

Miscellaneous.

OVERWORK OF CHILDREN IN ENGLAND.

Notwithstanding the exposures heretofore made of the inhuman treatment of very young children by parents and employers in various branches of industry in England, and the attempts to mitigate the evil by legislation, it seems to prevail almost as extensively and with as much cruelty as ever.

The results of these investigations, thus far, are given in the April number of the London Quarterly Review, from which we shall make such extracts as will suffice to give a correct, though far from exhaustive, view of the facts in the case.

The first branch of industry considered, was the celebrated Staffordshire earthenware, with which the name of Wedgwood is connected. In this, more than one-sixth of the workers are children from five to ten years of age, nearly six hundred being not over five years.

Young girls are employed in painting cheap earthenware, and their health was seriously injured by being kept too long at their sedentary work in crowded and ill-ventilated rooms; but the children whose case presented the strongest claims to consideration were the 'mould-runners'; little boys employed to convey the articles turned out by the potter into the stoves—small rooms, thirteen feet square, and from eight to twelve feet high, attached to the workshop. They are fitted with shelves on which moulds with the moist ware arranged upon them are placed, that they may be dried previous to removal.

The practice of dipping the earthenware into a mixture of borax, soda, potash, and carbonate of lead, for glazing it, was also found to be followed by the most fatal consequences. The clothes of the workers were constantly saturated with a poisonous compound, which produced paralysis and epilepsy in adults, and epilepsy in children.

Parliamentary legislation has, however, interposed to protect these victims of parental avarice, and since 1864, no child under thirteen years of age, can be employed in this branch more than half of the working time. The manufacture of Lucifer matches, carried on often with little capital, and with the rudest accommodations, produces the most terrible effects upon the miserable children who are employed in stirring the inflammable and poisonous mixture for a considerable portion of the day.

The phosphorus is thus not only breathed, but absorbed by the clothes, making the children shine like little imps in the dark, and giving them at night a very spectral appearance. It is the process of dipping which chiefly produces the jaw disease, a vapor continually rising from the heated mixture, which the dipper, ignorant of the consequences, unavoidably inhaled. The disease is thus described by a medical practitioner: "It seems to be at first, as one of its names implies, merely a local disease, affecting the jaw-bone; but it causes in all cases, when fully established, great and unbearable pain; lasting, with little or no relief even from sleep, for months or often years; ending with the loss of parts or the whole of one or both jaw-bones, and so to a greater or less degree of the power of mastication, and often in an entire breaking up of the constitution and death."

This business, also has been placed under legislative restriction with three others of minor importance, while others are still the scenes of cruelty and oppression, and slow murder, which the worst Red River cotton plantation could never have rivalled. In lace-making, infants of two years used to be set to work pulling out the threads, and many were found working at three years. This was the case as reported by the Commission of 1842.

"The usual age for children to be set to work is now between nine and ten, but in some private houses as early as five. It is

in the manufacture of pillow or hand made lace, however, that the oppression to which young children are subjected has been most painfully exposed. The business is taught in schools established for the purpose. Six is a common age to begin to learn, but many commence at four and five. The places of work are termed lace-schools, generally rooms in small cottages, with the fire-places stopped up to prevent draught, and without ventilation. The work requiring considerable manual dexterity but very little muscular strength, children are turned very early to profitable account by their parents, who pay a small weekly sum for their instruction and sell the lace made by them. There is nothing more startling and distressing in these reports than the details of the suffering to which these poor children are subjected in learning a business by which they are to earn their livelihood, the wearisome days, sleepless nights and painful exhaustion which manufacture by almost infantile finers involves, and of the physical and moral ruin which soon overtakes little creatures herded together in rooms with scarcely space to move or breathe, and deprived from infancy of every kind of recreation and enjoyment.

"From fifteen to twenty have been found collected in a small, low room, not more than twelve feet square, working for fifteen of the twenty-four hours at an employment exhausting by its monotony, and exposed to every influence that can destroy health. In one school only twenty-five cubic feet of air are found available for each child in a room with its window closed and without ventilation. In some houses, to keep the lace clean, the children sit without shoes in the coldest weather, the floors being of plaster or brick. Although the treatment of the children by the mistresses is said to have improved of late, a long case is resorted to in proportion as the hours of work are protracted, the youngest becoming at length so fatigued as to be 'as uneasy as birds.'"

"The Straw-plait Manufacture is attended with perhaps even greater abuses and physical suffering than that of lace-making. It is carried on under conditions very similar to the pillow-lace manufacture. The age at which children commence their instruction is almost incredibly early; parents in this, as in the lace business, being eager to derive a profit from their children at the first possible moment. Girls only three years old have been found at work, and five seems a common age at which to commence. The parents find out what the physical endurance of their children, when taxed to the utmost, will enable them to accomplish, and they rigidly exact it; they are thus driven to school before a winter's dawn, after having been kept at work throughout the greater part of the previous night. The mortality among these poor overworked children is great, consumption and fever carrying them off at a very early age. The rooms in which the business is taught are excessively small, and the children are packed together in the smallest space, 'like herrings.' An Assistant Commissioner, on his visit to Houghton Regis, saw the little clippers with scissors tied to their waists, and the mistresses had by her side a long stick, which, however, on his entry, she put out of sight. In other places, schools formidable sticks were seen, and the mistresses admitted they were obliged occasionally to use them. In a room ten and a half feet square and between six and seven feet high, forty-two children were found seated with the window shut. The air-space for each of these forty-two children would be exactly eighteen and a half cubic feet, or less than half what one would have if shut up in a box three feet each way.

"The Hosiery Manufacture has engaged the serious attention of the Commission, and it needs to be very strictly regulated. The girls begin 'seaming,'—a process required to complete most of the articles,—as young as five, and instances are known of some having commenced at four. The greatest proportion of this work being done by the wives and children of the men who labor at the frames, the parents are generally alone answerable for overtaxing their children's strength, and depriving them of the necessary amount of rest and sleep. 'Little creatures, four or five years of age,' said a well-informed witness, 'are kept up shamefully late, mothers have been known to pin them to their knees to keep them to their work and prevent their falling down from sleep or exhaustion, and they slap them to keep them awake. A child has so many glove fingers set for it to do before it is allowed to go to bed, and it must do them.' The practice of parents sitting up all night and making their children do the same is said to be far from uncommon."

When we pass from these lighter employments to those seemingly less suitable for children, the various manufactures of metal, the case is not altered. Not only the more delicate branches of these pursuits, but the heavier work at the forge and the anvil, by night and by day, is shared in by boys and girls alike.

Worcestershire and Staffordshire are referred to in the following extract:

"In the blast-furnaces, mills, and forges, great numbers of children and youths are employed in night sets, between 6 P. M. and 6 A. M.; and in the miscellaneous trades overtime is very common, a great number of children working as long as the men, viz. from 6 A. M. to 11 P. M. Little girls are employed in bellows-blowing (very hard work for children) for fourteen hours a day, standing on platforms to enable them to reach the handle of the bellows. An instance is given of a father having worked his three young boys from four in the morning until twelve at night for weeks together, until the other men 'cried shame upon him.' Overwork is systematic; 1200 boys under fifteen, and 2400 youths between thirteen and eighteen, work through the nights of every alternate week. Iron chains are wrought in this district, and there is no employment in which boys are subjected to a greater amount of labor. Each link is formed by welding together, at white heat, the ends of thick pieces of rod-iron, a man and his boy striking alternately with the greatest possible rapidity

lest the iron should cool before the welding is completed. The labor of boys is measured only by the strength of the men; for as long as the men can work, the boys must attend them; but so heavy is the work, that by 6 P. M. the men themselves are completely exhausted, and obliged to cease; and it has been pronounced unfit for boys. A chain-maker at Wednesfield Heath, working in his own shop for a large manufactory, and who had left the establishment that he might employ his little girls to help him instead of hiring boys, which he was obliged to do in the public workshop, was found by the Assistant Commissioner, engaged in making a large chain. Two girls, nine and ten years of age, were working as 'strikers,' and a little girl of eight, occasionally relieved by a still younger one of six, was working the bellows. The gross earnings of this man amounted to two guineas per week. It may be doubted whether the world could now produce a more revolting instance of parental oppression than the spectacle of these two young girls, whose little hands would have been appropriately employed in hemming a kerchief or working a sampler, begrimed with the smoke, stifled with the heat, and stunned with the din of a smithy, welding sledge-hammers, and forging iron chains from morning till night."

Two thousand children under fifteen are employed in Birmingham alone, and forty thousand women, children and youth in Birmingham and its district.

(To be Concluded.)

NATIONAL JUSTICE.

Whoever has read the new History of England, as far as it is completed, by Froude, has had a rich treat. The volumes are written in a style that keeps the interest awake from the opening sentence to the close. There is, too, an apparent thoroughness of research, and candor in adducing testimony, that gives the seeker after historical truth confidence in his guide. Still, the volumes essentially change some of our previous opinions—placing some historic characters in a new light, and reversing decisions previously reached. Especially is this true of Henry VIII. We think that sovereign, could he do it, would most heartily thank Mr. Froude for the service done to his country.

One trait, truly noble, of his reign, is strikingly brought out, and may well be adverted to as an example for the governments of to-day. It is the quality of his justice. The chances of escape, under Henry VIII, for a convicted traitor, diminished just in proportion to the dignity and position of the criminal. The nearer he stood to the crown the less the hope. For one of the commons, a poor, deluded, private man, there was hope of the royal clemency. But for one of the nobility, a lord, a peer of the realm, there was no chance. On him the stroke of justice fell quick and sure. The passages from the hall to the tower, and from the tower to the block, followed each other quickly. No petitions availed. It was a royal quality of King Henry's justice.

But will any future historian ascribe this character to our national justice? Is it thus we are dealing with traitors? One poor, friendless, contemptible, wounded, almost dead agent of the rebellion, holding office under its leaders and executing their behests, has been dragged through a tedious trial, condemned and executed. But does any one believe that one of the originators, or great movers of the rebellion, is in danger of any such fate? So far, it has seemed, we have been anxious to make some little show of retributive justice, but have not dared to strike in any high place. Such, we fear, will be the course throughout. A high premium would have been demanded to insure the life of the great leader the day he was captured; but a very small premium would be required to-day. He is reported to be confident, contented, cheerful; and he has every reason to be. There is little for him to fear from the justice of that nation whose life he has attempted to take, and many thousands of whose loyal sons he has been the means of bringing to untimely and cruel deaths. The memory of his great crimes grows daily more faint, and the indignation felt at the atrocities committed under his leadership is dying away, and the number of those who demand his death is constantly diminishing. Is there any other government on earth that would permit such a man to live? Can a nation long live with such a feeble, partial, timid administration of justice?— Watchman and Reflector.

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