



in John Van Vorst and Marie Van Vorst

The Woman Who Toils.

Being the Experiences of Two Ladies as Factory Girls, 1903

PREFATORY LETTER FROM THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Written after reading Chapter III. when published serially

WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON, October 18, 1902.

My Dear Mrs. Van Vorst:

I must write you a line to say how much I have appreciated your article, "The Woman Who Toils." But to me there is a most melancholy side to it, when you touch upon what is fundamentally infinitely more important than any other question in this country—that is, the question of race suicide, complete or partial.

An easy, good-natured kindness, and a desire to be "independent"—that is, to live one's life purely according to one's own desires—are in no sense substitutes for the fundamental virtues, for the practice of the strong, racial qualities without which there can be no strong races—the qualities of courage and resolution in both men and women, of scorn of what is mean, base and selfish, of eager desire to work or fight or suffer as the case may be provided the end to be gained is great enough, and the contemptuous putting aside of mere ease, mere vapid pleasure, mere avoidance of toil and worry. I do not know whether I most pity or most despise the foolish and selfish man or woman who does not understand that the only things really worth having

in life are those the acquirement of which normally means cost and effort. If a man or woman, through no fault of his or hers, goes throughout life denied those highest of all joys which spring only from home life, from the having and bringing up of many healthy children, I feel for them deep and respectful sympathy—the sympathy one extends to the gallant fellow killed at the beginning of a campaign, or the man who toils hard and is brought to ruin by the fault of others. But the man or woman who deliberately avoids marriage, and has a heart so cold as to know no passion and a brain so shallow and selfish as to dislike having children, is in effect a criminal against the race, and should be an object of contemptuous abhorrence by all healthy people.

Of course no one quality makes a good citizen, and no one quality will save a nation. But there are certain great qualities for the lack of which no amount of intellectual brilliancy or of material prosperity or of easiness of life can atone, and which show decadence and corruption in the nation just as much if they are produced by selfishness and coldness and ease-loving laziness among comparatively poor people as if they are produced by vicious or frivolous luxury in the rich. If the men of the nation are not anxious to work in many different ways, with all their might and strength, and ready and able to fight at need, and anxious to be fathers of families, and if the women do not recognize that the greatest thing for any woman is to be a good wife and mother, why, that nation has cause to be alarmed about its future.

There is no physical trouble among us Americans. The trouble with the situation you set forth is one of character, and therefore we can conquer it if we only will.

Very sincerely yours,

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.