

Life in Industrial (Revolution) Britain

In 1832 Michael Sadler secured a parliamentary investigation of conditions in the textile factories and he sat as chairman on the committee. The evidence printed here is taken from the large body published in the committee's report and is representative rather than exceptional. It will be observed that the questions are frequently leading; this reflects Sadler's knowledge of the sort of information that the committee were to hear and his purpose of bringing it out. This report stands out as one of three great reports on the life of the industrial class - the two others being that of the Ashley Commission on the mines and 's report on sanitary problems. The immediate effect of the investigation and the report was the passage of the Act of 1833 limiting hours of employment for women and children in textile work.

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Evidence Given Before the Sadler Committee

[Parliamentary Papers, 1831-1832, vol. XV. pp. 44, 95-97, 115, 195, 197, 339, 341-342.]

Joshua Drake, called in; and Examined.

You say you would prefer moderate labour and lower wages; are you pretty comfortable upon your present wages? --I have no wages, but two days a week at present; but when I am working at some jobs we can make a little, and at others we do very poorly.

When a child gets 3s. a week, does that go much towards its subsistence? --No, it will not keep it as it should do.

When they got 6s. or 7s. when they were pieceners, if they reduced the hours of labor, would they not get less? - They would get a halfpenny a day less, but I would rather have less wages and less work.

Do you receive any parish assistance? - No.

Why do you allow your children to go to work at those places where they are ill-treated or over-worked? - Necessity compels a man that has children to let them work.

Then you would not allow your children to go to those factories under the present system, if it was not from necessity? - No.

Supposing there was a law passed to limit the hours of labour to eight hours a day, or something of that sort, of course you are aware that a manufacturer could not afford to pay them the same wages? - No, I do not suppose that they would, but at the same time I would rather have it, and I believe that it would bring me into employ; and if I lost 5d. a day from my children's work, and I got half-a-crown myself, it would be better.

How would it get you into employ? - By finding more employment at the machines, and work being more regularly spread abroad, and divided amongst the people at large. One man is now regularly turned off into the street, whilst another man is running day and night.

You mean to say, that if the manufacturers were to limit the hours of labour, they would employ more people? - Yes.

Mr. Matthew Crabtree, called in; and Examined.

What age are you? - Twenty-two.

What is your occupation? - A blanket manufacturer.

Have you ever been employed in a factory? - Yes.

At what age did you first go to work in one? - Eight.

How long did you continue in that occupation? - Four years.

Will you state the hours of labour at the period when you first went to the factory, in ordinary times? - From 6 in the morning to 8 at night.

Fourteen hours? - Yes.

With what intervals for refreshment and rest? - An hour at noon.

When trade was brisk what were your hours? - From 5 in the morning to 9 in the evening.

Sixteen hours? - Yes.

With what intervals at dinner? - An hour.

How far did you live from the mill? - About two miles.

Was there any time allowed for you to get your breakfast in the mill? - No.

Did you take it before you left your home? - Generally.

During those long hours of labour could you be punctual; how did you awake? - I seldom did awake spontaneously; I was most generally awoke or lifted out of bed, sometimes asleep, by my parents.

Were you always in time? - No.

What was the consequence if you had been too late? - I was most commonly beaten.

Severely? - Very severely, I thought.

In those mills is chastisement towards the latter part of the day going on perpetually? - Perpetually.

So that you can hardly be in a mill without hearing constant crying? - Never an hour, I believe.

Do you think that if the overlooker were naturally a humane person it would still be found necessary for him to beat the children, in order to keep up their attention and vigilance at the termination of those extraordinary days of labour? - Yes; the machine turns off a regular quantity of cardings, and of course, they must keep as regularly to their work the whole of the day; they must keep with the machine, and therefore however humane the slubber may be, as he must keep up with the machine or be found fault with, he spurs the children to keep up also by various means but that which he commonly resorts to is to strap them when they become drowsy.

At the time when you were beaten for not keeping up with your work, were you anxious to have done it if you possibly could? - Yes; the dread of being beaten if we could not keep up with our work was a sufficient impulse to keep us to it if we could.

When you got home at night after this labour, did you feel much fatigued? - Very much so.

Had you any time to be with your parents, and to receive instruction from them? - No.

What did you do? - All that we did when we got home was to get the little bit of supper that was provided for us and go to bed immediately. If the supper had not been ready directly, we should have gone to sleep while it was preparing.

Did you not, as a child, feel it a very grievous hardship to be roused so soon in the morning? - I did.

Were the rest of the children similarly circumstanced? - Yes, all of them; but they were not all of them so far from their work as I was.

And if you had been too late you were under the apprehension of being cruelly beaten? - I generally was beaten when I happened to be too late; and when I got up in the morning the apprehension of that was so great, that I used to run, and cry all the way as I went to the mill.

Mr. John Hall, called in; and Examined.

Will you describe to the Committee the position in which the children stand to piece in a worsted mill, as it may serve to explain the number and severity of those cases of distortion which occur? - At the top to the spindle there is a fly goes across, and the child takes hold of the fly by the ball of his left hand, and he throws the left shoulder up and the right knee inward; he has the thread to get with the right hand, and he has to stoop his head down to see what he is doing; they throw the right knee inward in that way, and all the children I have seen, that bend in the right knee. I knew a family, the whole of whom were bent outwards as a family complaint, and one of those boys was sent to a worsted-mill, and first he became straight in his right knee, and then he became crooked in it the other way.

Elizabeth Bentley, called in; and Examined.

What age are you? - Twenty-three.

Where do you live? - At Leeds.

What time did you begin to work at a factory? - When I was six years old.

At whose factory did you work? - Mr. Busk's.

What kind of mill is it? - Flax-mill.

What was your business in that mill? - I was a little doffer.

What were your hours of labour in that mill? - From 5 in the morning till 9 at night, when they were thronged.

For how long a time together have you worked that excessive length of time? - For about half a year.

What were your usual hours when you were not so thronged? - From 6 in the morning till 7 at night.

What time was allowed for your meals? - Forty minutes at noon.

Had you any time to get your breakfast or drinking? - No, we got it as we could.

And when your work was bad, you had hardly any time to eat it at all? - No; we were obliged to leave it or take it home, and when we did not take it, the overlooker took it, and gave it to his pigs.

Do you consider doffing a laborious employment? - Yes.

Explain what it is you had to do? - When the frames are full, they have to stop the frames, and take the flyers off, and take the full bobbins off, and carry them to the roller; and then put empty ones on, and set the frame going again.

Does that keep you constantly on your feet? - Yes, there are so many frames, and they run so quick.

Your labour is very excessive? - Yes; you have not time for any thing.

Suppose you flagged a little, or were too late, what would they do? - Strap us.

Are they in the habit of strapping those who are last in doffing? - Yes.

Constantly? - Yes.

Girls as well as boys? - Yes.

Have you ever been strapped? - Yes.

Severely? - Yes.

Could you eat your food well in that factory? - No, indeed I had not much to eat, and the little I had I could not eat it, my appetite was so poor, and being covered with dust; and it was no use to take it home, I could not eat it, and the overlooker took it, and gave it to the pigs.

You are speaking of the breakfast? - Yes.

How far had you to go for dinner? - We could not go home to dinner.

Where did you dine? - In the mill.

Did you live far from the mill? - Yes, two miles.

Had you a clock? - No, we had not.

Supposing you had not been in time enough in the morning at these mills, what would have been the consequence? - We should have been quartered.

What do you mean by that? - If we were a quarter of an hour too late, they would take off half an hour; we only got a penny an hour, and they would take a halfpenny more.

The fine was much more considerable than the loss of time? - Yes.

Were you also beaten for being too late? - No, I was never beaten myself, I have seen the boys beaten for being too late.

Were you generally there in time? - Yes; my mother had been up at 4 o'clock in the morning, and at 2 o'clock in the morning; the colliers used to go to their work about 3 or 4 o'clock, and when she heard them stirring she has got up out of her warm bed, and gone out and asked them the time; and I have sometimes been at Hunslet Car at 2 o'clock in the morning, when it was streaming down with rain, and we have had to stay until the mill was opened.

Peter Smart, called in; and Examined.

You say you were locked up night and day? - Yes.

Do the children ever attempt to run away? - Very often.

Were they pushed and brought back again? - Yes, the overseer pursued them, and brought them back.

Did you ever attempt to run away? - Yes, I ran away twice.

And you were brought back? - Yes; and I was sent up to the master's loft, and thrashed with a whip for running away.

Were you bound to this man? - Yes, for six years.

By whom were you bound? - My mother got 15s. for the six years.

Do you know whether the children were, in point of fact, compelled to stop during the whole time for which they were engaged? - Yes, they were.

By law? - I cannot say by law; but they were compelled by the master; I never saw any law used there but the law of their own hands.

To what mill did you next go? - To Mr. Webster's, at Battus Den, within eleven miles of Dundee.

In what situation did you act there? - I acted as overseer.

At 17 years of age? - Yes.

Did you inflict the same punishment that you yourself had experienced? - I went as an overseer; not as a slave, but as a slave-driver.

What were the hours of labour in that mill? - My master told me that I had to produce a certain quantity of yarn; the hours were at that time fourteen; I said that I was not able to produce the quantity of yarn that was required; I told him if he took the timepiece out of the mill I would produce that quantity, and after that time I found no difficulty in producing the quantity.

How long have you worked per day in order to produce the quantity your master required? - I have wrought nineteen hours.

Was this a water-mill? - Yes, water and steam both.

To what time have you worked? - I have seen the mill going till it was past 12 o'clock on the Saturday night.

So that the mill was still working on the Sabbath morning? - Yes.

Were the workmen paid by the piece, or by the day? - No, all had stated wages.

Did not that almost compel you to use great severity to the hands then under you? — Yes; I was compelled often to beat them, in order to get them to attend to their work, from their being over-wrought.

Were not the children exceedingly fatigued at that time? — Yes, exceedingly fatigued.

Were the children bound in the same way in that mill? — No; they were bound from one year's end to another, for twelve months.

Did you keep the hands locked up in the same way in that mill? — Yes, we locked up the mill; but we did not lock the bothy.

Did you find that the children were unable to pursue their labour properly to that extent? — Yes; they have been brought to that condition, that I have gone and fetched up the doctor to them, to see what was the matter with them, and to know whether they were able to rise or not able to rise; they were not at all able to rise; we have had great difficulty in getting them up.

When that was the case, how long have they been in bed, generally speaking? — Perhaps not above four or five hours in their beds. William Cobbett (1763-1835), after a long career as a publicist, entered the Reformed Parliament in 1833 and at once took part in the debate on the bill Lord Althorpe had introduced as a result of the Sadler Committee's report.

Mr. Cobbett's Discovery

[Hansard's Parliamentary Debates. 3rd Series, vol. XIX. July 18, 1833, p.912.]

Mr Cobbett said, a new discovery had been made in the House that night, which would doubtless excite great astonishment in many parts; at all events it would in Lancashire. It had formerly been said that the Navy was the great support of England; at another time that our maritime commerce was the great bulwark of the country; at another time that our colonies; and it had even been whispered that the Bank was; but now it was admitted, that our great stay and bulwark was to be found in three hundred thousand little girls, or rather in one eighth of that number. Yes; for it was asserted, that if these little girls worked two hours less per day, our manufacturing superiority would depart from us.

[The material above was reprinted in an old history textbook, Readings in European History Since 1814, edited by Jonathan F. Scott and Alexander Baltzly, and was published by Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. in 1930. The original sources of the material are listed in footnotes in the book; I've put them in brackets after each subject heading. The explanatory notes between sections are by Scott and Baltzly; the links were, of course, added by me. — L.D.C.]

Sanitary Conditions

Edwin Chadwick (1803-1890) had taken an active part in the reform of the Poor Law and in factory legislation before he became secretary to a commission investigating sanitary conditions and means of improving them. The Commission's report, of which the summary is given below, is the third of the great reports of this epoch. The following material comes from Report...from the Poor Law Commissioners on an Inquiry into the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain [online source]. London, 1842, pp. 369-372.]

After as careful an examination of the evidence collected as I have been enabled to make, I beg leave to recapitulate the chief conclusions which that evidence appears to me to establish.

First, as to the extent and operation of the evils which are the subject of this inquiry: -

That the various forms of epidemic, endemic, and other disease caused, or aggravated, or propagated chiefly amongst the labouring classes by atmospheric impurities produced by decomposing animal and vegetable substances, by damp and filth, and close and overcrowded dwellings prevail amongst the population in every part of the kingdom, whether dwelling in separate houses, in rural villages, in small towns, in the larger towns - as they have been found to prevail in the lowest districts of the metropolis.

That such disease, wherever its attacks are frequent, is always found in connexion with the physical circumstances above specified, and that where those circumstances are removed by drainage, proper cleansing, better ventilation, and other means of diminishing atmospheric impurity, the frequency and intensity of such disease is abated; and where the removal of the noxious agencies appears to be complete, such disease almost entirely disappears.

The high prosperity in respect to employment and wages, and various and abundant food, have afforded to the labouring classes no exemptions from attacks of epidemic disease, which have been as frequent and as fatal in periods of commercial and manufacturing prosperity as in any others.

That the formation of all habits of cleanliness is obstructed by defective supplies of water.

That the annual loss of life from filth and bad ventilation are greater than the loss from death or wounds in any wars in which the country has been engaged in modern times.

That of the 43,000 cases of widowhood, and 112,000 cases of destitute orphanage relieved from the poor's rates in England and Wales alone, it appears that the greatest proportion of deaths of the heads of families occurred from the above specified and other removable causes; that their ages were under 45 years; that is to say, 13 years below the natural probabilities of life as shown by the experience of the whole population of Sweden.

That the public loss from the premature deaths of the heads of families is greater than can be represented by any enumeration of the pecuniary burdens consequent upon their sickness and death.

That, measuring the loss of working ability amongst large classes by the instances of gain, even from incomplete arrangements for the removal of noxious influences from places of work or from abodes, that this loss cannot be less than eight or ten years.

That the ravages of epidemics and other diseases do not diminish but tend to increase the pressure of population.

That in the districts where the mortality is greatest the births are not only sufficient to replace the numbers removed by death, but to add to the population.

That the younger population, bred up under noxious physical agencies, is inferior in physical organization and general health to a population preserved from the presence of such agencies.

That the population so exposed is less susceptible of moral influences, and the effects of education are more transient than with a healthy population.

That these adverse circumstances tend to produce an adult population short-lived, improvident, reckless, and intemperate, and with habitual avidity for sensual gratifications.

That these habits lead to the abandonment of all the conveniences and decencies of life, and especially lead to the overcrowding of their homes, which is destructive to the morality as well as the health of large classes of both sexes.

That defective town cleansing fosters habits of the most abject degradation and tends to the demoralization of large numbers of human beings, who subsist by means of what they find amidst the noxious filth accumulated in neglected streets and bye-places.

That the expenses of local public works are in general unequally and unfairly assessed, oppressively and uneconomically collected, by separate collections, wastefully expended in separate and inefficient operations by unskilled and practically irresponsible officers.

That the existing law for the protection of the public health and the constitutional machinery for reclaiming its execution, such as the Courts Leet, have fallen into desuetude, and are in the state indicated by the prevalence of the evils they were intended to prevent.

Secondly. As to the means by which the present sanitary condition of the labouring classes may be improved:--

The primary and most important measures, and at the same time the most practicable, and within the recognized province of public administration, are drainage, the removal of all refuse of habitations, streets, and roads, and the improvement of the supplies of water.

That the chief obstacles to the immediate removal of decomposing refuse of towns and habitations have been the expense and annoyance of the hand labour and cartage requisite for the purpose.

That this expense may be reduced to one-twentieth or to one-thirtieth, or rendered inconsiderable, by the use of water and self-acting means of removal by improved and cheaper sewers and drains.

That refuse when thus held in suspension in water may be most cheaply and innocuously conveyed to any distance out of towns, and also in the best form for productive use, and that the loss and injury by the pollution of natural streams may be avoided.

That for all these purposes, as well as for domestic use, better supplies of water are absolutely necessary.

That for successful and economical drainage the adoption of geological areas as the basis of operations is requisite.

That appropriate scientific arrangements for public drainage would afford important facilities for private land-drainage, which is important for the health as well as sustenance of the labouring classes.

That the expense of public drainage, of supplies of water laid on in houses, and of means of improved cleansing would be a pecuniary gain, by diminishing the existing charges attendant on sickness and premature mortality.

That for the protection of the labouring classes and of the ratepayers against inefficiency and waste in all new structural arrangements for the protection of the public health, and to ensure public confidence that the expenditure will be beneficial, securities should be taken that all new local public works are devised and conducted by responsible officers qualified by the possession of the science and skill of civil engineers.

That the oppressiveness and injustice of levies for the whole immediate outlay on such works upon persons who have only short interests in the benefits may be avoided by care in spreading the expense over periods coincident with the benefits.

That by appropriate arrangements, 10 or 15 per cent. on the ordinary outlay for drainage might be saved, which on an estimate of the expense of the necessary structural alterations of one-third only of the existing tenements would be a saving of one million and a half sterling, besides the reduction of the future expenses of management.

That for the prevention of the disease occasioned by defective ventilation and other causes of impurity in places of work and other places where large numbers are assembled, and for the general promotion of the means necessary to prevent disease, that it would be good economy to appoint a district medical officer independent of private practice, and with the securities of special qualifications and responsibilities to initiate sanitary measures and reclaim the execution of the law.

That by the combinations of all these arrangements, it is probable that the full insurable period of life indicated by the Swedish

tables; that is, an increase of 13 years at least, may be extended to the whole of the labouring classes.

That the attainment of these and the other collateral advantages of reducing existing charges and expenditure are within the power of the legislature, and are dependent mainly on the securities taken for the application of practical science, skill, and economy in the direction of local public works.

And that the removal of noxious physical circumstances, and the promotion of civic, household, and personal cleanliness, are necessary to the improvement of the moral condition of the population; for that sound morality and refinement in manners and health are not long found co-existent with filthy habits amongst any class of the community.

Women Miners in the English Coal Pits

From Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1842, Vol XVI, pp. 24, 196.

In England, exclusive of Wales, it is only in some of the colliery districts of Yorkshire and Lancashire that female Children of tender age and young and adult women are allowed to descend into the coal mines and regularly to perform the same kinds of underground work, and to work for the same number of hours, as boys and men; but in the East of Scotland their employment in the pits is general; and in South Wales it is not uncommon.

West Riding of Yorkshire: Southern Part - In many of the collieries in this district, as far as relates to the underground employment, there is no distinction of sex, but the labour is distributed indifferently among both sexes, except that it is comparatively rare for the women to hew or get the coals, although there are numerous instances in which they regularly perform even this work. In great numbers of the coalpits in this district the men work in a state of perfect nakedness, and are in this state assisted in their labour by females of all ages, from girls of six years old to women of twenty-one, these females being themselves quite naked down to the waist.

"Girls," says the Sub-Commissioner [J. C. Symons], -regularly perform all the various offices of trapping, hurrying [Yorkshire terms for drawing the loaded coal corves], filling, riddling, tipping, and occasionally getting, just as they are performed by boys. One of the most disgusting sights I have ever seen was that of young females, dressed like boys in trousers, crawling on all fours, with belts round their waists and chains passing between their legs, at day pits at Hunshelf Bank, and in many small pits near Holmfirth and New Mills: it exists also in several other places. I visited the Hunshelf Colliery on the 18th of January: it is a day pit; that is, there is no shaft or descent; the gate or entrance is at the side of a bank, and nearly horizontal. The gate was not more than a yard high, and in some places not above 2 feet.

" When I arrived at the board or workings of the pit I found at one of the sideboards down a narrow passage a girl of fourteen years of age in boy's clothes, picking down the coal with the regular pick used by the men. She was half sitting half lying at her work, and said she found it tired her very much, and 'of course she didn't like it.' The place where she was at work was not 2 feet high. Further on were men lying on their sides and getting. No less than six girls out of eighteen men and children are employed in this pit.

"Whilst I was in the pit the Rev Mr Bruce, of Wadsley, and the Rev Mr Nelson, of Rotherham, who accompanied me, and remained outside, saw another girl of ten years of age, also dressed in boy's clothes, who was employed in hurrying, and these gentlemen saw her at work. She was a nice-looking little child, but of course as black as a tinker, and with a little necklace round her throat.

"In two other pits in the Huddersfield Union I have seen the same sight. In one near New Mills, the chain, passing high up between the legs of two of these girls, had worn large holes in their trousers;

and any sight more disgustingly indecent or revolting can scarcely be imagined than these girls at work--no brothel can beat it.

"On descending Messrs Hopwood's pit at Barnsley, I found assembled round a fire a group of men, boys, and girls, some of whom were of the age of puberty; the girls as well as the boys stark naked down to the waist, their hair bound up with a tight cap, and trousers supported by their hips. (At Silkstone and at Flockton they work in their shifts and trousers.) Their sex was recognizable only by their breasts, and some little difficulty occasionally arose in pointing out to me which were girls and which were boys, and which caused a good deal of laughing and joking. In the Flockton and Thornhill pits the system is even more indecent: for though the girls are clothed, at least three-fourths of the men for whom they "hurry" work stark naked, or with a flannel waistcoat only, and in this state they assist one another to fill the corves 18 or 20 times a day: I have seen this done myself frequently.

"When it is remembered that these girls hurry chiefly for men who are not their parents; that they go from 15 to 20 times a day into a dark chamber (the bank face), which is often 50 yards apart from any one, to a man working naked, or next to naked, it is not to be supposed but that where opportunity thus prevails sexual vices are of common occurrence. Add to this the free intercourse, and the rendezvous at the shaft or bullstake, where the corves are brought, and consider the language to which the young ear is habituated, the absence of religious instruction, and the early age at which contamination begins, and you will have before you, in the coal-pits where females are employed, the picture of a nursery for juvenile vice which you will go far and we above ground to equal."

Two Women Miners

From Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1842, Vol. XV, p. 84, and *ibid.*, Vol. XVII, p. 108.

Betty Harris, age 37: I was married at 23, and went into a colliery when I was married. I used to weave when about 12 years old; can neither read nor write. I work for Andrew Knowles, of Little Bolton (Lancs), and make sometimes 7s a week, sometimes not so much. I am a drawer, and work from 6 in the morning to 6 at night. Stop about an hour at noon to eat my dinner; have bread and butter for dinner; I get no drink. I have two children, but they are too young to work. I worked at drawing when I was in the family way. I know a woman who has gone home and washed herself, taken to her bed, delivered of a child, and gone to work again under the week.

I have a belt round my waist, and a chain passing between my legs, and I go on my hands and feet. The road is very steep, and we have to hold by a rope; and when there is no rope, by anything we can catch hold of. There are six women and about six boys and girls in the pit I work in; it is very hard work for a woman. The pit is very wet where I work, and the water comes over our clog-tops always, and I have seen it up to my thighs; it rains in at the roof terribly. My clothes are wet through almost all day long. I never was ill in my life, but when I was lying in.

My cousin looks after my children in the day time. I am very tired when I get home at night; I fall asleep sometimes before I get

washed. I am not so strong as I was, and cannot stand my work so well as I used to. I have drawn till I have bathe skin off me; the belt and chain is worse when we are in the family way. My feller (husband) has beaten me many a times for not being ready. I were not used to it at first, and he had little patience.

I have known many a man beat his drawer. I have known men take liberties with the drawers, and some of the women have bastards.

The Physical Deterioration of the Textile Workers

[P. Gaskell, The Manufacturing Population of England. London, 1833, pp.161-162, 202-203.]

Any man who has stood at twelve o'clock at the single narrow doorway, which serves as the place of exit for the hands employed in the great cotton-mills, must acknowledge, that an uglier set of men and women, of boys and girls, taking them in the mass, it would be impossible to congregate in a smaller compass. Their complexion is sallow and pallid--with a peculiar flatness of feature, caused by the want of a proper quantity of adipose substance to cushion out the cheeks. Their stature low--the average height of four hundred men, measured at different times, and different places, being five feet six inches. Their limbs slender, and playing badly and ungracefully. A very general bowing of the legs. Great numbers of girls and women walking lamely or awkwardly, with raised chests and spinal flexures. Nearly all have flat feet, accompanied with a down-tread, differing very widely from the elasticity of action in the foot and ankle, attendant upon perfect formation. Hair thin and straight--many of the men having but little beard, and that in patches of a few hairs, much resembling its growth among the red men of America. A spiritless and dejected air, a sprawling and wide action of the legs, and an appearance, taken as a whole, giving the world but "little assurance of a man," or if so, "most sadly cheated of his fair proportions..."

Factory labour is a species of work, in some respects singularly unfitted for children. Cooped up in a heated atmosphere, debarred the necessary exercise, remaining in one position for a series of hours, one set or system of muscles alone called into activity, it cannot be wondered at--that its effects are injurious to the physical growth of a child. Where the bony system is still imperfect, the vertical position it is compelled to retain, influences its direction; the spinal column bends beneath the weight of the head, bulges out laterally, or is dragged forward by the weight of the parts composing the chest, the pelvis yields beneath the opposing pressure downwards, and the resistance given by the thigh-bones; its capacity is lessened, sometimes more and sometimes less; the legs curve, and the whole body loses height, in consequence of this general yielding and bending of its parts.

John Fielden, although himself a Lancashire factory owner, was one of the staunchest fighters for protective legislation for the cotton worker. His difficulties are such as today in the Southern states of the United States are commonly urged by manufacturers.

A Cotton Manufacturer on Hours of Labor

[John Fielden, M.P., The Curse of the Factory System. London, 1836, pp. 34-35.]

Here, then, is the "curse" of our factory-system; as improvements in machinery have gone on, the "avarice of masters" has prompted many to exact more labour from their hands than they were fitted by nature to

perform, and those who have wished for the hours of labour to be less for all ages than the legislature would even yet sanction, have had no alternative but to conform more or less to the prevailing practice, or abandon the trade altogether. This has been the case with regard to myself and my partners. We have never worked more than seventy-one hours a week before Sir JOHN HOBHOUSE'S Act was passed. We then came down to sixty-nine; and since Lord ALTHORP'S Act was passed, in 1833, we have reduced the time of adults to sixty-seven and a half hours a week, and that of children under thirteen years of age to forty-eight hours in the week, though to do this latter has, I must admit, subjected us to much inconvenience, but the elder hands to more, inasmuch as the relief given to the child is in some measure imposed on the adult. But the overworking does not apply to children only; the adults are also overworked. The increased speed given to machinery within the last thirty years, has, in very many instances, doubled the labour of both.

Sending boys up chimneys to clean them was a common practice, and a dangerous and cruel one. Lord Ashley became the chief advocate of the use of chimney-sweeping machinery and of legislation to require its use. Even earlier, however, such a law had been proposed, but it met with strong opposition. In a debate on this subject in the House of Lords in 1819 the Earl of Lauderdale well represented a large body of conservative opinion.

Opposition to the Chimney Sweepers' Regulation Bill

[Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, March 8, 1819. New Series, vol. 39, p. 901.]

Their lordships had lately heard complaints of the encouragement given to machinery, in preference to manual industry. Now, though he differed most completely from those who cherished the prejudice he alluded to--though he was convinced that the introduction of machinery had not only had the effect of enriching the proprietor, but also of enabling the workman to live better and cheaper than he otherwise could have done--yet there certainly was some difference to be drawn between their encouraging and enforcing the adoption of machinery, and especially when those persons who best understood its application in the way of trade were against its introduction at all. ...If their lordships were determined to adopt such a course, they must introduce a code of moral legislation unknown to their ancestors, and quite unsuited to their habits and laws. The better way, in his judgment, would be to leave reforms of this kind entirely to the moral feeling of, perhaps, the most moral people, on the whole face of the earth.

When Sadler was defeated for reelection in 1833 by Macaulay, his successor as leader in the campaign for shorter hours was Lord Ashley, later Earl of Shaftesbury, whose achievements in this field exceeded any other man's. More than a generation later the old Earl of Shaftesbury, speaking for a bill to relieve conditions of textile workers in India, commented on the great gains brought about by similar legislation in England.

The Benefit of the Factory Legislation

[Hansard's Parliamentary Debates. Apr. 4, 1879. 3rd Series, vol. CCXLV, pp. 355-356.]

The other is the old, the often-repeated, and as often-refuted, argument that the work is light. Light! Why, no doubt, much of it is light, if measured by the endurance of some three or four minutes. But what say you, my Lords, to a continuity of toil, in a standing posture, in a poisonous atmosphere, during 13 hours, with 15 minutes of rest? Why, the stoutest man in England, were he made, in such a condition of things, to do nothing during the whole of that time but be erect on his feet and stick pins in a pincushion, would sink under the burden. What say you, then, of children--children of the tenderest years? Why, they become stunted, crippled, deformed, useless. I speak what I know--I state what I have seen. When I visited Bradford, in Yorkshire, in 1838, being desirous to see the condition of the children--for I knew that they were employed at very early ages in the worsted business....I asked for a collection of cripples and deformities. In a short time more than 80 were gathered in a large courtyard. They were mere samples of the entire mass. I assert without exaggeration that no power of language could describe the varieties, and I may say, the cruelties, in all these degradations of the human form. They stood or squatted before me in all the shapes of the letters of the alphabet. This was the effect of prolonged toil on the tender frames of children at early ages. When I visited Bradford, under the limitation of hours some years afterwards, I called for a similar exhibition of cripples; but, God be praised! there was not one to be found in that vast city. Yet the work of these poor sufferers had been light, if measured by minutes, but terrific when measured by hours.

[The material above was reprinted in an old history textbook, Readings in European History Since 1814, edited by Jonathan F. Scott and Alexander Baltzly, and was published by Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. in 1930. The original sources of the material are listed in footnotes in the book; I've put them in brackets after each subject heading. The explanatory notes between sections are by Scott and Baltzly; the links were, of course, added by me. --L.D.C.]