

Children in Textile Industries

BY JOHN SPARGO

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The textile industries rank first in the enslavement of children. In the cotton trade, for example, 13.3 per cent of all persons employed throughout the United States are under sixteen years of age. In the Southern States where the evil appears at its worst, so far as the textile trades are concerned, the proportion of employes under sixteen years of age in 1900 was 25.1 per cent; in Alabama the proportion was nearly 30 per cent. A careful estimate made in 1902 placed the number of cotton mill operatives under sixteen years of age in the Southern States at 50,000. At the beginning of 1903 a very conservative estimate placed the number of children under fourteen employed in the cotton mills of the South at 30,000, no less than 20,000 of them being under twelve years of age. If this latter estimate of 20,000 children under twelve is to be relied upon, it is evident that the total number under fourteen must have been much larger than 30,000. According to Mr. McKelway, one of the most competent authorities in the country, there are at the present time not less than 60,000 children under fourteen years of age employed in the cotton mills of the Southern States. Miss Jane Addams tells of finding a child of five years working at night in a South Carolina mill; Mr. Edward Gardner Murphy has photographed little children of six and seven years who were at work for twelve and thirteen hours a day in Alabama mills. In Columbia, S. C., and Montgomery, Ala., I have seen hundreds of children, who did not appear to be more than nine or ten years of age, at work in the mills by night as well as by day.

There are more than 80,000 children employed in the textile industries of the United States, according to the very incomplete census return, most of them being little girls.

One evening I stood outside of a large flax mill in Paterson, N. J., while it disgorged its crowd of men, women and children employes. . . . Of all the crowd of tired, pallid and languid looking children I could only get speech with one, a little girl who claimed thirteen years, though she was smaller than many a child of ten. Indeed, as I think of her now, I doubt whether she would have come up to the standard of normal physical development either in weight or stature for a child of ten. One learns, however, not to judge the ages of working children by their physical appearance, for they are usually behind other children in height, weight and girth of chest—often as much as two or three years. If my little Paterson friend was thirteen years of age, perhaps the nature of her employment will explain her puny, stunted body. She works in the "steaming room" of the flax mill. All day long, in a room filled with clouds of steam, she has to stand barefooted in pools of water, twisting coils of wet hemp. When I saw her she was dripping wet, though she said she had worn a rubber apron all day. In the coldest evenings of winter little Marie, and hundreds of other little girls, must go from the superheated steaming rooms into the bitter cold in just that condition. No wonder such children are stunted and underdeveloped!

In textile mill towns like Biddeford, Me.; Manchester, N. H.; Fall River and Lawrence, Mass., I have seen many such children, who, if they were twelve or fourteen years of age, according to their certificates and the

companies' registers, were not more than ten or twelve in reality. I have watched them hurrying into and away from the mills, "those receptacles, in too many instances, for living human skeletons, almost disrobed of intellect," as Robert Owen's burning phrase describes them. I do not doubt that, upon the whole, conditions in the textile industries are better in the North than in the South, but they are, nevertheless, too bad to permit of self-righteousness, boasting and complacency. And in several other departments of industry, conditions are no whit better in the North than in the South. The child-labor problem is not sectional, but national.—From the "Bitter Cry of the Children."

THE CHILD

The girls go to the mills, the boys to the breakers. A year or two ago Mr. Francis H. Nichols said regarding these working children: "I saw four hundred lads working in the breakers. One of the children told me, 'We go to work at seven in the morning and stay until six in the evening.'" "Are there many in the breakers younger than you?" he asked one of the children. "Why, sure, I'm one of the oldest; I'm making sixty cents. Most of them is eight and nine years old." Mr. Nichols then asked, "Did you ever go to school?" "To school?" the child echoed. "Say, mister, you must be a green hand. Why, lads in the anthracite doesn't go to school; they works in the breakers!"

For ten or twelve hours a day these children of ten and eleven years stoop over the chute and pick out the slate and other impurities from the coal as it moves past them. The air is black with the coal dust, and the roar of the crushers, screens and rushing mill-race of coal is deafening. Sometimes one of the children falls into the machinery and is terribly mangled, or slips into the chute and is smothered to death. Many children are killed in this way. Many others after a time, contract coal-miners' asthma and consumption, which gradually undermine their health. Breathing continually, day after day, the clouds of coal dust, their lungs become black and choked with small particles of anthracite. There are in the United States about twenty-four thousand children employed in and about the mines and quarries.

In New Jersey, an appeal for state protection of the little ones, made public a short time ago, asserted that children of six years of age were employed in the glass factories. Great numbers of children worked all night. One factory alone, it is said, had two hundred and eighty workers, mostly children between ten and fourteen years of age. Over five thousand children are now employed as glass-workers in the United States, and most of these are at work in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. In the textile mills and in the tobacco and cigar factories of the latter state many thousand children are employed. Working in tobacco is one of the employments most injurious to health. During the recent agitation against child labor in New Jersey, it was reported that many children working for the American Cigar Trust fell down with weakness after their day's labor.

The census for 1900 gives the number of children under fifteen years of age at work in New York State as nearly ninety-two thousand, but the result of our investigation three years later showed that these figures certainly did not include all of the working children.

The messenger and delivery boys were, previous to 1903, unprotected

by any law. Children of all ages from eight to sixteen years were found working almost unlimited hours at such occupations. Several boys, striking for a shorter "day," had been working from eighty to ninety hours a week. At the Christmas season their hours were longest. At the time of our inquiry a child was found frozen to death in a delivery wagon. He had worked far into the night, and, being too tired to go home, laid down in his wagon to sleep until morning. There were hundreds of boys, under fourteen years of age, employed as messengers.

Besides these children, upward of seven thousand boys and girls, employed in street-trading, boot-blackening, peddling newspapers, etc., were working under conditions which made it often impossible for them to resist temptations of vice and crime.

Those industries which coin into profits the vitality of children—and leave to the world, for its mercy to support, wrecks of manhood—rob the country of something which they can never return. They have contracted a debt to the child and to society which they can never repay.

The school must take upon itself these new responsibilities, both of which are educational problems, and both of which the school, more than any other public agency, is fitted to master. An awakening to the necessity of assuming the new duties should not be delayed, for the yardless tenement is multiplying, the children must be kept from the factory, and the little ones of the street may even now be counted by the million.

Those of the new social faith are growing in numbers. To them the child is the world's supreme treasure. For it the world moves and has its being. Without the child the world were barren, riches but dust, and life joyless. With the child (not mine only, nor yours, but every child born to man) the world is forever new, forever hopeful, and forever blessed.

(From "Poverty," by Robert Hunter.)

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

BY MRS. BROWNING.

Do you hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
Ere the sorrow comes with years?
They are leaning their young heads against their mothers,
And THAT cannot stop their tears.
The young lambs are bleating in the meadows;
The young birds are chirping in the nest;
The young fawns are playing with the shadows;
The young flowers are blowing toward the west;
But the young, young children, O my brothers!
They are weeping bitterly.
They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
In the country of the free.

For, "Oh!" say the children, "we are weary,
And we cannot run or leap;
If we cared for any meadows, it were merely
To drop down in them and sleep.
Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping;
We fall upon our faces trying to go;
And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping,
The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.
For all day we drag our burden, tiring,
Through the coal-dark, underground;
For all day we drive the wheels of iron
In the factories round and round.

"For all day the wheels are droning, turning;
Their wind comes in our faces,
Till our hearts turn, our heads with pulses burning,
And the walls turn in their places.
Turns the sky in the high window blank and reeling,
Turns the long light that drops adown the wall,
Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling—
All are turning, all the day, and we with all,
And all day the iron wheels are droning,
And sometimes we could pray,
'O ye wheels' (breaking out in a mad moaning),
'Stop! be silent for today!'"

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their look is dread to see,
For they mind you of their angels in high places,
With eyes turned on Deity.
"How long," they say, "how long, O cruel nation,
Will you stand, to move the world on a child's heart—
Stife down with a mailed heel its palpitation,
And tread onward to your throne amid the mar?
Our blood splashes upward, O gold-beaper,
And your purple shows your path!
But the child's sob in the silence curses deeper
Than the strong-man in his wrath."

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