

# A WOMAN'S WORK FOR WORKERS



A Street Scene in Colon



Dancing for Workers as Approved by Miss Beeks

## THE LIFE OF GERTRUDE BECKS WHO INVESTIGATED CONDITIONS AT PANAMA, DEVOTED TO THE BETTERMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE

NOT many years ago a tall, handsome, dark-eyed, dark-haired girl went to Chicago from an obscure little hamlet in Tennessee. She became one of the great army of working women in the "Lake City"; she put her hand to the plow, and, despite the tears in her eyes and the longing in her heart, did not look back.

She was resolute in her purpose. There was a future before her—work to be done. And what work was it?

In Chicago, the girl from Tennessee saw women laboring amid unsanitary and morally unclean conditions; they had no places for recreation; no places to eat except by their looms and benches; they had nowhere to go at night, except to their dingy apartments or the saloons.

So the dark-eyed girl from Tennessee betook herself to the task of bettering the condi-

tions of poor working women—and men, too, for that matter. She has succeeded.

Miss Gertrude Beeks, for it was she, recently returned from the Isthmus of Panama, where she had been sent by Secretary of War Taft to inquire into the condition of the working men there. She went among the laborers at the Zone, of whom there are 32,000, and made a searching inquiry into the living conditions and possibilities of betterment.

Champion welfare worker for women! This is Miss Beeks' unique title. Through her efforts, conditions of working men and women in many of the big cities have been greatly improved. Recreation rooms, lunch rooms, social clubs and other improvements in places where women are employed have been inaugurated by this young woman. In the interests of her work she has traveled all over the United States.

MISS Beeks spent three weeks on the Isthmus of Panama. She made a careful study of the manner of living of the men and women there, their homes and lodging houses, their food and their amusements.

In selecting this woman to do this work, the secretary of war created a precedent. But, to those who know Miss Beeks, Mr. Taft showed unusual wisdom and far-sightedness.

Wherever Miss Beeks had gone heretofore, whether in the factories of New England, the cotton mills of the South or the coal mines of Pennsylvania, she had improvements to suggest, and, what is more remarkable, always persuaded employers to follow her plans for ameliorating the condition of working men, women and children.

"I visited all of the nineteen canal camps between Panama and Colon," said Miss Beeks on her return. "There are 35,000 employees of all kinds there. About 5000 are Americans, and about 10,000 Europeans, including Greeks, Spaniards and Italians. The remaining 20,000 are made up of Jamaica negroes. The Canal Zone is ten miles wide, and the camps are distributed all along the railroad between Panama and Colon.

"The climate there is more pleasant than summer in Texas or Washington. I found that locomotive engineers, and even nurses, preferred the climate there, taken the year around, to the climate here.

"There are, of course, mosquitoes, the malarial and the yellow fever kind, but the drainage system is effective in controlling the situation. There has been no yellow fever in eighteen months. One case was found just before I left there. It did not develop on the Isthmus, but was brought there by one of the coasting steamers.

"The victim was immediately taken to the government hospital at Ancon, where he was put in a mosquito-proof cage. This was to prevent the spread of any mosquito which might become infected by biting the patient, and so spreading the contagion."

When Miss Beeks went to Chicago from her Tennessee home it was not as a welfare worker, but as secretary to a business man. Being a tender and sympathetic woman, she was often distressed by the conditions which existed in the factories.

**FOUNDED WORKING WOMEN'S CLUB**  
Often the rooms where the women worked were not ventilated. The surroundings were unsanitary. Besides this, the workers had no place to go for luncheon. There were restaurants near many of the factories, but the charges for food were too high for the poor women. So what was to be done?

When Miss Beeks saw an evil, her impulse is to try to discover a means for its elimination. How could the girls be enabled to secure a good luncheon at a low cost? By starting a restaurant.

So Miss Beeks got to work and founded a working women's club. Miss Beeks mustered together quite an army of working women; a clubhouse was secured—and the luncheon problem was solved.

The clubhouse was situated in the central business section of the city and was accessible to those who were employed in the vicinity. The house was artistically

furnished, and lounging and reading rooms were fitted up. But this was not all. Miss Beeks realized the opportunity of elevating the women. Meetings were held and means of improving the business conditions of the workers as well as their own efficiency were discussed. Miss Beeks invited the leading business men of Chicago to address the meetings.

For many days the welfare club was the talk of the city.

One evening Mrs. Cyrus H. McCormick, wife of the president of one of the largest industries in the city, read a paper before the women. Mr. McCormick, who accompanied his wife, was impressed by the club and its founder.

In his own establishment were employed 5000 men and 500 women. Mr. McCormick realized that conditions were not ideal. He realized that much was his own fault, and also that a great part of the blame lay with the working men and women.

### AMUSEMENTS NECESSARY

"A working man and woman must have amusement. A working man and woman must have a place to eat and a pleasant place to live."

These words of Miss Beeks made a deep impression on the man of wealth, and he felt a desire to make his employees happy.

So he asked Miss Beeks whether she would not come to his factory and make a study of the conditions prevailing, with the purpose of discovering methods of relief and betterment.

Miss Beeks hesitated, but Mr. McCormick finally persuaded her to undertake the work. She made an investigation—and advised Mr. McCormick to open a dancing hall.

She also started a sociological department among the employees.

When Miss Beeks made her investigations she saw at once that many of the women were accustomed to visit cheap saloons near the factory. So she suggested a hall for amusement and dancing. The dance hall was opened—and visits to the saloons were abandoned.

The most pronounced characteristic of Miss Beeks is her keenness of observation. Evil conditions exist—and she sees the cause.

This power of intuition is natural with her. It is the secret of her success.

Combined with this rare penetrative ability, the young woman is an indefatigable worker. She shrinks from no task; she goes where many women would falter; she talks as frankly and authoritatively to the men who unjustly abuse their employees as she does to the employees themselves.

She does not hesitate to tell a rich manufacturer that he is killing his employees, robbing the women of health and freshness and the men of their strength.

When she is through with her investigations she reports to the employer whether or not his rooms are unlighted, poorly ventilated and dirty. She insists on improvement, if they are.

But her work does not end with the factory. Miss Beeks goes to the homes of the employees. She has slept and eaten in the homes of the poorest.

Then she instructs. She teaches the rule of cleanliness.

The great cause of suffering and hardship of the igno-

rant, Miss Beeks found, lay not so much in low wages as in the improvidence and carelessness of the people themselves. So she persuaded many employers to start savings funds among the employees.

Having instituted the welfare work in Chicago, Miss Beeks took a trip to various cities in the United States to study the condition of working people. Justice to both employer and employee was her slogan.

Into factories in the most remote places she went; she bravely continued her studies despite hardship and opposition, and she was fearless in her decisions.

Miss Beeks visited the humblest homes. She ate and slept in huts which had merely the bare earth for floors. She visited the anthracite coal mines of Pennsylvania, and investigated the conditions of child labor in the South. She went to places where epidemics prevailed. Her humanitarian impulses are too strong to permit anything to escape her attention.

Of the southern cotton mills she said: "Far too many children are employed there; but the conditions under which the employees, generally, work in these mills and live in the mill-villages are far better in every way than the conditions in the North."

"For the employment of child labor the mill owners are not wholly to blame. It is necessary to examine the cause before offering criticism."

## NEGROES WHO OWNED SLAVES IN THE SOUTH



"To begin with, labor is very scarce in the South; the parents of many of the children are uneducated, poor, and the additional income tempts them. They cannot be relied upon to tell the truth about their children's ages, and there are very few birth registry laws. There are very few laws restraining child labor, too."

"The mill owners would be glad enough to cease employing children if they could get adults to take their places. But sensational writers have given the South such a bad name in this respect that immigrants do not go there."

"I found none of the horrible conditions in regard to child labor in the South such as are described by these writers."

Employers who had instituted welfare work in their mills, factories and department stores united in a mutual help association about four years ago. The organization is known as the National Civic Federation. Welfare work is one of the chief departments.

## BOUGHT IN BY HIS WIFE

"Dick" was sold on the block for \$1500, his wife being the purchaser. Clark Templeton, a white neighbor, indorsed the wife's note, or in some way provided the money, and when the war closed the debt was still due the Templeton estate.

This debt "Dick" did not repudiate, though he probably could have done so, but continued to work and save, and several years after emancipation paid the last dollar with interest.

George Shewsbury, a Charleston negro, owned twelve slaves. He was a quiet, exemplary citizen, and was elected to the City Council without solicitude on his part.

Shewsbury died in 1875, at which time he was still an alderman and an almshouse commissioner. His funeral was attended by the members of the City Council in a body.

These slave-owning negroes had no political privileges, but they were amply protected in all their rights, and were free to buy and sell and to engage in whatever legitimate commercial enterprise or undertaking they pleased.

The story of the negro slave owners of the South before the war is an interesting one. The descendants of these negroes stand high in the South and are usually well-behaved and quiet, and enjoy the respect of their white acquaintances.

The largest owners of slaves among the colored people in Charleston was R. E. Dereef, an Indian, and Maria Weston, each of whom possessed fourteen.

The free colored people of Charleston were generally a very intelligent folk, and always composed

exciting the consul's curiosity, led to the discovery that they were wanted as inside sales for shoes! Why such a waste of time and money in playing so uncertain a game? Or, rather, it is a certain game—certain that other nations, principally Japan, will in a short time monopolize the whole business, and for his exports the American will have to look elsewhere.

"When it comes to consuming gas in large quantities blind people take the lead," said an inspector of a large gas company recently. "I know two families where both husband and wife are blind. Every jet is turned on full tilt in their homes at night and is kept going at that rate clear up to 12 o'clock, and that partially for light is not a whim peculiar to those two couples. All blind people feel that way. They demand the light, and in all private homes and institutions where the blind are cared for the gas bills vouch for their strange fancy."

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The federation also provides a forum where representatives of all elements of society may meet to discuss national problems in which they have a common interest.

RE-ESTABLISHING "PERSONAL TOUCH"

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"While the employer cannot, under present conditions, meet individually each employee, he can periodically attend their functions. This active participation brings him into communication with the employee, and it is highly appreciated by them."

"Welfare work establishes a bond of sympathy, because the employers' efforts to provide for the comfort of employees indicate to them that the employer is interested in their welfare. There is no better antidote for socialism today than welfare work."

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"Laws," declares Miss Beeks, "do little good, for as soon as a new law is made a way to evade it is discovered. We must show the employer that his own best interests are conserved by caring for his employees. It is no use to quarrel with the employers, it is no use to criticize. Arouse an employer's latent human sympathies and show him how to benefit himself and his employees at the same time, and you will have won."

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