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**Two Addresses**

DELIVERED BEFORE

**The Portland, Oregon, Branch**

OF THE

**National Consumers' League**

BY

**Reverend Dr. Stephen S. Wise**

AND BY

**Mr. D. Solis Cohen**

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THE PORTLAND, OREGON, BRANCH

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NATIONAL CONSUMERS' LEAGUE

BY

REVEREND DR. STEPHEN S. WISE

*Rabbi, Temple Beth  
Israel*

AND BY

MR. D. SOLIS COHEN

PORTLAND, OREGON

*October 20, 1906*

*Portland's most  
distinguished Jewish  
citizen*



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## ADDRESS BEFORE THE CONSUMERS' LEAGUE.

By Stephen S. Wise.

The work of the Consumers' League could not be, save for that stirring of the conscience which is moralizing human relations, which, putting it differently, is ethicizing the consciousness of the social bond. In two widely different ways, converging withal to the goal held in view by the Consumers' League, does this ethical socialization of the race express itself. Spreading from day to day is the recognition of the truth that much of what we need in daily life is made by men, by women, and, also, by children, and not by *hands*. The use of the term, hands, significantly ignores their human possessors. In one word, we are beginning tardily and hesitatingly to acknowledge that we are served not by things but by beings, not by hands but by fellow humans. Behind the widespread use in other days of the term, hand, for operative, lay the denial of the humanhood of the workers. The gospel of the Consumers' League is based upon the core-truth that the workers of the race are our brothers and sisters. Whether we are worthy to be considered their brothers and sisters depends upon whether we choose to rise to the height of a brotherly and sisterly attitude toward those of our brothers and sisters to whom by reason of their daily service on our behalf we are most indebted.

They ask not charity but justice. They demand no more; we dare give no less,—than that justice, the very name of which has become sacramental in our age, that justice cosmic and potent, which must needs supersede charity, parochial and futile. In the presence of the glaring, yea, tragic inequalities and inequities which are the iniquities of injustice, we would do what in us lies to serve with the justice which is their due those whose life and labor are given to the serving of you and me. Would not the seemingly inmedicable woe of the social order find some remedy, if not redress, if we should give ourselves to the task of carrying



out inexorably and therefore in the end universally the moving principle of the Consumers' League? The Consumers' League insists that the things by us used and purchased shall be produced under conditions, which ensure the physical health, the moral wellbeing and the measurably just economic treatment of the world's workers. Even though a crusade on behalf of the gospel of the Consumers' League would not end the reign of wrong, surely a sign of the dawning of the kingdom of justice upon earth were visible in the first serious endeavor of the reapers of the world's harvest to safeguard the weal of the world's sowers. Moreover with the workers, whose existence as humans was once but faintly felt, but is acknowledged at last, some of us, not all of us by any means, are ready to admit that we must deal humanly. They are our fellow-beings, fellows as well as beings. To deal humanly with them is to do them justice. To do justice is the supreme thing, prior even to loving-mercy, saith the Hebrew Prophet.

Reinforcing the aim to secure livable conditions for the producers or the world's workers is the recognition of the truth that money may be tainted in the spending as truly as in the getting. Money must not be gotten or gained without regard to the rights of others. The self-regarding attitude in the getting or the using of wealth is conscienceless and unjust. Man must be other-regarding, is the dictum of social ethics, in his efforts to acquire substance and in the manner and the method of his expenditure. It is a new thought, born amid the conditions of the industrial era, that some things money or its possessor dare not buy, the things in the making of which have been consumed men's ill-requited toil, woman's easily depleted strength, and the life-blood of little children. Men may no longer pay their money and take their choice if such choice lie between justice to the workers and injustice. The invasion by ethics of the relation between the producer and the consumer means that the purchaser must have something more than money—conscience, the social conscience, which looks to the welfare of the social body. Henry Demarest Lloyd has said this incomparably well: "The sentiment of humanity has widened until we are beginning to be sensitive to blood shed by bargain-hunters, and the factory acts are but a late carrying into a broader field the same duty of protecting the weak with which we charge the policeman in the street \* \* \* \*  
When we go to the 'bargain' counters to buy the bodies of little

children, starving women bleached into snow-white tissue for our backs—'goods' that ought to be called 'bads'—we are shoplifters in the worst sense of that word." Was not Emerson right in holding that the millenium will come, when in a transaction between two men each is as concerned that the other be fairly dealt with as he is that he himself be not the loser. In the contract which is implicit between producer and consumer whenever a purchase is made, the consumer is coming to feel it to be his duty to see to it that the producer has received a living wage and has performed his or her labor under conditions which guarantee the physical health of the producer and the consumer alike and the moral health of the worker as well.

No less admirable in method than in spirit is the effort of the Consumers' League. The very essence of its appeal is for justice to the workers of every kind and class, but it employs no weapons of offense even toward the most offending. The benignant weapon to which it resorts in defence of the economically defenseless is the white list. Without express disapproval of such producers and middlemen as are indifferent to the welfare of their employees, this commends to the thoughtful such business establishments as deal equitably with the men and women of their working forces. Nor can the most compromising idealist in reason find fault with the League for striving after amelioration of the worker's lot through the practice of such methods as appeal to the sense of prudence of the employer of labor, who, as a result of the practices of the League, finds himself rewarded with approval and economic furtherance. While in the last analysis, as it should be, the Consumers' League must rest its case with the conscience of the nation, it is performing no unimportant service in bringing home to buyer and seller alike that an economic difficulty can not be solved save through the agency of economics.

From one point of view, the Consumers' League builds upon the most powerful of all human motives, man's will to see to it that justice is done to his fellow man. Again, it appeals to a motive only slightly less potential than enlightened unselfishness, and that is enlightened selfishness. Great indeed is the value of its testimony to the effectiveness of every appeal to the instinct of self-regard or self-preservation. Is it not of immeasurable value to the cause of righteousness to have it brought home to men and women with unanswerable emphasis that enlightened selfishness and enlightened unselfishness must needs pursue a



common end, and that, far from the interests of producer and consumer clashing, they are and of right ought to be one and inseparable. If self-regard urge us to scrutinize the sources of our supplies in food and clothing, because of the peril to the consumer incident to unclean and unhealthful methods of production, it is but a single step to that concern for the toilers, housed amid unsanitary and unhealthful conditions, which is the vitalizing principle of the Consumers' League. The high art of other-regardfulness will be developed to the extent to which the science of self-regard gains recognition. To the question of the ages, "Am I my brother's keeper?" the women, banded together under the aegis of the Consumers' League answer with the resistless strength of conviction, "Yes, we are the keepers of our brother and our sister, and, above all, we are the keepers of our little brother and sister, the child toiler, suffered by man's inhumanity to toil for and in the place of man. Carlyle tells the tale of a woman, sick to death in a Glasgow alley, begging for the help which men withheld from her. No one thought of her as a sister. But she died, and the dread typhus which killed her spread through the neighborhood and counted its victims by the score. Thus, does Carlyle grimly argue, did she prove her sisterhood to those who had denied her. Shall men and women wait for such ghastly reminders of the oneness of the race? The Consumers' League would not render itself immune from contagion from the stricken and sisterless woman, but would sister and succor the woman-worker and the man-worker, and the child-worker, by such means as can alone avail,—through justice and the love which upon justice waits.

Apart from the eminent value of the work of the Consumers' League in many directions, the warfare waged by it against child labor with high zeal and consummate wisdom is its chiefest glory. The Consumers' League declares, in the words of a prophet of our day, that the model merchant may not "tie thousands of children to his wheel and return them to the world dwarfed forever in body and mind, robbed of their too little of the joy, freshness and sweetness of life, to increase his too much."

Surely it should not be needful to plead the cause of the Consumers' League as long as the Consumers' League pleads the cause of the child-slave. The day is not far off when upon the statute books of the nation there shall be written such laws as

will strike off the shackles of the child-slave, hundreds of thousands of them in the mills and factories and shops and mines and tenements. Let the sociologist and economist declaim against child labor on the ground of the peril to the state, which inheres in the threatened impairment of the fibre of its citizens tomorrow. But do you, of the Consumers' League, preach the tidings of salvation to the child laborer, even to the least of these, on other and higher grounds. Proclaim ye the rights of the child citizen of the United States, inalienable in name, but alienated in deed, to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Not for the sake of the nation, nor for the sake of future generations, but for the sake of the child today, lift up your voices in protest against the unspeakable shame of child-slavery in the land of the free. Tolstoi said that the secret of Garrison's lifelong battle and ultimate triumph was his choice ever and everywhere of the highest possible ground. Do you stand upon the highest possible ground in pleading for the voiceless children of toil, resting your case upon the broad and sure foundation of liberty, justice and righteousness.

Let us, in closing, dwell for a moment upon the life of a woman, who may be said to have been the inspiration and mainstay of the Consumers' League movement. "Woman of sorrows," splendidly borne, Josephine Shaw Lowell was in a unique sense the civic and social conscience of the community in which she lived. Her noblest nobleness lay in the high and serene joy with which she took upon herself and throughout her lifetime bore the duty of sister to the race. Too lofty to stoop to the condescension of soulless almsgiving, too lowly to bend to the patronage of earth's disinherited, the ceaseless battle of her life, wherein she spared neither herself nor the enemy, was on behalf of justice for the wronged and oppressed. To this high cause she hallowed her days as truly as her gallant brother and heroic husband. When New York heard of her passing, men and women felt that none there was to take her place, and yet that her place could be filled if but men and women strove to fill their own places in the ranks of the army of soldiers for the right. That woman is the conscience of the race it is for you to prove anew, as did your sister, Mrs. Lowell, who was "conscience incarnate." The test of the older civilizations of the race was their treatment of women. A test of our present-day civilization is woman's care for the race.



ADDRESS BEFORE THE CONSUMERS' LEAGUE.

By Mr. D. Solis Cohen.

As I speak to those directly interested in your organization it is unnecessary to refer to its purposes in detail. It is a serious problem which you, as an association, confront, more serious than many of your members imagine; more so, perhaps, than many of your members in this city can appreciate. God and Nature have been—are—so lavish in the blessings bestowed upon our favored locality that our bitterness might elsewhere seem sweet. Your local task, even carrying your purpose to its ultimate, is comparatively easy. By determined effort you could at any time, if necessary, compel the adoption of reasonable regulations as to help and conditions in the stores of your own city. Decency of environment and recognition of the fact that a "shop girl" is a human being may be enforced by the "help" alone. We have not reached here that extreme of competitive penury which palsies heart and tongue and makes dependent labor a trembling slave. We have not the conditions which make the sweat shop, and, therefore, we have not the sweat shop. We do not see before our eyes the horrors which are the visible cost of competition nor do we see our unfortunate fellow beings ground daily before us between the revolving wheels of "all the traffic will bear."

Cost of competition, and—all the traffic will bear. These are the twin heads of the monster problem which you attack, if your purpose and sympathy are broad as I surmise, and not confined to your local surroundings. Cost of competition! It is the cry of the children; the hacking cough of the festered and poisoned lungs; the blindness of the exhausted, overworked eye; the brutality born of a search for forgetfulness in drink; the ever-recruited army marching towards the brothel and the jail; the weary, puny, miserable life that comes to a joyless and a sunless world; the degradation of American aspiration; the ulcer eating so deeply into our body politic that the sores have become loathsome to the sight and pollution to the touch.



All the traffic will bear! No thought of who may be ground and crushed and maimed and slaughtered; all that the traffic will bear, that the gatherers of millions may enjoy regal splendors and adulation; that palaces may be reared, that daughters may buy titles, and the sensuality of sons shame the immoralities of history; that functions costing more in a night than would keep a hundred families in comfort for a year may give avenue of display to the genius of frivolity and callousness; that colossal fortunes may control, monopolize and manipulate industrial necessities and regulate the pittance for which the multitude may compete. The blood of Abel calling from the ground. There is a murder which is not of the club, the pistol or stiletto; a martyrdom which is not of the stake or gibbet,—and we dare no longer answer in the formula of selfishness: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

The worker in the sweat shop must live, or strive for life. The miserable child, who knows not what a smile is like, clings to life. The aged, wornout worker, without hope or friends, still fights off dissolution. Can you snatch from the fevered hands and racked bodies the needle and the thread which means life? Putting your label upon goods made in certain factories is but scratching on the surface, mountains high above the vital spot, I am here to dig just a little, and as needs must be, in merely a suggestive way.

In New York City in an area somewhat less than that of the business center of Portland, west of the Willamette, are living today more people than are today living in the entire state of Oregon. Three-fourths of these people, men, women and children, are dependent for sustenance, shelter and covering upon what their fingers can earn for them day by day, hour by hour. The principal market for their service and product is the department store, which practically controls all the retail business of the country, making all production subservient to its needs and requirements. These institutions—I speak of department stores generally, not particularizing or differentiating,—have grown colossal through your approval and support. The specialty store, the merchant of moderate means, the young mercantile aspirant, the independent middle man and the allied industries by these supported, are practically wiped out. Through your approval and support, the octopus gradually absorbs, enslaves, or crushes them. Those still struggling against them do so under

a most depressing handicap. The gist and substance of the story upon which these stores have builded, and still are building their commanding patronage, is that they are selling you the bulk of their goods below value—giving you something for nothing. Take these items, all from this week’s papers: \$50 suits for \$30; \$2.00 silks for 95 cents; \$1.50 gloves for 68 cents. You know that this is not true, yet you crowd and buy. Still—though false in form—there is a serious underlying truth. I have heard shoppers, looking at displays of white garments in the windows, say: “Why I could not have it made for that money,” or “the material would cost me that much”; yet the proprietors are making their full and ample profit, and *somebody* makes the goods. Yes, factories conducted for the purpose of producing goods to be used by these stores for the special sales which so delight you are the hot-beds of the system you officially deplore; goods made under conditions which will preserve to the store,—the first necessity—its usual and accustomed profit and yet attract you by a seeming cheapness. Who slaves? Who gives eyes and nerves and heart and soul and youth and hope and grey hairs and bitterness to this result? Not the factory boss; not the storekeeper. Can you wonder that the sweat shop grows with the department store, and that its conditions deteriorate as the stores wax stronger? The more centralized the demand for labor, for service, for work, the more helpless becomes the worker. How true are the words of William Morris, that helpful heart which all too soon ceased its beatings of human love and service:

“Society is now divided between two classes,—those who monopolize all the means of the production of wealth save one, and those who possess nothing except that one, the Power of Labor. That power of labor is useless without the help of the other means of production. It must, therefore, apply to the owners of the means for fructifying labor for leave to work that it may live. The possessing class are quite prepared to grant this leave, but the privilege enables them to *compel* the non-possessing class to sell them their labor power on terms which insure the continuance of their monopoly.”

The sweat shop is one evidence of this truth; let us look at others. I say let us look at others, but you cannot look. We read, we hear of the horrors of the sweat shop system; the cost



of competition in human life and divine hope. Our hearts are filled with pity, sympathy, indignation, all more or less transitory. We feel that we should like to aid, relieve, uplift, wipe out the apparent injustice of it all. Yet we know little of the real truth. We have but a conception from what we read and hear. I have read of railroad wrecks, of the killed and maimed, shuddering at the fearsome record. I was called to a wreck a few years ago and stood in the midst of the reality. How different from the reading of it! The groans, the blood, the dissevered limbs, crushed heads, the ghastly face of death—to read, to hear is one thing; to see, to know is quite another. Take your station at a down town New York corner at evening time, Canal Street and the Bowery, Third Avenue and Grand Street, Sixth Avenue and Fourteenth Street. Trains thundering through the air above you and rumbling in the ground beneath you, passing with electric speed over the surface before you; a whole world moving, moving, moving, on the ground and above and below it and still not space nor room enough. Gaze in wondering thought as the thousands upon thousands of women wage earners after their hard day's labor rush past, crowded and crowding, pushing and pushed, crushing and crushed in the maelstrom of the great city of magnificence and misery. From every story of stone and iron buildings around the streams of humanity issue. The young girl just offering her life to the slavery of the needle and machine, and the tragic pinched and time-worn worker who is counting in terror the passage of each day, as it brings palpably nearer the moment when the great heartless demon of utility will pronounce her useless and cast her out. The gay and careless, living in the passing day—the plain and plodding with the seriousness of life as an enveloping garment, never removed, the worker for ribbons and personal finery, the sturdy soul with old folks to care for or young ones to feed. And further up town the same great crowds, living machines from behind the counters, some with the flush of youth yet undisturbed, unmarred by toil; some with the pitiful paleness telling of long hours, wearied feet, vexatious customers and captious floor walkers; some with the grey hair of long service, the lack-lustre eye of vanished hope, each one, up-town and downtown, with a life story apart from every other story, yet all within the spreading, grasping tentacles of the same octopus, from whose hold so very few escape save in moral or physical death.

And one more evidence. Have you read the new "Cry of the children," pitiful as Mrs. Browning's weeping words? Do you know that in the mills where today are manufactured the muslins from which are made even the garments which bear your label there is a slavery cruel as that of the coal mines? That children four and six years old slave at the groaning wheels and on night shifts? Truly you but scratch the surface. Listen to but two brief extracts from Mrs. Van Voorst's articles:

"The facts of the case as regards the law are these: Each state being free to impose upon manufacturers what regulations it pleases, there is a variety of labor problems to choose from in studying any single American industry. Not having unlimited time in which to make a general investigation, I selected as centres of observation for these studies of child labor: Maine, where there are good laws poorly enforced; New Hampshire, where there is no factory inspection; Alabama, where the laws are poor and enforcement poorer; Georgia, where there are no laws at all. I confined my visits almost entirely to woolen and cotton mills, because more children are employed there than in the more complicated manufactures, and because, also, by making a comparative study of the same industry under different conditions it was possible to arrive at some general conclusions regarding it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Then hastily I put the question: "How old are you?"

"Goin' on tweayulve," he responded. "I've been workin' abeaout four years. I come in here when I was seven."

"Ever been to school?"

He shook his head. "No, meaym. I don't know if I'd like it. I reckon I'd soon work here as be in school."

"How many hours do you work here a day?"

"From six until six."

The noise of the machinery was distracting and as I bent over him to catch his answers, piped in a shrill, nasal voice, I could not but notice how fine and delicate his features were; the deep eyes and high-arched nose, the slender lips, were placed in the oval face as features only can be placed by the unerring mould that breeding casts. Observing also the miniature shoulders that seemed to have been oppressed by some iron hand, I said:

"Don't you get very tired?"

There was a pause which made more marked the honesty of his response:



"Why, I don't pay much attention whether I get tired or not."

"You have an hour at noon?"

Here he pushed the cloth cap onto the back of his head, and sent a long, wet, black line from his mouth to the floor.

"Well," he said, (it was the man who spoke, his arms akimbo, his body warped in the long tussle for existence), "they aim to give us an hour, but we don't never get more'n twenty-five minutes. We all live right up there." He nodded toward the square of houses clustered around the mud-puddle on the brink of the slovenly hillside.

Here the bobbins began to revolve slowly the spindles to whirl, and the boy started back to his work.

"You can't loaf much," he explained, "when the machine's a-runnin'."

Up and down he plied on his monotonous beat—lone little figure. Ah, how far some of us could go if we worked thus in tacit submission, without stopping even to question whether or not we were tired!

Evidently waiting to join in the conversation, a small boy, I noticed, was standing beside me. His dark eyes sparkled merrily in his colorless face; he was dirty and covered with lint.

"What's your job?"

"Sweepin'," he grinned.

"How much do you make a day?"

"Twenty cents."

"And how old are you?"

"Seayvun."

The boy at the card machine, making straps for the spindle was "goin' on tayun." He made twenty cents a day. Others I questioned were eight, nine, ten and occasionally there was one as old as twelve.

Some of my Birmingham informants had told me that there were whole families of "dwarfs" who came down from the mountains and took work in the mills, greatly misleading certain visitors who supposed them to be children "under age." As I walked on now through the mills, talking with a twelve-years-old red-headed girl who had been four years at work, my eyes suddenly fell on a strange couple (doubtless, I thought, some of the dwarfs against whom I had been warned). I could not take my attention from the tiniest of the tiny pair; the boy's hands ap-

peared to be made without bones; his thumb flew back almost double as he pressed the cotton to loosen it from a revolving rod in the spinning frame; they no longer moved, those yellow anaemic hands, as though directed in their different acts by a thinking intelligence; they performed mechanically the gestures which had given them their definite form.

The red-headed girl laughed and nodded in the direction of the dwarf. "He's 'most six," she said. "He's been here two years. *He came in when he was 'most four.* His little brother 'most four's workin' here now."

"Yes? Where?"

"Oh, he works on the night shift. He comes in 'bout half-a-past five and stays till six in the mornin'."

Let us briefly conclude. I said my words would be simply suggestive. The department store is with us to stay, to wax stronger and more despotic. Attempts have been made to centralize these great establishments in our large cities under one head. That would create a trust in comparison to which the oil trust and steel trust will be as motes in the sunbeam. The masses of the people will buy where they think they buy cheapest. The pocketbook is a great controller of human sympathy. Manufacturers will procure their materials where they can do so cheapest and mills will produce it at the lowest possible cost. Children may be murdered, body and soul, the girl life may be crushed, the man life brutalized, the sunset of old age made a Dantesque horror. All that is utterly immaterial to corporate greed, individual selfishness and popular carlessness. What then can you do? I have said that I believe your power here in our surroundings and conditions can be made complete.

Here is a field which can be guarded and kept free from the worst features you deplore. You must be in earnest, however, and oppose centralization to centralization. First a branch in every precinct composed of as many women in that precinct as you can personally induce to join you, each precinct reporting to the general ward organization composed of the precincts in the ward, each ward sending its delegates to the general city organization composed of all the wards. Wheels within wheels, it is thus the world moves, the smallest wheel, the precinct organization, keeps the others moving. In precincts must your meetings be held and your recruits gained. With such an organization in time you can keep Portland as clear of extreme evils as



it is today. Now imagine this same principle extended, a north-western organization, a western organization, an eastern, a southern, a great central organization comprising all the large cities of the land. Not a thing of pamphlet and desultory propaganda, but a live, active, purposeful work, controlled by the brainy women of every section. Is there any force that could resist it. Certainly not, if its foundation be laid upon that bed rock of human sympathy—fellowship—the spirit of kinship, of brotherhood and sisterhood. This is the first means towards the ultimate end, and toward this an honest resolve to act, not talk, can do much. Behold our great and beautiful western land—broad as freedom, strong as brotherhood, rich as love, room to make happy and contented homes for millions, and avenues in every direction for development promising independence to intelligent and consistent industry.

To bodily move the crowds from the congested districts, the reeking tenements of the large eastern cities is, of course, impossible, but propaganda rightly directed, aid, advice and encouragement properly and systematically provided, as it could be provided under the organization outlined, would bring family after family to a land of hope. These crowding masses are in absolute ignorance of the promises of your fair skies, they know nothing but their squalid surroundings and the teeming streets from tenement to factory. Here the land cries for workers. It is a stupenduous proposition, but this is the day for great things and for great women to do them.