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Manuscript: The Woman The Tariff and the Quality of Things

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The Union, the Tariff & the Quality of Quality.

It was never so difficult in any country run by machinery, as all our modern countries are, to get cheap and moderate priced clothing which will wear well, as it is today in the United States. One reason for this - not the only one - but one is the high tariff which cuts our wearing clothing off from competition with the old world, where people are trained to believe in quality and demand it; and where manufacturers are not only proud of the quality of what they make, but could not keep their trade if they did not give it.

When the tariff was adopted in the country one of the principles everybody insisted on was it should never be so high as to release our manufacturers from the necessity of making things which would wear as well as they do any where in the world. In many things essential to comfort this has been forgotten. The duties have been so high that competition has been destroyed - the American manufacturer has come to care nothing for durability, but everything for looks - and the American housewife has had to take what she could get for her price. If the prices increase the poor can not afford to go up with it, they must continue to buy a \$12.00 pair of shoes and a \$2.00 hat. The merchant meets this demand by changing not the price, but the quality of the goods: Not long ago I went through a manufactory with a shoe man where 10,000 or more pairs of \$2.50 shoes are turned out every day. The profit on a pair is very small indeed. He told me of the increased cost of every material. Thread cost more, leather and lining are more. He could not make the shoe for \$2.50, but people could only pay \$2.50; therefore it had been necessary to change not the price but the quality of the material. He showed me the leather and linings which he had used in 1900 and which he was using now. They were decidedly inferior. That is the man and woman who buys the \$2.50 shoe is getting a poorer shoe and will have to buy more or go without.

The muslin of which clothing is now made is not as good for the price as ten years ago. The material is more open - that is you are not getting the same number of threads to the square inch as you used to. People complain that the

laundry wears out their cottons and linens and they show their garments full of holes, which they charge on acids used in washing and on rough handling by mangles. Nine cases out of ten - perhaps ninety-nine out of a hundred - the fault was in the cloth. It was little better than cheese cloth when it came from the wash-tub, but it had been so treated that the careless believe it good thick cotton - and so it is thick with stiffening which disappears when it is wet.

The most conspicuous deterioration in quality is in woollen goods. Here we have our most failures in attempting to establish an industry by a high duty. We have been trying for years by taxing wool and woollen goods to supply our market and we are still unable to produce much over 40% of what we use. We probably never could do more if we kept up our present duties, which for fifty years have made us pay fully twice as much for woollen goods as we would pay if there were no duty. Last year in Europe I bought for a \$1.00 a yard goods which would have cost me \$2.50 in New York and I found serge at .67 cents a yard which sells for \$1.37½ here; mohair for 27 cents which retails here for \$1.00. These prices make it impossible for the woman on small means to buy woollen goods any longer. She must take all kinds of substitutes and if you analyse these substitutes, which of course are sold here for "all wool" you will find them practically all cotton. Cheap sweaters; babies shirts; blankets; dress goods; scores of articles which the sales men swears to you are "every stitch wool", if boiled in caustic alkali come out as good as new. If they had been wool nothing would have remained. Now cotton is a useful material; cotton underclothing, if well knit and finished is durable and well-fitting; cotton blankets are useful for summer; cotton worsted makes a good looking suit at the start. But none of these things are warm and none of them look well long. Is there a woman alive who does not want real wool blankets to cover her children in winter; real wool stockings and coats to send them to school in, but there are hundreds of thousands of women in this country today who cannot.

get them. She must take imitations which are mainly cotton. Now this result is almost entirely due to the duties of nearly 100% which we have had to pay on woollens.

It is poor business for any country to take away a necessity of life from the masses of its people, though in doing so it may be able to keep alive a great industry.

The new tariff bill strikes a deadly blow at this great wrong of the poor quality, both in goods and in clothing. When it gives us free wool and reduces the duties on blankets and flannels and dress goods to only about one-third of what it was, it at once begins the restoration of quality. These rates give the world a chance at our trade and the woman can pick and choose and get not only the advantage of competitive prices, but competitive quality. Under this bill cotton manufacturers will have to give more thread and less stiffening to the square inch. They will have to look to the quality of the goods they sell the women for they will have a choice - the choice of the world.

And so for the sake of the woman who rears her babies on a slender purse - that she may have better clothing for them at cheaper prices - as well as for many other sound reasons let us put our shoulders to the Underwood Bill and help shove it through.