in order to get recruits at all; and the men they got in too many cases were of such inferior physique that they died, like sheep, of fever before they even had a chance to meet an armed foe in the field.

I think that lamentable result—and I speak of it with genuine feeling as lamentable, for I am one of those who wish well to the British Empire, and so far from speaking with any exultation of any woe that befalls it, I speak with genuine and unaffected regret—that result has been due primarily to the fact that for over a century English statesmen in accordance with the demands of effective English public opinion, treated the man—the average man—as nothing, treated his welfare as nothing compared with the success of business, compared with the accumulation of wealth, compared with the achievement of a wide-spread industrial supremacy.

In the Northern States we have seen a great industrial growth, and after much fighting, after continuous effort to overcome what I cannot but regard as the truly short-sighted position of the employers of labor and of the statesmen, especially the judges who take their ideas from the employers of labor, we have finally succeeded in getting reasonably good laws on the statute books for the protection of child labor; not as good as they ought to be, but reasonably good. In the North, the child labor we are protecting is the child labor of immigrants—Slovacs, Poles, Italians, French-Canadians, Portuguese, Greeks. It is our duty, of course, to protect

them, just as much our duty to protect them as to protect our own children. But you women and men here are asked to protect your own flesh and blood. You are asked to protect the children of native Americans, the children of people of the same Revolutionary stock as yourselves. You are asked to see that your stock does not go down as the stock in the parent country has gone down.

I wish to see the new South go forward. I take the greatest pride and exultation in every particle of your industrial success. I am glad to see the spirit of the new South, embodied as it is here in your marvelous city, but I want you to keep the power of idealism of the old South. We are fortunate enough now, in whatever section of the country we may live, to be able to take equal pride in the deeds of heroic valor, in the iron endurance shown alike by the men who wore the gray and the men who wore the blue in the great Civil War. We feel keen woe that ever brother should have had to fight against brother; but since they did have to fight, we are glad they fought well. We are glad they had the right stuff in them. Never again, should this republic endure ten thousand years, never again will brother fight against brother. Once for all we are united forever.

But if in the future it ever becomes necessary for this nation to call on her sons, woe to us if those sons are unable to respond in the spirit of the men who fought from '61 to '65. Woe to us if we cease to develop men able in time of need to prove by their deeds that our race has not lost the fighting edge. And in the last analysis, the qualities that make the best soldier are those that make the best citizen. I ask you to remember that great though the importance of developing the mine, the mill, the factory, the railroad, great though the importance of developing all that tends to make for industrial supremacy, it is still more important to develop the right kind of citizenship.

I want you to take pride in getting the very best machinery. It is a good thing; just as it is a good thing to be able to have the best kind of firearms; but you must have a middling good man behind your gun, or the gun does not count. In the same way it is even more important to have the right kind of man behind the machine than it is to have the right machine. And you can not have the right kind of man unless you have the child trained in the right way, unless you have the child brought up amid right conditions.

As Unto Your Own

How do you want your children brought up? You mothers and fathers who are fortunate enough to be able to decide for yourselves how your children shall be brought up, think of how you wish them brought up, and then see to it that the state provides that as far as possible the children in less fortunate conditions shall at least approximate in their bringing up to what you demand for your own children. Now is not that a common-sense demand? I am not asking you to consider anything abstruse. I am asking you to think of your own experience in the most intimate relations of life, and to see insofar as possible that the state provides somewhat similar conditions for the children of those who cannot or will not take care of them, that you who can and will take care of them provide for your children. That is all I am asking.

It ought not to be necessary to make very much of an appeal. You have done a great deal in Alabama to improve your stock, to improve your breeds of horses and of cattle. You use horses and mules for ploughing; sometimes oxen. How far would you get in a stock farm if you plowed with your colts? Put a couple of calves to a plow, and see what kind of oxen they will make. There is not a farmer that would not laugh at so much as considering the possibility of it. It strikes everyone at once as absurd. Yet I ask no more for the children than that you give them the same show you give to the colt and calf. That is all.

A Federal Children's Bureau

In this matter, something must be done by the nation, but most must be done by the states. Something can be done by the nation. There are a good many things that I cannot understand in Congress, (I speak after a somewhat intimate acquaintance with the subject.) and one of the things I can least understand is the refusal to pass a law making a very small appropriation for a bureau of child welfare, somewhat akin to the Bureau of Labor. The same objections are made to it that I have heard made to the Bureau of Labor. We are trying to establish all over the country, as you are trying to establish here, juvenile courts, courts which shall take care of the children who tend to become bad, and prevent them from becoming bad, instead of treating them as criminals and providing elaborately that they shall become criminals by so treating

them. We are trying to work for the limitation of the hours of labor for children all over the country, and for raising the age at which children can be employed in labor at all. We are hampered at every step by the fact that in making any effort in any one state, there is no body to which we can turn for information as to what has been done and how it has succeeded in other states. It is a perfectly elementary proposition that the Federal Government ought to do what little it can in this direction by providing for such a bureau, which will enable the thoughtful man or woman who wants to find out what ought to be done to turn at once to an authoritative publication and find out what has been done, and therefore be able to gauge the possibilities of having something similar done. The bill for this purpose has been going through the usual course of measures that, because they are in the interest of everybody, do not appeal especially to the improper interest of anybody. Congress will provide money with a lavish hand for a lot of things for which it ought not, because there are certain special interests to be gratified by the appropriations, and then the same man who will work himself almost to death to get a public building where it is not needed, or to dig out a creek that you could not float a canoe on when it is dug out—that same man will turn around with lofty austerity and say that he does not think that the Constitution meant that the money of the tax-payers should be spent to the extent of one-tenth of a cent per individual in the United States in looking after the interests of the children in the United States. Children do not vote.

While there is something that the Federal Government can do, I am well aware that the problem in the different states assumes different forms. I do not intend to dogmatize very much about conditions in Alabama, but I do ask that you satisfy yourselves, that you get committees of your own number here, women and men who are here, to go into the mine, to go into the factory, and see for yourselves just what the conditions are, and whether you are willing that the boys and girls who are to make the men and women of Alabama in the next generation, should work for excessive hours, when of tender age, under such conditions as you will see.

A Century Ago and Now

Last summer I went through the mines in a section of Pennsylvania. As to certain things I saw there, there was a difference of opinion; but I never met one particle of difference of opinion as to the enormous benefit that had come to the children from raising the age at which they were allowed to be employed from twelve to fourteen years, limiting their hours, and especially eliminating night work. Thirty or forty years ago in Pennsylvania, children were employed in the mines at eight and nine years of age. A century ago in England, Parliament for decades refused to act in the way of prohibiting the work of women and children underneath the ground in coal mines, where the children would be used—little tots of six and eight—to work on all fours all day dragging cars in and out of the shafts that were too small for the grown people to come up in, and where the women, young girls and mothers were kept all day working, dragging these coal cars as if they were beasts. The answers to the appeal for the change then were exactly such answers as are made now when we appeal for a change in the laws of the present day: "You cannot interfere with the liberty of the individual." "You must not interfere with business," and "It would not do, for if you took the children out of working on all fours in the mines, they might become mischievous and idle." Then, as now, when it was urged to give the child a chance to be educated, not to spend its years of growth in the factory so that it should emerge stunted and anæmic, the answer was that the factory was light work, that the work of the spindle was so easy it was rather healthy than otherwise that the child should be employed at it. There was one report made in the interest of manufacturers that picking oakum from twelve to fourteen hours a day was a healthy thing for children; it kept them from mischief and did them good. The same kind of statement exactly, hardly with a variant in the crossing of a "t" or the dotting of an "i," is made at the present day in the defense of those who wish to exploit the childhood of the country for their own financial profit.

Alabama is well on in the early stage of a period of phenomenal industrial development. I ask you to study what has been done in similar periods in Northern States and in England. Study it

with an open mind. Study it to find what to follow and what to avoid. Study the successes and study the failures, study conditions that tell for good in the factory towns of the North and of England; and those that tell for what is evil. I have been fighting in New York ever since I have taken any part in political life, for thirty years, for laws providing for workmen's compensation, and for laws that shall make it possible for men and women in tenements—make it not merely possible but imperative that they shall live under conditions that tell in favor of decency and cleanliness. And at every step of that thirty-years' fight I have been met by worthy, conservative people who have told me: "Oh, but you must not do this; you can't interfere with the liberty of the individual to contract not to recover damages, if he or she gets hurt, under the law", and so on and so on. And the effort we made to improve the conditions in the tenement houses in New York by forbidding the manufacture of tobacco in them was declared unconstitutional by the courts, and of all things in the world, the excellent gentlemen making up the court said that we could not put a stop to these unspeakable conditions in tenement houses, because we must not interfere with the sanctity of the home.

Here at the outset of your great industrial career, I hope you will see to it that you have a proper workmen's compensation act; and I hope you will see to it that you have the proper kind of act for the protection of children, for the protection of the citizenship of the future. I hope you will go much farther than that, and I hope you will see to it that wherever women are employed, young girls or older women, that the conditions of employment, as regards the length of hours, and as regards the conditions, such for instance as furnishing them seats where they can sit down, are such that the women shall not end the day's work utterly worn out, end each day's work with such a strain upon her body, upon her physical constitution that she can not help being a physical wreck before she has passed through half the years that she should pass through.

Remember, that the human being is the most important of all products to turn out. I am eagerly anxious to do everything I can to wake up our people to the need of protecting the soil, protecting the forests, protecting the water; but first and foremost, protect the people. If you do not have the right kind of citizens in the

future, you cannot make any use of the natural resources. Protect the children—protect the boys; still more, protect the girls; because the greatest duty of this generation is to see to it that the next generation is of the proper kind to continue the work of this nation.

National Child Labor Committee

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