

ARE WE MAKING SERIES OF OUR WOMEN?

Will Shop-Work Make Our Feminine Types Like Those of Russia?



Work that Hardens Our Femininity

ARE we brutalizing our women? Are they being made more masculine by the struggle for bread which our modern conditions impose upon so many of them?

Declaring that unless factory and shop conditions in the United States are improved the working women of the country will retrograde, mentally and physically, into the class of the peasant women of Russia, Professor Edward A. Ross, of the University of Wisconsin, recently said:

"Unless some one takes an interest in working women, the truly feminine girl, the one of frailty and delicacy, will pass from our working classes. There will be a reversion to the type of masculine women—

squat, flat-chested, broad-backed, low-browed creatures, working in the fields side by side with the men, the burdens of wifehood and motherhood coming but as an incident in the day of toil.

"Cost of the cure, prevention of such a state, is in the hands of society today. The day when a man could sell himself into slavery is in the past of all civilized countries. A further interference in the field of the so-called freedom of contract cannot be considered bold. The law can tell a girl just how many hours of her time she may sell."

If women must toil for daily bread, in other words, should not femininity, as we value it, be guarded against the debasing influences of toil? Else what may our age bequeath to coming generations?

ACCORDING to statistics, Professor Ross asserts that one-third of the women of the country between the ages of 15 and 25 are engaged in industrial occupations.

Figures of the last census report showed the number of women engaged in a few occupations to be: Tobacco and cigar factories, 37,125; seamstresses, 138,724; shirt, collar and cuff makers, 27,788; tailoresses, 61,571; textile mills, 231,458; laundresses, 328,335. These were all upward of the age of 16.

According to the annual report of the factory inspectors there were employed in the state of New York, in food, liquor and tobacco establishments, 29,745 over the age of 16 and 919 below that age; in textile work, 49,165 over and 2756 under 16; in clothing, millinery and laundry work, 118,311 over and 2329 under 16.

And before the thousands of toiling women stands the specter of the woman of Russia, dull, hardened, coarsened, a sister of the ox, a creature from whom God's image seems well-nigh blotted out.

Are we brutalizing our women? Within the last year economists have sounded the warning; improvement leagues have been formed with the express purpose of bettering the conditions of working women.

Meanwhile the tide of disease is rising among the workers, their vitality is depleted, their morals deteriorated, their children are puny, sickly, deformed.

Disease, functional disorders, tuberculosis—these terrors daily loom before thousands of women compelled to work for their living.

SUFFERINGS OF TOILERS

Through the long, weary day their heads ache, at night they cannot sleep; their eyes burn with the pain of a steady gaze upon a brilliant needle darting in the loom; or their shoulders throb painfully from stooping over steaming tubs of dirty garments or sewing clothing; or their lungs are filled by noxious fumes.

A countless army of these women each morning march to their daily tasks, and each evening return, their doom more pronounced on the faded, peaked faces, and indicated by the hacking coughs and pains. Many also work during the night, and in the sweatshop rooms of the big cities they toil for mere pittance, their children wailing about them—weak children, who will grow, perhaps, to be fathers and mothers of an inept, weakly or perverted race. In the fields of Russia visitors have seen

the coarse-faced, horny-handed women of the peasantry, hardened, although fairly healthy; stupid, but with iron muscles and strong limbs. Surely we would not like our women of the future to resemble these.

What, from a scientific standpoint, are the dangers that confront the working women of our land?

Dr. A. Jacobi, of New York city, who has done considerable work among poor working women, states the case of one who came to him for advice; she looked to be 68, but was no more than 45.

ALWAYS TIRED AND SLEEPY

Her story was commonplace; she was married, cared for a husband, a workman, and five children; did the cooking, scrubbing, washing, mending, and although she was always tired and sleepy, was unable to rest or sleep. "No law in the land could reach this woman's case," declared the doctor, "and there are 100,000 women in New York of the same kind.

"Hundreds of women work in stores, laundries, hotels; work at irregular hours and beyond endurance. I know of but one prescription: It is a different configuration of society, with less individualism, more solidarity and a greater sense of responsibility on the part of society and the state.

"Many practitioners of medicine in large cities daily come into contact with young women who work at tobacco trades," Dr. Jacobi states. "Most of these patients are anemic, sallow, thin, underweight. They are poorly paid, poorly nourished, early risers—they begin work without appetite.

"Almost every one suffers from catarrh of the throat and catarrh of the bronchial tubes, and the inhalation of tobacco dust, which results often in solidification and pigmentation of the lungs. Their circulation is incompetent to keep off the influence of the changes between the warm and overheated or ill-ventilated shop and the open air.

"Colds are common. Bright's disease is becoming more common. The stomach and digestion suffer. All these causes co-operate to affect the nervous system. Depression and hysteria are the results. Tuberculosis of the lungs is very frequent among these young workers, who are carried off in great numbers between the fifteenth and twenty-fifth year."

There are more than 37,000 women working at these tasks in this country. Another occupation peculiarly blasting to



Type of the Russian Peasant Woman

tion. In such rooms women sit day and night sewing garments, wasting their lives and frittering away their vitality because of the dire need of bread.

Annie S. Daniel, of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children, who has made a study of the home labor of women in New York, declares that "many of the garments worn by women are being manufactured in these tenement rooms. In them garments from the coarsest home wrapper to the daintiest lace gown for a fine evening function are made.

"In addition to wearing apparel, the women make boxes, cigars, pocketbooks, jewelry, clocks, watches, wigs, fur garments, paper bags and anything possibly made by hand or on small machinery. Frequently such working women take no more than five hours rest out of the twenty-four. At 5 o'clock in the morning the work begins, after a breakfast of bread and coffee; for four or six hours the workers toil unceasingly, bending over the garments or boxes, straining their eyes in the dark—they are too poor to burn gas or oil—and after the evening repast they often begin again and work until 1 or 2 in the morning. Their pay averages from 1 1/2 to 10 cents an hour. A girl of 10 can earn as much doing various kinds of work as a grown woman."

Of 615 families Miss Daniel visited in New York she discovered that 394 were supported, entirely or in part, by women. Of this number, 150 women were engaged in manufacturing in their living rooms, and of the 174 remaining the women worked in factories, laundries, on took lodgers and boarders.

Women of seventeen families, after completing their work by day in factories, made artificial flowers at night. The average income of the 615 families was \$5.69 a week.

RESTRICTIONS REQUIRED

"If women must add to the income of the family," said Miss Daniel, "they should do it in buildings built for this purpose; children, at least under 8 years of age, should not be employed; men and women in the last stages of tuberculosis could not work because of inability to go to a factory. Children, the future Americans, would stand a better chance of becoming useful citizens."

Coming to America with bright hopes, with gleaming eyes and the conviction in their hearts of enjoying prosperity and peace, many foreign women find themselves dumped into steaming courts and fetid alleys. And to make ends meet, they find themselves compelled to labor, night and day, and the land which was golden in their dreams becomes their curse, the land of sordidness and misery. And these women become the mothers and grandmothers of future citizens and future mothers, so that any debasing influence exerted on their lives debases their progeny.

In the poorest Italian homes the industry of rag-picking, with all its objectionable features, is carried on. In the single rooms great heaps of soiled, dirty rags are gathered; they are torn into strips and sewed together and rolled into balls. Working thirteen or fifteen hours a day, the wizened-faced Italian woman may earn from 5 to 15 cents.

Compare such conditions with those that exist among the peasantry of Russia—conditions which should warn us, according to the western economist—and imagine the dire wage the nation will be compelled to pay in the future.

Armies of women and girls march each morning to the mills of the country—women and girls who begin such careers rosy-faced, bright-eyed, merry. There, during the long day, they watch the needles, moving with incredible rapidity, until their eyes burn. They



Russian Women Tilling in the Fields

women is work in laundries. Government statistics give the number of women thus employed as 328,935. Of this number 111,144 are white, of whom more than 69,000 are native born.

In this trade new machinery is being constantly adopted. A feature in even the small laundries is the calender machine, which consists of huge steam or gas-heated cylinders, varying from four to nine feet in length. These revolve slowly, and the wet linen is drawn in under the hot rollers. Clouds of steam arise as each new article is fed into the machine. Thomas Oliver, an expert on trades, writes:

"The heat given off by these machines is sometimes very great; a temperature of over 90

degrees Fahrenheit may be registered, even in winter, on the feeding step in front of the machine, at which little girls stand all day."

According to statistics gathered from groups of laundresses, every one in seven workers suffers from ulcers of the legs, compared with one in twenty-seven of women in other trades. These women are also subjected to phthisis, bronchitis and rheumatism.

In New York city there are 300,000 rooms without windows or adequate means of ventila-

lift off bobbins of woolen weighing ten pounds apiece, and in one day one woman may lift 800 pounds. There is great heat in many of these mills, and heavy, disagreeable odors arise from damp wool.

This labor may continue day after day for years. In many mills there are no rest rooms. (CONTINUED ON INSIDE PAGE)