

PAMPHLET

THE FUTURE OF WOMEN IN INDUSTRY.

By MISS A. MAUDE ROYDEN.

*Delivered at Whitefield's Men's Own, on Sunday afternoon,
June 22nd, 1919.*

IF you go away this afternoon with mental indigestion, will you reflect that you have given me just one afternoon in which to deal with a subject which in industry is perhaps the sorest point of all. In the near future probably the question of cheap labour given to us by other races may be one of the stormy centres of industry in white countries. But at the moment the cheap labour of women is perhaps the sorest point in the industrial problem at home. Because of this I want to lay down four or five general principles.

It is because religious people and social and political reformers have so often ignored general principles, or in the backs of their minds cherish the belief that truths of human nature will suddenly cease operating when it is convenient to us that they should do so, that they suffer from a sense almost of paralysis, in face of the tremendous complications of modern life. Scientists have a field of knowledge infinitely greater than that surveyed by the social reformer, but as soon as they began to lay down general principles, to formulate the laws under which this universe operates, to realise that a law never fails, they gained that extraordinary sense of power which makes us feel to-day as if there is almost nothing that we cannot believe science will do in the material world. On the other hand, in the social and religious worlds we seem still so hampered by the feeling that everything is chaotic, that we cannot trust any great statement of truth as the scientists can trust theirs. And so the individual feels almost paralysed in front of the vast problems which we individuals have created.

I want to begin by making half-a-dozen affirmations of faith. The first is that it is not the worker but the idler who is a burden on the community. Now that is an axiom to you, and for yourselves; but you will find that when you come to apply it to women, you are apt to think it is not true. I want to affirm also that it is best for the community that the individual shall do the best work that he is capable of, and that that is also best in the long run for the individual; that the two interests coincide; that it is to the advantage of the community that work shall be done not by the less competent people, but always by those people who can do it best. Further, so few of us are competent to judge in our own case that it is almost best to judge that none of us is capable. Again, women are not all alike, and ought not to be all alike. Not only is every woman not born by Divine fiat a domestic servant, but it is even better that all women should not be born domestic servants. All women do not naturally understand or love children. That is a hard saying even for women to believe, because the great

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majority of women do care for and understand children, but not every woman does. When a woman differs from the standard that society has set up for her, it may be that she has exceptional gifts in other directions. It does not mean, although we have so often taken for granted that it does, that a woman who does not like domestic work or does not shine in the management of children, is a wrong sort of woman. It merely means that there are more varieties in human nature than it has always been found convenient for society to allow for.

I suggest that when women differ as a sex from you—and there are certain broad differences running between the sexes—it does not seem possible that our bodies should be so different and our outlook on life be exactly the same—where those differences exist it is a mistake to assume that they always imply an inferiority on our side. For instance, if I may take an example, it has been found—I do not say finally and definitely proved; but a great many people believe it—that in certain kinds of work women are quicker than men, but that they exhaust themselves sooner; and therefore they ought to work shorter shifts and their time should be arranged in rather a different way. Now, the moment we say to a woman, You cannot work as long a shift as a man because you work quicker, she immediately thinks it is because she lags behind you in some way. That is not necessary. It may be an inferiority, but it is not necessarily so; and when we begin to organise the work of women in the future, let us realise that it may be necessary for women to work under rather different conditions without necessarily implying inferiority. It may simply mean difference, not inferiority.

I think it follows that women ought to have the same freedom of choice in their work as men have. I go further and say that to every child coming into the world there ought to be a much greater freedom of choice than there is. Certainly women should not be hampered beforehand by being told that if, for instance, they choose an unmarried life, if they choose to work in the world rather than in the home, that is because there is something wrong with them. That sort of judgment cramps women almost as much as legislative or trade union restrictions. Girls should be brought up with at least as much freedom as boys to choose their own work. The girl who has to do work she does not like, even if she thinks she ought to like it, does not make a really good worker. One of the cleverest women I know has been in this world—I hope she may be more fortunate in another—a singularly unsuccessful charwoman, because she had no turn for that kind of work; but she never had a chance of doing anything else. Yet I fancy she would have made a brilliant speaker, for she is a woman of real brains. But her whole character has been warped by the fact that she is always doing work she does not like, and consequently she does it badly. The community suffers when it has unwilling workers, because unwilling work is nearly always inefficient work. Women have always been taught two things. If they

belong to the richer class they are told they ought not to work. I myself, for instance, when I had been at college, was always given by my people to understand that it would be an unscrupulous thing of me to take a paid post of any kind, because it would mean that I was taking away work from somebody else. That is very plausible on the face of it, but behind it there runs this vicious assumption, that the idler may be doing a service to the community that the worker is not, that it was really good for the community that I should be idle, and if I wanted to do work which happened to be paid work, it would be an injustice to somebody else. On the other hand, if a woman belongs to the poorer classes, she has not to argue whether she will work or not, she has got to work; but she does it on this understanding, that she has got to do the work you, gentlemen, don't want to do. If not, she is just as freely told, as I was told, that I ought not to work, that she is taking away a man's job, and that she ought to do the work you do not want to do. She replies, perhaps: "But I don't want to do it either." And you reply: "Then you ought to want to do it." And that feeling—which I am certain is in the minds of an enormous proportion of my audience—that a woman ought to like certain kinds of work, is a vicious assumption that women are far more alike, or ought to be more alike, than they are. Yet it is true that women and men are different physically. Women are muscularly less strong; their power of endurance is probably as great, but in actual muscular power for work that requires great strength they are inferior. There are other differences in the way their lives are lived, which I am certain, in the long run, while leaving a certain amount of work common to both, will, if given free play, sort out to the sexes the work they can do best, and that would happen which I believe to be best both for the individual and the community.

You, gentlemen, have hitherto judged what sort of work women ought to do, and, on the whole, you have not judged extraordinarily well. The report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry contains the following: "The pre-war unregulated relation of men's and women's wages excluded the woman from trades in which the war has enabled her to show her efficiency, while allowing her to work in processes now regarded as unsuitable." Before the war society excluded women from work that they were perfectly competent to do, while leaving her to do work which is now decided to be unsuitable. That is to say, the process of judgment has not been altogether successful. I do not mean to maintain for a moment that it has always been mistaken, or that there are not certain broad aspects on which it has not been correct. But, still it has worked clumsily and badly on the whole, and women have been doing work for which they were unsuited and excluded from work for which they were fitted, until the war came along and broke down by force of sheer necessity standards and barriers erected before it broke out. Women have, by the work they have done during the war, shown that they have more brains

than was commonly supposed—I think more than many women would have supposed, as well as men; they have shown that they had more public spirit, that they were more willing to respond to a great public need, than people imagined; and in leaving home and taking up a new line of life, have shown more adaptability and initiative than was expected. They have proved that light sedentary work is by no means always so healthful to them as heavier work out-of-doors. Have you noticed how very rarely girl omnibus conductors use the seats provided for them? I have asked one or two why they did not use them more frequently. To my surprise they have often replied that they would just as soon stand, that they were not tired. I do not mean to say that women can stand, with benefit to themselves, as long as men; but I do suggest that so long as they have a good deal of fresh air and good food, they are able to endure harder conditions of work than we had expected. Women have been, at any rate during the greater part of the war, much better fed than before, because they had better conditions and more regular appetite, and they have responded to it. The old superstition that women really exist most beautifully on a cup of tea and a bun has perished during the war. Neither do women exist to the best under these conditions of feeding nor do they really like them. They get better food when they can, and they have shown under better conditions a very remarkable degree of sheer physical and muscular strength.

Again, it has been shown that women can sometimes do the work of men, perhaps even as well as men, so long as conditions are made a little different. In Manchester, when women were put on to the trams, the hours during which they worked, the points at which the shift was broken, and even such details as the shape of the bags in which the takings were carried and the way the straps by which they were suspended from the shoulder were fixed—all these things were decided after consultation with a woman doctor; with the result that the women on the Manchester trams broke down less frequently and improved more in health than those in almost any other city. The amount of work they did was the same as the men's, but they required to do it under rather different conditions. During the war we could not afford to waste labour, and during peace we cannot afford it either. The most incredible power of expanding industry revealed to us during the war should be used now not to destroy life but to enrich it, to dignify it and, above all, to give it leisure. We want production to increase in such a way that the workers—who should be the whole community—may be able to do their work with zest and with the pleasure that comes from work done when one's powers are at their best and not over-strained or over-tired; and we want production on such a scale that the hours of leisure may be greater than they have been in the past.

By what means is it proposed to achieve this? The first measure that is presented to us is what is called the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Bill. That bill is simply a measure of

justice. It means that the barriers, the restrictions, the regulations created by the united efforts of organised working-men before the war and abandoned by them during the war for patriotic reasons, shall be restored, and that in the re-organisation of industry we must begin from the point where we were when the war broke out and not at the point to which the war has brought us. But if that Bill is passed as it stands an enormous number of women will inevitably be turned out of their work. The Bill applies chiefly to engineering works, to chemical works and allied trades, glass works, &c. Now, during the war, women have done extraordinarily well in engineering. They have done work which no one, with the exception of a few "fanatics" here and there, believed before the war they were capable of; and in doing it they have learned their own powers. Nearly 800,000 women will be turned out of their employment under the operation of the Bill. Of these 450,000 did definitely replace men, and of course understood they would have to give up their places if, and when, the men came back. But in addition to these 342,000 came in owing to the enormous expansion of the industries and the creation of the great aircraft factories. During the war an enormous number of women went into that great industry. These women have learned a trade; but they have also learned their own powers. If you now forbid them to do this kind of work it is because you do not want their competition, not because they are not capable of doing it. It was always rather paradoxical to forbid a person to do what she could not do.

What are you going to do? This Bill is before the House of Commons. It includes the new as well as the old industries. Are you going to send the women home, telling them not to work? Or will you tell them to get married, which was always woman's employment? Will you face the fact that a very large number of them will not be able to marry, not through their own fault but owing to the war? And will you remember that, not only is it natural to the normal, average man and woman to be married, but it is often to a woman her sphere of work as well, and that, when you make marriage impossible to her, you are very often, not always, cutting off from her that channel into which naturally she would have poured her creative forces, her energy as a human being, the powers that God has endowed her with; whereas, when a man does not marry, he still has a channel into which his work goes, has still the creative force every human being possesses. When you deny marriage to a woman, unless she has exceptional gifts and exceptional spirit, you are cutting off from her that into which the whole force of her being would naturally be poured. So that no one in the world needs work more than the woman who does not marry. She wants something to pour herself into. Every human being desires to create, and the atrophy of the creative impulse is one of the worst charges that can be brought against our industrial system. Your energy, your power, can be put into something; but to cut a woman off from marriage, as the war has cut many off, and

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at the same time to deny her interesting, hard work, is to leave her a maimed and discontented being. It is just that every man who has given up a post to go to the war should be restored to his work, as far as is possible; if it is impossible, then surely something better. But it is not just legislatively to close the door permanently against women who have come into a new industry, and proved their capacity for it.

How then shall we get over the sore struggle between the expensive man and the cheap labour of women? I should like to rely upon what, I suppose, if I were a scientist, I should call natural selection. To legislate against women being allowed in a certain industry—yes, or through your Trade Unions to refuse their admission—is to create in their minds an intolerable soreness, the feeling that you are simply afraid of their competition, that you won't have them there, although you know they can do the work, because you don't desire they shall compete with you, and you are prepared to use your power to keep them out. But if you use that power to insist that every woman who in any industry is the equal of a man in productive capacity shall receive an equal rate of pay, you give free play to the process of natural selection by which the right people will go into the right work. Before the war, an employer was, on the one hand, bribed to employ women by being able to give them a lower rate than they were worth; and, on the other hand, he was terrorised into not employing them by the threats of the Union, if it was a well organised industry. Strikes have actually taken place on this point of the admission of women. That has happened, for instance, more than once in the printing industry. In Edinburgh women compositors were introduced, and given permanent work, composing being one of the things for which women are well suited.

Throughout the evidence given before the War Cabinet Committee there runs the almost unvarying statement that in really heavy work a woman is not the equal of a man. Obviously you cannot arrange, as some people guilelessly suggest, that all the heaviest part of the work should be done by men and all the lighter by women. You must take the worker as an all-round factor in his industry. But if you rule out this factor of the difference between the wage of the two, you will, I believe, very generally get the employer to employ a man, because on the whole the man is more adequate to work entailing the heavier kinds of labour, and at the same time get out of the minds of the women the sense of injustice which is done when they are shut off from work, not because they are inefficient but simply because they are women.

The objections to this rather drastic proposal are, I suppose, roughly two: first, that the woman will thereby be as effectively driven out as if she were legislated against; secondly, that it would be an injustice to the man, because he, as a general rule, has a wife and family to support, and the woman who, under this proposal would get the same rate of pay, is not so situated. On these two points let me say first, that the proposal would,

in fact, drive out the women just as effectively as if they were legislated against. I don't think any woman is more desirous than I am of seeing women doing every kind of work for which they are fitted ; but I am persuaded that if, when you pay men and women alike, women are driven out, it will be because the work is really better done by men, and in that case it is for the advantage both of men and women, that is for the whole community, that the men should do it. It is because I believe in a certain difference between men and women and their doing the work they can do best that I advocate absolutely equal rates of pay. There are certain broad lines of distinction. We do not do certain things as well as you ; you do not do certain things as well as we. There is no great competition on the part of men to become sick-nurses ; but we do not demand legislation to keep you out of it. We know, indeed, that there are certain cases in which a male nurse is a necessity. It seems to me that the process of natural selection by which the gifts required for sick-nursing are more often found in women is perfectly sufficient to regulate the number of men and the number of women in it. The same thing applies to the teaching profession. With very little children and with girls alone, the woman is better ; for classes of boys a male teacher is usually, not always, the more efficient. Although the principle of equal pay for equal work may operate harshly in certain instances, I am persuaded this is the only sound line along which to advance. The second objection to the proposal I have cited is that it would be an injustice to men who have a wife and family to support. I do not believe anything will meet that difficulty except some scheme of the nature of the endowment of motherhood ; and I believe that is coming. Already the Labour Party have endorsed the payment of pensions to women whose husbands are dead or been permanently disabled ; in order that they may be able to bring up their children. And the War Cabinet, I notice, reports that there should be a payment in connection with the continuance of the race, in other words, the payment of children's allowances to *married men* ! Really, gentlemen, who is it that does that particular bit of work ? It seems to me we are going back to the state of affairs in some remote island in the South Seas where the custom was observed under which, when a woman had a child, her husband went to bed and received the visits of his friends. On the same principle, in this country, a little while ago, when a woman had a baby, her husband received thirty shillings. Well, you have to correct that. Let the person who does the work get the recognition of the State for the value of her work ; and you will then not only equalise the men and women in the labour market, making of marriage a real partnership in very sense of the word, the man bringing to the home what he has earned and the woman bringing what she has earned ; but you will also remove some soreness. If a woman wants any kind of economic independence, wants to have any money of her own, she is forced to go out and earn it. Can't you make it possible to give a married woman in the

home an equal economic independence? Why should the one doing the most important work in the world be the one penalised? Ought it not to be recognised that this is a "service rendered to the State in connection with the continuance of the race," and that this burden does fall, on the whole, more on the woman in the home than on the man?

None of these problems can ever be solved in a spirit of sex antagonism or bitterness or suspicion. May I appeal to you to realise that the people whom you are dealing with are not only or solely tiresome, difficult blacklegs in the industrial market, but human beings, with all the desire for independence, the variety of temperament, the interest in life, the creative power, that belong to human beings? May I remind you that one of the most striking remarks in the report which I quoted is as follows: "Among the trade unions represented were many that included women in their membership, but there were no women representatives, and in the whole course of the discussions no questions were raised from the woman's point of view." Isn't that a very severe indictment against the tribunal which decided the conditions under which women should work during the war? There was represented on the one side the Treasury and on the other side the men of the Trades Unions, the consultations extended over days and weeks; and in the end this War Cabinet Committee reports that in the whole course of the discussions no questions were raised from the women's point of view! It is with the desire that the thing should be considered from the woman's point of view on all sides interested, the desire to treat these things with loyalty, with honesty, with justice—justice that will remove bitterness—that I plead. For, believe me, the women will not be slow, indeed have not been slow, to make any sacrifice required for the good of the community: perhaps because they have the little community, the children, in their hands, they find it very easy to care for the kind of world we are going to build hereafter. Appeal to them on grounds of justice, of the good of the community as a whole. I believe they will not be slow to respond. But do not let it be said in the future, when we look back on the way these questions were settled, that, in the whole course of the discussions, no questions were raised from the point of view of women.

Next week: "Workers' Control," by Mr. Frank Hodges, M.P.

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