

## CHILD LABOR AND ITS ATTENDANT EVILS

“The employment of children in factories depresses wages, destroys homes and depreciates the human stock. Whatever interferes with the proper education and nurture of the child contradicts the best interests of the nation. We call then on Christian employers and on Christian parents to endeavor after such betterment of the local and general laws as shall make the labor of children impossible in this Christian country.”—Resolution unanimously adopted by the Protestant Episcopal General Convention of 1904, and repeated in substance by a resolution adopted by the Convention of 1907.

This resolution, said to have been framed by that great friend of the children, Jacob Riis, contains so admirable a summary of the evils that attend the child labor system as to warrant its use as a text for this article: “Depresses wages, destroys homes, depreciates the human stock”—this is the indictment presented against the institution.

The January number of *THE SEWANEE REVIEW* contained two important articles on education in the South, one from the pen of Dr. S. C. Mitchell, on “The School as an Exponent of Democracy,” and the other by George F. Milton, on “Compulsory Education in the Southern States.” It may be easily proved that the greatest foe of democracy in this nation is the child labor system, and by the same token, the most effective promoter of illiteracy. A third article in the same number, by Winifred Snow, was a charming dissertation on “The Child in Eighteenth Century Literature.” There is another view of the child for which we are indebted to the eighteenth century, of which we have considerable mention in its literature, and that is, the child as an industrial asset. For in the England of the eighteenth century are to be found the beginnings of the child labor evil, and it was not until the nineteenth that there began the protest against it by way of parliamentary action. Defoe was filled with enthusiasm in the description of a district in which “scarce anything of five years old,” but could earn its own living. In an account of the workhouses of England, written in 1732, the writer says: “They that pick oakum are continually refreshed by

the balsamic odor of it; the spinners and knitters with an exercise so moderate that it fits any age or sex, at the same time that it qualifies those that are young for most handicrafts." From an "Essay on Trade," published in 1770, we extract this quotation: "Being constantly employed at least twelve hours a day, . . . we hope the rising generation will be so habituated to constant employment that it will at length prove agreeable and entertaining to them. . . . From children thus trained up to constant labor we may venture to hope the lowering of the price."

Yet in this twentieth century, two of our Southern States, North Carolina and Georgia, still allow by law the employment of children for twelve hours a day, the hours being sixty-six a week, which, with the half-holiday given on Saturday, means twelve hours a day for the first five working days. And Georgia allows children as young as ten, who are already unfortunate enough to be orphans, or the children of dependent parents, to work for twelve hours a day, and both States allow children of fourteen to work a twelve-hour night.

But the first recorded protest against this evil also belongs to the closing years of the eighteenth century, and the protest was such sound doctrine that it is applicable to our own problem today. The physicians of Manchester, England, attributed an epidemic of fever in the Radcliffe Cotton Works, in part, to "the injury done to young persons through confinement and too long-continued labor. . . . For the active recreations of childhood and youth are necessary to the growth and right conformation of the human body. And we cannot excuse ourselves from suggesting this further important consideration, that the rising generation should not be debarred from all opportunities of instruction at the only season in life at which they can be properly improved." This was in 1784; and again in 1796 the Manchester Board of Health passed the following resolution: "The untimely labor of the night and the protracted labor of the day, with respect to children, not only tend to diminish future expectations as to the general sum of life and industry, by impairing the strength and destroying the vital stamina of the rising generation, but it too often gives encouragement to idleness, extrav-

agance and profligacy in the parents, who, contrary to the order of nature, subsist by the oppression of their offspring." And they recommend "parliamentary aid to establish a general system of laws for the wise, humane, and equal government of all such works."

The first factory act was passed by Parliament in 1802, limiting the hours to twelve a day, forbidding night work for children of tender years, providing for factory inspection and securing the instruction of apprentices in reading, writing and arithmetic. This was the beginning of a hundred years of battle for a proper standard of legislation on this vital subject, to which England has but just attained. If it were not such a tragedy that the remedial measures should have been so slowly adopted, it would be a humorous study, the various protests of the manufacturers and other employers of child labor to the effect that their business would be ruined by the next small advance proposed. Dickens satirizes this in "Hard Times," when he mentions how often Coketown had been "destroyed" and how often the ultimatum had been delivered by the factory owners that they would prefer pitching their mills "into the Atlantic ocean" rather than submit to the proposed restriction, whatever it happened to be. They were the advocates of the last abuse and the opponents of the next reform. Robert Owen, Sir Robert Peel and Lord Shaftesbury are the three great names of the last century, factory owners all of them, in their protest against the child labor evil. And now that the proper standard of legislation and of effective enforcement of the law has been reached, an English authority testifies that "in spite of keenest foreign competition, the Lancashire cotton mill, in point of technical efficiency, now leads the world, and the Lancashire cotton spinner, once in the lowest depths of social degradation, now occupies, as regards the general standard of life as a whole trade, perhaps the foremost position among English wage-earners." So much for the economic folly of child labor.

But the system at the time of its unchecked abuses left its mark upon national life and vigor. It had been foretold, as we have seen, by the Manchester physicians. Lord Macaulay, at first an advocate of the doctrine called "Manchesterism," that

economic laws would bring their own cure of this and kindred evils, later became deeply aroused on the subject and an advocate of child labor laws in Parliament. He argued that "intense labor, beginning too early in life, continued too long every day, stunting the growth of the mind, leaving no time for healthful exercise, no time for intellectual culture must impair all those high qualities that have made our country great." And he made this prophecy, which has been fulfilled to the letter: "Your overworked boys will become a feeble and ignoble race of men, the parents of a more feeble progeny; nor will it be long before the deterioration of the laborer will injuriously affect those very industries to which his physical and moral interests have been sacrificed."

Great Britain and the rest of the world wondered why it took so long, and at such a fearful cost of blood and treasure, for that mighty empire to conquer a handful of South African farmers. Great Britain had to put 320,000 soldiers in the field against the Boer army of 28,000. As a matter of fact, the war was won at last by the Colonials, the Irish and the Scotch. And England began in humiliation and at first with secrecy to study the causes of her loss of prestige. Meanwhile the papers and the magazines began to present their own theories. Dr. Robert Jones, an eminent London physician, wrote to *The Times* that insanity among the masses was constantly increasing and that out of one thousand consecutive cases of males between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five examined by himself, the average weight and stature were so far below the normal that, he concluded, "there is an alarming impairment of the national physique." The president of a Manchester improvement association testified that there were large districts in which there were "no well grown children or men and women except those who have been born in the country"—which was the natural result of "Manchesterism," of course. During the period when regiments were being patched together to be sent to the front, a London newspaper published the startling statement that out of 11,000 men examined in Manchester, 10,000 were rejected, and that after the standards had been lowered again and again and the tests made as conveniently easy. The news came back

from Africa that these regiments never reached the firing line, but were swept off by enteric fever before they found the front. As one of the magazines expressed it, "The men that faced the Malakoff and stormed Sebastopol were no more. . . . When the typical Englishman that went to war — the John Bull of tradition — was broad-shouldered and deep-chested, a ruddy-cheeked giant, then the brawn and endurance of the Englishman were a proverb. Against him Hooligan, anæmic, neurotic, emaciated, too often degenerate, dull of wit and feeble of will, showed like a figure of fright."

Then a formidable series of blue-books were published on the theme that was occupying so deeply the English mind. From the report of the Royal Commission we select one or two abstracts. In the enlistment reports the following figures are suggestive:

1897 — Number medically inspected, 59,986; total rejections, 22,813  
 1898 — Number medically inspected, 66,501; total rejections, 23,287  
 1899 — Number medically inspected, 68,059; total rejections, 25,393  
 1900 — Number medically inspected, 84,402; total rejections, 23,105  
 1901 — Number medically inspected, 76,750; total rejections, 22,286

In connection with this is the statement in the British Sessional papers: "When examining these totals it must be borne in mind that they do not represent anything like the total number of the rejection of candidates for enlistment into the army. A large number of men are rejected by the recruiters themselves for the causes above mentioned, and in consequence are never medically inspected, and do not appear in any returns."

In the same report we have this testimony from Dr. Neston, of Newcastle: "There is an undoubted falling off in the physical condition of the infants vaccinated and young persons presented for employment during the last quarter of a century." Says Factory Inspector Harry Wilson: "Personally, the poorest specimens of humanity I have ever seen, both men and women, are working in the preparing and spinning departments of certain Dundee jute mills."

Now there has been no opportunity to observe this physical degeneration in the older manufacturing States of New England

and Pennsylvania, for the reason that on account of the low wages of the textile industries, as compared with the skilled trades where the labor of adult men is desired, there has been a series of changes in the nationality of the cotton mill operatives. The native Americans soon left the cotton mills for industries presenting better conditions as to hours and wages. Their place was taken by English and Irish and Scotch immigrants. These in turn have gone into other employments and have been succeeded by the French Canadians, the Portuguese and the Greeks.

But in the South, it is the same English stock that has degenerated in England with which we are concerned. The negro has proved a failure thus far as a mill operative. There is no immediate prospect of foreign immigration for the South. And the process of deterioration is now going on. There has already developed a cotton-mill type. Lieutenant-Governor Winston, of North Carolina, has said that in his career on the bench, as a Superior Court Judge, he could recognize a man from the cotton mills as soon as he came into the court room, and he personally opposed the erection of a cotton mill in his home town as a detriment to the community under the existing child labor system.

A young South Carolinian, recently returned from military service in the Philippines, has the same story to tell about the inability of the recruiting officers to find suitable material for soldiers in the cotton mill communities of his State. "The employment of children in factories . . . depreciates the human stock"—to revert to our text.

We presume that there is no controversy over the statement that "whatever interferes with the proper education and nurture of the child contradicts the best interests of the nation." Says the *Manufacturers' Record*, the most conspicuous opponent of child labor legislation in this country, in its issue of January 30, 1908: "The cotton mills of the South have been the most efficient agencies for education in the South in the past twenty-five or thirty years." Let us examine that statement.

There is now being conducted a federal investigation of the labor of children and women in industry and the report of the

Bureau of Labor may confirm or may upset the theories that have been based on the census statistics of 1900. The enactment of child labor laws in all the Southern States (for at this writing it seems probable that Mississippi will adopt one at the present legislative session), although these laws have been for the most part rendered ineffective by numerous exemptions, the want of compulsory education, and the absence of factory inspection, has tended to the improvement of conditions. Public sentiment is a powerful influence with the class of men in the South who own and control the textile industry and the putting upon the statute books of the simple principle of State regulation of child labor has had an excellent moral effect. Nevertheless, it is a matter of common knowledge that these laws have been almost universally violated, both in letter and in spirit, and the statistics of 1900 are the only authoritative ones to which we can appeal.

The statistics show that in Georgia and the two Carolinas, the centre of the cotton mill industry in the South, one cotton mill operative out of three was from ten to fifteen years of age. For these three States 997 children under ten were reported by the enumerators as at work in the mills, though their instructions did not call for such reports. In the Northern States, the proportion of children workers to adults was one to ten. The *Blue Book*, a textile directory corrected annually, showed in 1907, 209,000 operatives. Thirty per cent of this number would be 62,700! When the absence of birth records are considered, the desire of parents to put their children to work that they "may subsist by the oppression of their offspring," the demand for labor in the mills that has often rendered it impossible to secure sufficient adult help, and the complaisance of factory superintendents at admitting children under age when their parents say that they are over the legal age, it is certainly within the bounds of probability that there are sixty thousand children under fourteen years of age. A recent investigation of over half the cotton mills of Mississippi disclosed the fact that on a most conservative estimate twenty-five per cent of the operatives were under fourteen. In one mill the percentage was as high as forty per cent. A recent most friendly investigation of South Carolina

mills showed 1,500 children employed under twelve years of age.

And now for the consideration of the cotton mill as the promoter of education. It is true that many of the larger and more successful mills have done a great deal that they were not obliged to do in the building of school-houses and the payment of the salaries of teachers. Although this is also true, that if they had allowed the extra tax for school purposes which many Southern communities have voted upon themselves, they would have had to pay considerably more for education — charity thus becoming an economy. But what boots it to build schools and employ teachers if the mill all the time makes its imperative demand for the labor of the children and empties the schools of the children?

The census figures show that in North Carolina the general white illiteracy for children from ten to fourteen years of age is 16.6 per cent. But the illiteracy of the factory children between these ages is 50 per cent. In South Carolina the corresponding figures are 14.8 per cent and 48.5 per cent. In Georgia, 10.4 per cent and 44 per cent. That is, the illiteracy of the children from ten to fourteen years of age in the factory families is from three to four times as great as the illiteracy of the white children in the State at large. Moreover, the general percentage of illiteracy includes that of the mill villages. Considering the numbers of the children now gathered at the factories it is hardly too much to say that the problem of white illiteracy could be solved for our generation if the children of the factories were sent to school. In the investigation just mentioned of the cotton mills of Mississippi, in 1907, fifty per cent of the children were found to be illiterate.

I visited a typical country cotton mill in Georgia before the enactment of the Georgia child labor law. The school had been built by the corporation and a large part of the teachers' salaries was paid from the corporation's funds. The enrollment was found to be ninety. The attendance averaged about thirty. The average age of the children was nine years. Twenty-two children had left the school for the mill during the session and eight of the thirty children then attending school had been at



work in the mill. Of those who had left the school for the mill one was seven, five were eight, two were nine, three were ten, four were eleven and two were twelve years of age.

It is asserted that the children of the mills have come from districts where they had no school advantages and that their illiteracy should not be charged to the mills. But these are children between the ages of ten and fifteen and one year of schooling would enable them to read "See the old hen," and prevent their being classed as illiterates! It is a painful fact to record in this connection, that when the Georgia Legislature was considering, in 1906, the present child labor bill, the Georgia Industrial Association made its main attack upon the provision requiring children under eighteen to attend school three months of one year as a prerequisite to employment the following year, and the same body of manufacturers asked the Attorney-General for an opinion whether instruction in a night school would be a compliance with this provision of the law as passed. The Attorney-General made answer that in his opinion the Legislature was aiming at the protection of the children, not their destruction, and he considered that the requirement that the children attend school at night after working twelve hours a day tended to their destruction.

It should be said in justice that a few conspicuous mills are encouraging the education of children by all the means in their power, and that the manufacturers of North and South Carolina have advocated compulsory education up to twelve years of age. But the very fact that these few mills are always mentioned in the apologies for the child labor evil is proof that they are exceptional. And while North Carolina has passed a compulsory education law by means of which any school district may vote to come under the operation of the law, I have yet to hear of any mill district so voting, and that could be easily accomplished if the mill management desired to exert its influence in that direction.

Referring again to the article of Dr. S. C. Mitchell, in the January SEWANEE REVIEW, it is my opinion that the average cotton mill community is the poorest place in the world for training the citizens of a democracy. Children shut out from school

and shut within the walls of a factory, finally becoming human machines with a weary round of labor, cut off by the long hours from association with any but their fellows, will never be fitted for self-government. The paternalism of the mill, its "benevolent feudalism," as some one has called it, the very providing of schools and churches and in rare instances, of reading rooms and gymnasiums and lyceums, all the gift of the mill, are not conducive to self-help. The spirit of democracy demands justice, not charity. One mill president that I know of, Mr. Banks Holt, of North Carolina, has shown the better way. Feeling that a good graded school was a necessity in his mill village, he proposed to the people that they vote the extra tax that was needed for the erection of the school and its adequate support through a nine months' term. The tax on property had to be practically all paid by himself. The poll-tax could be paid by the employees. So a great educational rally was held, Governor Aycock and State Superintendent Joyner went to the village and spoke on the subject of education, and the people voted the extra tax upon the mill and upon themselves. And they regard it as their school and patronize it as such and respect themselves as citizens and taxpayers. Fraternalism is better than paternalism.

Perhaps the most serious indictment that can be brought against the child labor system is that it "destroys homes." Child labor and the labor of women are always associated. The adult man has in large measure won his fight for shorter hours and higher wages in those industries that demand his brawn and skill. He is therefore able to support his family, keep the wife and mother at her task of home-making, and send the children to school. But when the wages are measured by the ability of the child to perform the work required, the whole family, except the very youngest, must be employed. The worker in a steel mill in Birmingham makes as great a wage as the whole family can make in a cotton mill in the same city. It seems to be an economic law that the system of family labor produces just so much and no more in wages as the system of adult male labor. And where the family is large, the temptation to idleness on the part of the parent becomes irresistible. Vagrancy laws have been passed by several Southern States, but these are and will

be ineffective until the root-evil of child labor is cured. So child labor disintegrates the family. "To be a man too soon is to be a small man." The bread-winning child becomes independent of parental restraint. The mother is unable to fulfill the most ordinary duties of housekeeping. The girls are brought up in ignorance of the first principles of home-making; and early marriages are the rule. In the recent Textile Conference held in Tennessee, Mr. Garnett Andrews, a prominent mill man of Tennessee and Georgia, introduced a resolution recommending to the Southern States that they forbid by the law the marriage of girls under seventeen or of boys under nineteen years of age, and in earnest support of his resolution said:

"I would like to know what worse labor there is than taking care of a child, when the parents are only fifteen to seventeen years of age. It is not right that a woman should be put to bearing children at the age of even seventeen; they are not physically able to take care of a child, they are not matured themselves. Right near my mill is a cavalry post. These soldiers are irresponsible chaps, come around there courting some girl and marry her. We have had girls married out of our mill at fourteen years of age. And not long ago there was a girl who came over there for work, with a child in her arms. She wasn't but fifteen, and had on short skirts. That was a crime against civilization."

Even so. And the number of deserted wives in these factory districts is something appalling. There is an exception in the Georgia law providing that the children of widows may go to work at ten years of age if their wages are deemed necessary to the support of the family. The law is construed to include the deserted wives as well, being virtually widows. All this evil can be traced to the family disintegration that is the result of the employment of children.

I have confined my attention to the cotton mill in the South, because the evil is confessedly greatest there, in this section, and the cotton mill owners have been the conspicuous opponents of child labor legislation. But already in the South it has "spread from the cotton mills" into other industries, as Lord Shaftesbury said of child labor in England. The few silk and

woolen mills of the South employ a comparatively large number of children. The cigar factories of Florida and the tobacco factories of North Carolina and Virginia share the same reproach. In two years the number of child employees in the cigar factories of Tampa, Florida, had grown from 150 to 2,000.

The coal mines of Kentucky and Tennessee and Alabama employ too many children by far. The glass industry of West Virginia is a wholesale employer of children, and the system there has an advocate in the United States Senate. It is a growing evil in many of the smaller manufacturing industries of our cities. One of the most demoralizing forms of the system is the employment of children in the street trades. The little telegraph messengers are sent to the worst quarters of our cities, and soon obtain an intimate acquaintance with the houses of prostitution.

And yet there is a hopeful side to all this. Public opinion has been awakened and is expressing itself in restrictive legislation. A brief review of the legislative situation may be of interest.

Kentucky now has the best child labor law of any Southern State, with an age limit of fourteen, the desired minimum, and a fair system of factory inspection. Tennessee comes next, with a fourteen-year age limit, factory and mine inspection, and a sixty-hour week. Virginia has just amended the child labor law, raising the age limit from twelve to thirteen in 1909, and to fourteen in 1910, the manufacturers forcing this compromise — alas for the little toilers for whom the increased age limit will come too late! North Carolina last year raised the age limit from twelve to thirteen, but is still cursed with the sixty-six-hour week, which means twelve hours a day for the first five working days, with a half-holiday on Saturday, and there is more night work in the North Carolina mills than in all the other Southern States put together, the age limit being now fourteen for night work. Factory inspection has been hitherto a farce in this State. South Carolina has the worst law in the Union, with an age limit of twelve, but exempting the children of any age whose labor is deemed necessary for the support of a dependent parent, and there is not the shadow of factory inspection. It should be said that many South Carolina manufacturers do

better than their law allows them to do. South Carolina has recently adopted the sixty-hour week, which means an eleven-hour day. Florida has an age limit of twelve for all occupations except agriculture and domestic service, but no factory inspection. Georgia has a general age limit of twelve, with the exemption at ten years of age for orphans and the children of widows and disabled fathers, allows a sixty-six-hour week and has no factory inspection. The age limit for night work is fourteen, and there is the excellent provision heretofore described, which raises the age limit to fourteen for children who cannot read and write and requires workers under eighteen to attend school three months of each year. This provision has converted many factory owners to the doctrine of compulsory education. Alabama has a minimum age limit of twelve, fourteen for night work (eight hours for night work for children under sixteen), fourteen for illiterate children, and the educational requirements of the Georgia law for children under sixteen. It has a sixty-hour week, and there are two factory inspectors. Mississippi has a child labor bill before the Legislature which has passed the Senate and has been favorably reported to the House, but the age limit was forced down from fourteen to twelve by the manufacturers' lobby. Louisiana has an age limit of twelve for boys and fourteen for girls, and the Parish of New Orleans, where most of the children employed live, has provided for factory inspection, and Miss Jean Gordon, the inspector, has done thorough and efficient work. Louisiana also has a sixty-hour week. Arkansas has a twelve-year age limit, with the unfortunate exemption of ten-year old children, but raises the age limit to fourteen for illiterate children. Texas has a minimum age limit of twelve for factories, and sixteen for mines. But there is no factory inspection in either Texas or Arkansas. Oklahoma has made a constitutional prohibition of child labor, with a constitutional requirement for school attendance, and the Legislature is about to pass, so my information is, excellent statutes to carry out the provisions of the constitution on these subjects. In fact the new State will probably be a model for the Southern sisterhood in this matter and in others relating to the protection of children.

And no one need feel discouraged over the final outcome, who enlists in this cause. There can be no stronger appeal than that which helpless childhood makes. The future of our country and of our race is at stake in the abolition of this curse. As in the prophetic picture of the Golden Age, the little child is leading the way to all social progress. And whether it is our good fortune to see the universal protection of the child in all his rights, the opportunity for the child grows wider with each succeeding year, the right

To seek! Not to be bound and doomed in the dust!  
And the seekers, the millions far-lifting,  
In the dim new ages we know they shall fail—  
Some crushed, some self-lost, some drifting  
Back down the slopes—but the chance shall be theirs  
And ten thousand touching the sun,  
Shall pull the race upwards to the City of Brothers  
Till on earth God's will be done.  
Till our streets shall be sunned with the joy of children  
And our shops be busy with men  
Toiling together the great ends of the Earth,  
And our homes be hallowed again  
With the Mother, the Child! Till our schools shape souls  
For an earth-life ending in skies,  
Till we know that a Soul is a Soul, and as such  
Is holy before our eyes.

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