

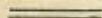
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THIRD ANNUAL MEETING
OF THE
WISCONSIN STATE FEDERATION
OF
WOMEN'S CLUBS.

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LEGISLATION THAT IS NEEDED AS A PROTECTION
TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THE
VARIOUS FIELDS OF LABOR.



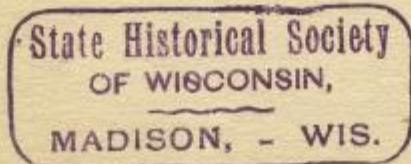
A PAPER

BY MRS. THOMAS H. BROWN,
OF MILWAUKEE, WIS.

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READ WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26.

EAU CLAIRE, WISCONSIN,
OCTOBER 25 AND 26,
1899.



LEGISLATION THAT IS NEEDED AS A PROTECTION
TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THE
VARIOUS FIELDS OF LABOR.

THE employment of women in factories began with the building of the factories themselves. About 1780 Tench Coxe, known as the father of American industries, incorporated "The United Company of Philadelphia for Promoting Manufactures," and set up the first spinning jenny in America. In a short time he had 400 women employed. It is not strange that from the time of the establishment of cotton factories women found employment therein. The spinning and weaving of both cotton and woolen fabrics had furnished the necessary training to make them skillful workers. In 1784 one factory alone employed about 1,200 persons, mostly women and children.

The building of factories began in Pennsylvania, but soon extended beyond that State. The first large factory

with improved machinery erected in the State of Rhode Island, was built at Pawtucket in 1790, and this was followed by another in 1795. In 1802 and 1803 two factories were built in Massachusetts, and in the next three years ten more were put in operation in Rhode Island and one in Connecticut. So fast did the factory system spread that in 1809 there were fully 100 mills in operation in the New England States. Did time permit, it would be interesting to dwell longer upon the evolution of the factory and the wonderful increase in numbers of the women and children employed in manufacturing establishments. Reference to the statistics of the years 1870 and 1890 shows the rapid growth of this army of laborers, and emphasizes the importance of our efforts to ameliorate its condition. In 1870 there were employed in the various lines of manufacturing 1,836,288 females ten years of age and over, and 548,064 boys from ten to fifteen years inclusive; while in 1890 there were 3,914,571 females ten years of age and over, and 400,586 boys from ten to fourteen years inclusive. The distinction of sex in the occupations was not made in the censuses prior to 1870, and therefore the statistics prior to that date have not been used. [These statistics are taken from Carroll

D. Wright's new publication, "Elements of Practical Sociology," pages 211 and 214.]

Wisconsin has its proportion of this vast army of women and children. They constitute one of the fundamental sources of activity, or moving causes, in the progress and increase in wealth of the State. These wage-earners are an important part of the body politic, and have rights which the State is bound to respect; they have wrongs which the State must redress.

The general laws for the protection of employes, of course, protect women and children as well as men. The importance of inspection was recognized by the creation in 1883 of the office of Factory Inspector. Much has been accomplished by this Bureau. Laws regulating the condition of labor in factories have been considerably elaborated and made more stringent; penalties have been attached for violation of such laws; the age at which children may be employed in factories and workshops has been raised from thirteen to fourteen years (this was enacted in 1891), and an act relating to fire escapes has been passed.

I quote the following paragraph from the Eighth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics, State of Wisconsin, 1897-1898, page 200:

"As no change in the inspection service has been made since 1887, two inspectors only can be exclusively employed in the inspection department. The duties of the inspectors embrace the enforcement of the laws relating to the employment and labor of women and children; the prevention of cruelty to minors; the means of escape from fire in factories, workshops, office buildings, hotels, assembly halls, schoolhouses, churches, etc.; the inspection of passenger and other elevators; the protection of operatives from dangerous machinery; the sanitary condition of factories and workshops; the communication between engineer and workrooms; the outward swinging of doors in factories, hotels, schoolhouses, churches, etc.; the secure guarding of vats, pans or other structures containing molten metals or hot liquids, and of well, stair, elevator and other openings." All these measures when enforced benefit males and females alike.

The report further says: "While this includes most of the direct duties which devolve upon this department, it does not give any adequate idea of the amount of work

involved in carrying them out. In fact, only those to whom they are familiar can fully comprehend the amount of work usually required to detect, completely establish and enforce certain violations. Wisconsin is also a manufacturing State, being in this respect the tenth in order in the Union, with her manufacturing establishments so scattered or distributed that there is not a single county which does not need the attention of the inspectors. Taking all these facts into consideration, it is not hard to see that we have had our hands full; that it is no exaggeration to say that there is more work to be done in the way of inspection than two inspectors can properly accomplish."

The need which was so plainly stated in this report has been met by the appointment, April 12th, 1899, of six additional inspectors. While the work accomplished by two inspectors has been creditable, with the increase in the number of inspectors great improvement should be made in the administration of the laws. And yet, it is questionable whether there are now enough inspectors. There is also a strong and growing sentiment in favor of women inspectors for women and children. Mrs. Florence Kelley, of Chicago, whom we are proud to welcome

to-day as an honored guest of this Federation, holds that there should be one woman inspector for every one thousand women and children employed. That there should be legislation to this end, is a subject to which should be given, at the present session, the earnest and careful consideration of this Association.

The good which is being accomplished by "The Consumers' League" can hardly be overestimated. The increasing demand for goods produced under healthful conditions will prove a powerful factor in the enactment of laws for the benefit of women and children. The abolition of child labor to the age of sixteen and compulsory education prior to that age would redound to the lasting welfare of the human race.

WAGES.

Not many years ago a dealer in a variety of commodities was informed by the watchman that a certain employe had been detected in stealing wood. The merchant instructed the watchman not to mention the matter to any one, but to watch the man and report what disposition he made of the stolen property. This, together with investigation along other lines, revealed a very interesting case. The man practiced constant selfdenial,

vigilant frugality and the most rigid economy of expenditure. He had a wife and five children for whom he cherished the most tender regard, and for whose support his income was insufficient. He pilfered the wood for his home, and took no more than was necessary to protect his family from the rigors of a cold Wisconsin winter. Pinching poverty made him a thief. Startled by the discovery, and realizing his own responsibility in the matter, the merchant, without assigning the paramount reason, thereafter paid the man living wages. The agonized expression which had for months disfigured a good face disappeared, the timidity which had characterized his every movement gave way to selfreliance. No more wood was stolen. A man was saved.

Women and children are by nature and choice honest and pure. But when wages are inadequate for support, when scanty clothing chills the blood, when want of nourishing food withers the body, when hope fades and moral forces are weakened, is it surprising that some yield to temptation?

Indigence is the germ of sin. The state is vigilant in suppressing disease. Of how much greater importance it is that the sin germ should be destroyed.

Worry kills oftener than work. Remove the cause of worry—the fear of impending disaster—and the sufferings of wage-earning women and children will be reduced to a minimum. Competence is the best protector. How can it be secured?

It would be presumptuous in me to claim that I could devise a plan which would insure to wage-earning women and children just compensation for their labor. However, I will venture some suggestions.

I have a very dear friend, now a loving wife and happy mother, who was before marriage a wage earner. She has told me of her trials and sorrows and temptations in those ante-nuptial times, and how distressed she would be should her daughter be subjected to a similar ordeal. A confidential friend in the person of a married woman helped her to bridge the sloughs of despond. The experience of this lovely character teaches the importance and power and efficiency of womanly sympathy and friendship. Every member of women's various organizations, whose environment will permit, should seek out and become the confidential friend of some woman or child of toil. The beneficial effects of such a system of inspection would be felt at once. Many

weary and despairing toilers would be comforted; unscrupulous employers would be goaded by fear of exposure to better the condition of their employes—fear sometimes does the work of conscience; and the information requisite for drafting legislation would be gathered.

LEGISLATION.

Banks are required to make verified statements exhibiting in detail their resources and liabilities. And these statements are published in the newspapers of the vicinage where the banks are located. This is done as a protection against the loss of money. But there are some things more precious than money. The integrity of the women and children is of far greater consequence to any country than all its gold.

The Legislature should be memorialized to enact laws which shall provide—

1. That the employers of women and children shall make verified statements, semi-annually, or oftener if demanded by the Inspector of Labor, classifying employes by ages, specifying the kind of work required, the number of hours employed per week, and the wages paid,

and furnishing such further information as the laws and the Inspector of Labor may require ;

2. That these statements shall be published in the newspapers of the localities where such laborers are employed ; and

3. That in conjunction with these statements shall be published the official statement of the Inspector of Labor, which shall show what it costs such toilers to live comfortably and respectably.

Banking laws were not made for honest bankers, but to protect them as well as communities from scheming adventurers. So also the proposed laws would not cast reproach upon honest and honorable employers of labor, but would safeguard them as well as unprotected women and children against the treacherous intrigues of degenerate men.

The robber employer of women and children plies his miserable business under cover of secrecy, screened windows and barred doors. Turn on the searchlight of publicity, and public opinion will drive him to the open field of honorable competition, or to other pursuits, or to bankruptcy.

