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THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

THE
CRY OF THE CHILDREN

A STUDY OF CHILD-LABOR

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BY

MRS. JOHN VAN VORST

Author of
"The Issues of Life," Etc., Etc.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

HON. ALBERT J. BEVERIDGE

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To MR. and MRS. JOHN SHERMAN NELIGH, in the name of the laboring children who owe them so much, and with sincere admiration for their incomparable work, I dedicate this book.

B. VAN VORST.

November, 1907.

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INTRODUCTION

The Nation owes more than it can ever pay to those keen-minded, brave-hearted men and women who have fearlessly and thoroughly looked into our national conditions and told the people the truth about them. One such debt we owe to Mrs. Van Vorst for this book. Nearly all our reforms have been started by such men and women, and when started, gone on to success. It is the glory of the American people and the safety of their future that they need only to know the truth about anything to do what is right concerning it. The difficulty is in getting the truth before them. All of us are very busy; all of us get into ruts; the time of all of us is taken up by what we have to do from hour to hour and from day to day. So when a bad thing grows up among us the intensity of our lives prevents us from knowing anything about it unless some one makes it his or her business to see that we all do know about it.

We might expect to learn everything that goes on from the newspapers; but what is true, as I have just pointed out, of each one of us is also true of the newspapers. They are busy with the day's happenings; they are willing and anxious to publish anything interesting, but once published it ceases to be "news"—it is not good journalism to pursue it. Therefore it is forgotten. Then again, while most American newspapers are free, pure and fearless, all of them are not. Within the last ten years interests which wish to prevent reforms that will interfere with unrighteous profits have begun to buy up newspapers, and very wealthy men who want to have a public career have done the same thing. Both these interests and these men have done this for the same reason—namely, to control public opinion; but after all, there are, comparatively speaking, only a few of such papers.

It is these facts that have given the present-day magazine such tremendous power in the homes of the Republic. The magazines as yet are perfectly free and independent. Also necessarily they are not subject to the rules of good journalism which confine the pages of all newspapers to current events. The magazines find it possible and profitable to take up one subject and keep hammering at it for months, and years. So the men and women who want to make the Nation better, and who have the time for the work, have found in the magazines the means by which the people may be thoroughly educated upon any question of national interest. By the same token the magazines have found that these men and women supply their best and most attractive material. Thus it was that the Nation was awakened to the revolting infamy of child-labor in the Republic. Many writers of the very highest character began to present the hideous facts to the American people. Periodicals of the first class printed series of articles running through many months.

It was thus my own attention was first called to our terrible national sin of child slavery and child murder. Especially was I, together with millions of other Americans, astonished by the revelations in a series of articles by Mrs. Van Vorst in the "Saturday Evening Post," of Philadelphia. I have friends in one or two places which Mrs. Van Vorst described, who confirmed her appalling statements. The articles, much amplified and rewritten, form the body of her extraordinary book, for which I am glad to write the introduction. It is a profoundly impressive volume, as engaging as the most vivid novel, as true as mathematics, as instructive as science. You will not quit it once you have started reading it, and while it will shock you, the shock will leave you with an aroused and militant conscience.

I think most Americans will feel as I first felt when I began to read about child-labor; that it was too hideous to be true; that nine-tenths of it was exaggeration; that we were living in a period of sensationalism when mountains were made out of molehills. In short, I felt that it could not be possible that such outrages as Mrs. Van Vorst and others told us about could possibly be practised in the American Republic at the beginning of the twentieth century. But then Mrs. Van

Vorst and every other writer on the same subject (men like Spargo, Durland, Lovejoy, and women like Miss Ashby and Florence Kelley) all gave specific examples. They gave names, dates, places, figures.

It began to dawn upon me, notwithstanding my incredulity, that if these splendid men and women, representing the very flower of American conscience and culture, were lying about child-labor, they were doing it in unison and in a detail and with specifications very dangerous to themselves. So I began a study of the question, and found that all they said is true; found, indeed, that they had understated rather than over-stated the facts. This was demonstrated when, for two whole days, I read to the Senate of the United States the testimony of these men and women and of many others just like them, *all given under oath.* Although these fearful things were *sworn to* and published in the "Congressional Record," no man denied or has yet denied the truth of a single affidavit I presented.

The truth is that an army of American

children greater in numbers than the army of soldiers with which either Russia or Japan flooded Manchuria are daily marched to the mills, factories, and sweatshops here in America and either killed outright or forever ruined. The combined losses of both Russia and Japan in all the battles of the Russo-Japanese war were not so great as the number of American children who are worked to death or made degenerates every year in the mills, mines, and sweatshops of our own country.

Aside from the sheer savagery of American child-labor, the effect upon us as a Nation is as terrible as it is certain. England went through the same experience, and the physical deterioration of the British people which the Boer War revealed and which shocked the world was the direct result of this manufacture of degenerates begun in England a hundred and twenty years ago and not stopped until within the present generation. It took the English reformers decades upon decades to end this infamy in England because there was no way of getting the shuddering facts to the English people. But the American magazine and the American book are getting the facts before us very quickly indeed; and we may hope by their aid to end American child-labor in a small fraction of the time it took the English reformers to end child-labor.

When our people know that more than a million American children are dying of overwork or being forever stunted and dwarfed in body, mind, and soul; when they know that we are pouring into the body of our citizenship two hundred and fifty thousand degenerates (at the very lowest estimate) every year who have clouded minds and a burning hatred of the society that has wronged them, and that they have ballots in their hands; when American workmen awaken to the fact that child-labor brings manhood wages down to the level of childhood wages; when the Nation learns of these things and many more just as bad, we may hope for an end of this national disgrace.

Everybody who has carefully and thoroughly thought this question out knows that nothing but a national law can put an end to this widespread evil, just as was the case with the evil of lotteries, the evil of obscene literature, and other similar disgraces which the Nation has already ended. When lotteries were corrupting the Nation the states took feeble, disconnected, and spasmodic action against them. The lotteries merely laughed. If four-fifths of the states passed anti-lottery laws and the others did not, lottery tickets could still be sent by express over the railroads through interstate commerce into every portion of the Republic. This is exactly what did happen. So a national law was proposed to keep lottery tickets out of interstate commerce.

The lottery companies fought this law bitterly. A certain kind of ''constitutional lawyer'' with which the people have been unpleasantly familiar since the Constitution was adopted insisted that such a law ''violated the rights of the states,'' and was ''a dangerous tendency towards centralization.'' From the beginning such men have always tried, with the Constitution, to put shackles on the hands and ball and chain about the ankles of the people whenever the people made war upon any practice which was cursing and destroying the people on the one hand, but which, on the other hand, was putting ill-gotten gains into the pockets of those who indulged in such practices.

The country has never been without such legal stranglers, who have tried to make of the Constitution a rope for the binding of the people whenever the people attacked any interest that was financially bleeding them. For it must be remembered that not one single assertion of national power has ever been resisted except when it attacked some evil financially interested. It was so in the case of the lotteries; it was so in the case of obscene literature; it was so in the case of the selling of poisoned foods and diseased meats; and it is so in the case of child-labor. Just as we kept lottery tickets, obscene literature, and diseased meats out of interstate commerce; just as we kept convict-made goods out of our foreign commerce; just so we can keep child-made goods out of interstate commerce. Of course, if the men who work children to death cannot ship over the country the goods woven with the children's blood, they will no longer enslave the children. It would no longer be profitable for them to do so; and it must never be forgotten that with the twentieth century child slave drivers *it is all a question of profit and loss, and nothing else*, just as has always been the case with any kind of slave driver.

It is said that we must leave it to the states to put a period to this infamy. The same thing was said of lottery tickets, obscene literature, poisoned foods, and diseased meats. But the states have not stopped the evil—they cannot. If one state passes a good law and another state does not, the manufacturers of the bad state have a financial advantage over the manufacturers of the good state because they can get cheaper labor. Worse than that, the bad state brings away from the good state its children and puts them at work in its mills, mines, and sweatshops. This is exactly what happened when Tennessee passed a good child-labor law and enforced it. I presented to the Senate the affidavit of the Rev. A. J. McKelway, one of the most reputable men in the Nation, that he personally saw *shipments* of children being made under a boss from Tennessee to South Carolina.

Think of that! little children from seven to fourteen years of age *shipped* like cattle or hogs from a state that has a good child-labor law into a state that has a bad child-labor law, or no child-labor law at all.

Then again, in those states where this industrial disease is worst the interests that fatten on it are so powerful that they prevent good laws from being passed; or what is a great deal worse, permit a bad law to be passed which fools the people but which lets the slave drivers do as they please. Even when temporary public opinion gets a good law on the statute books and compels its enforcement for a year or two, the interests are so powerful, finally, with the executive departments that they see that the law is not executed and the shame goes on. Again, it is absolutely impossible to get any uniformity in the laws of the various states. So it is clear, is it not, that the Nation must act?

If we pass a national law making it a crime punishable by fine and imprisonment for any manufacturer that employs child-labor to ship his products over the railroads or for the railroads to carry such products, there will be an end to child-labor in America. For such a law will not depend upon some political hanger-on appointed factory inspector by a political governor. Such a law will depend upon the vigilance and conscience of every good man and woman in the Nation. If such a law were on the statute books all that any man or woman would have to do when he or she saw little children being worked to death would be to write to the United States Department of Justice, or even to the United States District Attorney, and the man who was violating the law would be haled before a United States Court, fined, and sent to jail. It is just because a national law would stop child-labor that it is so bitterly fought by the cotton mills, glass factories, and mining companies who are employing child-labor, and by the railroads that carry their products.

It is a hard fight, with the children on the one side and wicked interests upon the other side. The latter interests have untold money and the support of cunning legal minds; while the children have only the aid of public opinion, aroused and put in action by such inspiring books as this book of Mrs. Van Vorst's. I wish that her vivid and truthful volume might be read by every man and woman in the Nation. I wish that every such book as hers might be read at every fireside over and over again. And I ask you who read this book and shudder as you read to think what *you* would do if the children whom Mrs. Van Vorst describes were *your* children. You who are reading these words, suppose that *your* little girl or boy were being murdered or ruined as the children you are reading about are being murdered or ruined. Bring the sad facts home to *yourself;* and then act for these wronged little ones as you would act if *your own* little ones were being wronged in the same way.

It is absolutely useless to denounce this crime and do nothing about it. Convert your tears into deeds. Make your indignation felt. Arouse your neighbors about this awful thing; write to your congressman and senator, and have everybody you know write to his congressman and senator, and ask them what they are doing about this thing—ask them why they do not act. And not only ask them, but insist that your question be answered. Demand an answer. You will get it if you ask hard enough and long enough.

I wish I could find words to say more in praise of Mrs. Van Vorst's brilliant but horrifying book, and of all the articles and books on the same terrible subject. Perhaps if Mrs. Van Vorst's book and articles are read by enough of the American people to create a steady, permanent, fighting public opinion, we shall overcome the child slave drivers of the twentieth century and confound the legal jugglers who, in the sacred name of the Constitution, defend them. Perhaps we shall make them admit that our Constitution is what Marshall, and Story, and all the great judges who sat upon that bench have considered our Constitution—a chart of progress, not a shield of wrong. And when we have done this and thus cleansed ourselves of the foulness of child-labor, we shall have also done an even greater thing—we shall have stopped that growing wrath against our Constitution created by the resistance in the name of the Constitution which corrupt interests and legal jugglers always make to every reform that looks to the betterment and upliftment of the American people; we shall have made the Constitution a help, not a hindrance, to the moral advance of the Nation, and thus restored in the hearts of the people their devotion to our fundamental law.

God grant that this book will make the Nation hear "the cry of the children." It will then be, not only an admirable piece of writing, but a blessing to the Republic and the race.

ALBERT J. BEVERIDGE.

WASHINGTON, January 14, 1908.

PREFACE

There is one fact regarding the industries in America which concerns every man and woman throughout the land.

Since cotton mills began to spring up like mushrooms, and sociological philanthropy began to be the fashion, we have heard much about child-labor; so much indeed has it been a matter for discussion that the very life has been taken out of the phrase itself and it has come to have no meaning. It suggests reports and dull discourses and lobbying for legal reform, and dry statistics. It has assumed the form of a mere stereotyped heading which serves as a watchword to deter the hurried reader from wasting any time on articles he ''always skips.'' Yet back of these two words, linked incongruously together, there is a fact which concerns us all, an outrageous fact which cannot be denied, a fact which, if presented from its human side, cannot fail to touch every heart that beats for the good of the country and the welfare of others. And the fact is this: that in our thriving mills, both North and South, there are thousands and thousands of little children at work. As I formulate this simple statement I can hear a chorus of protests: echoes of past objections which have been made for years by those whose interest it is not to acknowledge the truth. In response I have only to say that I started, a sceptic myself, upon a tour of inspection regarding what I held to be ''sensational reports'' about child-labor. After remaining six weeks in various cotton-mill towns of Maine, New Hampshire, Georgia, and Alabama, I determined to relate only what I saw,—all too sensational, alas!—believing the simplest account of realities to be the most convincing, and daring to hope that it may serve as an appeal, and that it may stir those whom it reaches into procuring some remedy for an existing condition of things which is contrary to every principle of civilization and Christianity.

The facts of the case as regards the laws 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 confined my visits in Alabama, Georgia, Maine, and New Hampshire almost entirely to the woollen and cotton mills, because a greater number of children are employed there than in the other 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.

To be sure, even the most rabid reformer could not hope to see business run as a philanthropy, and the question might easily be asked whether—the model child-labor law having obtained—there were still any profit to be made by the cotton-mill owners? The nearest approach to an ideal state of affairs being that which exists in Massachusetts, I made a sojourn also at Fall River, studying there the evolution of reform and its practical effects both upon the well-being of the employees and the welfare of employers. But if the chapters which follow make a slight pretence at tracing the history of an industry, their most earnest purpose is to get a hearing for the little children who toil; to let them speak for themselves; to show something of their lives which will be eloquent in claiming for them protection, legal and humane; to sound their cry—the cry of the children. Listen for it in what I am going to tell. A complaint? you ask, used as you are to the wheedling of charity recipients. A complaint! Why, the children of the mills are an army of tiny pilgrims, whose miserable bodies, in the onward march, are but the vehicle for a spirit that no suffering can repress. Victims of ignorance and avarice, robbed of health by the heavy burdens too early placed upon their fragile shoulders, denuded of hope, they trudge forward on life's way with a fortitude and determination which makes their cry less a complaint than a summons.

The memory of faces such as theirs clings in the mind with a lingering tenacity: faded masks of withered flesh, dark eyes gouged out of pale, swollen brows, all the ugliness visible which deprivation and toil can practise upon the human features; yet, illuminating this sullied, tragic image, an expression that glows as the sun does for whole days behind clouds which seem to diffuse and magnify its brilliance.

The bringing about of any modification in social conditions is, in a republican country like ours, determined by public opinion, and this irrepressible force is composed of so many minor opinions that no one, on the ground that "what he thinks can't make any difference," is excused from taking an interest in such a national question as that of child-labor.

There are at work in the United States over a million and a half children between the ages of ten and fifteen; twenty-five per cent. of all the textile operatives in the South are under sixteen; two thousand girls under thirteen are doing night-work in Pennsylvania;* ninety-two thousand are employed at this age, or younger, in New York State. . . . But it is not statistics that we are looking for. Considered thus, as mere figures in an official statement, these thousands of children seem like one of the necessary elements in a great industrial organization.

How are they designated on the pay-rolls of the great mills? How are they alluded to familiarly by employers? Not even by the generic name of children: they are called, very pertinently, "hands." Their hands and what they can do with them are all that attract the manufacturer. For him, the rest of their little persons—from the youth that is repressed within them to the soul which not even greed can attain—is of minor consequence. Yet, it is only by taking time to consider these "hands" as individuals that they can appeal to us from a human point of view. It is just this life of theirs which the mill disregards that I would aim to make the subject of this book; the life, not as it manifests itself in so many mechanical gestures with relation to a machine, but the inward life, the life of sentiment and feeling, the home life, the character of the children, their occupations outside of working hours, their pleasures, and their own opinions about child-labor.

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*Census Bulletin No. 215 on cotton manufactures, also "Menace of Privilege," by Henry George, Jr.

A remark often made among the less militant of the fairer sex has taken the familiar form of: "We don't want to hear any horrors!" Physical sufferings, squalor, and poverty are not the only "horrors"; paucity of spirit, lack of compassion and indifference can also come under this comprehensive heading. Those who are "all stirred up" by what they read and who take no action, are more likely to be provoked at existing conditions than with their own inactivity. They argue in this way: "What is the use of knowing about such dreadful things when we can't help them?"

So long as there are *over a million children at work* for us, our industrial records need such forcible cleaning up that *everybody* can "help." If those who set their shoulders to the wheel find that their hearts fail them, they need only to consider the example of these little laborers, and to distinguish the cry of the children, in order to renew their courage and their energy in the effort for reform.

PART I

ALABAMA

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CHAPTER I

After first consulting the State Records at the Capitol in Montgomery, where all corporations are registered, and determining upon what centres it seemed advisable to visit, I accepted a letter of introduction to the owner of a cotton mill in Birmingham and set out for that place, the second city, with Montgomery, in Alabama, which has attained to a population of thirty thousand.

The idea of a letter of introduction was, to be sure, incongruous with that of making a tour of investigation, and though the few courteous lines I presented to the proprietor of these mills might have procured me hospitality under his own roof, they sent me as an outcast from his factory gates. "It was of no interest to him that a piece should be written about his help." This he made quite clear, and, having done so, he closed the door peremptorily, leaving me without, to meditate upon some more successful method of obtaining entrance to the establishments I had determined to visit.

Profiting by the presence at Birmingham of several ladies who had been more or less active in passing the only laws which place any restraint upon Alabama manufacturers, I called upon them before proceeding to Anniston, and gathered from their conversation certain facts regarding the situation in their State. My chief informant was a pretty woman of the graceful, languid type we designate in a word as "Southern." It was a shock to hear her affirm in her soft musical voice, with its drawling intonation:

"Why, child-labor in Alabama is a necessary evil."

"Do you think," I exclaimed, "that it is just as well for a child twelve years old to be at work as to be in school?"

Her gentle eyes reflected in their smile a feeling of inward indulgence.

"That," she said, "is not a fair question. When you know more of these people, you'll see that they're just like animals. In the mill they have some chance of getting civilized. If we made laws restricting labor we should frighten away capitalists and wreck our very surest chances of progress and prosperity.''

She followed up her argument with pitiful descriptions of ignorance among the people who flock in from the hills and plains to feed the mill machinery.

''They don't even know enough to level the ground where they build their cabins. They fry every bit of their food, even the bread.'' And then she repeated the comprehensive phrase: ''They're just like animals.''

She was a stockholder, this gentle ''Southerner,'' in the mills I had just attempted to visit. Oh! Hideous logic which greed alone makes plausible! What part, pray, had God in creating a class ''like animals,'' and who could maintain with justice that out of such mental and moral insufficience a better state might come, so long as it remained coupled to physical oppression and misery! Two wrongs cannot make a right, and the cursory despatching of a whole class of people to the realm of the animal does not free the bondsman from his ultimate accounting for the soul which has passed, along with the body, into his keeping.

As a matter of fact, there was a law made in 1903 which prohibited the employment of children under twelve years of age in factories unless widowed mothers or aged or disabled fathers be dependent upon the labor of such children, and the same law forbade children under thirteen to work after 7 P.M. or before 6 A.M., and all children to hire out for more than sixty-six hours a week day-work, or forty-eight hours night-work.

"*Why did we pass the law?*" responded one of my feminine informants. "*Why not? What difference does it make?* There are no inspectors, no school laws, no truant officers, and where there is nobody to enforce a law it can't inspire much respect."

CHAPTER II

The method of asking permission having met with such rebuff, as I took to be characteristic, I determined, on reaching Anniston, upon the more simple plan of walking into any factory that might be open and pursuing my inquiries regardless of consequences, until I was stopped or put out.

The town of Anniston lies among the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, half-way between Birmingham and Atlanta. Like all places whose destiny has been determined by alternate periods of boom and collapse, Anniston presents the appearance of an elaborate bit of confectionery pulled too hastily from an overheated oven. The fancifully trimmed buildings, in marble, stand unfinished, staring at the hovels beside them with the peculiar wide-eyed expression of a façade without window-frames. A tramway clangs along through the only street, and splashes off into mud at either end of the town. The prospectus sums up the history of Anniston in a word. It says: ‘‘In 1880, Anniston did not exist.’’

There was little need to ask directions for reaching the mills; over a slope of the hill on the village outskirts hung a black cloud, fed perpetually from a forest of chimneys that rose like the dark cypress trees of some *campo santo.* Thither I bent my steps.

The cotton-mill ‘‘folks’’ wear unwittingly a badge which distinguishes them far and wide. As I came along down over the hillside I met a child holding in her arms another smaller child: both were covered—their hair, their clothes, their very eyelashes—with fine flakes of lint, wisps of cotton, fibres of the great web in which the factories imprison their victims.

‘‘Hello,’’ I said, ‘‘do you work in the mill?’’

‘‘Yes, meaum.’’ The voice was gentle and the manner friendly. And giving a sideways hitch to the baby, who had a tendency to slip from her tiny motherly arms, this little worker showed me one of her fingers done up in a loose, dirty bandage.

"I cut my finger right smart," she drawled, "so I'm takin' a day off."

"How old are you?"

"Tweayulve."

"Got any brothers or sisters?"

"I've got *him.*" She straightened the piece of lemon stick candy in the baby's mouth as she thus called attention to him, and continued, "And I've got one brother in the mill."

"How old is he?"

"Tweayulve."

"Twins?" I asked.

She smiled, and shook her head.

"He's tweayulve in the mill, and he's teayun outside."

This little bit of humanity, taking a day off as mother to a still tinier being, seemed a promising sponsor, and I suggested that we walk along together. She could not go to the mill with me, she explained, without first consulting her mother, so we proceeded to the settlement in which she lodged, along with the other eighty or a hundred families who man the mills in which she was a hand.

"That's where we live!"

Her fleet little bare feet picked a way deftly over the stony path, and she kept a hand free—when it was not laid on the baby's back—to point out the turns in the road that led to "where she lived." Her home was one of a group of frame one-story houses perched on a slant of ground. Each house was encircled by a wooden veranda, and the order of housekeeping described itself before the eyes, as a whisk of the broom which carried all the dirt from the kitchen on to the porch, and another whisk which landed it on the slant of ground, bedecked, in consequence, with old tin cans, decayed vegetables, pieces of dirty paper, rags, and chicken feathers.

It was to the more intimate quarter, however, that I penetrated with my guide. The inside court or square upon which these "homes" opened their back-doors, was a large mud-puddle overhung with the collective wash of the neighborhood. In and out of the mud-puddle wallowed the younger members of the mill families, receiving from time to time admonishing reprimands from a gently irate parent who swished her long cotton wrapper over the court, drawling to her offspring: "I sure will whip you if you-all don't quit."

"That-a-way's where we live," said my little companion, stepping on to the porch and depositing her load, as she opened the door and ran to announce a visit to her mother. The woman turned listlessly from the sewing-machine over which she was bent.

"Won't you come in?" she called to me, dragging out a chair by the fire, without getting up. "Lookin' for work?" she asked.

I took a seat, glancing at the interior which my little friend called "home." The outer room was a kitchen—though it might, except for the stove, have been mistaken for a hen-coop. The chickens pecked their way about the dirty floor, venturing as far even as the table upon which stood the meagre remains of a noonday meal. The second and the inner room had each a bed;—an unmade bed I was going to say, but how, indeed, could a bed be made without either sheets or pillows? Two grimy counterpanes were flung in disorder across the mattresses; a few chairs, a bureau, and the sewing-machine completed the house-furnishings.

As the listless woman talked with me in a kindly manner about work, the baby, who had crawled in from the porch, and arrived as far as his mother's skirts, now tugged at these, to be taken up. His tiny hands had served as propellers across the filthy floor; the piece of lemon candy had added to the general stickiness of the dirt with which both face and clothes were smeared. As a soldier shoulders his gun—the burden to which he is most accustomed,—this mother swung her baby into her arms, and, while she talked on, giving items about the cost of living and factory wages, she loosened her cotton jacket—evidently the only garment she had on—and folding the baby to her breast, she lulled its whimpering.

''Yes,'' she said, ''we pay $1.50 a week for three rooms. That's a little over six a month.

I call it high. We don't get no runnin' water. Every drop we uses 's got to be drawed in the yard; 'n we don't get no light either, nothin' but lamps.''

The baby, comforted and consoled, let his hand stray over the woman's throat with little spasmodic caresses which left in their trail smears of dirt, flecked with tiny scarlet streaks where the sharp nails had caught in the pale, withered flesh.

''I reckon you-all might be cold,'' she said, directing the older girl to put more wood on the open-grate fire, thinking apparently nothing of herself. ''We don't like it here first-rate. Mebbe we'll move on. I sure do crave travelling. Well, honey,'' this was addressed to the baby, who had sat up with a jerk and begun to whine. The candy, picked up from the floor where it had fallen and restored to its owner's mouth, did not seem the desired thing. The mother looked at me with a knowing smile.

''I reckon I can guess what ails him. He wants his babies.'' And at this, always without getting out of her chair before the machine, she reached behind her and drew from a shelf over her head two white rats. These were apparently what the baby had wanted. In the game that ensued between him and his pets, his chief delight seemed to be in seeing the rats disappear through the open-throated gown of his mother, and make the tour of her bodice, wriggling, burrowing, crawling, to emerge finally from her collar at the nape of her neck. Sometimes they diversified their gyrations, proceeding upward into her hair and down again by way of her ears on to easier climbing ground. Impassable, unmoved, she talked on in her gentle, drawling voice, giving no sign whatever that she noticed the animals. It was only when the baby plunged his short nails into the white rat's side that she ejaculated mercifully:

"Quit that! You-all 'll hurt them babies."

I was somewhat dazed as I proceeded presently with my little guide from this interior to the mill. The squalor and disorder of what I had seen, the ignorance and the insensibility, contrasted strangely with the courtesy that had been shown me, the friendly concern about any intention I might have to get work, the desire to help me on my way, the strange lethargic tenderness which took the form of pity for even rats.

"Like animals," my friend had told me. That we must wait to see.

Following thus in the bare footprints of my companion, the way seemed to lead directly into the mill, the door of which stood open with no more formidable porter than a tired overseer. He nodded an indifferent "Yes" at our request to visit, and we stepped over the threshold on a level with the street, and into the spinning-room.

There were thirty-eight hands in this spinning-room. Not ten of them had reached the age of twelve.

It was only after I had talked with them and questioned them for some twenty minutes that the "second man" came to me and explained in a jovial, courteous way that "talkin' kept the hands from work." But in that twenty minutes there was a little world revealed to me of which, knowing nothing, I had read only such accounts as I believed to be ‘‘sensational.’’

The operation of spinning is an extremely simple one. An expert hand can run as many as a thousand bobbins or ten ‘‘sides.’’ A child of ten keeps from two to four ‘‘sides’’ going with no further effort than the renewing of the large bobbins, the cleaning of the ‘‘saliva’’ from the frames, and the refilling of the spindles whose threads have snapped. The replenishing of the quills is done by the smallest hands, who, from the task they perform in lifting the full spools off the frames to put empty ones in their places, are called ‘‘doffers.’’

The first child to whom I spoke stood waiting, without work, for the machinery to start up. He had on a cloth-cap, overalls, and a blue cotton shirt open at the throat. His face was wan, his eyes blue, with an intenser blue streak beneath them. His mouth was full of tobacco, which had caught in a dingy crust about his lips. As he leaned back, one foot

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crossed over the other, expectant for the spindles to begin again their whirling, he presented, in his attitude and gestures, the appearance not of a child, but of a gaunt man shrunk to diminutive size. Coming over to where he stood, I started conversation with him about his work.

"How many sides do you run a day?" I asked.

"Three to four," he answered.

"How much do you make?"

"About $2.40 a week."

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 seayvun."

"Ever been to school?"

He shook his head. "No, meayum. I don't know if I'd like it. I reckon I'd as 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, the 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 never pay much attention whether I get tired or not."

"You have an hour at noon?"

Here he pushed the cloth cap on to 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. Then the bobbins began to revolve slowly, 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 machine, making bands for the spindles, was "goin' on tayun." He earned 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-year-old red-headed girl who had been four years at work, my eyes suddenly fell upon a strange couple (doubtless, I thought, some of the dwarfs against whom I had been warned). I could not take my attention from the tinier of the tiny pair: the boy’s hands appeared to be made without bones, his thumb flew back almost double as he pressed the cotton to loosen it from the revolving roller in the spinning-frame; they no longer moved, these yellow anæmic 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 come 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 'beaout half-a-past five and stays tell six in the mornin'."

I went over to the other dwarf of the couple, older evidently than the boy "'most six." Below her red cotton frock hung a long apron which reached the ground. Her hair was short and shaggy, her face bloated, her eyes like a depression in the flesh, and about her mouth trailed dark streaks of tobacco. It seemed atrocious to question her. Oblivion was the only thing that could have been mercifully tendered—even the peace of death could hardly have relaxed those tense features, cast in the dogged mould of misery.

"How old are you?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I don't know."

"What do you earn?"

She shook her head again.

Her fingers did not for a moment stop in their swift manipulation of the broken threads. Then, as though she had suddenly remembered something, she said:

"I've only been workin' here a day."

"Only one day?"

"I've been on the night shift tell neow."

Dwarfs? Ah, yes; dwarfs indeed. But would that those who affirm it might once catch sight of the expression that lowered under the brows of these two miniature victims. Like a menace, threatening, terrible, it seemed to presage the storm that shall one day be unchained by the spirits too long pent up in service to the greed of man.

The next child I questioned was twelve. She had been only three weeks in the mill.

"Did you ever go to school?" I asked.

"I sure did."

"Would you rather be in school now?"

She stopped a moment, looked full at me, and then she said:

"Yes, indeed I would."

It was just then that we were interrupted by the "second man."

"Some folks," he explained, "thinks we are runnin' children under tweayulve. They's all over tweayulve except a few little ones that's in here helpin'."

He knew something of the law then, this second man?

And if the children were only "helpin'" who was paying them for it?

Who but the owners of the mills?

At the next factory I visited in Anniston, the work—cotton woven bedspreads, crash towels, etc.—being more intricate required older and more experienced hands. The "boss" made no objection to showing the mill, but as I was accompanied through the rooms by a clerk from the office, I had no opportunity to question what children were there. Among two hundred hands, I saw six or seven who looked to be under twelve, and a score who might have just completed their first dozen of years.

About a mile out of Anniston, over the single-track trolley line, is yet another mill, employing one hundred hands. Finding the gate open there I walked in without passing by the office or asking any sort of permit to visit. My solitary tour through the spinning-room was interrupted by the superintendent who asked me my "business." When I told him it was "simple curiosity" he led me on a fatiguing expedition through picking, carding, and twine rooms. But I had already questioned hastily ten miniature "hands" who were under twelve years of age. Too large a proportion, perhaps, even though they might have been only "helpin'."

The largest company in Anniston was firm in its refusal to allow visitors of any sort within its gates.

"You see," the superintendent said, with a knowing twinkle in his eye, "we have some difficulty keeping our help, and we're always afraid folks might be prowlin' around to get some of our hands away from us. Beside that," he added, fortifying his refusal, "the

Insurance Companies don't permit us to let people through the mills.''

One mill there was whose tall narrow windows continued through the night hours to glow in the darkness, reflecting long silver beams of light against the hillside houses, as though to search out, and claim in their very sleep, the mill hands.

Let him who is a sceptic on the subject of child-labor, let him who scoffs at the worth of the ''lower classes,'' stand one morning at six o'clock before the door of that mill when the night shift gets off.

In the haggard procession that filed up the incline toward the settlement the thing which impressed me most was the cheerfulness of every response that was made to the questions I put. Conversation with these people never became, as it does inevitably among the poor whom charity societies reach, an occasion for lamentation and complaint.

''Why, the old mill keeps us company,'' one woman protested. She was a pale wraith of a being, clad in black, her sparse hair dragged clear of her forehead. The fine films of cotton had settled over her garment, where they rested like a shroud already enveloping one whose weary limbs would find rest at last in death.

"We-all don't mind sleepin' in the daytime," she smiled, "when the children don't wake us up playin' reound."

By our side trudged a long-legged, barefooted boy, who gave his age as thirteen. At an exclamation of pity from me with regard to the night work for children, he said:

"If you don't work you can't earn nothin'. You sure do make more nights. You can get as much in five nights as you can in six days," which information was accompanied by a comprehensive expression that traversed his wan face.

"How much time do you have for resting in the night?"

"Not much of any," he said.

"But for eating?"

"You've got just abeaout time enough for swallowin' your midnight lunch. The machinery don't never stop and the work's mostly piece-work.''

Here I caught sight of the ''hand 'most four'' whom my red-headed friend had signalled to me as being on the night shift. Tumbling along by his mother's side in the semi-obscurity of the dawn, he appeared like a sprite, a creature bred in a cave, his flesh bleached, his eyes dazed by perpetual darkness. Yet when I spoke to him, he turned his strange, bloated, mask-like face to me and smiled.

''He's only helpin' me,'' the mother explained; ''he makes $1.20 a week. I've got three and myself,'' she added, almost apologetically, ''to look out for since my husband died.''

Anniston is a typical Alabama town in which there happen to be mills. The tenements rented by the mill hands are part of the company's property, but the schools belong to the township; and the mill children, like any other residents of the city, may go or not, as they please, to the public classes.

There are no compulsory school laws in the State.

"We don't think it right in a democracy," one of the Alabama clubwomen explained to me, "to *force* any one to do anything. If the parents want their children to go to school, it's their privilege to send them; but we don't believe in compulsion, we believe in liberty."

This system works well, doubtless, among the more prosperous people who can afford to send their children to school, and among the intelligent who understand the benefits an education affords. But among the poorest class and among the mill people what is its result? The corporation town, whose population is made up entirely of "hands," answers this question, as we shall see, with all sorts of illuminating suggestions about liberty.

CHAPTER III

There is no more strictly characteristic manufacturing centre than Alabama City. It would be superfluous to mention on what railroad this great ''plant'' lies, for the trains which reach it are almost wholly freight trains that lumber through the village at unearthly hours, importing the raw cotton and transporting the manufactured product of the factory, with only occasionally a passenger ''local'' which bumps along over the hard-worn bed of the Birmingham, Calera, or Gadsen lines.

Any one who has visited a mill town knows the deserted aspect of its streets during the daytime. Had it not been for the roar of the mill engines which throbbed on as the pulse continues to beat in unconsciousness, I might have supposed Alabama City to be a village whence all life had suddenly fled. The only person in sight when I alighted from the "local" was a small tow-headed girl, swinging on the gate of a neat little one-story mansion, near the station.

"Hello," I called to her, "aren't you going to school?"

She shook her blond head vigorously.

"No, meaum."

"Why not, it's time?"

"My mamma don't *want* me to go to school." With this she scampered into the house, eager, no doubt, to recover the presence of so ideal a parent.

Proceeding further into the village along the railroad ties which form the principal avenue, I perceived a straggling procession of little girls and little boys with slates and books under their arms, swinging along in the direction—doubtless—of the school.

Waiting for an introduction in a mill town would be as hopeless as to wait presentation to one's *vis-à-vis* in some English drawing-rooms. The very high and the very low classes have at least their simplicity in common. The English *grande dame* supposes her presence in the midst of her guests a sufficient introduction; and so it is with the poor, except that the hostess in their case is necessity, need—the imperative need for making a living. Nothing else but such need could explain the presence of a stranger in such a town as Alabama City. And poverty inevitably having invited one thither, one is welcomed among the fraternity who have already arrived.

I joined a small girl in a sloppy frock, her hair done up in wiry pigtails with no hat to cover them, and, as a finishing touch to her get-up, black stockings which I took at first to be polka-dotted, so numerous were the holes scattered over them. She was about seven.

"Going to school?" I asked.

"Yes, meaum."

"Do you know," I pursued, walking along with her, "who lives in those houses?" I pointed to a row of pretty cottages, whose neat and alluring appearance led me to doubt that they were the houses of the laborers. My informant nodded towards one of the houses—both of her arms were full of books—and she said:

"Victoria Stuart lives in this-a-one." And then, with the *blasé* tone of a woman of the world, she added: "That is, she was Stuart, but she married a Morgan."

This evidence of family pride in a child of seven recalled the classification of these people as "animals."

The mills at Alabama City were built in 1895, and are consequently among those longest established in Alabama. They run sixty thousand spindles and employ about two thousand hands. The entire village belongs to the corporation, which lets out the stores, the Inn kept for the bachelor "hands," and the laborers' houses. There is a free library open in the evenings, two churches, a school, a sanatorium, and a large amusement hall, all built at the company's expense. Everything, it would seem, has been done to make the workingman's lot a happy one at Alabama City. Yet thousands of the spindles in the great mill stand idle.

Why? Because of the difficulty in getting help.

And why is it so difficult to get help?

Because the wages paid to "cotton-mill folk" are so low that they live with no hope of ever bettering themselves, and their consequent dejected state of mind keeps them on the go from one place to another, roving perpetually with the excitement of change as the only anodyne for their sufferings. What prisoner indeed would not, if he could, change thus the outlook from his prison's bars?

The school is a bright, cheerful building, with four large rooms where the different classes are graded as best they can be among children, most of whom know more about the hard facts of life than they do about a primer of learning.

Out of the three hundred children whose names are enrolled on the school lists, there are nearly one hundred in the lowest grade class; one hundred and fifty of about the same age in the next grade, and a mere handful of girls (no boys), from thirteen to fifteen, in the upper grade. What strikes one first in the little barefoot, ragged scholars, is their shabbiness, their uncouth appearance, and their vivacity and cheerfulness. They are all eagerness to learn, all willingness to obey; agitated, tempestuous, undisciplined,—not an easy handful for the teacher.

The system of "liberty" in the matter of education precludes all question of regularity in school attendance. In the second class, for example, at the Alabama City mill school, out of sixty-five children between the ages of seven and eleven, ten had "quit" to go into the mills. On the other hand, there were three or four tall, languid, dull-eyed pupils who sat at the back of the room half-ashamed, half-stupefied: old mill hands, the teacher explained to me, who had gone as babies into the service of a machine whose monotonous inflections had seemingly stunned the intelligence.

No child attends school more than three winters, and many of them come in for a month or two at a time just to "rest up" from work.

I took from the teacher a list of children who had for some time been truants, purposing to call upon them, obtaining in this way easy access to their homes.

Having planned (as the surest way of gaining entrance to the mill) to accompany the hands in when the factory gates were open at 12.30, I bought a bag of peanuts and sat down on the back-steps of the store, waiting for the noon bell to strike, and trusting that some of the children might come my way.

Presently I saw a little girl, such as the picture-books represent Red Riding Hood to be. The peanuts served as an introduction, and when she had taken a handful and thanked me, she said:

"Did you ever work in a mill?"

"Yes, in a knitting mill."

She sank down beside me, leaning back against the post of the doorsteps. Her face was hardly less white than the knitted woollen "cloud" which covered her head. She had blue eyes, and when she smiled she showed a row of sound, white teeth.

"I sure am tired enough to sit down," she sighed.

"Do you get tired in the mill?" I asked.

"I reckon I do. We live up on the hill yonder, and when I first started to work it didn't seem nights like I ever could get home. Now I don't mind it."

"How long have you been at work?"

"Over a year."

"And how old are you?"

"Eleavun."

"What are the hours in the mill?"

"Abeaout tweaulve a day, I reckon."

"Twelve?"

"Well," she reflected, as though it were the first time she had given much thought to the matter, "there's the first bell at half-past four, that's for ringin' us up; then there's the second bell for breakfast, and they don't give us more than a few minutes to eat before they begin callin' us at twenty minutes to six."

"And you get out at——?"

"Twenty minutes a-past six."

"With only half an hour for lunch? It's rather long, isn't it?"

"I suttinly think it is."

She leaned listlessly against the wooden post, breaking the shells of the peanuts into her little lap, and eating slowly as she talked. She had on a blue gingham frock, across her chest she had fastened with a needle a narrow cloth cape; she wore stockings and shoes in the last stages of dilapidation. Her blond hair hung in a braid beneath the white woollen hood.

"Does your mother chew?" she asked, following her question with: "Lots of the mill folks dip snuff. There," she pointed to a guant figure in a cotton wrapper dragging along the railroad track, "that's the kind that chews;" and she punctuated this statement with a little shiver of disgust.

"There's piles o' little children in the mill," she went on, "teaun and eleavun years old. Some of 'em only do make teaun cents a day. They used to go in when they wuz about five. Now they say they're tweaulve, but they ain't." She looked at me with a twinkle in her eye. "They knew how old I wuz when I went to work, for I told 'em. They didn't say nothin'. They-all needed help, I reckon."

Her voice had assumed the communicative

tone of a gossipy confidence. "You see, the little girl that was in the cloth-room before me kept throwin' in the threads. The boss spoke to her twice and so she said to him: 'If you don't like my work I reckon I won't stay.' So then they came after me."

Rapidly my mind evoked the images of other children I know who are eleven. . . . By comparison with them how like an elderly woman she seemed, this little pale, cheerful laborer, with her sense of justice, her experience, her importance as a "hand," her resignation to a life of nothing but toil.

"Do you know," she went on, "a little boy deown at the mills told me they wuz goin' to fix it all over the United States so's nobody couldn't work more'n teaun heours a day." Her eyes rested a moment on mine, and then she added, "I don't know if it's true, but I sure do hope it is."

Chatting, as women do, more freely while they have something to nibble at, she lingered as long as the peanuts lasted. Then she shook the shells from her lap and got up to go. She seemed willing that I should walk with her, so we turned up the road which she had found so hard to climb during the first months of her apprenticeship to toil. As soon as we reached "home" she abandoned me to the hospitality of a mother whose arms were occupied with an active year-old baby, and she began vigorously to sweep the floors and porch.

"We-all," said the mother, "sure do wish Mamie-Bell would rest some, but it don't seem like she could."

Mamie-Bell was the victim, and there are many, not only of the lawlessness of manufacturers and their greed, but of the ignorance of parents. Her fathers and brothers made enough to support the family, and indeed to put money aside, for they owned the house in which they lived, together with the ground on which it stood. Though she was dressed in the usual trailing cotton wrapper, and had made apparently no more serious toilet than the twisting of her limp locks into a tight coil at the back of her head, the mother preserved a relative neatness; the house was fairly tidy, and obviously it would have been possible to allow "Mamie-Bell" to go to school. But the social obligations of these parents who had lived always on a farm, far from their fellow-beings, took no more definite form than vague regret that Mamie-Bell didn't "rest more."

To be sure, the founders of mills at Alabama City have made the village as attractive as possible (given the monotony which any place must present where everybody has about the same income, and that income barely above starvation rates). The little one-story houses occupied by the mill families are built with sloping irregular roofs, verandas which are more or less screened by vines planted at the company's expense. About each home there is a small bit of ground enclosed with a fence, all of which, together with the fact that no two of the cottages are just alike, gives a pleasing aspect to the town. No law obliges such corporations to provide a schoolhouse and teacher, nor a library; and one's first impulse is to feel that here, really, is a mill run almost on philanthropic principles. Alabama City is undoubtedly the most attractive mill town in the South, but the facts are simply these: the difficulty of procuring operatives and of keeping them is so great that it is an investment to make the surroundings as alluring as possible, and it is cheaper to offer swimming pools and amusement halls and lodge rooms than it is to raise the wages of two thousand laborers. This, however, would be the only way of attaching them permanently, for nobody becomes really fond of the place where he makes "just too much to die and not enough to live."

When the half-past twelve bell rang the diverse avenues of the little town began to fill with the slow, languid procession dragging along toward the mill gates which stood open. I joined a tall, meagre figure in a cotton dress sagged down over shoes that expressed weariness in their irregular, bulging lines.

"Going to the mill?"

"Sure."

"May I go along with you?"

"Sure."

This laconic permission from a "hand" was worth half a dozen letters of introduction, for, having once penetrated with my companion beyond the austere and forbidding walls of the mills, I was free to make my way into the spinning-room, and to question there as many children as I pleased. Eight, nine, ten, eleven, these were the ages given me by the little piping voices that responded to my questions. Sometimes I followed the all-important "How old are you?" with "How long have you been at work?" Two years, three years, were the average responses. One pale wasted wraith of thirteen fixed my attention because of her hands, cast irrevocably in the mould of drudgery.

"How long have you been at work?" I asked.

There was a touch of shame in her answer.

"Oh, *awful* long."

"A year?"

"Five years. I came in when I wuz eight."

Out of the two hundred and seventy-five hands in one spinning-room, there were certainly seventy-five per cent. under twelve years old. Three things struck me most forcibly: the ghastly appearance of all the hands; the extreme animation and cheerfulness of the little children; the appalling languor of the girls and boys who were fifteen years and over.

The girl who volunteered "to show me around" was typical: she had the natural awkwardness of those whose muscles are depleted by poor nourishment. She hitched along, wielding her arms and hands, like so much dead weight, as best she could. Her little face was pale to transparency: a smile, indulgent, resigned, lighted her dim brown eyes, and rested on her faded lips. How old was she? "'Most sixteen." And how long had she been at work? "Abeaout eight years."

Down in the "weave-room" my guide was a fair-haired girl of fourteen whose apprenticeship at "spinnin'" had lasted five years. "It was only when papa died," she explained, "that I had to come to work. Before that I went to school, and I sure did love it." Then she continued: "There's just piles of little ones in here; too little, I think. When the owner of the mills used to come through we'd 'run out' those tiniest ones."

"Run out?" I asked.

"Yes: hide 'em in the closets or anywhere, for fear he'd stop 'em workin'."

In the spinning-room of the newer mill there were fewer small children, but fewer hands also, for here thousands of spindles stood idle.

With a growing desire to know more of these people who were "like animals," I set out now for the addresses given me by the school, of children who were habitual truants. It was a warm November day and the doors of the houses for the most part stood open on the verandas. A strong smell of iodoform was wafted by the breeze outward from the first interior whither I tried to penetrate. In response to my repeated knocks a boy finally made his appearance, followed by two tiny little girls. Across his temple there was a scar, deep and angry-looking, with flashes of scarlet where the surgeon's stitches had gone into the torn surfaces. Enveloped with bandages his hand lay in a sling whence protruded only the fingers, swollen and blanched by unwonted idleness.

"Got hurt at the mills?" I asked.

"No, meaum," he said, "I got fightin' with a fello' and he drew a knife on me."

He drawled his words; they seemed to dribble slowly, without intelligence, from his mouth, like the tobacco juice which spilled over his lips when he spoke.

Immediately I concluded: a drunkard's quarrel, of course.

"Why doesn't your little sister go to school?" I asked. "She's ten years old."

"Wal, she's a ben goin' to the mill sence I was struck. That's three weeks. We'll send her back to school as soon as I kin quit loafin'. There's seven of us, you see . . ." He laid his free hand on the little head of the youngest child by his side. There was something gentle in the touch, and the baby, lifting her face toward him, rubbed contentedly against his arm. Perhaps he wasn't a drunkard after all. . . .

‘‘You’ve been out of work three weeks?’’ I repeated.

‘‘Yes, meaum. I had thirteen stitches in my wrist and head.’’

‘‘How did you get to fighting?’’

He shifted from one foot to the other, emptied his mouth in a long black trail, which glistened on the wooden floor, and began in his nasal monotone:

‘‘My sisters went down to a party here, an’ papa feound eout ’twas goin’ to be a dancin’ party, and he deon’t alleow my sisters to dance, so he went an’ took ’em away, an’ this fello’ was right provoked, an’ he did some smart talkin’ abeout my father, an’ I won’t stand that, so I tol’ him real sharp to min’ his business, and then we got to fightin’.’’

His face was as implacable as a mask. How easy to have dismissed him at a glance as incapable of human feeling! How tempting to classify him, from his appearance, as one of those whom it is ‘‘useless trying to help’’! Who could have supposed that this formless hulk was moved by a spirit fine enough to place his personal safety beneath the family honor? Dressed in lank black clothes, which served for Sundays, funerals, convalescences, and all such things as mean ''a day off'' from work, he looked like a dejected tramp, yet he had a chivalrous desire to protect his sisters; he had an instinctive respect for his father's will, and he had the fine fibre of loyalty which an affront to those we love stings into the imperative demand for justice, at the sacrifice, if necessary, of life itself. . . .

At the next house where I inquired for a truant I found a barefoot man warming himself by the open fire preparatory to going on duty at six as night watchman. In the room where he sat there were two beds; one was occupied by a child in the unconscious stages of ''the fever.'' Watching with her was a ''neighbor,'' who had come in to take the mother's place while she worked at the mill.

''You see,'' the neighbor explained to me, ''this here child's ben a-bed six weeks.'' She lifted the dingy spread and uncovered the little sufferer's face. ''When she-all gets better, Doshia can begin lessons again, I reckon. Now we need her to help round the house.''

My visits continued to reveal a variety of interiors. One fact remained the same in almost every case I investigated. Back of the absence of the little truant was some misfortune,—sickness, death, or an accident,—which caused her to be taken from school in order temporarily to go to work or to share the responsibilities of running the house or acting as nurse. One mother was keeping her boy out because he had no shoes:* one other practical parent had sent her girl of eleven into the mill to earn her own Christmas money; one or two very wild youths of about ten had taken their careers into their own management and given up school, because it set too much restraint upon their liberty—but such cases were comparatively exceptional. Shiftlessness, actual need, illness, and misfortune are the principal causes which take the children from the schools and send them back into the mills. What an opportunity is there here for a visiting nurse, such as the "district nurses" of Miss Wald's admirable settlement in New York, who go from house to house, giving the proper care to the sick, offering encouragement to overworked, ignorant mothers, and instructing them in the simple rules of hygiene and cleanliness!*

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* The company is willing to provide books and shoes for children who want to go to school and who have no money to buy them ; but the mill hands are proud and reluctant to declare their poverty before others.

The last address on my list took me out along the track whose iron rails form the only paving of the central thoroughfare. I had knocked for some time at doors and blinds, which echoed, in response, only the emptiness of a deserted house, and I was about turning away when a kindly voice called from a neighboring window:

"They-all ain't home. Won't you come on over and rest?"

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* As a matter of fact, the two thousand operatives of the mills at Alabama City are taxed by the company one cent on every dollar they earn, to support two resident doctors. If a visiting nurse could be added to the staff, it is my belief that the sickness would diminish, the attendance at both school and factory be more regular, and the experiment prove, in this way, an economy to the corporation. The work of such a nurse would be, in a measure, missionary work, as is that of the admirable teachers at the Alabama City School.

Eager to see what I could of the homes which shelter the workers whose concerted effort goes by the name of "child-labor," I yielded to this hospitable request; and as I crossed the yard I caught sight of a boy standing near the fence: the sunlight fell aslant the mat of blond hair with which his head was crowned, and there was something golden, too, in the ghastly pallor of his face. His legs and arms protruded, bare and lank, from clothes long since outgrown, and his whole attitude expressed such physical exhaustion that instinctively I exclaimed to the woman who waited on the doorstep:

"Is that your boy?"

Perhaps she detected something more than curiosity in my tone, for she answered:

"Yes, meaum. He's been a-sleepin'. He's on fer night work neow."

Through the kitchen, which was scrupulously neat, she led me into a darkened room, in whose semi-obscurity I could perceive a bed in disorder, the sheets thrown back, the mattress airing during this moment of idleness between the rising of the night hand and the coming to rest of the day laborer.

"Yes, meaum," the mother resumed, apologizing for the confusion of the room, and offering me a chair by the fire, "Arthur's took to the night work deownt the steel works. He sure does make more. He gits to bed abeout seavun in the morning, he's up and reound by two, loafin' till five, and then he walks over to the mills, abeout a mile."

She had on a neat cotton dress, and an apron over her skirt; her hair, already streaked with grey, was carefully arranged; her small blue eyes looked out from a surrounding network of fine wrinkles, which added to the resignation of their appealing expression. There were two babies, the oldest scarcely able to walk, playing about the floor.

"They're my daughter's children," she explained. "I'm mindin' 'em while she's 'twork deownt the mill. Arthur's comin' to dinner neow," she went on, as a sound in the kitchen announced his return. And during the short five minutes which it took

Arthur to despatch the meal prepared for him, the mother, in answer to my inquiries, told me their story. Thirteen years before, her husband, a sheriff, had been shot dead in an attempt to separate two drunken disputants. Left thus a widow, with no means of support, she had sent her two children, as soon as she could, into the cotton mill. With the eighty cents a day they brought to her she had fed and clothed them and herself. Not quite twenty dollars a month; it was this stipend, furnished by tiny hands, which for years had kept together that home. When the daughter married, she continued to work as a mill hand, but her earnings were contributed to aid in the support of her own household and children.

Arthur was thus left alone to provide for himself and his mother.

With some reluctance, having finished his dinner, he now joined us as we sat by the fire "visiting." He was "ashamed," his mother protested, not to be dressed, though he might indeed have been proud, for his miserable clothes only offset his bearing, which reflected the dignity that prevails where courage and fortitude persist side by side with misery. Scarcely had he sat down, when a tiny voice at his side plead with him:

"Take me up, Uncle Arthur, take me up!"

It was the oldest of the children. He lifted her on to his knees, and clasped his brawny, toil-worn arms about her, while she nestled against him, content. And, as the mother murmured shyly, "He's got that baby right spoiled with pettin'," Arthur began to talk, in broken sentences, about his work, his life, his ambitions. He spoke very slowly, as one who knows from long familiarity all the limitations that make well-nigh impossible whatever he would undertake. For almost ten years he had drawn his fifty or sixty cents a day from the cotton mill. Then the steel works had been set up just outside of Alabama City, and some one brought the news that he could earn seventy-five cents a night, and work on Sunday nights as well as week nights. . . . Hands were so scarce, in fact, that he could be at his job day and night when his strength allowed.

"We-all can't stop him," the mother said, in her timid, gentle voice; "he never quit workin' from Sat'day night tell Monday mornin', and he started in Tuesday again and worked tell Wednesday evenin'. It's mostly an out-door job, too, so's 't keeps him with a real smart cold on his chest."

"This is not right!" I exclaimed, appealing to the boy. "You cannot go on in this way; you are only fifteen years old. . . ."

His eyes met mine with a glance that made me feel how much stronger was his own determination than any argument I could use, and he said:

"I'm makin' twenty-two dollars a month deownt the steel works."

"You see," the mother put in, "he gives me twelve a month for his board, an' mine, an' the rent, an' all . . ."

"He's never been to school?" I asked.

"No, meaum, he's never had no time; he's been at work since he was five."

"But he *must* learn to read and write."

"That's what he craves, but it's been a right hard pull now for abeaout ten years."

It was through a mist glistening before my eyes that I looked again at Arthur. The baby had fallen asleep on his breast, and he sat immovable, gazing at the red coals that glowed on the hearth. In the semi-darkness of the room the firelight intensified the shadows that played around the rugged little figure, bowed over the burden that lay in its arms. Turning to me, he said, very slowly:

"I reckon that-all's true abeout readin' and writin'." And then, as though he were pledging an oath, he added in his hoarse, broken voice: "I'm goin' to school next year if I'm alive. It'll take abeaout a year, then I'll have enough."

Enough? Yes, enough, so that he could support his mother and himself out of his savings while he "quit work" the time it takes to learn "readin' and writin'." He had never had a book in his hands nor "scratched a line," as his mother put it; he had had no contact with that outside world of imagination and learning in which the rest of us dwell; he had been for ten years up before dawn and plied in the service of a machine for twelve hours of the day; he had spent his childhood as a laborer, a breadwinner, who earned food and shelter not only for himself but for another; he had lived without pleasure, without amusements, without hope. Without hope, yes, but never without courage. And when at last an opportunity presented itself, what form did it take?—the chance to extenuate his remaining energies working nights and days and nights, and to be drenched to the skin and to be too tired to eat when food was put before him, and too exhausted to sleep when his head touched the pillow—this was his chance, and he met it fighting the good fight, and bound to be a victor! Heaven knows his lank and withered body gave evidence sufficient of what he was going through, but who could pass him on the way and not be better for it, who could take his hand and not be uplifted by this iron clasp which, in suffering untold, had clung fast to the real things of life?

This is the sort we can point to with pride when asked: "Where are the real Americans?" There is not another country in the world which can produce such metal. That boy-laborer is a tacit defiance of the manufacturer's greed. He stands as a testimony to the fact that no one can rob the human soul.

CHAPTER IV

The somewhat imposing name of Pell City has been given to a cluster of houses lodged in the valley between Attalla and Birmingham. The five hundred inhabitants of the incipient town have submitted to taxes sufficient for the authorities to erect a city-hall, a court-house, a hotel, a post-office, and a railroad station. The city hall consists of three brick walls and a marble façade, behind which are two empty rooms (no one has time to be a functionary in Pell City). The court-house is a red brick building with a spacious front hall occupied by a janitress and two of her babies, who, she explains, laughingly, are ''the only livin' souls in the place.'' The post-office screens behind its grey wooden slats and swinging door the real heart of the city; and the railroad station is a shanty divided into ticket and freight offices, with two waiting rooms, one for white people, one for negroes. Each has a window, a bench, and an earthenware stove, which has so long served as a butt for the expectorations of the travelling populace that it presents rather the appearance of a weeping funeral urn than of an apparatus for distributing heat.

On the outskirts of this flourishing city, a mantle of smoke veils the heavens and indicates, without doubt, the locality of the cotton mills.

It was thither that I made my way on the open road over which was reflected the warm November sun, that glistened comfortably upon the rows of white cottages composing the settlement of the factory hands. A church, a schoolhouse, a vast ''plant,'' a sprinkling of little homes, a superintendent's residence, somewhat grander than the rest, an office and a store,—such the architecture of the buildings before me declared them evidently to be. As at Alabama City, here, also, there was a population of some fifteen hundred to two thousand souls, spinning, weaving, drudging. . . .

Having got into conversation with one of the older "hands" and joined once more the slow procession which moved at 12.30 toward the factory gates, I entered without difficulty the weave-room, whence I could make my way as I pleased to other parts of the mill.

In the spinning-room there was a crowd of children, the same in aspect here as at Anniston and at Alabama City: little bodies bent and twisted, faces from which every vestige of color and animation had departed, hands that flew in a deft response to the claims of a machine, eyes that glanced upwards from toil long enough to flash a glance of cheerful comradeship to the stranger who questioned as she passed. Out of seventeen children with whom I spoke hastily, two, after a moment's hesitation, gave their ages as twelve. The others were seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven. Some of those who were eleven had already been three years at work.

I paused a moment to watch a boy of twelve: his shoulders were bowed, his brows drawn together, his hands were like claws, his eyes and hair were all one dark, dusky color. With lightning rapidity he snatched the old quills from the pins and dropped the new ones in place, and when they showed resistance he drove them down with a nervous stroke that plainly said "You *must* go on!" Yet as I talked with him, his face lighted up.

"How long have you been at work?"

"In a cotton mill?" His tone implied that he had always been working somewhere.

"Yes," I said, "in a cotton mill."

"Four years."

"Don't you get tired?"

"A little," he nodded, passing on along the frame out of hearing, like some sombre mechanical spring which had been wound up and which could do nothing but "go" until its time came for running down.

In the weave-room the hands were older and there was a general aspect of gaiety; the long bands of red, blue, and yellow denim were furled and unfurled like gigantic flags, the drawing-in frames made a pretty setting for the swaying figures that hovered over them, and an atmosphere of animation and coquetry floated about amid the roaring din of the machines, as it is wont to hover wherever chance places in close companionship—even of work—men and girls who are young.

Without so much as being accosted regarding the purpose of my visit by any officious overseer, I did, however, as I lingered here and there on my way through the mill, rouse the curiosity of three little sweepers who followed me out into the yard with an evident desire to converse. It was with kindly good-humor that they put the usual question: "Ever worked in a mill?" And, having received an affirmative answer, they stuffed their hands in their pockets and leaned up comfortably against the doorstep where we stood, ready to make friends, and presenting all the appearance of three diminutive men who knew just about what to expect in life, and who had determined instinctively to make the best of it. One was from Georgia, one from Alabama, one from Kentucky, and though the oldest was but thirteen they had all worked in half a dozen different places.

"Why do you move around so?" I asked, impressed here, as I had been everywhere, by the nomadic propensities of the operatives. The Alabamian explained in an indulgent way:

"Why, that's how mill folks are, always thinkin' they can make a little more in the next place."

And the Kentuckian added: "Money's the thing they're all after. You spend it all when you crave travellin', but you sure do make out to have a good time."

A propos of a good time, I followed the remark by a question, which I expected to be met with a burst of enthusiasm, on the subject of football or some other sport.

"What," I asked, "do you like best of all?" There was a moment's pause, and then one of the boys said:

"Weavin'."

Anxious to find out in how far this mill direction respected the law, I questioned again:

"At what age can you come in here?"

The Alabamian grinned, showing a row of strong, white teeth, and lines of wrinkles on his freckled nose.

"Oh, *any* age from one to forty!"

And the Kentuckian, more poetic, took up the refrain: "Any age from knee-high to a grasshopper until you can touch the moon."

"Don't you have to show a certificate?"

"You do in some places," the Georgian responded, speaking with the authority of experience, "but not here."

"Haven't you got one?"

"Why, they don't know such a thing here. You just apply for a job, and the boss asks you what you can do, and then he gives you your place."

How hard to realize that these were children! They had all the forbearance of the poor, and all the professional understanding of their work, which grown mill hands have, the sceptical acceptance of its limitations, the sly classing of themselves in a category apart from the employers. Lack of responsibility alone distinguished them from men, and left them still with a fund of merriment and good-humor, bubbling over in the form of jokes and chuckles.

They wore the usual mill badge of lint, in their case more noticeable because of the dark-blue tint of the cotton-dust with which the colored denims powdered them over—head, ears, hair, nostrils.

At Pell City proper, with a population of five hundred, there were, I found, fifty children attending school. In the mill town, out of the fifteen hundred hands who formed the inhabitants (three hundred and fifty of whom were of the school age), there were but eighty or ninety scholars under the direction of the two faithful teachers, who confessed themselves discouraged at the frequent absences among their pupils, and the nomadic disposition of the mill ''folk'' which drives them on about every six months from one town to another, attracted by new possibilities, above all, tired of the old ones, and needing, in their very weariness, the stimulation of change.

The privilege of letting every man do as he pleases is extended to the Alabamian, not only in the matter of sending his children to school, but in the question of protecting his own health and that of his family. No one need be vaccinated unless he desires it. Last winter smallpox broke out at Pell City, and before it had spent the full force of its virulence two hundred of the mill hands had been attacked by the disease without the doctors having a right to prevail upon the ignorance of the people with any more definite authority than friendly persuasion.

Seeking always a chance to make friends with some of the little laborers, I went into the grove of trees which, because perhaps of a few benches and a bandstand, was known by the name of "park." This luxurious pleasure-ground and a bowling-alley were the company's contribution toward the entertainment of its hands. Strange to say, the bowling-alley was never patronized—strange, indeed, that after eleven hours and a half of work, standing, the operatives should not choose to spend their superfluous energy on driving weighty balls down an alley in pursuit of ninepins!

It was not long before a little brown-haired girl in a blue cotton dress, with a woollen hood over her head, came swinging along.

"Hello!" I said, "where are you going?"

She was an earnest, dull-eyed, uninteresting little specimen.

"I'm going deownt the store," she said, "to get some breown velvet for Mama."

"How old are you?"

"'Most nine."

"Ever worked in the mill?"

"Yes, meum. I worked there 'most a year, makin' forty a day, but when the new 'super' came he cut me deown to twenty-eight, and I sure did quit."

This fact of "quitting" at a change in salary harmonized with the idea of buying "breown velvet," and both gave a notion of what this family must be: rich on pay-day, in debt the rest of the week, estimating their own worth by the amount of their needs, and, when there was a deficit in the exchequer, attributing it not to their own shiftlessness, but to the "company's meanness," which they punished peremptorily by "quitting."

As I could prove no rival to the charms of buying "breown velvet," I was abandoned by the young *révoltée* to my meditations, which were interrupted by the passage on my way of a little being with short hair, a pink gingham frock, a bruise over one eye, and a bag of groceries under either arm. I had already noticed her when I visited the primary class, so I said, detaining her as she passed:

‘‘How do you like school?’’

The angry bruise over her forehead held her little brow rigid, but there was a smile in her eyes, as she said:

‘‘I sure do love school.’’

As she spoke she tugged at one of the grocery bags, opened it, and offered me some candy. Then, having lodged a piece of toffy at the side of her mouth, she went on:

‘‘I’ve worked in the mill, but I don’t love it. I’m the only one up home that ain’t workin’ neow. Jeff and Musie and Loona and Doshie is all ’t work.’’

She took a place beside me on the ‘‘park’’ bench, and deposited her bundles.

‘‘I was right smart sick the other day,’’ she continued. ‘‘A little boy hit me with a rock,’’ she touched the wound on her forehead, ‘‘but

I kep' on 't school 'cause I'm so afraid if I once stay eout my stepmother 'll make me go back 't the mill. I wouldn't miss school for anything.'' She smiled wisely, and plunged her hand in the paper bag for another candy.

''Does your father work?'' I asked.

The smile faded, and the little face grew very serious.

''He died,'' she said, ''the week after we come here. He had the asthma. His job was awful hard, he worked nights in the dye-room. He used to have to keep the windows open so 's he could get air enough.''

She hurried on with a rapid description of his sufferings, and then more slowly she said:

''That night he went over to get a drink, and just 's he come to the pump he dropped deown. The men had to tote him home. His head was like this—and his arms were like this,'' her own little head fell forward on her breast as she spoke, and her arms hung lifeless. Then she added in a low voice:

''Death struck him when he fell.''

After a moment she began again:

''Mama just keeps house. She never has

worked.'' And in turn she questioned me: ''I guess you're a good pensman.''

When we had decided upon our relative merits at writing, she said:

''Are you a good dressmaker?''

''Not very, and you?''

She laughed. ''Good enough to make my own clothes.''

''Did you make that dress?''

She nodded. ''I make them all except Sunday ones.''

In her family there were, I found, five grown members earning pay at the mill sufficient to support them comfortably. Yet, because the youngest was already eleven, that is to say, because she represented a daily stipend of fifty cents—there was a determination to make her a bread-winner, a determination so strong that only her own courage and valiance had so far been able to ward off the evil day when she should move from the school-bench into the spinning-room.

It is natural that the first impulse of these people who have deserted their farms for the factory should be to embrace every opportunity for gain which presents itself, and it is, therefore, all the more necessary that they should be made to see the ultimate profit of giving their children some education. For this end nothing, does it not so seem, could be more promptly effective than a compulsory school law.

CHAPTER V

The question of reaching Huntsville was a serious one. "We can't rightly say what the route is," the Gadsden hotel clerk explained. "Lots o' folks goes there, but none ever comes back."

Huntsville, it was true, partly because of the gloominess of the town itself, partly because of its indirect approach, by water, suggested the village of Eden which Dickens has described in his *Martin Chuzzlewit.* A bulky dingy steamer it was that conveyed us from one landing to another on the Tennessee River. For three hours the double side-stacks sent forth whirling columns of feathery black smoke, the rear paddle-wheel beat a snowy path in its watery way, a chilly mist enveloped the ample bushes whose rounded sides, overhanging the banks, swept the swift stream's surface, and within the cabin of the *Chattahoochee* the dreary passengers talked in undertones, deluged the ship's utensils with copious expectorations, and waited with that air of resignation which characterizes animals in transportation.

Huntsville was reached at last. The clouds of soot, which in the small towns had indicated at once the locality of the mill, were here spread in a sombre veil over the entire city. Several small ''plants,'' scattered through the town itself, together with the enormous mills outside the town, had, by the perpetual consumption in their works of soft, bituminous coal, darkened the very bark on the trees in the neighborhood.

Determined always to ''go'' until I was stopped, and to see all I could before I was ''put out,'' I started at once for the mills, which are a mile or so from the Huntsville City Hall. It was too late to join the hands in their noon return, and a forbidding wall with padlocked gates drove me as a last resource into the superintendent's office to ask there a permit to visit the mills. I told him I was a Mrs. Watson from Birmingham, Alabama, and the ''simple curiosity'' of this fictitious person brought from him the slow response:

"I haven't got any one to send with you, but I guess you can find your way through all right."

Straight I made all speed to the spinning-room, and as I entered this vast domain I thought, at a first glance, that it was empty. Then, having passed along one end, I perceived, toiling laboriously, quantities of children, so small that their heads did not appear over the low frames! Fourteen of these tiny spinners I questioned; three of them only "claimed" to be twelve, and these had all been several years at work; the others were eight, nine, and ten years old.

"Have you ever worked in a cotton mill?" one small girl asked me in her shrill little voice.

"No," I answered.

"I tell you," her tone was animated, "it's real hard work."

"Is it?"

"Well," she smiled, "it is for us little kids anyway."

"Did you ever go to school?" I asked.

"No, but I'd just love to." Here she threw out her hands with a sorrowful gesture, and added: "I'm only twelve. I've been workin' 'most four years, and I haven't got enough education to read and write!"

The heat in this great hall was intense. In order to maintain the proper pliability of the cotton thread the atmosphere of the spinning-room must be kept at a very high temperature. In addition to the steam-pipes which encircled the walls there were here, at intervals, open valves which poured forth diminutive clouds of vapor, taking from the air every breath of its vitality.

It was not long before one of the overseers, noticing how freely I was talking with the little, toil-worn, ghastly waifs who plied their way up and down before the whirling spindles, came over and began to make maudlin excuses:

"We don't care about havin' the 'help' talk much," he said.

"Ah?"

"No, you see they don't allow no children under twelve to work in the mills. We're kind of afraid people might come in and question some of 'em and get us into trouble. Of course,'' he added, ''our children all *is* twelve.''

''Do you think so?'' I asked.

''My, yes, all our help has certificates. We keep a notary busy the whole time.''

The next child I questioned, having noticed perhaps that the ''boss'' had spoken to me, answered in this way when I asked her age:

''I'm teaun. No—I mean—I'm twealve.''

Nobody could pass through such spinning-rooms as those and not cry out lustily against child-labor. No moderate friend of the manufacturers, no partisan of the rabid industrial development in the South, could find a single argument with which to meet the unspoken plea of this little army of toilers. They bear no resemblance to healthy children. They look like the pale insipid flowers that straggle up in the furrows of the wheat field when the harvest has been gathered. . . .

An incident at the other mills, which I subsequently visited at Huntsville, confirmed the remarks made by the little spinning hand at Alabama City: ‘‘When the gentleman that owns the mills comes around to visit we hide the littlest hands so he won’t see em.’’

The proprietor of this important manufacturing company happened, while I was there, to be passing through the village where his ‘‘plant’’ is situated. There was, in consequence, some reluctance to let me visit the spinning-room. The dye-rooms, the weaving-rooms, and engine-houses were shown with a free conscience, since no ‘‘little help’’ can be employed in these localities. But my guide from the office explained to me they were ‘‘cleaning the machinery’’ in the spinning-room, and ‘‘most of the hands’’ were ‘‘loafing,’’ so there wasn’t ‘‘anything much’’ to see.

Let us hope that this sort of deception keeps the mill-owner from knowing really what wraiths of childhood are doing his work for him. Otherwise he would too easily appear in the guise of a modern monster crushing human life in order to get the full price of his greed. And the snowy threads in the spinning-room, as they whirl about the spindles like an immaculate, diaphanous cloud, might seem to this same mill-owner to be drenched in the scarlet that speeds outward from little fingers, whose forces, as their life's blood, ebb from them while they toil!

Over the rolling country outside of the town, in the direction of West Huntsville, there are a succession of smaller mills, made to look insignificant indeed by comparison with the giant plant which flings its human débris, when work is done, into a group of yellow frame, two-story houses, each of which is inhabited by two families, and surrounded by a yard, sprinkled over, as were the sidewalks in this desolate town, with slag from the factory furnaces. An occasional attempt to grow flowers in these paupers' areas had been thwarted by an old-time habit of sweeping on to the incipient flower-beds such rubbish as came daily from within the house: ashes, old rags, barrel hoops, chicken feathers, paper bags, tin cans. The result was an uninviting accumulation.

As all attempts to trespass within the well-guarded enclosure of the mill were unavailing, I resorted to a post of observation opposite the gates through which the operatives filed out at noon, and in again when the clock's hands had sped onward to 12.45, having left them this only too brief three-quarters of an hour to cook and eat their dinner. In the multitude that came drifting, scurrying, whirling past me, there were scores of children under twelve years old. Their clothes were flecked with cotton lint, grey and dusky like their ashen faces; they were bowed and drooping, with a strange nervous animation that became them as pitifully as friskiness favors an unconscious old age.

What could they be expected to look like?

They work twelve hours and five minutes a day, these little "hands."

Having been peremptorily stopped by the janitor when I attempted to follow with the procession into the mill, I repaired to the school, and there found out of a population of six hundred possible scholars about one hundred to one hundred and thirty scholars enrolled on the lists.

"Where are the rest?" I asked the teacher.

"In the mill," she answered solemnly. "Even the littlest boys and girls from the primary classes are constantly taken out and made to work as long as the parents see fit."

Work is the only discipline they ever know. The parents, depleted and underfed, exert no authority. Their only attempt at restraint is made in the outbursts of exasperation, to which over-tired nerves give reckless vent.

"We have to switch the children," the teacher volunteered, when I questioned her about a birch rod which lay across her desk. "Without switching them we couldn't keep any sort of order here."

And again, perceiving a crippled boy, I asked how he had lost his arm, and received from the teacher this amazing answer:

"Oh, he lost it in the mill. We get lots of them maimed, with one finger or a hand or an arm gone. They go in so young to work they don't know what machinery is, and they try 'just for fun' to see how near they can come to it without 'touching.' It's rather a dangerous game sometimes."

CHAPTER VI

After visiting a number of towns, such as those above described, journeying always from one place to another in the "locals" patronized chiefly by the nomadic paupers, to whom has been unjustly affixed the appellative of "poor white trash," one becomes familiar with this native American type. They produce an impression like one we had long ago when we were children and went to visit some mysterious relative, a grandmother or a great-aunt. On the first rainy day we used to mount into the somewhat awe-inspiring realm known as the attic. Young and vivacious we revelled at bringing our exuberant animation, like a whirlwind, to toss about the withered, inanimate objects that had long lain dust-covered and in silence. Suddenly in the midst of such disrespectful turbulence we came across some discarded by-gone possession which, by its very faded elegance, invoked a past memory that roused in us a feeling of reverence for we knew not what. It might have been only a bit of silk, a bodice, a mantle, an embroidered shawl, a parasol of lace, so worn, in fact, that as we touched it, it crumbled in our hands. Yet the very dust that sifted on to us arrested the assurance in our hearts that youth was not everything, and awakened brusquely the consciousness in us, the consciousness of a past.

Thus do the poverty-stricken people of the South—the poor white trash—irresistibly affect one.

Any economist who enjoys riding, rough-shod, his hobbies into a "class," can heedlessly confront the mongrels, pouring pell-mell from Europe into the Northern and Western slums. But the Southern "mill folk," the hill people or "crackers," are of that warp and woof whose fine original quality, like the faded brocade bodice, exhales a perfume of long ago, which causes one, however militant, rather to dwell upon the charm of past memories than to conjure up any hope of future hygienic and progressive reforms.

These people are the best we have. But they have dwelt too long in exile, cut off by their illiteracy from an outside world, without instruction, plunged in profoundest ignorance concerning practical things. Descendants of the early English settlers who, two hundred years ago, moved inland after a primary sojourn in the coast towns, they have carried with them the fine principles and moral qualities which no physical deterioration can cause them to forsake. They have a reverential and religious attitude of mind, a pride of family, a sense of honor, the sentiment of gratitude. They are courteous and hospitable. Such probity as theirs, such delicacy of feeling and uprightness of character, show, as do their faces, the inherited capacity for culture which constitutes good breeding.

Yet it is not, to be sure, with a workman's sentiments and possibilities for refinement that the mill-owner has to concern himself.

His interest in the human ends when he has tested his abilities as a "hand." These, alas! in the Alabamian are limited. Whatever their charm from a social point of view, these English descendants are industrially poor recruits. It is generally not an energetic resolution that has brought them in from the country to the mill, but some misfortune in the family: the death or illness of the father, the extreme youth of the children or delicacy of the mother, which make it necessary for them to abandon farm-work and turn to something requiring less physical force, and permitting them, nevertheless, to remain together, and to subsist on what they earn.

Long depletion, generations of insufficient nourishment, ignorance and isolation, together with the circumstantial reasons given above, place the "mill folk" below par. The sum of energy drummed out of them—insignificant as compared to the effort put forth by a similar group of toilers in the North—is chiefly supplied by the spasmodic labor of the children. Their pluck drives them to an expenditure of their forces,—all too precocious,—which is paid for by premature exhaustion.

It is, to be sure, only thirteen years since the first important cotton mill was started in Alabama. Millions of dollars since then have poured from the coffers of the North and from the native resources into this accommodating State. The result is a general awakening to life, such as, in modern times, a flourishing industrial status can alone effect.

What brings the money?

The cotton mills.

Who run the cotton mills?

The children.

The children under fifteen years of age! Without their collaboration, the mills would be forced to shut down.

"The law," so more than one factory agent told me, "is, and must remain, a dead letter in Alabama."

What, then, are we to conclude?

That we are a nation financially ferocious? That we are and should be willing to have a generation of girls and boys among the poor, of future mothers and fathers, sacrificed, crippled, deteriorated, starved slowly to death, in order that the cotton-mill industry in a single State shall prosper?

Exactly so, economists respond. A few lives more or less scarcely count in the history of a nation's commercial growth.

Granted. But does not a single one of these human lives, these innocent children's lives, plundered by us, blindly, unwittingly, if you will, with no other thought than our own enrichment, leave an ugly disfiguring blot upon the annals of our spiritual welfare, which more than effaces all our benefactions to the poor in the name of philanthropy, and all our contributions to "progress" in the name of industrial evolution?

PART II

GEORGIA

CHAPTER VII

And Georgia? Take one of the largest factories in that State. The immensity of the mill, the dreariness of the village in which it is situated, strike one with a melancholy that clings and is insidious: the frame houses all alike, painted a sickly yellow; the invading back-yards with dogs and chickens that stray about the steps and porch; the geometrical avenues labelled A, B, C, and D; the church without a steeple; the "plant" with its tall chimneys which pour forth a blackness that stains the sky and changes its dome of blue to a mantle of dulness; the new roads that cut like scars across the withered earth as it rises in a slope on either side of the mill stream; the dead corn-stalks in the neighboring fields; the cotton, resting here and there like flakes of snow on the brown plants which the first frost has killed. Such are the homes and the surroundings offered by Northern capital to the twelve hundred hands who operate the mill.

No one is permitted to visit the spinning-room: no one may watch the monster feed upon human lives. But the miserable débris that, hour by hour, escapes from its clutches, can be studied at the schoolhouse and in the "homes."

Lessons are, it is true, given regularly to the children by a number of teachers, a part of whose wages is paid by the company. I found two hundred and fifty children enrolled on the school lists, and an average attendance of about half that number in the class-rooms, which are spacious and well-lighted. On the floor near the entrance of the school I encountered a poor boy whose body, legless, maimed, and twisted, gave evidence again of the "company's" indifference to human life. For, indeed, what could any company expect when they run a railroad, without gates or barriers of any kind, straight through a tiny village where there are hundreds of children? What could they expect except that periodically some venturesome boy, unrestrained and unprotected, should, for his childish imprudence, become the victim of a horrible accident, an accident which must leave him, as it had this poor creature, to crawl about helpless and dependent? Such a ''case'' goes down on the company's books among the ''incidental expenses.'' But any one of the mill-owners who chanced to see that miserable cripple and to observe his expression, sombre and desperate, might open another private reckoning of accounts under the heading of ''criminal negligences.''

In the school there was the usual turbulent, restless, eager little group; ragged, barefoot, old in experience, unborn to book-knowledge, tragic in all they represented of glorious possibilities suppressed and stifled by overwhelming labor, and slowly crushed by the gradual starvation of their bodies.

With the teacher's permission I put the following question to a primary class of forty-five children between the ages of six and eleven:

''How many of you have ever worked in a mill?''

The attention quickened at this word of work—like a flash the hands went up: I counted thirteen. Thirteen out of forty-five who already had been laborers! . . .

Everything in the village belongs to the "corporation." The company charges for a four-room house $1.20 a week, and for a building, or half building with five rooms, $6.00 every four weeks. Neither light nor heat is furnished free.

Having taken from the teacher a list of truants, I set out to call upon some of the strange, unknown "other half" of humanity about which such questions are often put as: "Are they really so different from us? Are they as unhappy as we think they are? Do the children suffer as *our* children would?"

No doubt one of *"our"* children, were he made to work twelve hours a day, would either rise up in juvenile revolt, or soon be carried to an early grave. But to break the spirit that is bowed and bent by accumulated generations of want and need, it takes some time, even for the subtlety of the cotton-mill owner.

Yet he accomplishes it!

There is a wearing out among the mill hands, a gradual breaking down, an inward unhappiness, a sensibility, different in kind to what ours would be under similar circumstances, because of the opposite æsthetic key to which "their" tastes have been attuned, but no less than ours in degree, and keen enough, God knows, to make of their lives and of their children's lives one long, slow martyrdom.

The general impression of these homes was appalling: the dirt, the smells, the disorder, the idle old women and wallowing babies, proclaiming innocently the fact of existence, which becomes tragic when this uselessness of infancy and old age imply a dependence upon others whose burdens already are too heavy. . . .

But general impressions of humanity are always appalling, and a crowd never reveals the idea of God. I made straight for one of the addresses given me by the teacher, and on the back porch of the yellow frame cottage I found a miniature being, dressed very neatly, with one arm in a sling, and under the other a pile of newspapers.

"Why aren't you at school?" I asked the boy when we had exchanged greetings. "You don't work in the mill, do you?"

"No, meam. I carry the *Constitution* and help Gran'maw mind the baby." This programme of political and domestic occupations having been recited solemnly, the following explanation succeeded:

"The *Constitution's* the Atlanta newspaper."

"Do you sell many copies?"

"No, meam. And Gran'maw's not my real Gran'maw, I just call her that; and the baby isn't her baby, it's her daughter's, that's dead."

His eyes were brown and round and wide open, and his skin had the peculiar clearness which does more than soap for making a boy look clean. He shifted the newspapers on to his knees and rested the lame arm over them.

"Why did you stop going to school?" I asked.

"Got hurt," he answered. "A boy fired

off a denamite cartridge. Some men that were boardin' here gave it to him. He didn't know what it was. It'd like to have blowed my hand off."

"But you are well enough to go to school?"

"Gran'maw don't reckon it's wouth my while startin' in before Christmas; that'll be in six weeks."

"Gran'maw's" notions of what was worth while seeming rather vague, I asked:

"Have you no parents?"

"Yes, meam. I've got a father 't's always movin' reound. Sometimes he comes here. He's t' Alabama City neow."

Then he looked at me with his round, wide eyes, and said: "My father's been *as far as to where there's an ocean.* He says he likes that the best."

"And your mother?"

His voice, which had dropped into the communicative tone as he talked, here became almost a whisper.

"My mother died when I was three."

"You can't remember her?"

"Oh, *yes,* I can." His eyes were no longer looking toward me—they had turned their wide gaze, as it seemed, into the short past of the little eleven-year-old life. "Oh, yes, I can remember her," he reiterated very slowly, "but it seems like a dream neow, it was so long ago."

"Why don't you live with your father?" I felt the crudity of my own curiosity which brought the child back from his "dream."

"Well," he said, speaking with a mature sort of wisdom and resignation, "I've been with Gran'maw six years now. I've found one good place, and I reckon it's better for me to stay in it than to go wand'rin' reound the whole world."

And here, having paid such touching homage to "Gran'maw," he led me into the house and presented me to the kindly person who had stood him in stead of a family.

"Gran'maw's" anatomy—it might in her early days have been called a figure—consisted of an implacable series of double chins, formed like the Chinese nest-boxes, each one a trifle larger than the preceding one, and the last in size a mammoth over which her hands were folded. Her face had that stolidity of expression met with among those peculiarly constituted people who "make up their minds" as one would make up a bed, at a given hour, and with the intention of not disturbing it until they consider the proper time has come.

There was an open fire burning on the hearth in "Gran'maw's" parlor. Half a dozen easels supporting family portraits formed the chief furniture of the room, whose closeness seemed to be rendered stifling by the presence of these crayon images, drawn with that fixed stare which so evidently declares them to be gazing down from another world upon the present company.

"Your children?" I asked, indicating the younger of the chromo group.

"Gran'maw's" lips drew back over her darkened teeth,—it was the first sign of life her face had betrayed,—and a jet of tobacco shot out in the direction of the fire, and lay for a moment hissing on the andirons.

"Yes," she said, "my children and my husband. All dead, every one of 'em."

“Ah,” I answered, struck by what she said, “that is hard for you.”

She was silent for a time. Then she repeated the operation which set the hearth to simmering, and she resumed:

“Yes, meum, it sure is hard. But I reckon it’s right.”

So much for these two far-away creatures of no importance whatever, but who, perhaps, serve to show that the human heart among these people varies not according to conditions, but, as with “us,” according to what there is in it of vice or virtue, of revolt or resignation. The boy, a castaway of eleven, cherished tenderly a single dream: that of his mother, whose arms had enfolded him during three short years only of his little life. For the rest he had taken up his cross on his tiny shoulders, and he was ready for what existence might offer, grateful for the kindness he received by the way.

And “Gran’maw,”—the seemingly so vulgar “Gran’maw,”—robbed successively of all that a woman’s heart holds dear,—husband, children,—was sustained by that Faith for which we earnestly pray, so that we, in turn, when such agonizing trials come to us, may say, as she did: "Not my will, but Thine, be done, O Lord!"

Up in a back-yard in Avenue B, I found a group of children who belonged in the factory rightly, but who were not at work for the same reasons that big hands are "not at work": some were ill, some were discontented. They made a pitiful group. Ghastly was their pallor in the broad daylight, and pathetic their childish efforts to amuse themselves, this bruised and limping detachment of the child-labor battalion.

"What are you playing?" I asked, by way of introduction.

A tall boy of ten or twelve, with an uncertain hip, which seemed to give under him at every step, answered sheepishly:

"We don't know how to play."

"Why aren't you at work?"

This was a more suggestive question.

"I got struck in the cardin'-room," he touched his hip. "I'm only takin' a day off."

By his side a fair-haired little mite piped up in her shrill voice:

"*I* ain't a workin' 'cause they cut me deown to teun a side, and that ain't enough, so I sure did quit!"

Meanwhile, I had been watching a tiny boy whose face was swollen so that the eyes were almost closed, under a deep gash in his forehead. Thinking perhaps that he should account for himself, he said in a quiet little voice:

"A boy hit me with a tin can. It hurt right smart, but I didn't quit the first day. Then my eyes swole up so I couldn't see out of 'em. Now the doctor's taken the stitches out, I expec' I'll go back to work in two or three days."

He touched the discolored wound with his hand, which had the peculiar claw-like posture of all those that have gone early to work. The first joint of his thumb was gone.

"How did you lose it?" I queried.

"Cardin'," he answered in his mild, aged manner. "I been over a year 't the mill."

"How old are you?"

"Teun."

"Are there any boys as young as you are in the mill?"

"Heaps of 'em younger," he affirmed; and then, lest I get an exaggerated impression, he corrected:

"There's none younger 'n eight years old."

"Do you like to work?" I went on.

His face was pitifully bloated and there was a lassitude about his whole tiny person, yet his response was, nevertheless, resolute:

"I sure do like work a heap better 'n doin' nothin'!"

"Wouldn't you like to go to school?"

He looked at me as Cinderella might have stared, sceptically, at the fairy godmother.

"I never have been to school," he said, "but I reckon I'd *love* that better 'n anything."

There is no "race suicide" among the mill folk. I called at house after house in this mill village where there were families with from six to twelve children; three or four married, one or two just able to creep, one still in the mother's arms, and all classified, not by their real age, but by their approach to the time when the mill could lay claim upon them.

"We can't keep them out of the spinning-room," the agents over and over protested to me. "These families won't come in from the country unless we guarantee to let the children go to work."

There are two observations to be made in answer to these self-defensive affirmations of the mill authorities. The first is a simple statement of facts: the wages paid to cotton-mill folk are so low that in a family of ordinary size there is no way out of starvation except by letting the children work. The second observation is drawn from life.

By the time I reached the upper end of the town the shadow of a late November twilight was already creeping over the village, veiling somewhat its crudities in the semi-darkness. When I rapped at the Loftons' door, a cheerful voice called out to me, and entering I found Mrs. Lofton before an open fire whose uncertain flame was the only light in the little room. I could perceive an attempt at decoration, in the form of a round centre-table with an album on it, a few pictures against the wall, and crocheted tidies on the chair-backs, which, in spite of the bed and bureau between the windows, clearly said: ''This is our parlor.'' There were three babies, one crawling, one toddling, and the third, pale to blueness, breathing heavily, its eyes closed, on Mrs. Lofton's knees. She hitched forward in her rocking-chair to greet me.

''Rest your bonnet, won't you?'' she asked, with that spontaneous courtesy which needs no introduction to suggest that kindness is due to a stranger.

She showed the baby before her and apologized for not rising:

''He's been awful low with bronchitis. I've had eleven, an' 't seems like it was a hard pull raisin' these last three.''

Her voice was agreeable, without the suggestion of a whine. Her chief preoccupation was that I should be comfortable, and the insistent demands of the three little creatures who appealed continually to her while we "visited" were met with such tact as any hostess likes to display in relegating to their proper place all claims which should be secondary to those made by a guest.

I explained the object of my call: "They'd like to have Lizzie back at the school. She's only eleven. You haven't put her in the mill, have you?"

"Well, yes, meum, we have," Mrs. Lofton confessed. And then she went on: "You see, my three oldest's married, and two's dead, an' the other three's under fifteen, but if I don't keep two in the mill all the time they quarrel with us."

"Quarrel with you?"

"Yes, meum, one of the bosses down 't the mill. He sure does want two out of every family. He kep' a-callin' on me for Lizzie."

"Calling on you?"

"Yes, meum, sendin' messages that he wanted her. I made as though I didn't understand. Then baby took sick," she touched the pallor-stricken infant on her knees, "and Lizzie was a-helpin' me, and it seemed like I'd have to send her."

"Does this man quarrel even for the little ones?" I asked.

"He sure does. It don't make no difference how small they are. If he's got 'em in there he won't let 'em go, not if he can help it."

The flickering flames now illuminated the miserable room, and again left it in obscurity. Mrs. Lofton spoke in her gentle voice:

"I sure have craved education for my children, but 't seems like we were always too poor to give 't to 'em."

In the other visits I made I found, among the truants, several boys of eleven who had left school to go to work, several little girls who were staying at home to keep house or to nurse an invalid member of the family, and one child of eight who had departed on a visit to a neighboring town, where she was "wild to go 'cause she sure did love travellin'."

The same spirit which took this tiny wanderer on an excursion near by, keeps the mill folk in agitation. In summer many of the hands go back to farming, which the fine weather makes easy and profitable. At the return of winter they drift again, bred in restlessness, down to the more sociable centres of activity which any mill settlement presents.

The light in the sky had faded from amber to emerald, and against the sombre mantle of night which mingled its shadows with the feathery blackness pouring from the factory's chimneys, the mill shone out like a jewel, sparkling, flashing its innumerable rays from the succession of long windows, behind which "heaps of little children" were toiling, toiling from quarter to six in the morning until quarter past six at night, with one-half hour to rest and eat at noon. A world of little workers, uncomplaining, heroic,—"laying off" now and then perforce for a day or two,—uniting their share to the effort which keeps the Southern cotton mills in motion. As I walked on back to the station, which was a small frame building caught in the iron clasp of two branch railroads that passed either side of it, I came upon a group of cotton-flecked children busy tending a bonfire they had made in a hollow of the roadside. Convalescents all of them, they suggested the groups of aged men one sees around an old-people's home. They moved about slowly, with that peculiar hesitation common to people who are frequently in pain. They spoke only occasionally to each other in the tone of those who, having no reason to recall the past nor to invoke the future, reduce their conversation to comments upon the trivial incidents of the actual moment. Oh, sad little group, and how unlike children! Youth in general resembles a rising tide whose own latent energy carries it upward, onward, forward, relentless, cruel even, engulfing every obstacle. But these little mill hands, these child-laborers, suggested the waters that have reached their mark and spent their force, and that are now receding, ebbing outward toward the great sea, drifting slowly to "where the ocean is. . . ."

CHAPTER VIII

PASSING rapidly in the train through the "cotton-belt" region, one is struck only by the monotony of the mill towns that are huddled, one after the other, along the railroad lines. The factory buildings are all identical: brick walls, riddled with windows, through which the dark austere machines are visible—and the villages themselves scarcely vary in their rows of dismal, expressionless, wooden cottages. Yet, though outward appearances repeat themselves with insistence, behind the dreary scenic effect there is the variety which life itself, and the fantasies of the human mind, industrial or otherwise, never fail to impose.

Cartersville was "just one more" Southern mill town, but in the little settlement of very recent foundation, certain new phases of the child-labor problem presented themselves.

At the railroad station, which is a mile or two from the mill, I found a barouche with a team of horses. The hack-driver had on lank, black clothes, a white shirt collar, very loose and open over a scrawny neck which seemed to tilt backward under the weight of his head, rendered ponderous by a large felt hat. As we slopped and spatted along through the muddy roads, the "team" were cheered on their disintegrated way by a mechanism in the throat of the driver, which produced now a conciliatory cluck, now a deluge of tobacco juice. The anatomy of the "team" resembled two stony ridges in the Rocky Mountains, across whose irregular surface the hackman, by way of preparing for conversation, quietly slapped his dilapidated whip.

"Are you-all acquainted with the proprietor of the mill?" he queried; and, having received a negative answer, he went on: "He's about the right sort. I reckon they don't make no better," which generous comment was followed by a double gurgling of the mechanism in his throat.

The mill village, to be sure, exhaled a general air of tidiness and thrift, of method and prosperity, which I had not before encountered. The houses, painted white, with grey shingle roofs, green blinds, and red chimneys, were cheerful in appearance; each back-yard had a neat wash-house, and there was an incipient growth of grass in the front areas, agreeable to the eye. The monotony of the company's buildings—a church, an opera house, a school, two stores, and the factory—was relieved by a successful attempt to finish with white window-sashes and over-doors these red-brick colonial constructions.

I proceeded directly to the office. Without any reluctance, permission was at once given me to go anywhere I pleased in the mill. The same appearance of cheerfulness which had struck me as I entered the village, again appealed to me as I went into the spinning-room. Provided with every modern improvement, the machinery was compact and convenient; the bands of the fly-wheels, placed under the spinning-frames instead of between them, left ample space for circulating; and the light came not only through the side windows, but it shone down generously from an upper skylight, glowing upon the spotless white walls and fresh wooden floors.

The same remark made by the hack driver was repeated by the foreman who showed me around.

"The proprietor of these mills is about as good as they make 'em. He don't want morn 'n six per cent. on his money. The rest goes back for improvements. He keeps the mill runnin' night and day. That way the machines wear out sooner so 's he can get new ones with all the latest inventions."

Were there children in this pleasant mill, you ask? Yes, alas! too many; and my first question to the foreman was:

"How can so good a proprietor employ such little hands?"

"Well," was his answer, "I've got a hundred 'kids' here who should be over twelve years old, but sometimes I've got to ask the parents if they're bringing me triplets! They generally manage to have three between twelve and fourteen years old. Anything to get 'em in. But if they swear falsely, what can we do?"

I questioned a number myself. Some were nine, some ten, some eleven.

"Did you ever go to school?" I asked one pale, sallow, sunken-eyed little girl. In a tone which implied that I evidently didn't understand things, she answered:

"I can't go to school. I *have* to work." Then she added: "I would love to learn readin' an' writin'." And another midget looked at me with yearning eyes as I put the usual question, and said:

"I sure would rather go to school than be in *here!*"

Out of the hundred "kids" there were surely forty who were under twelve. This was the usual aspect of the Southern cotton mill, but the unusual occurrence in the Cartersville factory was the presence of new machines which, with an intelligence that seemed human, were doing, not only the mechanical tasks, but which were themselves gradually reforming child-labor. In what way, the following figures will best give an idea.

At the Lindale mills there were 100,000 spindles, and a total of 1,500 hands employed.

At Cartersville, owing to the perfection of the machinery, there were only 300 night and day hands employed, with a total of 30,000 spindles!

The weaving-looms fed themselves, so that one girl, instead of caring for from six to twelve, could run from sixteen to twenty-eight looms.

Each spindle in the cotton mill has its own band, which bands are generally made, one in every three minutes, by a boy, eight or ten years old. At Cartersville the bands were furnished, one a minute, by a machine which needed no one to feed it!

Thus the small boy, whose services were heretofore deemed indispensable, had been actually replaced by an automaton which successfully aided in reducing the burden of child-labor.

Examples of this sort should, and do, no doubt, serve as an encouragement to engineers and inventors. Occupied always with mathematics and mechanics, they sometimes consider their task in life as dry and abstract, but how truly humanitarian is their work! By a single invention, such as the automatic self-feeding band machine, they have emancipated from the serfdom of child-labor a whole category of little people, who must of necessity, eventually, if not at once, benefit by the fact that there is one "job" less which they can fill in the cotton mills.

CHAPTER IX

GRIFFIN is a charming Southern town of old aristocratic type. The lofty colonnades of the ample white frame mansions are overrun by rose-vines; along the broad avenues the dark magnolia trees stand stately as sentinels; there is something soft and enveloping in the air, something melancholy and sweet, that ill coincides with the atmosphere of activity and thrift emanating from half a dozen lively factories in the immediate neighborhood. Yet, if the black smoke curling upward from tall chimneys, the groaning and trembling of machinery, promise animation from without, within the mill walls one finds the same listless, prostrate troop of children, their small bodies racked by a service which wrings all vitality from them.

At one of these manufacturing companies where I was given permission to "find my way alone" through the mill, I questioned twenty children in the spinning-room, only two of whom gave their ages as over twelve. At another smaller factory, which I visited without permission, the door being open, I found ten children under twelve out of a total of one hundred operatives; and at two other mills I was forbidden admission, but the teachers of the school in the mill neighborhood had records of babies as young as eight and nine who had abandoned their primers to go and follow the whirling bobbins of the spinning-frames at these last establishments. In addition to such desertions as were caused by the fascination of the mill over possible bread-winners, the school had lost twenty pupils, who preferred to go without an education rather than to be vaccinated, since in the State of Georgia, though vaccination is obligatory for all children who attend school, there are no compulsory school laws.

There are, it is true, a number of "active" clubwomen in Griffin, some even who are members of the National Child-Labor Committee, but "what can one do when one's friends and one's husband have stock in the mills?"

To be sure, what can one do?

One can hardly be expected to give up one's own bread and butter, even for the sake of reformed legislation in regard to child-labor! Certainly not; starvation is too great a sacrifice to ask of any one. But there is one concession that I would like to suggest.

I talked with a number of the "active club-women"; not one of them, for the reasons above given, had ever been through one of the Griffin mills. Many of them, nevertheless, were mothers themselves. All I wish to propose is that they stand some morning at twenty minutes to six o'clock before one of the mill gates, and that they watch the litle laborers who come, toil-worn already at dawn, weary, hungry, over-strained, courageous, heroic, ready to take up once more, in exchange for a miserable and insufficient pittance, the burden of labor which is slowly killing them. Watch them, those of you who have children yourselves, follow them in your thoughts during the long, long hours of the day; think of their unremitting effort, think of their exhaustion, their fitful longing to rest or play, their craving for something good to eat; be haunted by them, as you are bound to be if once you have seen their appealing eyes gaze at you from out their pale, bloated brows. Admit the truth about them for a day —I don't ask you to do it for more—and at night go again to the mill gate, and see for yourself that your nightmare is a reality, grasp once and for all what the desperate misery of these children is; and thereafter the bread they earn for you will, I doubt not, stick in your throats; it will seem to you that the very snowy flour with which it is made must be flecked with scarlet. Yes, for the price of it has been paid in the life-blood of the children!

Then return to your next club meeting, and ask each other what the First and the Greatest of those who have plead for the little children meant when He said:

"'Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in Hell.''

Most of the mill towns in Georgia and Alabama have sprung up during the last ten years, and they have at least the advantage of being comparatively new. Columbus is an exception to the rule. The vast mills which make it one of the largest industrial centres in the South were, as long ago as the war, some of them, already huddled along the arid banks of the broad and stony Chattahoochee River, the border line at this juncture between the two States. But new improvements, vast modern additions, have been made little by little to the original nucleus, until Columbus has come to resemble an old piece of cloth upon whose selvedge the looms have again begun to weave.

Easy as is the approach to the ''mill folk'' in a little village, so is it difficult in the larger cities. Provided with no letter of any sort, I took to the street as the most hopeful meeting-ground, and bending my steps in the general direction of the large mills I soon came across a kind-looking man, of whom I asked, by way of introduction, the name of the superintendent. He gave it to me promptly, and then, with a sideways nod toward the implacable mill, whose rows of windows looked down on us like so many staring eyes, he said:

"I worked in there myself for thirty years. As long as you can work, they'll give you somethin' to do, but when you're played out, you're played out, and that's all there is abeout it."

We spoke of the wages, the possibility of saving, and he volunteered in his frank, honest way:

"It's abeout all a man can do to raise a family on mill wages, much less put anything aside. The trouble with the mill is that you can't never rise much; you are earnin' as much at fifteen or twenty years old as you will be at forty."

"Why did you never try something else?" I asked.

"Once you're in the mill," he answered solemnly, "you get an idea you can't make a living any other way, and you don't dare quit."

Thirty years' service! I thought of this lifetime spent in the hard persistent toil, day after day, year after year. He was one of the troop that earn "too much to die, and not enough to live"; his lot was cast in with those who have nothing to show for their toil except the fact that they have not starved to death!

As though his thoughts followed mine, he said, almost apologetically:

"You know the mill appetite ain't like any other in the world. You can only eat what you've a fancy for, and you sure do spend more money that-a-way. Why," he said, "you can be so hungry in the mill that you're just sick, and when you get your dinner you can't eat it. It seems like it had no taste."

Two of the mills in this place have built a kindergarten, where women, busy weavers, can place their children during at least half of the day; and for the pupils "over seven" there is a dilapidated, deplorable old schoolhouse, where classes are held in an irregular fashion, and at odd hours, to accommodate that part of the youthful population which belongs to the brigade known as "dinner toters." Gradually, towards eleven o'clock, the children in these mill schools slip stealthily, one by one, from the benches where they are supposed to pursue their studies. They thump down the schoolhouse steps in groups, and, once free, they set out for home with that conscious importance that little people feel when responsibility is put upon them.

When at last the noon hour strikes, the mill gate looks like the portal of a fortress being stormed by a Lilliputian throng, each and all armed with a dinner basket, which he must pass within to the beleaguered forces.

Oh, pitiful multitude! The old and the young stand side by side; those who are waiting the moment to make an offering of their strength on the altar of toil; and those whose energy is spent and who are reduced to these childlike tasks, which they perform with an eagerness touching in all that it implies of their longing still to be of use. Pitiful, tragic multitude of old men and babies,—the "waste material," the "remnants" which the mill cannot suck into its deadly clutch,—they wait, huddled together on the mill threshold, with one common purpose: to feed the bread-winners.

Oh, you who eat daily of every luxury the land affords, think of this band who begin and end their patient, terrible lives as "dinner toters." When they have delivered the little basket that hangs on their arm, don't fancy that they speed home themselves to partake of some hot, wholesome dish. No, no! They linger, hungry no doubt, expectant; and when the toiler, the mill hand, has eaten what he can of the dinner that "seems like it had no taste," they gather up the crumbs which are to make their own repast, and shouldering once more their burden, they set out again, walking sometimes a distance of over a mile before they can at last partake, second-hand, of the meal which has already *nourished* a laborer.

Toward two o'clock the children are free to go back and take up their studies!

Who could see them, this earnest, weary throng, indifferent to their own welfare, intent upon the comfort of another, submissive to privation, depleted, uncomplaining;—who could see them, and not long to establish, in the immediate neighborhood of such mills, first-rate eating-houses where, for cost price, the laborer could find wholesome, clean food prepared to stimulate the ‘‘mill appetite,’’ and to replenish his wasted energy?

I knew a rich family in New York who, during Lent one year, determined to make the sacrifice (great, no doubt, for the gourmand’s palate) of all sweets furnished by the confectioner. In a month there was an economy of eighty dollars set aside. With eighty dollars a restaurant could be started in Columbus, and with a few more equal sums a system of proper eating could be established in an entire community. . . .

Actually, what is the position of these people?

Having put to myself this question, I wandered on into the settlements which stretch along the dreary banks of the Chattahoochee. The day was warm, doors and windows stood open. Before the gate of a tiny yard I paused presently, struck by the appearance of the woman and the two children who were seated in rocking-chairs on the porch. Some deadly wind, it seemed, had breathed upon them. Yet at my word of greeting they responded with the habitual courteous invitation to ''come in and rest.'' (Is it not indicative that, in this whole region, the first proposition hospitality makes is a bidding to *rest?*)

Easily, as always, when work is the topic, we fell into conversation. The mother was tall and broad-shouldered, having an appearance of vigor that tallied ill with her droning voice and listless manner.

''I've got a boy of twelve in the mill,'' she said, ''and my husband—that's two. You get your house rent for $1.15 a week if you've got three hands in the mill. They charge you more if you've got only two, and still more if you've only one.''

''Neither of these work?'' I asked, nodding towards the two little girls.

''They want the oldest one,'' the mother responded; "she's eleavun and they're after her, but she's too sick now, I reckon."

I looked at "her." Pale to ghastliness, she lay, languorous, indifferent, her head resting against the back of the rocker, her feet on the railing of the veranda.

They were "after her." They wanted her "deownt the mill." No doubt they did. Only they had started too late in their conquest of this additional hand. Already the Great Adversary had his clutches upon her; he was disputing her, mercifully, with those who sought a more lingering termination to the earthly existence of this little pilgrim. Like the delicate shadows that fade at the approach of twilight, she was going gradually out as the Night drew nigh.

The mother talked on.

"We've been in Texas," she said. "We wuz sick with the fever abeout the whole time. 'Most everybody is, deown there."

As she elaborated upon the forms of disease which the Texas climate provokes, the second child settled herself upon the doorsteps and began to rub her bare ankles, which were encircled with a band of angry-looking sores. Presently she reached up toward the complacent, weary mother, who, without interrupting her narrative, handed the child a pin with which she proceeded to probe the succession of wounds on her foot.

Instinctively I exclaimed:

"Oh, don't! You mustn't!"

But the mother, tranquil, responded:

"She-all has to do that to get the corruption out. It's only Texas rust she has, that's nothing much——"

And to my protestations she again went on:

"Why, there's some parts of Texas where you can't raise children at all; the lime there just eats their feet right off."

Beyond the door, which was ajar on to the porch, I could see the miserable interior, the kitchen with its evident outlet upon a filthy back-yard, two wretched bedrooms which six ailing people hired for a trifle less because two of them worked from dark morning until dark night, day after day. Perhaps the woman divined what was in my thoughts, and resented my inward pity; perhaps she was only recalling the ‘‘corruption’’ of Texas, for she said, as I got up to leave:

‘‘I tell you there’s heaps o’ worse places than this here.’’

In the street again I stopped to question two boys who were intent upon the construction of a mud house. One of them, aged eleven, was an old mill hand who had ‘‘quit’’ because they ‘‘cut him down’’; the other child, only seven years old, had stopped school because his mother needed him at home. At my suggestion we crowned the mud house with an improvised flag, and, having thus led up to the question of patriotism, I asked:

‘‘What does the flag mean, boys?’’

Like a flash the child of seven answered:

‘‘It means there’s smallpox in the house.’’

Farther along the road I stopped again before a veranda where there were two women chewing snuff-sticks and another rocking her young baby to sleep. The group was no exception to others I had already studied; neither in Georgia nor in Alabama did I ever see one of these women with a bit of crocheting or knitting or mending in her hands. Occasionally some rather fancy garment is ‘‘run up’’ on the machine; but aside from this the ‘‘ready made’’ triumphs, and when it is worn out they throw it away and buy something new in its place.

Yet the idleness of these women on the veranda at Columbus, though it appeared at first incomprehensible, became gradually associated in my mind with their physical exhaustion. After sitting for a time with them, listening to their monotonous conversation, something of their very listlessness communicated itself, fatally. Depleted as was their strength, it seemed only too natural that they should feel unequal to the task of mending their own clothes, much less to that of making new ones for their children.

In the yard there were several tiny members of the community playing with a hatchet, which was apparently their only toy. Addressing an emaciated boy who had joined the babies engaged in wielding this dubious weapon, I asked:

‘‘How old are you?’’

He twisted his wiry body about, and answered, smiling, ‘‘I’m fourteen, but I’m older ’n I’m any good, for I’ve been workin’ four years in ’t the mill.’’

His brother, almost as large and far more healthy looking, was only ten years old, but, the mother explained, he had never been at work.

‘‘He’s just begun dinner-toting,’’ she added, ‘‘and it’s pullin’ him deown right smart a’ready.’’

Here, as everywhere in the Southern mills, there is a migratory population. At one factory, in order to keep a regular average of 1,800 hands, they are obliged to register as many as 5,000 employees in a year.

What, indeed, can fix the laborer who makes ‘‘scarcely enough to live, much less to put aside’’?

I visited both of the largest Columbus factories. Being old and of long standing, they were dingy within, not provided with the recent labor-saving inventions, and deluged, it must be admitted, encrusted with successive layers of tobacco-laden expectorations. Not satisfied to stain the floors with a dark slime, the bolder of the "dippers" had made targets of the huge signs which bedecked the stairways, and the separate letters of "no spitting allowed" were draped each in a trailing envelope of the brown stuff.

Though accompanied through these two vast factories, I was able to question a few of the younger hands, and to observe the little flock which contributes to swell into the thousands and tens of thousands the number of children under twelve years old working in the Southern mills.

And what is the profit earned by such tiny fingers for the greed of the thrifty mill-owners?

The superintendent of one factory, who showed me his domain with the air of one justly proud of reducing 1,800 souls to serfdom, confided to me in an undertone and with a knowing blink of the eyes:

"Since the company was reorganized, we have been earning a yearly profit of eighteen per cent.!"

Although the industrial and domestic conditions in Columbus are so deplorable as to discourage even the reformer, there is some remarkable work being done among the mill children.

The peculiar condition of these people, their refinement and ignorance, their latent possibilities and their illiteracy, present demands for instruction somewhat different from that given to the ordinary laboring population.

The occupation, for example, of the ''dinner toters'' necessitates that classes be held from 7.30 until 10.30 A.M., and from one o'clock until four in the afternoon, instead of at the regular hours. Night school is indispensable for those confined all day within the limits of the factory. But more important than all the opportunities for book-learning is the training these people need—at the right sort of school—in the ordinary practical details of hygiene and decent living.

As one of the reluctant mill mothers expressed it, when discussing the question with a future teacher of her progeny:

"I don't care if my girls learn to cook so long as you-all only learn 'em that, and let the other tomfoolery alone."

In 1901, under the direction of Mr. Carlton Gibson and Mr. George Peabody, with an appropriation from the public-school fund and an additional donation from a benevolent citizen of Columbus, the Columbus Primary Industrial School was opened by Mr. and Mrs. John Sherman Neligh, head workers. It was the first school in the United States to be organized as a part of the public-school system—not destined as a training school for teachers.

Of the hundred and five pupils, between the ages of six and sixteen, registered on the school lists during the first three months, not one could read the simplest English sentence. And, though some of the pupils in the night classes had passed the age of sixty, they were no less illiterate than the infants.

More appalling to note than this mere ignorance of the alphabet was the fact, recorded by a visiting nurse, that of all the children who had worked in the mills, *not one was physically normal.*

Yet the moral fibre is fine in these poverty-stricken descendants of the early settlers; ignorance has not dulled their ambition, nor exhaustion and ill-health made them less eager for an education. Let those who doubt "whether it pays to help the poor" attend one of the night classes at the Columbus Industrial School. Go, you who waste the rich opportunities that life extends to you, go and study these laborers' faces. Study in them the conflict between fatigue and interest, between weariness and the longing for knowledge, consider these toil-worn students who, as the night wears on, in spite of all resistance, drop one after the other to sleep, overcome with drowsiness after twelve hours of toil, and determined, nevertheless, to stand fast by the one chance which has been given them.

An influence, moreover, of incomparable value has been exercised upon the Columbus mill population by the principal of the school and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. John Sherman

Neligh, and their assistant, who were, for five years, "residents" at the schoolhouse which, by this wise plan, became a small social settlement. The humanitarian and civilizing work done here by Mr. and Mrs. Neligh may well act as an inspiration for all who long to serve in the right way the cause of child-labor in the South.*

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* See articles, Harper's Magazine, October, 1903 : "Industrial Education in the South"; Alkahest Magazine, April, 1903: "The New Education in the South," by J. S. Neligh; also Annual Report of the Public Schools, Columbus, 1902.

CHAPTER X

First in the list of manufactures produced by Atlanta is cotton cloth. If the mill village is dreary because of the monotony its rows of identical houses present, the city appears also as a peculiarly unbecoming setting to any industry. The beauty of the country belongs to all whose eyes care to claim it, but the environs of a large town seem like the refuse of the rich, the débris which, in the vortex of metropolitan life, has been flung from a prosperous centre to a forlorn outskirt.

Dirty and dingy was the settlement huddled around the cotton mills in suburbs of Atlanta. Before addressing myself to the office of the factory, I went in search of some home life. The little avenues were deserted, and the green frame houses presented that abandoned air which clearly announced that all hands had gone to work. Presently, however, I heard a child's voice singing with that emphatic rhythm which generally marks some active manual labor. I followed the sound and soon came upon a group in one of the mill-house yards: several children of the wallowing age, a baby in arms, a fat indolent mother, and a tiny girl, whose red hair hung in a shaggy mat about her face. She was barefoot, her hands were broad and scarlet, her apron was soaking wet, and her sleeves were rolled well up over the stout little arms which she plunged in and out of a tub, scrubbing, wringing, and twisting the wash, while she sang on with all her heart.

Having exchanged with the mother a word of greeting, I complimented the laundress.

"My, yes," the woman answered, "Mattie could wash as good as anybody, only her arms ain't got the strength."

Here the infant on the ground having begun lustily to squall, the mother appealed:

"Take the baby."

But Mattie responded firmly:

"I can't quit. I've got two more dresses to wash," and again she began cheerily to sing.

"She's six years old," the mother drawled, "and my boy's nine. He's been 'most a year in the mill. We can't keep him from it. He went himself 'n got the job. I never knew a thing about it. He just come home one day an' he says, 'Mamma, I'm at work,' and since then he's never missed an hour."

He was not the only one who had felt early the responsibilities of a life bereft of all that ease and well-being imply. At the schoolhouse, provided by the mills, I questioned the primary class.

"How many have ever worked in the mill?"

There were thirty-seven children in the class: five hands went up, five tiny hands already worn with toil. Indeed, the teacher told me that so many of the pupils go after twelve o'clock into the mills to "help" that the school is obliged to close as early as two o'clock.

Many people commenting upon the evils of child-labor make use of this well-known argument:

"If the children weren't in the mill, where would they be? The schools can't keep open all the time. Isn't it better for them to be in the mill than in the streets?''

Wishing upon this subject an opinion more competent than my own, I consulted a lady who was at the head of a large reformatory school in the South. Her experience, extending over a great number of years, had given her a close knowledge of all the evils which threaten the morality of the child.

''Would you,'' I said to her, ''rather have a boy put into the factory to work at eight, ten, twelve years old, or turned loose to his own devices? Which is worse for him, the mill or the street?''

Without an instant's hesitation she responded:

''The mill!''

Yet the offspring of these Atlanta mill hands are hurried daily from the schoolroom into the factory, their studies are interrupted, not for fresh air and recreation, but for the purpose of ''helping'' the elders. Just what the effect on them is of this early initiation to toil, I was able to judge by a remark made to me during my visit through this important factory. I was accompanied by an overseer who had worked his way up from the ''spinnin'-room.'' As we passed in among the looms, whose violent motion causes the very walls to shake and reverberate, I said to my guide:

''I should think the women in here would lose their minds!''

''At first the noise bothers 'em just like anybody else,'' he answered. ''Then they don't hear it. That's how it is with us. We learn a thing and then we get used to it, and that's all there is about it.''

And while I was still reflecting upon this stolid resignation which compared strikingly with certain exaggerated repugnances on the part of the highly sensitive and idle class—the foreman, having also, no doubt, pursued his own thoughts to a conclusion, said very earnestly:

''The worst feature of the cotton mills ain't the noise, it's the children. They get started the wrong way. I've seen too much of what the mill does for 'em ever to let a child of mine in here."

The wages are surely not the temptation, for the sum eked out by the younger toilers is remarkably small, from $2.50 to $4.50 a week for sixty-seven hours of work!

What then is it that continues to hold them in such miserable bondage? Ignorance and dire poverty, two fatal weaknesses upon which the manufacturer fastens his clutch with deadly and insatiable greed.

At the bag manufacturing company, Atlanta, there were, in the spinning-room, the usual one hundred "kids" out of a total of one hundred and sixty hands. The sweepers and doffers whom I questioned gave their ages as seven, nine, and one little waif responded apologetically: "I'm five—I'm only he'pin'."

Indeed the overseer himself volunteered this conclusive testimony:

"There's children in here, lots of 'em, that I'm *morally satisfied* are under twelve years old, but when the parents swear, what can you do about it?"

(Why—and this would be a tempting point for some ethical society to discuss—should a man feel his responsibility at an end because another man swears to something they both know is a lie?)

Bad as are the conditions in this company's spinning-room, it is, nevertheless, not here, but in the bag mill itself, that the massacre goes on wholesale.

The foreman, a kindly man, remarked as he accompanied me to this section of the factory:

"The dust here keeps me with a cold in my head about the whole time."

Fine, pernicious, it rose, this dust, in snowy clouds, filling the air. As I looked into the workshop it seemed as though a veil had been drawn before my eyes—a merciful veil that softened the image of desperate activity behind it.

There were one hundred and thirty hands in the room—seventy of them were little children, the rest were women. Here and there were perceptible in the ghastly artificial light the wooden frames upon which the bags must be stretched and turned. Like two rigid branches of a tree they lifted their prongs high above the heads of the tallest child-laborer. Yet, with an upward gesture that carried him almost off his feet, he must fling one bag after the other over this instrument; turn it and slip it free again with frantic speed.

The women, meanwhile, provided with electric sewing-machines whose insistent ''burring'' produced a peculiar bedlam, were ''running up'' the seams on these same long and narrow bags which we are accustomed to see used for flour, meal, and the various grocers' provisions. The material they are made of is stiffened with a dressing of white clay, which, at the first touch, is scattered from the coarse meshes of the loose-woven cotton cloth, and begins to fly about in the air, forming a cloud, settling over everything, filling gradually the lungs that inhale it at every breath.

We are often told how necessary fresh air is for those who exercise and who consequently, with an accelerated circulation, need more rapidly to purify their blood. What, it is difficult to imagine, must be the physical condition of the children at the bag company's mills? In such an atmosphere as we have above described, one boy *turns in a day from* 3,000 *to* 6,000 *bags!*

Everything, *as well as the law,* seems to further this voluntary destruction of so many innocent lives. The public schools in the neighborhood of the mill close at two o'clock, so that the youngest children can go into the factory for a half-day's work. And the company offers an extra twenty-five cents in a week's wages for the boys who, ambitious beyond their force, succeed in daily repeating thousands of times the gesture which twists their little bodies out of shape, and makes the work-room of these mills look like some part of Purgatory, where those who enter must expiate a sin for which they have been damned!*

*There is, in the neighborhood of the mill, a Methodist social settlement, directed by four residents who are doing admirable work among the mill hands. Out of forty boys who attend one of their gymnasium classes, and who are all employed at the mill, there are just two boys who have reached the age of twelve.

CHAPTER XI

Baedeker's guide to the United States, speaking of Augusta, says: Its cotton mills, run by a system of *water-power canals*, produce more unbleached cotton goods than any other city in America (value of manufactures in 1900, $10,000,000).

The canals are broad and peaceful, and as they wind along between sloping green banks they reflect, together with the images of tall chimneys and austere walls of brick, something of the blue skies above. So it is with those who labor: in the midst of the grimy evidences of toil they give us now and then a glimpse of the Infinite mirrored in the clear beauty of their souls.

The rooms of the mills down on the canals were many of them dingy and dark, opening on an inner courtyard; the wood-work and stairways were old and stained with brown tobacco slime, and one other fact contributed freely to make the general aspect of this factory dull and unalluring. There had been a strike during the previous summer, and a strike is to the mill what a blight is to the crops: it leave sterility and ruin in its train.

Out of fourteen hundred looms, a thousand only were crashing their noisy way through the warp in the trembling frames—the other four hundred stood idle, covered over with cloths which suggested the shroud.

In this dreary mill there were children at work, spinning, rolling yarn on to shuttles, preparing it for the dye-room; but as I was accompanied by a clerk from the office, I had no chance to question these toilers.

Perceiving a number of colored men in the picking and carding rooms, I said to my guide:

"You employ colored help?"

In a word he repeated the verdict which was everywhere given me on this subject of working the negroes in the mills.

"We have just one part of the factory where we use niggers," he said. "We can't mix 'em with white folk—the white folk won't stand it.* In order to keep thirty negroes at work," he went on, "we have seventy engaged on the lists. They lay off about half the time. As soon as they've made enough to live a few days they quit, and they don't start in again until their money gives out. Of course there's some exceptions, but as a rule they haven't got the intelligence to do the work, and when they have, they're so irregular you can't count on them." †

It was approaching the noon hour, and as I left the mills, walking along in the direction of the village which lay across the peaceful canal, I came upon a small boy whose clothes, flecked with cotton, betrayed him as one of the child-labor brigade.

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*At Atlanta, when the attempt was made to mingle white and colored laborers in the bag mills, the white people struck immediately, and raided the mills, throwing stones, arming themselves, and threatening the lives of the directors.

†A mill was started in North Carolina by a colored man who employed only colored hands. The result was lamentable. The mill was soon forced to shut down, and the stock became worthless owing to the failure of this honorable experiment. On the other hand, in certain out-door occupations, such as cotton-picking, and especially in lumbering, the negroes have attained to positions in which they are very well paid, though the complaint of irregularity is always brought against them.

"Do you work at the mill?" I asked him, having first commented on the "prettiness" of the day.

"I quit!" he affirmed.

"Why?" I queried again.

"Well," he said, looking me over as though he doubted that I could understand him, "they made me work till tweaulve o'clock 'cause they-all got behind."

"Till twelve at night?"

"Yes, meum. An' I had to come home alone, so I thought I might as well quit."

A little further along there was a group of boys, varying in age between three and ten years. The oldest, a mere wraith, had a hoople—an iron stave—in his hands; and there were, on the lapel of his tattered coat, a number of political badges. His face was pale to ghastliness, and his hair had grown long and sparse with a vitality that contradicted the lifelessness of his flesh and skin.

I put the usual question, and he answered:

"I did work to the mill. But I took chills an' so I quit."

It was Thanksgiving Day, though the steady activity of the giant "plant" little suggested a holiday. Yet there was in the brilliant sunshine and clear air something festal, and I asked, addressing the group, sorry at once that I had put an unanswerable question:

"Have any of you got anything to be thankful for on Thanksgiving Day?"

Immediately the boy who had "quit" because he "took chills" smiled at me:

"I've got *this,*" he said, rapping the iron stave. "I found it under the heouse this mornin'."

And a second voice responded almost as promptly:

"I've got lots of things to be thankful for. I've got *him* for one."

Him was a miniature brother of the age and obstreperous tendencies which might have been considered as an encumbrance had not this older pilgrim, himself not more than eight, chosen to look with gratitude upon the little companion whom life and poverty had thrust into his keeping!

How many of us are unselfish enough, when the day of Thanksgiving comes, or in the intervening hours of prayer, to bless God because we've got *"him for one"!*

There was a cold wind blowing, and, aside from the group I had passed near the canal, there was not a soul in sight, which somewhat perplexed me, for I wanted to see what was beyond the monotonous façades of the frame-houses, stretching in rows along the avenues that constituted the "village."

Presently a window opened in one of the mill houses, and a woman's head appeared. Seizing my opportunity, I called out to her:

"Where are the children?"

She might have thought me slightly mad, and treated me accordingly, but mill folk are indulgent, and the dreariness of their lives bids them welcome, as a diversion, the passing stranger. So the woman in the window answered:

"Our children 'll be back from the mill right soon neow. Won't you come in and rest?"

Accepting this proffered hospitality I went in. The mother of the household, in anticipation of the bread-winners' arrival, was preparing their dinner. She dragged back and forth between the kitchen and the bedroom where the rest of us—a married daughter, her baby, an elderly neighbor, and a little girl friend—sat and "visited" by the fire. This glowing hearth was in part the only bright spot in the room which, for the rest, appeared as miserable a lodging as one could imagine. Two double beds, placed end to end and covered with dark untidy quilts, filled a good share of the floor space; and the furnishings were completed by one or two chairs, a trunk, a clothes-rack, and some colored chromos on the wall, together with two crayon portraits, one of the sister and one of the father, who had the soonest gone their way to "dusty death."

Crouching by the fire, with an old soap-box drawn under her for a chair, the "married daughter'' leaned her elbows on her knees, her pale face on the palms of her hands; and it seemed to me as I looked at her that some fever had smitten her with an overwhelming listlessness. Only now and then, when the baby became too impetuous in his demands, did she rouse herself and strike out at him, exasperated by fatigue, and so weary, this young mill mother of twenty-three who had been at work for fifteen years—so weary that the very instinct of maternity was perverted in her.

The rest of the family consisted of the three children who would ''be home soon,'' and the mother who was active in preparing their dinner. Somewhat surprised that this woman, who did not appear more than forty-five years old, should not be at work in the mills herself, I questioned her regarding their general circumstances, and her own health in particular.

''We moved deown from the mountains,'' she said, ''when my husband died. He'd been sick a right smart spell with several diseases.''

‘‘And you,’’ I asked, ‘‘are you fairly strong?’’

She shook her head in a melancholy way and answered:

‘‘I ain’t bean feelin’ very well for twenty-one years.’’

The ‘‘old mill’’ had rung its bell some moments before, and a noise of approaching footsteps on the porch now announced the arrival of the children.

The children? Toil-worn and haggard, silent, dogged, they resembled in no way the little folks who are yet on the side of life which is all expectancy and hope. The oldest of the trio who returned to this miserable home of which he was the mainstay, was fourteen; he had been nine years at work, and during that interminable existence among the whirling bobbins of the spinning-room, something of the machine’s monotony had reflected itself irreparably in his jaded eyes. He was dressed, this child-laborer, with a self-respecting neatness; his hair was brushed back against his grey, wrinkled forehead. It seemed, indeed, observing his ghastly pallor, as though he were, by his own hands, made ready for the grave, waiting only the final blow which would carry him hence; his cotton-flecked coat hidden away by the enveloping shroud that entitled him at last to that sleep from which not even the "old mill's" bell could rouse him more.

The other two hands were a child of eight who still kept some of the buoyancy of childhood, and a girl of eleven who looked like so much formless clay which has been carried as débris from the potter's wheel.

Silently this little trio filed into the kitchen: there was not half an hour to spend at home, to dine, and to return again to the greedy mill. Hastily, therefore, the dependent mother spread upon the table the food of which her bread-winners were to partake: there was a plate of hot bread without butter, a few meagre slices of bacon, a mess of dried apples stewed in water, and a pot of coffee served with neither milk nor sugar.

You might think, you who have watched your own rosy-cheeked children devour, with normal appetites, the hot and savory food set before them at noon, that these little laborers, who already had accomplished a six-hours' day of work, would have fallen ravenously upon their dinner. Alas, fatigue was an all too jealous rival of the appetite! Without speaking, these three children took their places at the table, and, as though with an effort, they swallowed this meal which to them "sure did seem like it had no taste." They did not touch the bacon—their throats, dry and parched from the overheated atmosphere of the spinning-room, refused the nourishing food and craved some stimulant like the clear black coffee of which they greedily partook.

Poor to destitution as was this laborer's home, the hospitality was of the best. Again and again the weary mother urged me to take my dinner with the children, and the same generous proposition was made to the neighbor's child, who had come in to "visit."

"We pay $2.25 a settlin' for a side," the mother volunteered, which being interpreted meant $2.25 every two weeks for three rooms, or one-half of the house.

"There's every-day school," she went on, "and there's night school three times a week, where I try to send the children, but it sure seems like they wuz too tired when night comes."

How much did they make, these three bread-winners?

Fifty to sixty cents a day each.

Enough, you might object, to give them a better home than these bare, miserable rooms. Perhaps so, if the mother had been a thrifty housewife who had received some instruction in the ordinary details of housekeeping and hygiene. But this poor mother, cut off from contact with the world, like her people for generations before her, who herself had "not been feelin' very well for twenty-one years," résuméd the sum of her wisdom and her philosophy, when, in looking at the three children who were supporting her home, she said, with a smile which implied affliction:

"There's my livin'."

When her "living" had slowly and with difficulty swallowed the tasteless dinner prepared for them, they put on their wraps, and set out again, silent, dogged, for the mills. And no exception were they. From the rows of frame houses along the canal there came other "livings," making their way, silent, dogged, toward the great brick fabrics which produce manufactures to the value of *ten million dollars yearly.*

As the doors of the next mill near the canal stood open for the returning hands after the dinner hour, I profited by this occasion to enter with a group of "doffers." Not knowing always upon what grounds to begin conversation with these minor toilers, I had provided myself, in case of emergency, with a book of fairy stories, illustrated; and, as there were a few moments to spare before the one-o'clock whistle blew, as soon as we got up into the spinning-room, I spoke to one of the boys about this book.

"Do you like fairy stories?" I asked.

"*Do* I?" was his response, as he bent over the open pages, unable to read, his eyes searching the pictures with an eagerness which brought a group of fellow "doffers," several little spinners, to see what was the "fuss."

There was no chance to tell a story, for the book had only gone one round among grasping hands when a sharp shrill whistle gave the signal for "dorfing time," and there was a general scattering of thin and wiry bodies.

Passing apparently unnoticed through the spinning-rooms of this factory, I questioned the children at will. Thirty of those to whom I spoke gave their ages as under twelve. There were none younger than nine, but *many of those eleven and twelve had been five years at work!* Ah, what a desperately pitiful clan they were to be earning their way in life! They worked with a mechanical activity, with nervous energy and determination, and though I saw not one face that had in it a ray of hope, yet I heard never a murmur of complaint nor an exclamation of impatience or revolt.

Over and over again as I talked with the children, I tried to join the broken threads of the spools on to the whirling bobbins. Missing the "roller" nine times out of ten and letting thus the "saliva" accumulate in soft, vaporous clouds, I caused some amusement among my youthful instructors. When they laughed, the smile on their wan faces was like the sun as it tries, on a black day, to struggle through the clouds.

As far as light and air and new machinery were concerned, the conditions seemed to be irreproachable. However, though light and air may, in a nursery, prove adequate requisites, in a factory which works its employees mercilessly, they contribute only to prolonging for a brief space the "slow death" of the little "hands."

As I walked toward the door, about to leave, I felt some one lightly touch my arm, and turning, I saw a little bright-eyed girl who had stood close by my side when I showed the fairy stories to the "doffers."

"Please, meum," she began, looking at the volume still under my arm, "have you-all got that book to sell?"

"No," I answered. "Why?"

"'Cause if you have I reckon I'd like to buy it."

"Can you read?" I asked.

"My, yes! I went to school till I wuz eleavun, an' sure I did love it. Neow I'm tweayulve an' I've been 'most a year 'n the mill."

Needless to say I gave her the book, and she went back with flaming cheeks to her spinning-frame, hugging, passionately, the cheap little illustrated edition of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales.

There was doubtless in this busy mill an unusual freedom, a surprising indifference to the intrusion of an outsider upon its precincts. But, since this agreeable carelessness in the management furthered my chances for investigation, I took advantage of it, and lingered now to talk with a girl who had followed me out of the spinning-room on to the stairs. Her eyes reflected with intensity and pathos the vision of misery and insufficience to which she had too soon been accustomed. Yet there was something expectant in her expression, as though her youth asserted still the right to hope.

"Have you been long at work?" I asked her.

"Yes, meum, four years. I'm fifteen neow. I come in when I wuz eleavun."

But it was not of herself that she wished to speak, and, having given this brief account of her laboring days, she asked me hastily if I had noticed a little girl of thirteen in the spinning-room, dressed in a cotton frock like hers. Seeing my hesitation, she gave me further indications, adding:

"That's Mrs. Mitty's little girl. Mrs. Mitty's at our heouse neow. She's left her two children to mama."

"Left them?"

"Yes. She's took the consumption, and she's awful low. It seems like she can't live through another day."

Gently, as she spoke, she had drawn me toward the window on the stairway. Across the blue canal the white cottages of the mill settlement glistened in the clear November sunlight. Pointing to one of the houses on a miniature avenue, the girl exclaimed:

"There's where we live."

The appeal was indirect, but her eyes so clearly said: "Can't something be done for us—for Mrs. Mitty?"

As I waited in the porch of the little frame house, after knocking, I could hear an approaching step, slow, heavy, the step of an old person—the old person for whom the mills have no further use and who is thus consigned to the house and to idleness.

To the grandmother of the little spinner who had detained me at the mills I now explained, as she opened the door, the reason of my visit. Showing me the way through the kitchen, she led me to a back room, in one of whose two double beds Mrs. Mitty lay dying. There was a hot coal fire in the stove, and the windows were closed. On a chair stood some fragments of food, a few glasses with medicine and milk, which had attracted a swarm of flies, whose droning was the only sound beside the heavy breathing of the invalid. Several neighbors sat in a group together, rocking in silence—waiting.

After a moment Mrs. Mitty opened her

eyes, and looked at me with that mingling of attention and indifference peculiar to the sick. I put by her side some fruit I had brought with me. She smiled, and in a voice faint and broken she whispered:

"I tell 'em they have to give me whatever I've a fancy for now. I reckon the time's short when I can eat anything."

With her wasted hand she lifted from the counterpane a palm-leaf fan, swaying it back and forth while she rested from the effort of speaking. Then she murmured feebly:

"It sure seems as though the flies 'd suffocate me."

Like the paling autumn leaves her withered cheeks bore a flash of scarlet on their colorless surface. Her meagre body scarcely marked an outline under the heavy bedclothes, whose warmth, together with the stifling heat of the room, disputed but feebly the chill of an ebbing vitality. Yet, with the unfailing sociability of the very poor, Mrs. Mitty wanted to talk. Alert, and at the same time listless, she seemed, like an uncertain flame, to waver between the light that meant recovery and the darkness that was fast engulfing her.

It was quickly told, the story of her life. What variety could it offer? Like the course of the shuttle in the loom it proceeded on its monotonous way, halting only when a thread spun out to the end or broke before time under the strain put upon it.

Her husband, for twenty years a mill hand, had one day dropped dead at his work, becoming by this sudden failing of his energies a mere inanimate mass fit to place under the earth in the parcel of ground allotted those whose destinies are obscure.

The burden he had sustained as breadwinner passed from his shoulders on to others more frail. Mrs. Mitty, already for eighteen years a helpmeet whose days of labor had brought their contribution to the humble budget, became by this loss the mainstay of the home.

She had, to be sure, an aid in her oldest girl, a child of twelve, who earned ‘‘fifty a day’’ as a spinner, but Mrs. Mitty was one of those who do not live by bread alone. If her yoke had seemed easy up to this time it was because with the man she loved by her side she had been happy. Like the thunderbolt which dashes indomitable across the clouds, shattering their lustre into drops of rain, grief, with its sudden revelation of loneliness, had changed Mrs. Mitty's existence into a waste of tears.

It was then, as she put it in her feeble, quavering voice, she was "stricken with the consumption." Mrs. Mitty was a good "hand," an old hand, one they relied on at the mills. It was annoying that after eighteen years of service she should fail them! Yet, when her name was taken off the lists, her lifetime of labor was greeted by no further recognition than a gesture of petulance on the part of a busy "super" who was exasperated at the unreliability of the modern factory "help."

Thus, had Mrs. Mitty, in the mingled predicament of sorrow and overwork, looked only to the rich and thriving mill for succor and help, she would have perished without aid.

But happily, among her neighbors, there was a woman whose glorious abnegation might well serve as gospel for the greedy stockholders of the Augusta factories. It was, indeed, only a three-room cottage where Mrs. Mitty lay dying, but the narrow wretched quarters could no more oppress the spirit of those that dwelt within than could Mrs. Mitty's withered, miserable body detain the soul which was making ready for its final flight.

As she talked on in flickering tones her intelligence grew more astute—it seemed that there was a fresh awakening of the mind as the body was falling away to sleep. From her blanched and faded cheeks the life had fled back into the blue veins that coursed their rugged way over her transparent brow.

"I sure do wish," she whispered, "that I had health like Mrs. Cooper. The children are a-stretchin' and a-crawlin' reound in the mornin' nearly dead, but Mrs. Cooper gets up as bright and as cheery!"

Here one of the neighbors who sat by the stove, waiting, hitched forward on her rocker, and drawled in her slow, ailing voice:

"Why, some folks don't know what it is to have a bad taste in their mouths, but I reckon I'm just nearly dead all the time."

Mrs. Mitty, determined, it seemed, by a certain loyalty to tell of the kindness she had received at a neighbor's hands, went on:

"When I was first took sick, Mrs. Cooper come and told me I better move deown 't her heouse so's 't would save me rent. I didn't have no one but my little girl, six years old, to wait on me. My niece, thirteen, was in the mill makin' a dollar a day."

Mrs. Mitty's thoughts were not, like mine, tracing to its source the greed which had made her destitute; they had before them the better image of kindness, such as a friend alone can demonstrate. In her feeble voice she continued:

"When Mrs. Cooper found how I was situated she said she just couldn't sleep nights for worryin'. So we moved deown abeout two months ago."

This "moving deown" meant the invasion by an invalid and two children of a tiny three-room house, supported by the work of a withered mother, and occupied already by two grown people and two children, one of whom was the little spinner who had stopped me on the stairs at the mill. The other was a boy, eleven, at school, for Mrs. Cooper was eager, as prouder mothers are eager, that her son should have an "education." Yet the boy, Ernest, fretted at this enforced unproductiveness.

"It's right hard work keepin' him in school," the grandmother volunteered; "he wants to go in t' the mill so he can support his mother."

And the refrain was taken up by Mrs. Mitty:

"My, yes," she said, "Ernest's a tender-hearted boy. The other mornin' I was right bad and I heard him just a-beggin' his mother to let him go to work in her place so 's she could stay and wait on me."

Here again the grandmother responded:

"I reckon Mrs. Cooper won't stop workin' so long 's she can stand. The day she quits we'll know she's bad off."

If Mrs. Cooper, in her surroundings of desperate misery, got up every morning "bright and cheery," it was because in her the spirit was "more than meat."

The feeble flame which sustained existence in Mrs. Mitty flickered fitful, waned over until at last the shadows prevailed. But the love which watched by her side shone out through the darkness like the lighthouse rays that steer the storm-tossed traveller past the rocks of destruction into the Safe Harbor.

From a letter written me by Mrs. Cooper after Mrs. Mitty's death, I quote here the following lines:

"I am not feeling very well as I lost so much rest waiting on our poor friend, Mrs. Mitty. But she has gone from among us. She died on the eighth. She passed away as calm as if she was going to sleep, poor thing; she suffered so she was resigned and ready to go. I done all I could for her and she gave me her little child and also her niece Tilly, poor little things, neither one has no parents and my heart went out in sympathy for those little lonely orphans. Although I am a widow myself and has two children and a old mother to take care of, but I could not refuse Mrs. Mitty's dying wish. She was so lonely, no mother or sister or husband to stand beside her in her last moments, none but strangers."

These few words need no comment. The mere reading of them compels one to reflect upon the various interpretations of the simplest commandment and its application by the humble laborer whom his neighbor, the mill-owner, surely loves not as he loves himself.

It is with the memory of Mrs. Cooper's kindness for a stranger, and the recollection in my mind of Mrs. Mitty's complete neglect by industrial employers whom for eighteen years she had served, that I close the chapter of observations made in the two Southern States—Georgia and Alabama.

Determined, as was my declared intention from the beginning, to relate only what I myself saw and heard, I have in writing these accounts kept to the truth in every detail. Yet I doubt whether these simple descriptions transmit vividly enough the impression of misery, of hopelessness, of weariness and depletion conveyed by the children who toil, to one who considers them from the human point of view, and not merely as the inconveniences of a "necessary evil."

Aside from the images of suffering and self-abnegation that stand forth in the thoughts after such an excursion as I made through the factories and factory homes in Georgia and Alabama, there are certain general facts which become evident concerning the cotton industry and child-labor in the South.

If at any time, no matter where or under what circumstances, you have chanced to throw a handful of coppers into a heterogeneous crowd of human beings, you have noticed them change from an attitude of sobriety and intelligence to one of brutality and greed. This, on a large scale, is what has happened in the South. For thirty years the money has been pouring for industrial purposes into a country which previously had but few resources. To-day there are still no labor laws in Georgia regarding the hours of employment or age of the employed, and until four years ago there was none in Alabama. The children naturally have been the keenest sufferers of such abuse, and the employers will, of course, fight reform to the bitter end. Just as among the crowd to whom you fling your pennies the scrambling and violence continue until the police come and in the name of the law dispense justice, so will abuse in any industrial community be practised until the law protects the weaker members against their oppressors.

So far the intervention of the ''police'' throughout Georgia and Alabama has been but nominal.

Extreme is the despotism in the administration of the mill villages where the ''corporation'' owns the land, the buildings on it, the schools, the church, where the corporation makes the only laws applied, and applies them according to its fancy. The nature, indeed, of this corporation is in nowise different from that of the feudal baron, and were it not for the love of freedom which, because they are Americans, actuates even the most forlorn specimens of the cotton mill population and causes them, in frequent outbursts of revolt, to be ever on the move, changing one slave master for another,—were it not for this spirit of independence shown on the part of the laborers, the abuses perpetrated in the ''corporation'' villages would resemble nothing so much as the oppression of the people by the grand seigneurs of the middle ages, that same oppression which, weighing too long time and too heavily, brought at last a vengeance so bloodthirsty and so appalling that the slothful patrons, quaking in prison, dubbed it the ''reign of terror,'' while history gives it the more dignified appellation of the Great Revolution.

Nothing could be clearer than the statement regarding child-labor made to me by one of the mill agents in Alabama.

''If the parents swear falsely about the ages of their children, what are we to do? *We are here first of all to make money.*"

And a more humane superintendent, who had been for years in the mills near Huntsville, put the case in this way:

"No one would *want* to have children, but you can't get the big help; and if you won't take the children the parents won't stay; and when they swear, what are you going to do? There should be compulsory school education. The law now is a dead letter."

PART III

THE NORTH

CHAPTER XII

The question of child-labor is not confined to any one section of the country; it is national, and in the South it is native, one may say, owing to the absence as yet of all foreign element in the laboring population. The growth of the cotton industry throughout the Southern States, its promotion by purely American hands, the scarcity of help, and various other problems concerning it, have more or less in the North been worked out to a solution. What this solution is with regard to the cotton industry, why it is necessary to make laws against child-labor, why these laws must be broken, or what the outcome is of keeping them—these are all questions which the North, having already an industrial history, can answer; and it is, therefore, towards Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts that I shall ask my readers to direct with me their attention, in the hope that, by the power of comparison, some useful facts may be brought forward: First, to demonstrate (to those who doubt it still) that child-labor is contrary to all principles of civilization; second, to show those who dread reform that for preserving the cotton industry as a flourishing source of wealth, there are ways and means more legitimate from every point of view than the making of little children work daily as many hours as there are years in their short existences.

The town of Biddeford is an anomaly such as one meets with frequently among the Northern settlements: Founded long ago by a group of dreaming pioneers, it has been since possessed by ambitious manufacturers whose thrifty ‘‘plants’’ have attracted to their service quantities of foreigners.

Thus, side by side with the church-spire and the native New Englander, one finds the towering mill-chimney and the scum of Europe’s population. Out of about sixteen thousand souls registered as inhabitants of

Biddeford, thirteen thousand are foreign-born.

The mills, spreading upward from the stream of rushing waters which supply them with power, extending along the river bank and over into the contiguous village of Saco, form a solid agglomeration of brick buildings beside which the humbler architecture of the Biddeford dwelling-houses presents but a meagre appearance.

Having been told at the hotel that no permit to visit the mills was granted without special letters of presentation to the directors, I resorted, towards one o'clock, to the simpler measure of entering the workshops with the hands. Down the streets they poured, running, loitering, flowing along like some molten mass which the magnet animates. French, Italian, Greek, all languages were spoken by these cosmopolitan laborers, who, with a diversity of nationalities, had in common at least their determination to work, and their good-humor at easily finding a "job."

It was a Neapolitan girl of about eighteen to whom I first appealed.

"You know Naples?" was her first question, followed by a smile at my affirmative answer and an understanding:

"I like my country best. I go home next Christmas."

She took me in through the formidable gates, and I spent an hour visiting the mills, accompanied for the most part by a foreman or a second-man who seemed to think I was there as much to seek work as for any other reason.

The pay-rolls of these great plants count over six thousand hands on their lists, and the annual distribution in salaries and expenses mounts up into the millions.

Out of this vast force of laborers, ninety per cent. in one mill and sixty-five per cent. in another are foreigners.

"It takes some time," the foreman said to me, as he showed me about, "to get accustomed to the nationalities: with some you've got to be gentle or they'll fly up in a rage; with others, unless you're pretty sharp you won't get any work done at all. In the cardin'-room I've got six men: one Jew, one Greek, one Frenchman, one Italian, one Armenian, one Portuguese, and I can't treat any two of 'em alike!''

Aside from this abundance of foreigners who suggest problems more complex even than the difficulties described by the foreman, the thing most striking in these mills, by comparison with the Southern factories, was the great amount of work being done by each hand, and in consequence the relatively deserted looking aspect of the rooms.

The ten or twelve ''sides'' or spinning-frames, which in the South a flock of four or five tiny children attend with more or less successful results, here at Biddeford are not infrequently kept in neat, trim order by a single hand, generally a girl of sixteen to twenty, sometimes an older woman. Sometimes, to be sure, the bobbins whirled about on a level with little heads too low to be in the category of legitimate workers, though Maine in her laws is more strict than Alabama, placing restrictions on the age at which a child may work, limiting the number of hours which a child may work to ten a day, and complementing these labor laws by compulsory school laws.

''No child under twelve,'' says the Maine Code, ''shall be employed in any manufacturing or mechanical establishment in the State. (Penalty: A fine of twenty-five dollars or more imposed either upon the parent or the employer, as the case demands.)

''No child under fifteen shall be employed in any manufacturing or mechanical establishment, *except during vacation of the public schools* in the city or town where he resides.

''Every child from its seventh to its fifteenth year shall attend public school during the time of its session. (Penalty: A fine not exceeding twenty-five dollars, or imprisonment not exceeding thirty days.)''

It would seem that these reasonable demands might suffice to keep the children in school until such an age as is suitable for them to begin earning a livelihood. Unfortunately, however, the law is not everything: there is also the enforcement of it which exercises an important influence on the final outcome; and here in Maine practical results are balked by the fact that any parent or guardian who affirms that his child or charge is ''of age,'' that is to say fifteen, is taken at his word, pledged by affidavit. No measures are adopted to look up the child's birth certificate or any other official identification,* and no test of illiteracy is applied to determine even so much as that the future little ''hand'' can read and write.

Moreover, the legal engagement of children under fifteen during the summer vacation relaxes the employers' conscience, and without insisting too much upon the letter of the law he allows his youngest spinners and doffers to continue their ''vacation'' as long as the truant officers conveniently forget to reclaim for school the missing pupils.

Pointing here and there as I walked on through the mills to an obviously undersized employee, I said to the second-man:

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* A law was passed in 1892 obliging doctors to register the births of all chidren either at the church or the city hall. In another year this will permit the verification of age among the native children born in Maine, but they are only a small minority of the candidates for employment in the mill.

"Have you no age limit?"

"Well," he answered, "they oughtn't to come in here *before they're twelve,* but if the parents say they're twelve, we can't do anythin' about it. I send lots of 'em away. I don't care to have the poor miserable little things workin' around. They're so spindlin' and yellow. But we know if we send 'em away somebody else 'll give 'em work."

"Is there no inspection?" I asked.

The second-man laughed:

"Yes, but that's about like the enforcement of the prohibitory laws."

It was difficult to estimate the number of children illegally employed in these factories; for the question "How old are you?" brought forth invariably, with a shy, understanding twinkle of the eyes, the same classic:

"I'm past fifteen."

One boy, evidently about twelve, whom I asked his age, took in a long breath, and, as though he were greatly annoyed, let forth a lusty:

"I'm eighteen!"

"Why do you tell me that?" I questioned, smiling; and with an expressive shrug of the shoulders, he answered:

"Well, why did you ask me?"

The children, indeed, seemed better acquainted with the law's requirements than did the authorities. At the school I found almost no boys left in the upper primary class.

"They've gone into the mill," said the teacher, "and I have three little girls just twelve who are only waiting to finish their sixteen weeks of school before starting to work."

"Sixteen weeks of school?" I repeated.

She showed me a copy of the old code: "Every child must go sixteen weeks a year to school." The law made in 1905, compelling the children to follow their classes for the entire session, was unknown in the school itself. *The teacher had never heard of it!*

CHAPTER XIII

Wishing to get direct the views of a mill-owner in the region, I set out for the mill community, Sanford, a two hours' trolley ride from Portland. It was a Sunday, which day I had chosen, preferring to talk with the mill-owner rather than to visit the mill, and feeling that one was incompatible with the other. The little village, situated on a rise of ground above the stream whose waters furnish power for the machines, was cheerful, and the two or three thousand hands who formed its population had given it the air of tidiness and thrift lamentably absent in the Southern settlements. Yet here, as at Biddeford, a large proportion of the laborers were foreign.

''We have principally French-Canadian help,'' the mill-owner explained to me, ''because they have such large families. The Americans have so few children.''

"Do you find it profitable to use children?" I asked.

"We couldn't get on without them. They do work men and women couldn't do. Their fingers are more nimble and they are more agile. A man couldn't get around as they do."

"Have you many in your mills?"

"My! yes, a lot," and then he added: "The law permits them to work at fourteen if they go sixteen weeks a year to school. Here the trouble is there's not school room enough for them, and the priests have requested us not to turn away the little children into the streets. We offered to give school room if the Catholics would provide the teachers, but this hasn't been done yet."

"Well then," I concluded, "the law is not under very strict enforcement."

"If the law regarding the certificates were enforced," said the mill-owner, "there are times I know when this and other factories would have to shut down thirty per cent. of work." Then, after a moment he added, alluding then to the purpose of my visit:

"I don't know that the employees would come out and fight, but I believe they wouldn't do much to help along any movement toward enforcing the law."

In this especial factory, where the weaving of woollens and plushes requires skilled labor, the distribution of tasks according to the aptitude is significant: the heavy hauling requiring mere strength without intelligence is done by the French-Canadian men, the French women do the spooling, the French children are used in the spinning-room, and, as the proprietor put it, "all the upper-class work is done by Americans. We can't get enough of them. We haven't the houses for them, and they won't go into the French quarters."

Then, as though he could quite understand their prejudice, which he himself, in fact, shared to the extent of feeling that it excused his action with regard to the employment of foreign child-labor, he said:

"I don't have much conscience about using French little help."

Yet lax as is the present enforcement of the law, the mere fact of its existence has acted indirectly for the benefit of the children. Just how bad conditions used to be it is hard to tell, but I talked with one workman, thirty-three years old, who had been almost a quarter of a century in the mills.

"When I was a child," he said, "we used to start in at five in the mornin' and we didn't lay off till six and sometimes till ten o'clock at night."

Bowed and broken, he bore the disfiguring marks of hopeless toil, multiple lines traversed his face, scarring the flesh which was wilted with years of slow starvation.

"I can remember well," he went on, "when I was little, a Frenchman used to be a curiosity. To hear any one talk French on the street was like hearing a Hottentot. Now more than half the population is French."

Having noticed this fact in consulting the Lewiston vital statistics, and having at the same time observed that, though the French had increased so enormously in numbers, there had been relatively little augmentation in the total of inhabitants, I now asked, haunted by the face of this man who appeared like one saved from a plague that might have wiped out a generation of those caught too early in its clutches:

"But where are the Americans?"

He smiled:

"They're not there—that's all you can say about them!"

CHAPTER XIV

It was with a patriotic desire to alter the conditions which seemed gradually to be extinguishing the old American stock and to be replenishing it with foreigners (of whom but sixteen weeks yearly of schooling was required), that several militant clubwomen of Maine set on foot a movement which resulted in the 1905 amendment of the law, and the recent appointment of an inspector who is making no sinecure of his position.

In the last report of the Commissioner of Labor, of Maine, there is practically nothing said about child-labor, but I have, from a direct source, statistics as to the proportion of children working in the factories where the ‘‘authorities’’ alone could find out the truth, so shy are these ‘‘little hands’’ about divulging their age.

Such figures were instructive as to the centres where the children were doing earliest service, and referring to the information given me I proceeded to Lewiston. Here, out of a total of 2,000 hands in one single mill, there were found by the inspector 170 children under age, and, among the sixteen cases investigated, not one family was met with so destitute as to requre this additional assistance brought in by the daily labor of the child at the factory.

Nor was this, among the mills which by their importance make Lewiston a great cotton manufacturing centre, the only establishment employing "little help."

It was noon when I arrived in this picturesque Northern town. As I walked along the stream-banks where the factory blocks are situated, I mistook for a moment the tall red-chimneyed buildings for schools, because of the flocks of children that came tumbling pell-mell from them, running, hurrying along, with the peculiar intensity that little people put into play and into work. Again, an hour later, having been courteously permitted to visit the mills, I observed more closely the youngest spinners: some of them were Greek, some Armenian; indeed, so many were the

Slav and Eastern representatives that the French and Swedes seemed almost like natives, though to be sure there were older girls who had been ten years at work and who did not know English enough to make themselves understood.

To this question of the invasion by foreigners of the Northern industrial mill towns I have—though it may be a cause of irritation—frequently alluded, because one of the solutions proposed for the Southern cotton-mill problems, scarcity of help, etc., is a turning southward of the tide of immigration pouring, with yearly increasing force, its scum into America.

Before adopting this measure, which is desired by some of the most eminent mill agents, and which seems at present to be the most acceptable expedient, it is well at least to consider the various inconveniences presented by these agglomerations in a single district of foreigners who have come to America for reasons not always the noblest.

At Lewiston (population in 1900: 23,761), with the hope of forming some idea as to what the future working generation might be, I went into the public-school kindergarten during the morning session. The class was composed of twenty-three little pupils, for the most part dark-eyed and of a swarthy complexion.

"I have two Americans," the teacher said, as though even this were something to be thankful for.

"And the rest?" I asked.

"The rest are Greeks, Jews, Armenians, Portuguese, French, Russian. When the class opened they couldn't speak a word of English."

Round and round they marched, this cosmopolitan procession, headed by a rosy-cheeked Italian carrying the American flag. On the blackboard there was a splendid drawing in colored chalks of the *Mayflower* landing at the rock of Plymouth, upon which were printed the figures 1620.

Here, at least, the children were learning the dates of that tradition of freedom which had attracted them to the "sweet land of liberty," but across the street there were nine hundred other children in the Dominican Sisters' school, besides a numerous attendance at the parochial schools of the French Catholic priests, where it is doubtful (these classes are not open to the public without special permit) whether an ideal of American education consistent with our own was being imparted to these recently transplanted scions of Europe and Asia.

As for the reports which resulted from the first tour made by the present inspector, they also throw some light on the question of the foreigner as a citizen: in one of the Maine mills which employs six hundred hands, all foreigners, there were found about forty children under fourteen years old whose certificates, even when they had any, noted them as being only twelve or thirteen. On the other hand, in small mills, where only native ''help'' is employed, the laws were being respected. ''The Americans,'' so say the competent, ''are more eager than the foreigners to give their children an education. The American works for his children, the foreigner makes his children work for him.''

Other inconveniences of the foreign invasion are manifested at the New England law courts, which, after generations of tranquillity, are now being shaken by the evidence of murders and of *crimes passionnels* committed by the "hot-blooded" South-European, who draws his knife to kill as easily as the former Puritan drew his missal to pray.

The question of increasing or discouraging immigration is too vast to justify us in dwelling upon it longer than to give these few inductive facts.

It was to the laborer's point of view about breaking the law that I wanted to direct my attention at Lewiston, so, having set out on a cold rainy afternoon for the "mill block" I stopped at the first house whose front windows bore the sign "Board and Lodging," and rang at the door until admission was at last granted me by a very pretty young woman who led me into her bedroom, and there, having installed herself before a table on which were spread out a pack of fortune-telling cards, she asked me what I wanted.

"I'm looking for rooms," I said. "Have you got anything to rent?"

"Got any children?" she asked, lifting her clear blue eyes a moment from the cards. She was dressed in a loose woollen wrapper. The room was in deplorable disorder, and there were two young babies asleep, one in a crib, the other on the bed which occupied a large part of the floor space.

"Yes," I answered, "I have four children."

"Oh Heavens!"

"The two oldest," I continued, as she became again absorbed in her game, shuffling the cards deliberately, "the two oldest are twelve and thirteen. I suppose I can get work for them in the mills?"

"Oh Heavens, yes!"

Then, after a moment, in which she gave all her attention to the game before her, she added, turning her clear, beautiful profile toward me, and gazing out of the window while she spoke:

"If you've just come here, you can say your children 've been in school where you come from. But, if you've been livin' here and take 'em out of school, they may get after you."

Here she lifted her voice and called through the door, which stood ajar:

"Say, Mr. O'Neill!"

Mr. O'Neill responded, announcing his approach by the alternate thump on the hall floor of a wooden leg and a walking-stick. When he got as far as the threshold we could see his scarlet nose, and a pair of blue, bleary eyes under a tuft of black, thick hair. The woman nodded toward me and explained why I had come.

"Think she can get work for her boys 't the mill?"

"Sure, yes," O'Neill responded heartily. "The oldest boy in the spoolin'-room is only just fifteen! They're all under age. You just give your boys' age as fourteen. I've got a boy in there now only twelve years old. I just told 'Super' he was fourteen, and signed the paper." He took a long pull at his pipe, and then he chuckled:

"Don't you a-worry. They won't bother you!"

CHAPTER XV

A short journey in the cars from Portland, Maine, to Dover, New Hampshire, carries one across a State border line, and therewith into a new realm as regards the legal, if not the social, aspect of the cotton-mill industry.

Dover, though mild and conservative in appearance, boasts a population of fifteen thousand souls, two-fifths of whom are foreigners from that part of Europe which the good New Englander mentions with a downward curve of the lips. There are among them both French and Swedes, to be sure, but these nationalities represent already a laboring aristocracy, and the truly "lower classes" are formed by Armenians, Portuguese, Greeks, Poles, Russians, and other such Slavs as "herd together like animals."

It was with some hesitation that the agent of the mills consented to my visiting the vast precincts of his industrial domain. He accompanied me "upstairs and downstairs"—but whether or not we penetrated to "my lady's chamber" I could but surmise.

"I believe," said this agent, who is a disciple of Tolstoi, "I believe in respecting the law. I enforce the spirit by the letter. My overseers understand that I want only suitable help. It would not greatly affect us if they took all our smallest hands. When the truant officer came in, about six weeks after vacation was over, he found only one boy who could not show his certificate on request, and that boy had his at home and was able to go after it."

This certainly was a brilliant record.

Yet, as I walked on through the upper room where the old "mule spinners" were installed, I noticed a number of very little boys at work. These "mule spinners," which produce an extremely fine and perfect thread, are composed of so complicated a machinery that they must be tended not by a child, but by a man. Yet for the merely mechanical attention to that part of the moving frame which is close to the ground, the "little hands" are indispensable.

Pointing to one of the tiny aids, not more, evidently, than twelve years old, I questioned the Tolstoian agent.

"Oh," he responded with a somewhat indifferent air, "the children twelve and thirteen years old come in at three o'clock, as soon as school is over, to help their parents."

"But this is a tacit breaking of the law?" I asked.

The agent shrugged his shoulders, as though there were an inward conflict between conscience and expediency.

"I tried to stop this 'helping' system," he said, "but the parents protested so. After all, the children are better here than they would be in the streets of a town like Dover."

New Hampshire permits children to work in the factories at the age of twelve during the vacations of the public schools. During the full school session, the boys and girls, up to fourteen years, must follow the instruction given, and those who cannot read and write must, until sixteen years of age, go regularly to the school or follow the night classes.

One of the militant members of the Federation of Women's Clubs, speaking of the conditions in New Hampshire, expressed herself to me as follows:

"As far as I can ascertain there are children under age employed at the mills in Manchester, Nashua, and Suncook. When we tried to urge an investigation we were begged by the authorities not to "stir up" the matter. "As conditions are not very bad in New Hampshire," she concluded in a melancholy way, "the men and women of our State are willing to 'let things drift.' "

There is, to be sure, no factory inspection in the State of New Hampshire, and, as has been often remarked, laws have no real value except through their enforcement.

At Nashua the "herd" of foreigners is more dense even than at Dover, more villainous, more swarming, more rapacious, more heedless of the laws in a country whose patriotism for them echoes only to the sonority of a silver dollar.

The two thousand hands of the Nashua Manufacturing Company are almost all foreign. I questioned many of the children in the spinning-room. Those who were able to speak English gave their ages as fourteen. Those who could not speak English were, without exception, according to their own verdict, over sixteen years old; though their diminutive size, their immaturity, declared them, to the most casual observer, as not above twelve or thirteen years of age. As soon as I spoke to them upon this delicate subject their expression of intensity changed to one of merriment—they rushed to tell their comrades of their adroitness in deceiving a stranger, and, as I passed, I left behind me a trail of hilarity.

One girl who spoke in French only had been ten years in the mills. Her voice was gone, her eyes were dulled, she looked a thousand years old, and there was something gruesome in the way she spat upon the ground, grinning the while, as she twisted a broken thread between her fingers, joining it to the whirling bobbin which for a decade she had tended.

At the office of the Nashua Manufacturing Company the brisk young American clerks had but one verdict to give regarding the social disadvantages of the laborer from Southern Europe: "He is like an animal." He herds with his compatriots into quarters which his habitation renders so filthy that after him no American is willing to take up his abode there.

At the City Hall, where I talked for a time with the "young lady assistant," I learned to what an extent the prejudice against the foreigner has become ferocious in towns which, like Nashua, boast truly old and venerable inhabitants—and to what extent also this prejudice affects the very destinies of America.

"Why," the young lady assistant protested, "these foreigners have ten and eleven children in a family! They're just like animals, and they're responsible for all the poverty here. It seems as if they had no sense whatever, having such families."

Then, after a moment's reflection, in which it seemed she were summoning courage for a denunciation almost antipatriotic, she added:

"They don't have *my* approval if they do have President Roosevelt's. At our charity societies *we* are perfectly disgusted with them!"

CHAPTER XVI

There is something appalling in the statistics of the cotton mills at Manchester, New Hampshire: the floor space of these factories covers one hundred and twenty-five acres; the spindles that twist in their revolution thread for a world of cotton garments number six hundred thousand; the total yards of cloth woven, not in a century, but in a week, amount to 4,921,000; the eight-day pay-roll dispenses $108,000 hard-earned dollars, and the hands who receive them form a body of 13,704 souls. In other words, these mills are the largest in the world.

Almost one-half of the fifty-six thousand Manchester inhabitants are foreigners. They are monopolizing everything—so the legend goes—because of their large families.

"Why," said the little school teacher to me, "we've so many foreigners they keep our children back. The Americans,'' she added, with an air of superiority, ''many of them, have no children. The educated prefer quality to quantity. They'd rather have two children and give them a good education, and they'd rather have none than give them no education at all! Lots of the American hands when they marry go right on working. They have no home and no children; they just board around.''

It was the clerk at the hotel who gave me the word of introduction necessary for opening the door of the larger mills. A young office boy accompanied me on my round through the factory. He was of the energetic type we designate as ''thoroughly American,'' self-respecting, ambitious, proud, neat, smart, alert, and resolute.

''There's lots of children here under age,'' he volunteered, ''but so long as the truant officer doesn't get after them they're all right.''

And presently, as we passed by one of the mule spinning-frames which had, each one of them, two tiny boys in attendance, my companion proffered:

"You wouldn't think that little fellow was fourteen, would you?"

"No," I responded. And the practical American rather sneered in answer:

"Well, he says he is, but he isn't—they none of them are. They're all foreigners. Lots of 'em can't even read and write their own names. You see," he explained, "we've got to have the work done and the Americans won't do it—it's too dirty for them—so we take in foreigners."

"And how do they get in? They must have a certificate verifying their age. How can they obtain this?"

"Well," my informant responded, "the parents swear falsely about their children's ages, and, besides that, they move around from one ward to another, change their names, and use the new certificate of the older children for those too young to get a certificate of their own."

So light and airy a sense of legal obligations seems hardly credible, yet such are the facts: a family takes out certificates in one part of the town under the name of Blanche. The following year they move into another quarter, install themselves under the name of White, and the younger children thus, as little Whites, provide themselves with the certificates of the older brothers who are serving in the army of laborers under the appellation of Blanche.

It is in the pursuit of such miscreants that the truant officers can alone act effectually in a State where there is no official factory inspector. The work done by the present Superintendent of Schools, at Manchester, is irreproachable. All that conscientious and persistent endeavor can contribute toward reform is being here accomplished by those who enforce with rigid precision the New Hampshire school laws.

But, alas! there is a faith so implicit placed upon "parents and guardians" that their oath, made in no matter what spirit of rapacity, is accepted without question, and thus it happens that one finds in the mills a goodly number of children whose "parents swear they're fourteen when they're only twelve.''

Having obtained at the schools in Manchester a list of ''truants,'' I set out upon an expedition into the poorer quarters of this thriving industrial town.

The prodigious mills, massed together in a block which sways to the rhythm of the huge and forceful machines within, form the margin at one side of this city. A broad and busy avenue traverses Manchester from west to east: its rows of tempting stores reflect the flashing trolley-cars in their vast plate windows. Yet out of this thoroughfare so animated, a step carries one into the poorer quarters.

CHAPTER XVII

It was almost six o'clock when I rapped at the Landrys' door. Rose, they had told me at the school, and Josie, her older sister, were both of them truants. This somewhat romantic word invoked visions of other runaway children whose lives had begun with escapades and continued in adventures of all kinds—but the dismal entrance of the Landrys' tenement dulled at once whatever rose color had momentarily enveloped the images of these two fugitives.

A light step sounded in response to my tap at the door, which was thrown open by a child on whose little face was a smile of greeting as she welcomed me without question. In the hospitable tone of the very poor, to whom the stranger is an object for especial courtesy, she bade me be seated and wait until her mother returned.

"But it was you I came to see," I explained; "you are Rose Landry, aren't you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

She had placed one hand on either hip and she stood with her arms thus akimbo, a light cotton jacket hanging loose from her narrow little shoulders, her eyes all eagerness, and her thin frail body bent forward with the intensity of the working woman, weary herself, alert for others.

"You are eleven years old, aren't you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then why aren't you in school?"

She threw out both hands with a pretty gesture, indulgent, despairing, and then she laughed:

"Why, I have all the housekeeping to do, and mama's dinner to carry, and besides," she added, "I have these two to take care of!"

"These two" were a boy of nine and a girl of six who sat demurely in the corner looking at a picture-book. As I turned to speak to them, there was a sound from the direction of the kitchen which announced that something on the fire needed attention. Rose in an instant had quieted the simmering disturbance on the stove, and returning to us, she explained:

"I love school better than anything, but I must help mama. I'm up, you see, every morning at half-past four. I've got my floors to scrub, the breakfast to cook, and I go to market, and I have to get mama's dinner ready and take it to the factory, and every Friday I clean up her machine for her. It's getting mama's dinner," she added, "that bothers me from going to school."

Then, perhaps, something in my expression offended her, for she protested quickly, a flash of loyalty in her dark, bright eyes:

"I don't have to clean mama's machine and scrub my floors; mama don't want me to, but I do it to advance her. When she comes home at night I don't want her to have a thing to do."

The tenement was shining with cleanliness. On the table which was spread for supper a red cloth reflected gaily the light from a neatly trimmed lamp. There were order and cheer in all that this little housekeeper had touched.

Long before I heard a sound on the stairs, Rose—alternating moments of conversation with flights into the kitchen for the preparation of supper—sounded the signal of those accustomed to waiting for a returning footstep at the close of the day.

"Hark!" she cried. "There's Josie!"

And presently the door opened and the second of the truants, aged thirteen, came in from a ten-hour day's work at the shoe-shop over in West Manchester. She, too, was "doing it to advance mama," and the burden she carried, too heavy for so young shoulders, had put something prematurely resigned into the dignity of her bearing. When school was spoken of,—and indeed it seemed almost inappropriate proposing classes to one for whom life had been itself so full a lesson,—Josie smiled, and, with a certain pride, she opened a desk that stood at one side of the room, and took from it a handful of copybooks in which her clear round handwriting showed the application of a faithful scholar.

"I'd love to have graduated," she said. "I had only one more year."

Again the warning note of Rose, the vigilant, sounded. This time there was a ring of tenderness in her voice, as she cried, lifting up her little hand:

"Hark! There's mama!"

The step that approached slowly by the steep tenement stairway was heavy with fatigue, and the greeting Mrs. Landry gave as she pushed open the door was listless.

"Rosie," she said, turning to the little housekeeper, "you've been and scrubbed those floors again!"

But Rosie's gay ringing laugh defied the pity implied in these few words of affectionate reproach. The mother laid aside her shawl, put in its place the dinner-pail. She moved as one moves who has no real hope in life to prompt new energy and impulse. When I questioned her she was reticent, admitting only that her husband was living,—somewhere in New Hampshire,—how and with whom she did not know, for he had given them no news of himself since deserting her.

The two youngest children had slid down from their seat in the corner and they stood close to the mother, rubbing against her shyly as they listened to what she said without understanding, for how could they understand that their mother and a sister of thirteen were supporting them all, while the little companion of eleven served in lieu of housekeeper, nurse, playmate, and guardian?

Though she had been gone from the house since five in the morning, Mrs. Landry did not sit down. She was inspecting me—inwardly she had a misapprehension that I had come from some charitable or philanthropic society, and the idea to her of accepting help, other than such aid as one friend gives another, was repellent. It was only after I had reassured her of my unofficial interest that she relaxed, admitting slowly in her hoarse, broken voice:

"It's been a pretty hard pull."

Then again she added:

"I don't carry my cross, I drag it. But I have the children," her hand rested on the head of the little one by her side, "and"—she finished the sentence to herself—"I'm happy because I believe in God."

CHAPTER XVIII

Though no more advanced than several other States in the actual framing of her child-labor laws, Massachusetts, because of the prevalence among her industries of those in which children are fitted to work, is deserving of especial commendation for the rigid enforcement she exacts.

In the single town of Fall River, Massachusetts, there are over five times as many spindles as there are in all the State of Alabama.* In Alabama, as we have seen, these spindles, according to expert opinion would have to be abandoned were children under fifteen kept out of the mills.

In Massachusetts, what with vigilant factory inspection and school management, spinning-rooms and other parts of the manufacturing and mercantile establishments have been cleared of all children under fourteen, and of all those under sixteen who cannot read and write simple English sentences, while no child under eighteen may work more than fifty-eight hours a week.

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* **Fall River, 3,246,468 spindles. Alabama, 636,204 spindles.**

However, it is hardly fair to compare an industry so young as that of cotton-weaving in Alabama with the same industry already mature in the Northern States. As late as the early eighties (1882-3-4-5) the limit in Massachusetts was set at the age of ten for children to be employed in the shops or factories. It has taken time to reform the legislature, to combat the resistance of those who considered themselves "hampered" by "vexatious labor laws."

It is not, however, futile to trace, at the same time with the rise of the age limit for child-labor in Massachusetts, the fall of the price in the cotton cloths. It may be a variety of obscure causes which explain what, however, appears to be a direct effect of legislation: in 1876 the Massachusetts law restricted the number of hours for minors under eighteen, and for women, to ten a day, and the week's limit to sixty. This same year the price of cotton-print cloth per yard fell for the first time below four cents. In 1885 when the laws forbidding children under fourteen to work in the factories were definitely put into execution, the price of cotton cloth per yard dropped for the first time below three cents. Nor were these diminutions in price mere caprices of the market. Whereas before 1876 cotton-print cloth varied from five to nine cents a yard, since 1876 it has never gone as high as six cents, and since 1885 * it has never gone above 4 1-16 a yard.†

Yet with the clearing of the children from the spinning-rooms the wages of the laborers have not, as it might be expected, been augmented; on the contrary, they have, for twenty years, diminished steadily. The re-

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* These figures are taken from a small publication entitled *Fall River and Its Manufactories*, compiled by Henry M. Earl, A. M., from official sources. Page 24.

† Massachusetts owns eleven of the print works (with a capital of $10,000,000 incorporated companies) out of a total of only twenty-six in the entire United States (total capital incorporated companies $16,820,000). It seems therefore safe to affirm that the labor laws which are passed in this State affect the entire cotton print industry in the United States. (See *Fall River and Its Manufactories*, page 33.)

cent long and terrible Fall River strikes sufficiently attest to the gradual exasperation of the cotton-mill hand who has been "cut down," as he puts it, to "starvation rates." . . . And, if we believe the verdict of the expert, this "cutting down" has been an economic necessity. Referring to the outcome of the Fall River strikes, the New York *Times* says in an editorial:

"If the forty-one corporations had been required to disburse $1,500,000 more wages annually, irrespective of their profits, it is hardly too much to say that the prospect of the continuance of the industry would have been imperilled. . . . The annual reports and meetings are pitiful reading for anybody interested in the industry."

What does it all mean then?

That reform is inconsistent with prosperity?

That labor laws actually do hamper the manufacturer?

Before deciding thus peremptorily against the practicability of enforcing throughout other States such laws as are observed strictly in Massachusetts, there are a number of things to be considered.

Considered in the first place, we, as a nation, export large quantities of raw cotton, and import quantities of manufactured prints, ginghams, which, being of an infinitely finer quality, are four and five times more expensive to buy than our own cotton cloths.

We are creating a scarcity in the raw material, and importing the manufactured article!

In the second place, the Southern States have increased their consumption of cotton in the last five years from 656,440 bales to 4,278,980 bales. The Northern mills have increased theirs only by 16,995.

Now, since the South has become, in the matter of coarse cotton cloth, so lively a competitor with the North, why should not the North, in turn, with her equipment of "hands" *over fourteen,* compete with Europe and replace by home production the entire category of imported goods?

Such a move would harmonize with the enforcement of the child-labor law in the North.

The child-labor problem in the South is altogether different. Shortage in the supply of hands seems to be at the root of the difficulties here. As the retired agent put it: ‘‘No one would *want* to use children, but *we can’t get the big help.*’’

The *American Cotton Manufacturer,* November, 1905, says: ‘‘Farm products selling at high values have brought about a return drift of the proletariat from factory to farm which has aggravated the scarcity in industrial establishments. So far as the native supply of workers goes, the mill has been skimmed top and bottom, and then turned over and skimmed again. The bidding of one mill against another has created a spirit of unrest among the help and intensified the migratory habits of an ever-increasing number of them.’’

And Mr. Robert Davis, who presided at the last Merchants’ Mill Meeting at Fall River, makes the following affirmation:

‘‘The Southern mills are not able to operate more than three-quarters of their plants on account of the scarcity of operatives.’’

For the moment then it seems that, in the North, it is quality of labor, and, in the South, quantity that is required, in order, from a commercial point of view, to make practical the enforcement of proper legislation. The opinion of those competent to judge is in favor of encouraging at once the right sort of immigration toward the Southern mills. Now, until the question of labor supply is settled, the chances are that the laws, however good, will and must remain a "dead letter." When there are hands enough, then the questions can be discussed of Factory Inspectors, compulsory school laws, and truant officers to execute them. The preliminary task of reform, therefore, must, for the time being, devolve upon the militant citizens who have at heart the welfare of the American people. The clubwomen have already taken up the child-labor question, and their work faithfully carried on can accomplish that quickening of public opinion which is mightier than the sword itself.

Those who, like the benevolent citizens in Columbus, have a budget to spare, can create primary industrial schools, centres such as that which has been formed by Mr. and Mrs. John Sherman Neligh. They can accomplish a reform of incalculable benefit by cultivating the splendid American material which during generations has been "going to seed" in the Southern uplands.

Others, whose impatience to see conditions improved is keen enough to constitute an ambition, can establish (and to this idea the Southern mill agents with whom I talked were not opposed) a district system of visiting nurses, who will dispense, together with care in acute cases, a general knowledge of and interest in hygiene among those too clearly ignorant in the mere matters of cleanliness and cooking.

Now, while in the South, for the time being at least, scientific philanthropy can, and necessarily must, supplement the work of legal reform being slowly carried on, in the North, in Maine and New Hampshire, there is no reason why the laws, in their strictest form, should not be enforced. There is plenty of school room and there are truant officers to look after the children who escape from lessons to go to the mills.

In a great manufacturing State like New Hampshire it is preposterous that there should be no Factory Inspector; and, given the weakness of the human conscience, it is also abject foolishness to allow the oath of a "parent or guardian" to determine in the eyes of the law the age of a child whose years alone fit him for work.

The Massachusetts laws exact that any child under sixteen must not only be able to read and write English, but that he must be provided, in order to prove his age, with a birth or baptism certificate, or with evidence furnished by the last census, or with some proof conclusive of his identity and of his age.

Until New Hampshire and Maine (and all those States, in fact, where the inflowing tide of immigrants constantly renews the population) have adopted laws as strict as those enforced in Massachusetts, children under age will continue to work, and the parents to give false testimony, in order that their youngest may "get around the super."

All sorts of arguments are put forth by the ignorant and the rapacious regarding the chance evils of child-labor.

"If the children weren't in the factory they would be in the streets!" say some.

"Work doesn't hurt little children," say others.

"The spinners are better off than the newsboys!"

Yet the truth is always more eloquent than anything that can be said against it. With regard to the accumulation of fatigue which assails even the strongest "hands" engaged in mill work, a few statistics taken from a scientific review are exceedingly to the point.

An important member of the Faculty of Medicine of Montpelier has compiled the following observations regarding the time of day in which the greatest number of accidents occur in the factories. Out of 5,534 accidents recorded, the order of progression was as follows:

110 at	6	A.M.	120 at	1	P.M.
235 "	7	"	420 "	2	"
375 "	8	"	530 "	3	"
420 "	9	"	740 "	4	"
600 "	10	"	750 "	5	"
405 "	11	"	350 "	6	"
55 "	12	M.			

There is a slight diminution at twelve o'clock and at six o'clock, owing to the fact that the machinery slackens at these hours, and many hands "lay off" or "clean up" fifteen to twenty minutes before the noon and night whistles blow.

As for the days of the week, the lesson they impart is even more striking: the accidents have occurred in the following proportion as the week goes on:

307 on Monday	425 on Thursday
385 on Tuesday	420 on Friday
410 on Wednesday	435 on Saturday

What could be more convincing than the testimony of such figures as the above?

We must lift this burden of fatigue from frail young shoulders if we would see the child of to-day growing to the man, the woman, the parent of to-morrow.

The problem is a vast one.

But let me beg one thing from those whom it interests: not to be discouraged, not to be disheartened by the complexity of the difficulties which the situation presents. Difficulties taken collectively are always disheartening. The phases of the child-labor problem should be met one by one. Where their technical and legal demands weary us there is always their human side to which we can turn.

If the million and a half children who are at work in our mills form too vast a body for us to cope with from the sociological point of view, we need but consider their individual lives. In contemplating these we shall be prompted to activity in relieving at once whatever suffering lies within our nearest reach.

THE END

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