

National Child Labor Committee.

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THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CHILD

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It was written of old, "A little child shall lead them." It was written deeply into the very constitution of our nature that the child should lead. Science and revelation unite to proclaim this truth.

Henry Drummond pointed out the fact that there were two struggles for life, the struggle for the individual life, which is concerned with nutrition, and the struggle for the life of others, which is concerned with reproduction, with the life of the species. He showed that at the beginnings of life on this planet, "that early world was for millions and millions of years, a bleak and loveless world, without mothers and without children," and that Nature to develop mothers had to make the young helpless. He bade us "contrast the free, swimming embryo of the Medusa, dashing out into the heroic life the moment it is born, with the helpless kitten or the sightless pup." Then rising to the consideration of the human, he declared: "No greater day ever dawned for evolution than that on which the first human child was born. The child teaches the mother. The next effort of evolution is to lengthen out these school days and give affection time to grow." In the same way, through the leadership of the child, came the development of fatherhood, and the family, the clan, the state.

Wallace declares that in this prolongation of the period of human infancy, "Nature has begun to follow a new path, and make psychical changes instead of physical." And our own John Fiske made an important contribution to evolutionary science by establishing the fact that the prolongation of the period of childhood is the very measure of the progress of the race. "If it were not for our period of infancy we should not be progressive." He says, "The knitting together of permanent relations between mother and infant, and the approximation toward steady relations on the part of the male parent, came to bring about the family, the clan . . . the germ of altruism, of morality." He states this truth more fully

thus: "From of old ye have heard the monition, 'Except ye be as babes, ye cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven;' the latest science now shows us . . . that unless we had been as babes, the ethical phenomena which give all its significance to the phrase, the Kingdom of Heaven would have been non-existent for us. Without the circumstance of infancy, we might have become formidable among animals, through sheer force of sharp-wittedness. But except for that circumstance we should never have comprehended the meaning of such phrases as 'self-sacrifice,' or 'devotion.' The phenomena of social life would have been omitted from the history of the world, and with them the phenomena of ethics and religion." The history of civilization bears out the teachings of evolution on this point. We need not look beyond the fact of the child marriages that prevail in India to understand why the teeming millions of one of the oldest human civilizations are held in check, are controlled and developed, by the handful of English soldiers and rulers; or why the native tropical races, with their forced ripening of manhood and womanhood, have never developed civilizations of their own. It is a law of nature, "To be a man too soon is to be a small man," no matter what the physical development may be. The virile races are those that have believed in the tutelage of childhood and the development of manhood, the Hebrew, the Greek, the Roman. And in the decaying days of the Roman Empire the historian Tacitus, attributes two pre-eminent virtues to the Germanic races that have since over-run the world, the honor that they paid to womanhood and the prolongation of the period of adolescence. He tells us that it was considered a shame to marry before mature manhood had been reached.

Child Labor Thwarts Progress

Consider briefly how the modern system of child labor cuts across this line of development and progress. Here, through the long eons, the family as the social unit has been developing, motherhood, fatherhood, brotherhood, patriotism, philanthropy. Child labor begins its destructive tendency by disintegrating the family and ends with the destruction of the state. The period of childhood is shortened instead of prolonged. The dependence of the child, so necessary to the development of the social virtues, becomes the independence of the bread-winner. The task of the

father, the husband, the house-bond, is relegated in part or in whole, to the child, who is made the food-provider. The child, from being a blessed incumbrance, tending to home-building, becomes an industrial asset, to be exploited for gain. The child-laborer, coming into competition with the father in the labor market, brings down wages to the child standard, and the mother is forced into the ranks of the bread-winners, because the system of adult male labor has degenerated, by reason of the low wage scale, to the basis of family labor.

The system perpetuates itself. By reason of the illiteracy which is invariably the result of the child labor system, the victim of that system is handicapped in competition with his more fortunate fellows and is relegated to the ranks of the unskilled. He must continue to receive the low wages of the unskilled laborer. Having become independent of parental nurture, he becomes free from parental restraint. We even recognize in some of our defective child labor laws the fact of the dependency of the parent upon the child for bread. Having to fulfil the duties of manhood he feels a right to its privileges, and early marriages become the rule instead of the exception. So the poverty, and the immaturity are handed down in intensified form to the next generation. Illiteracy and resulting poverty are perpetuated and racial degeneracy is the inevitable result. In this new country of ours, with its shifting population, it has not been possible as yet to study such a development in its ultimate results. In the textile industry, which has always been cursed with child labor, and therefore with low wages and long hours, foreign immigration has changed the character of the population. The native New England and Pennsylvania stock, with American habits of thrift and industry, went from the textile mills into the skilled trades as soon as industries were sufficiently diversified to accommodate them. Their places were taken by the English, the Irish and the Scotch, who went through the same process of changing to better conditions as to wages and hours, and their places have been taken by the French Canadians, the Portuguese and the Greeks. In the South, where there has thus far been little help from immigration, and the native American stock is almost universally employed, the industry itself is only measured, in its real development, by a single generation. I have given elsewhere an account of the process of steady degeneracy that has gone on for a hundred

years in England, in its great milling centers, until there has come about "an alarming impairment of the national physique," to quote the words of an English physician.

Paisley

But we have a striking case of this moral and physical degeneration in a Scotch city, the history of which is quoted by Dr. Thomas Chalmers, from a contemporary writer: "From about 1770 to 1800 the manufactures of silk gauzes and fine lawns flourished in Paisley; as also, during a portion of the period alluded to, that of figured-loom and hand-tambourined muslin. These branches afforded to all classes excellent wages, and being articles of fancy, room was afforded for a display of taste as well as enterprise and intelligence, for which the Paisley weavers were justly conspicuous. Sobriety and frugality being their general character, good wages enabled almost every weaver to possess himself of a small capital, which, joined with their general intelligence and industry, enabled and induced many to spend days and even weeks together, in plodding over a new design, assisted frequently by their obliging neighbors, knowing that the first half-dozen weavers who succeeded in some new style of work were sure to be recompensed ten-fold.

"Nearly one-half of Paisley at that period was built by weavers, from savings off their ordinary wages. Every house had its garden, and every weaver, being his own master, could work it when he pleased. Many were excellent florists; many possessed a tolerable library, and *all* were politicians. So that, about the period of the French Revolution, Mr. Pitt expressed more fear of the unrestricted political discussions of the Paisley weavers than of ten thousand armed men. Had Paisley been then, what Paisley is now, crowded with half-informed Radicals and infidels, his fears would have been justified. But truth and honest dealing could fear nothing from a community constituted as Paisley was; and never perhaps in the history of the world, was there a more convincing proof of the folly of being afraid of a universal and thorough education, especially when impregnated with the religion of the Bible, than in the state of Paisley at that period."

Significantly enough, the period of Paisley decadence began with the manufacture of a sham, an incentive to human vanity

and pretence. Our author continues: "The introduction of imitation Indian shawls about the year 1800 required that each weaver should employ one, two or three boys, called draw-boys. Eleven or twelve was the usual age, previous to this period, for sending boys to the loom" (it should be recalled here that this was work at home under the eye of the parent and did not conflict with school attendance, as we shall see). "But as boys of any age above five were equal to the work of drawing, those of ten were first employed; then, as the demand increased, those of nine, eight, seven and six, and even five.

"Girls, too, were by and bye introduced into the same employment, and at equally tender years. Many a struggle the honest and intelligent weaver must have had between his duty to his children and his immediate interests. The idea of his children growing up without schooling must have cost him many a pang, but the idea of losing two shillings sixpence, or three shillings a week, and paying school expenses beside, proved too great a bribe even for parental affection, and, as might have been expected, mammon in the end prevailed, and the practice gradually grew too common and familiar to excite more than a passing regret. Children grew up without either the education or the training which the youth of the country derive from the schoolmaster; and every year since 1805 has sent forth its hundreds of untamed boys and girls, now become the parents of a still ruder, more undisciplined and ignorant offspring. Nor was this all. So great was the demand for draw-boys that ever and anon the town-crier went through the streets, offering not simply two shillings sixpence, three shillings, or three shillings sixpence, for the labor of the boys and girls, but bed, board and washing, and a penny to themselves on Saturday night. This was a reward on disobedience to parents; family insubordination with all its train of evils followed. The son, instead of standing in awe of his father, began to think himself a man when he was only a brawling, impudent boy. On the first or second quarrel with his father he felt he might abandon the parental roof for the less irksome employment of the stranger. The first principle of all subordination was thus early broken up."

Our author goes on to show at some length how the market became overstocked with goods and with cheap labor, with the result of a permanent reduction of adult wages, and closes his description

thus: "Thus was the employment of their children, from five to ten, by the weavers of Paisley, at first an apparent advantage, but in the end a curse, demonstrating that, whatever may appear to be the interest of the parents this year or next year, it is permanently the interest of them and their offspring to refuse every advantage in their temporal concerns, which tends to defraud youth of the first of parental blessings, education; and that Providence has bound in indissoluble alliance, the virtue, the intelligence and the temporal well-being of society. In 1818-19, during the Radical period, there were found full three thousand Paisley-born, and Paisley-bred, who could not read; and the decline of intelligence has been followed by the decline of that temperance, prudence and economy which are the cardinal virtues of the working classes, by which alone they can elevate their condition or preserve themselves from sinking into the most abject poverty."

In the South

It has been my custom at these annual meetings to give a brief description of child labor conditions in the field assigned to me, the Southern States. Every such description, founded on actual observation at first hand, has been disputed and the facts denied. That however denotes progress. The ground of apology for the child labor system has shifted in these last few years from a defense of the system as a good thing for the child and for society to a denial of the abuses of the system and the claim that the evil is fast disappearing. This year our Committee has been conducting some investigations in three of the Southern States, Virginia, Mississippi and South Carolina, the first with an age limit of twelve years, and fourteen for night work; the second with a minimum age limit of twelve, but with the provision that the child of dependent parents may be employed at any age, and the third without any child labor law now in operation. From all three states comes the indubitable evidence of the violations of law, where the law exists, of appalling illiteracy, apparently increasing, and of the wholesale employment of children, with the resulting evils of family disintegration, of early marriages, of wife desertion, of degenerate children.

It is not too much to say that the process that has been described as going on in Paisley is now being repeated with alarming rapidity

in eight hundred communities of the South. Let me quote from a humane and intelligent manufacturer, whom we hoped to have with us at this meeting. Speaking of the early marriages that prevail, Mr. Garnett Andrews, who is in favor of a fourteen-year age limit now, and an eight-hour day as soon as competition can settle upon that basis, said in advocacy of legislation preventing the marriage of children: "I have this thing come before my observation frequently. Right near my mill is a cavalry post; these soldiers, irresponsible young chaps, come around there courting the girls; go to paying attention and keeping company with some girl and marry her. We have had girls married out of our mill at fourteen years of age. And not long ago there was a girl came over there for work with a child in her arms. She was but fifteen and had on short skirts. That was a crime against civilization, against God and against everything else. There are a whole lot of collateral facts that chime in with this labor question. I do not know of one more important than this, even the age-limit they are setting here."

Legislative Progress

I am glad, however, to be able to report progress along the line of child labor legislation since the date of our last annual meeting. North Carolina has raised the age limit from twelve to thirteen and to fourteen for night work, the manufacturers refusing to grant the demand for any reduction of the hours from the frightful sixty-six a week, though some mills have voluntarily reduced them. A local option compulsory education law was also enacted in North Carolina, the manufacturers agreeing, though I have not learned that any of the mill communities have yet been persuaded to put themselves under the operation of this wise and humane law.

Arkansas has raised the age limit from twelve to fourteen, and that for the children of dependent parents from ten to twelve. In South Carolina the manufacturers had agreed to reduce the hours from sixty-six to sixty a week, gradually, reaching the culmination in 1909. The South Carolina Legislature thought that the sixty-hour week would be a good thing in 1908. But both sessions adjourned without having passed the compulsory education law which the manufacturers have favored so long. I could wish that

they were as influential sometimes in passing good legislation as they have been in preventing it. Florida passed its first child labor law, largely as the result of the combination of the labor unions with the women's clubs of that state. It recognizes the twelve-year age limit for all occupations except agriculture and domestic service, and there would have been a fourteen-year age limit except for the opposition of one oyster-packer, who was in the habit of importing Bohemian children from Baltimore for his business. He has since become a convert to the law, for the sake of his rivals in other Southern states. Tennessee enacted a sixty-hour week, and the Tennessee manufacturers, at the Southern Textile conference, recommended advanced child labor legislation to the other Southern states. Unhappily, one of these manufacturers, who has a mill in Mississippi, appeared before the legislature in opposition to the very provisions for which he had voted at the textile conference, including the fourteen-year age limit. Mississippi has passed its first child labor law, leaving now no Southern state without legal protection for the working children, and only one state in the Union, Nevada, without a child labor law. The manufacturers' lobby, however, succeeded in reducing the requirements for factory inspection to a minimum and in cutting down the age-limit from fourteen to twelve.

Alabama has moved forward a long distance, cutting off the ten-year old children who were allowed to work under the old law, making the age limit sixteen for night work, with an eight-hour night for children under eighteen, with a sixty-hour week for day work for children under fourteen. Children under sixteen are required to attend school three months of each year as the condition of their being employed in any manufacturing establishment. The inspector of jails and almshouses was made factory inspector also, and though he has not sufficient assistance to be effective in this work, the beginning of factory inspection has been made. The new Georgia law has just gone into full effect at the beginning of this year, and in Virginia the age limit has been progressively raised to thirteen in 1909 and to fourteen in 1910, while a new provision has been added to the law making the employment of children under the legal age *prima facie* evidence of guilt on the part of both parent and employer. If my advices from Oklahoma are correct, the youngest of the Southern states is preparing to

pass a law which will be in some respects a model for the rest of the Union. Thus far have we advanced in fifteen months in the way of legislation.¹

Special Claim of Childhood

The consideration of the child, as a child, of his rights as a child, of his claims as a child to protection and care, is fast demolishing the old *laissez faire* philosophy which has so long been the curse of Southern political thinking. Of course the first step was the establishment of the common school system. I can remember when it was considered almost as much a disgrace, in Virginia, for a parent to send his child to the common school as to have to go to the poor-house himself. How far we have come in a few years, to the confessed duty of the state to provide an education for every child, white or black, and to the next immediate step, of compelling the ignorant and indifferent parent, to send his children to school!

The next demonstration of the leadership of the child was the agitation of the child labor question. It all dates in the South, from the beginning of this new, young, century of ours. Now there is not a single Southern state without a child labor law. Nor will it be long before legislation shall be perfected here, for compulsory education everywhere, with factory inspection provided. The employer of children will soon find himself so much an outcast, in public opinion, that he will fear to face a jury of his fellow-countrymen to answer for that crime. A few healthy prosecutions will have a marvelous effect in the South.

The distinction between childhood and manhood has begun to be recognized in other ways. The servant of this Committee, in the disbursement of a special fund entrusted to him, has been able to accomplish something along the line of distinguishing between the adult criminal and the child criminal, for instance. One of the encouraging facts connected with social remedial legislation is that a small amount of time and effort and means in awakening public interest in a good cause, may do a vast deal of good, especially if there be no commercial interest directly opposed, as in the child labor reform. In North Carolina a reformatory for wayward youth has been established, following the example set in

¹Child Labor bill passed both House, but was vetoed by Governor Haskell, June 10, 1908.

Georgia the year before. Tennessee followed the example set in Georgia and North Carolina. Alabama, through the efforts of a member of this committee, Judge N. B. Feagin, passed a juvenile court law of a rather advanced type. Senator McDowell, who introduced and passed the child labor law in Mississippi introduced a juvenile court law, which will pass eventually. Two bills for the establishment of juvenile courts are on the docket of the Georgia Legislature. A reformatory for negro child criminals is being earnestly advocated in Georgia. These are but straws showing the direction in which the wind is blowing. May those who sow this wind be able to reap a whirlwind which shall sweep away the last vestige of the old penal systems that are a disgrace to our civilization; that shall wipe away the "blistering shams of the convict lease system." For the question will recur, if the child criminal may be reformed, why may not the adult criminal be turned into the way of righteousness instead of being hardened in his iniquity? The child is leading the way.

Protection of Womanhood

Another epochal step has recently been taken in the way of the protection of womanhood. The South Carolina Legislature, in fixing the sixty-hour week for children, added the same provision for women. The South Carolina manufacturers were advised by their lawyers that this latter provision was unconstitutional—there are always lawyers to be found who can discover the unconstitutionality of righteous legislation, though it does seem a little peculiar to have South Carolina lawyers invoking the aid of the Fourteenth amendment which they at other times hold to have been unconstitutionally adopted. To the credit of the South Carolina manufacturers be it said that they preferred not to contest that law. To the discredit of an Oregon laundryman be it said that he chose to contest a similar provision for that state. To the everlasting fame of a Boston lawyer, Mr. Louis D. Brandeis, the decision of the Supreme Court of Oregon was so presented before the Supreme Court of the United States, in a masterly brief, that the Supreme Court by unanimous vote, instead of the usual five to four, sustained the contention that the woman needs protection at the hands of the law. Said Justice Brewer in delivering this momentous decision: "The limitations which this statute places upon her (woman's) contractual powers;

upon her right to agree with her employer as to the time she shall labor, are not imposed solely for her benefit, but also largely for the benefit of all. Many words cannot make this plainer. The two sexes differ, in structure of body, in the functions to be performed by each, in the amount of physical strength, in the capacity for long-continued labor, particularly when done standing, the influence of vigorous health upon the future of the race, the self-reliance which enables one to assert full rights, and in the capacity to maintain the struggle for subsistence. This difference justifies a difference in legislation, and upholds that which is designed to compensate for some of the burdens imposed upon her." Mark you, it was the child that led the way to this far-reaching decision, and the legislation which secured it. Similar legislation for protecting the vast army of women now in industry will follow. If I may be permitted to express a personal hope, some national organization similar to this should at once be formed, if this Committee is unable to undertake the work, to secure this protection for the women of our land. John Ruskin once said: "It is a shame for a nation to make its young girls weary." America is already thinking in its heart that it is a shame for a nation to make its women weary.

We say to those, who for whatever reason, of prejudice or of supposed self-interest, have been fighting the cause of child labor reform, "ye know not what ye do." I can fancy the complacency with which the employers of child labor all over the land heard of the birth of this Committee, less than four years ago. With not enough money for their expenses to buy one cotton mill or to secure a controlling interest in one coal mine, what can they accomplish? And yet thirty-four state legislatures have changed their laws or enacted new ones for the protection of the children who toil. Because the child stands out in the might of his innocence, the appeal of his very helplessness is irresistible. We would make overtures to those who have resisted the effort to save the children of this nation, not to invite further the condemnation of mankind.

In the most crowded mart of London there stood one day a wee bit lassie upon the curb-stone waiting for the thousand vehicles and teams to pass by that she might cross the street. A tall policeman took her by the hand, and with his other hand uplifted, stopped the traffic of London for the sake of the child. There may have been some grumbling and even curses on the part of teamsters,

but to have driven recklessly over that lassie's body would have been to create a riot. Better the policeman than the mob. And so we say, gentlemen, even if traffic, our sacred traffic, be stopped for a brief moment while we conduct the child along its appointed way, let the traffic stop. For the child means more to humanity than any material gain. Self-interest cannot withstand the universal interest in the welfare of the child.

Persons who contribute from \$2 to \$25 annually toward the support of this work are enrolled as associate members, from \$25 to \$100 as sustaining members, and \$100 or more as guarantors of the Committee. Members receive the publications of the Committee and are kept in touch with the child labor movement throughout the country. Remittances may be sent to V. Everit Macy, Treasurer, 105 East 22d Street, New York City.