Woman Handicapped

The Frailest Sex Lacks Nothing in Patriotism, But Needs More “Days Off”—Endurance in Munition Plants

By George MacAdam

NOW that as a nation we are settling down to the task of developing our maximum efficiency, both military and industrial, we are no longer to take a fitting part in the great war, we begin to hear talk of munition workers, a considerable volume of women to fill the ranks of industry, and industry is never very far behind any development of the call of men to the front.

The talk of putting women in men's places, and the demand that they receive equal pay therein, either of which would have had the advocates of woman's rights for generations, is today received without any suspicion, and, so far as public opinion is concerned, without any dissonance.

The foundation for this quiescence was undoubtedly laid by the suffragettes, who, in their long, many-mouthed campaign throughout the land, have achieved to convert us from the old orthodoxy that woman's place is in the home, to the creed of the feminist that sex is an artificial and tyrannical delimitation in both politics and industry, and that woman's place is wherever she chooses it to be.

These men can contrive with her great force, and its effects upon man's work for its strength, with its drafts upon man's power for its strength, with its drafts upon woman's strength.

The main idea of this was that women of the women of Europe, particularly the women of England, were accomplishing in their new fields, how adequately they were taking the place of the absent men, but it led to one conclusion—that woman had at last been test ed out in industry and had more than met the test, that experience had put its unobstructable U. I. S. upon the head of the feminist, that sex was indeed but an artificial and tyrannical delimitation in either politics or industry.

There recently arrived in this country, however, a series of pamphlets which gives an accurate amount of variance with all the others that we have received since the women of England took to war work. This tells us that, judged not as self-sacrificing patriots but simply as women, in the industrial machines, women are inferior to men. In short, it brings us back to the old idea.

These pamphlets are reports made by the British Health of Munition Workers Committee which was appointed in September, 1915, by the Minister of Munitions, to study the consequences of the Home Secret ary.

The committee has twice mem orandums show that, compared with man, woman has less strength, less endurance, and tends to become physically and mentally different from man, is subject to cutaneous and neural disorders, and in particular to “impairment of mental efficiency” that are “reducing or at least accentuated” by various forms of work.

The committee concludes that, “the lifting and carrying of heavy weights, many hours, violence, or physically unsuitable movements in the operation of the factories, are highly provocative causes of trouble to women and girls.”

“Thus the work is unsatisfactory,” says a memorandum, “that there is a significant increase of cutaneous and neural disorders among women in factories which call for prevention and treatment.”

The committee also states that the relative merits of man and women as “human machines,” the “present condition of the women and the circumstances of the women and girls.”

Up to the present the committee has issued 100,000,000. These deal with matters of general interest, such as welfare supervision, Sunday labor, hours of work, employment of women, cars, and of technical interest, such as ventilation, lighting, eye strain, candle construction, and so on. From these memorandums I have extracted and condensed only those parts which have a bearing upon the industrial efficiency of women and upon the effect of labor on women’s health and on their national survival, both present and prospective.

There is nothing partisan, nothing emotional in these memorandums. They present a grim picture of a nation which is striving every nerve to overcome the foe. Just as England necessitates the necessity of using up its man power on the battle front, so it recognizes the necessity of using up its woman power in industry. England recognizes that more than ever in the past, women should contribute, to a great extent, the welfare of their racial future, the welfare of their children, their race, their future, and more than ordinary is threatened by conditions of employment.

But in the awful emergency that now faces England, “maximum output” is the watchword in the management of its munition factories, and as in these memorandums we find the individual, both man and woman, dealt with as a “human machine.” Health and welfare are of prime importance, in that “the maximum output must be secured and maintained for any length of time.”

The committee took a look in every industry for what they describe as “maximum output,” and that would be possible, and for the time being, to go by the board. Everything must yield to “the imperative necessity of war.”

Judged as a “human machine,” these

duties of mental fatigue are probably better accomplished in women. The strain strain well borne by the ordinary woman is that of corresponding vigour and physique. It is quite possible that a woman can work such a strain well; and the young girls should be relieved from those duties to which they are now wholly exposed.

Adult male workers are almost universally on double shifts. The committee found that, "adult male workers are almost universally on double shifts. The committee found that, "while they are on double shifts, their health is not good; while they are on single shifts, their health is not good."

Some very interesting data as to the relative industrial efficiency of the sexes are to be found in a special report made by H. V. Tetlow on the efficiency of labor in various types of labor investigated into, viz., the “moderately heavy,” “heavily heavy,” “light,” and “very light.” As the result of the statistics upon which the report is based, the statistics show that moderately heavy and heavy work are not well suited to women; that the “light” type had a greater output of work and was more easily adapted to the work; and that “moderate heavy” and “very light” types of labor "should evidently be confined to women and girls.

Dr. Vernon: At one steel factory where the male oper atives were being largely replaced by women, we found a good output in most operations, they performed very well about half as much as the men did in that particular occupation, with a better profit. It is quite possible that, turning aluminium fuse bodies is another occupation that the investigator believed the female operatives standing all day at capistan lathes. In the period under observation, there was no evidence of “broken time” and “sickness.” He says that the end of his work, but that when engaged on the “moderate” “light” type of work, the female operatives who put in less than 6 hours per week on the 6-hour job, and if so, more did, as because of the of heavy work for sex, there was no evidence of heavy work for sex.

Thus in a seven-week period no less than 15.4 per cent. of the works were short, averaging 36.9 hours, and 4.5 per cent. of them were absent work.

Dr. Vernon continues: “There can be no doubt that the extraordinary consonance of their short and absent work was due to the physical strain and discomfort of the strain of the heavy labor, for women their work was very different from that of the men who showed only about 3.5 months as many hours of

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Man's Labor Best, Says British Commission

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twelve-hour day, and over an hour out of the ten-hour day, in addition to the hour or so of compulsory rest required for attention to their lathes at the hands of the toolsetters.

To investigate more closely the effect of long hours upon the health of operatives the committee instituted a series of intensive inquiries among munition workers. At the time of preparing the particular memoranda in which this investigation is mentioned (January, 1916,) only a few returns relating to women operatives had been collected. So far as these returns go, "they do to some extent suggest progressive deterioration of health in proportion as the operatives had been employed for long hours and for long periods." It is important to remember that at the time this "progressive deterioration" was noted the women had been at work in the munition factories only a little more than a year.

"The imperative necessity of war" has revived, after almost a century of disuse, the night employment of women in factories. Prohibited for the textile trades by the factory legislation of 1844, it disappeared gradually in Great Britain, and also in other countries, until it was banished by international agreement from the twelve European countries which signed the convention drawn up at the Berne Conference in 1906. The agreement was based upon the results of inquiries into the effects, economical, physical, and moral, of night work for women. To quote:

"Now once more all these half-forgotten facts are in evidence in the munition factories. In a working class home the difficulty in obtaining rest by day is great; quiet cannot easily be secured; and the mother of a family cannot sleep while the claims of children and home are pressing upon her; the younger unmarried women are tempted to take the daylight hours for amusement or shopping; moreover, sleep is often interrupted in order that the midday meal may be shared."

"Attention is called to the fact that the hours between 3 A.M. and 6 A.M., and 4 A.M. and 7 A.M., coincide with the period when, apart from industrial fatigue, vitality is low."

"A few women of rare physique withstand the strain sufficiently to maintain a reasonable output, but the flagging effect of the majority is not only unproductive at the moment, it has its influence also upon subsequent output, which suffers as in a vicious circle. There seems little appetite for the meal which occurs between 1 A.M. and 3 A.M., and it is often of a most unsatisfactory character."

"Instances are mentioned of women so fatigued that they wouldn't make the effort to go from their work to the mess-room."

"Welfare officers are of use to workers of both sexes in such things as the engagement of new labor, the keeping of a register of available houses and lodgings, advising the management of a scarcity of these or of the inadequacy of transit facilities, assisting workers in regard to feeding arrangements, &c."

"In addition to the matters which concern women workers equally with their male comrades, there are certain other matters—particularly of conduct and discipline—in which helpful oversight is especially needed in the case of women and girls, if the highest and enduring efficiency is to be attained."

"An example of such matters, the committee would mention the various questions raised in respect of the conduct of foremen toward women workers; of the character and behavior of fellow workers; of the maintenance of suitable and sufficient sanitary accommodations; of the worker's own state of health; of her capacity to withstand the physical strain and stress of work; of her power to endure long hours, overtime, or night work."

"Of the effect upon the home and family of woman's entry into munition work the committee speaks with blunt directness and a grim acceptance of "The imperative necessity of war." It says:

"While the urgent necessity for women's work remains, and while the mothers' time and the time of the elders is largely given to the making of munitions, the home and the younger children must inevitably suffer. Where home conditions are bad, as they frequently are; where a long working day is aggravated by long hours of travel, and where, in addition, housing accommodation is inadequate, family life is degraded beyond recognition."

"Clearly everything it is possible to do should be done," continues the report, "to reconcile the mother's conflict of interests between her duties to her home and her children and her work on munitions. Wherever other labor is available the employment of mothers with infants is to be deprecated, as is also that of the mother of any young family."

"It must not be inferred that there is any disposition to belittle the services that the women of England are rendering in this crucial hour. In various places in the memorandum the committee state that "they appreciate the exceptional importance of women's labor in the present emergency." Nor is there any lack of appreciation of the splendid patriotism that the women have displayed.

"The engagement of women in the manufacture of munitions presents many features of outstanding interest. Probably the most striking is the universal character of their response to the country's call for their help."

"* * * * In the character of the response lies largely the secret of its industrial success, which is remarkable. The fact that women and girls of all types and ages have pressed and are pressing into industry shows a spirit of patriotism which is as finely maintained as it was quickly shown. Conditions of work are accepted without question and without complaint which, immediately detrimental to output, would if continued be ultimately disastrous to health."

"It is, asserts the committee, for the nation to safeguard the devotion of its workers by its foresight and watchfulness lest irreparable harm be done to body and mind both in this generation and the next."