

WOMEN WORKERS AND THE
INDUSTRIAL

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WOMEN WORKERS
AND
THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION
1750—1850

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TO THE MEMORY OF
MY MOTHER

PREFACE

THIS book is an attempt to give an account of the conditions governing the lives of working women during the period 1750-1850. The industrial Revolution has been studied from many aspects, but so far women's work during this period has not been the subject of any separate and detailed study. It is hoped that the present book, though necessarily limited in scope, may do something towards filling this gap.

My grateful thanks are due to the late Professor Lilian Knowles for her inspiration in the early stages of this research and guidance in the use of materials for this period which she knew so well ; and especially am I indebted to Dr. Eileen Power, who has directed my researches for her unfailing interest and her invaluable help in discussion, and in reading and criticizing my manuscript. I must also record my deep gratitude to Mrs Bernard Shaw for her generous scholarship, which allowed me to devote an extra year to this study, and for the kindly interest she has always taken in this subject. Finally, I wish to express my thanks to the Clerk of the Peace at Derby, the Rector of Darlaston, the Vicar of Rugeley, and the Clerk to the Parish Council of Duffield, for giving me facilities to use the documents in their charge.

IVY PINCHBECK.

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WOMEN WORKERS AND THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

1750—1850

INTRODUCTION

It is often assumed that the woman worker was produced by the Industrial Revolution, and that since that time women have taken an increasing share in the world's work. This theory is, however, quite unsupported by facts. In every industrial system in the past women have been engaged in productive work and their contribution has been recognised as an indispensable factor. But for centuries, under the handicraft and domestic systems, the greater part of their work was carried on in the home and there taken for granted. It was only when new developments brought about the separation of home and workshop that a far greater number of women than ever before were compelled to follow their work and become wage earners in the outside world; hence the mistaken notion that women only became industrial workers with the Industrial Revolution. By the division of labour which accompanied the reorganisation of industry, wage-earning occupations for women became more numerous, but their total contribution to productive work was not necessarily altered thereby. In the provision of food and clothing for instance, women had always played a great part, and specialisation in these branches merely resulted in new classes of workers performing in separate trades the multifarious tasks which previously had occupied women in their homes.

For much of their work prior to the Industrial Revolution, women themselves received no wages. Among the industrial classes, the earnings of wives and children were often included in the sum paid to the head of the family, and among agriculturalists and traders, marriage was most often a business partnership in which husband and wife worked together in their joint interests. But wherever women were unable to assist in their husbands' work, it was necessary for them as a rule to become wage earners themselves. Public opinion in the eighteenth century expected women and children to earn at least sufficient for their own maintenance, and men's wages were based on the assumption that they did so. "Consider, my dear girl," runs *A Present for a Servant Maid* (1743), "that you have no portions, and endeavour to supply the deficiencies of fortune by mind. You cannot expect to marry in such a manner as neither of you shall have occasion to work, and none but a fool will take a wife whose bread must be earned solely

by his labour and who will contribute nothing towards it herself."¹ Wives of day labourers and others paid at a fixed rate of wages, were therefore generally employed in some form of domestic industry such as spinning, knitting, lace making and weaving, or were compelled to engage in some kind of trade, or work for wages outside the home. Among the occupations in which women were employed no task was considered too heavy or distasteful. As servants in husbandry women performed the heaviest kinds of agricultural labour; they served as assistants to masons and bricklayers, as labourers in brickyards and foundries, as load carriers to and from markets, as rag sorters and cutters in paper mills, as cinder sifters and collectors of refuse.

The fact that women had for so long worked as assistants to their husbands and fathers was largely responsible for their bad economic position. Because their labour was subsidiary, it was cheap; and because they could perform useful service in many ways without technical training, they were often denied apprenticeship and the rank of skilled workers. So long as they were contributors to, and participants in, a family wage, however, this system was not necessarily oppressive; but as soon as women became dependent on their own exertions the hardship of their position was at once apparent. By tradition their wages tended to remain at a supplementary level and they found themselves excluded by lack of training from skilled and better paid work.

There can be little doubt that these inequalities pressed hardly upon a large proportion of women. The uncertainties of life in the eighteenth century threw many upon their own resources. In consequence of the high death rate the percentage of widows tended to be high, and as to the number of deserted wives and unmarried mothers, parish records bear eloquent testimony.² Since single women could barely subsist on the rate of wages paid in many women's occupations, it may readily be imagined how difficult was the lot of women who had also children to support by their labour. It is only too evident from the records of the times that such occupations as were open to women were overstocked. In rural districts domestic service was the chief employment for single women and when this was unobtainable or failed to attract, they relied mainly on spinning and occasional day labour for the farmers. But overseers' accounts with their lists of women who received either temporary assistance or small sums of regular outdoor relief, except

¹ Quoted by Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Kegan Paul and Co.), pp. 168-9.

² Readers of parish records cannot fail to be impressed by the high proportion of women among vagrants. The following entries in the Rugeley (Staffs) Overseers' Account Book for the month of June, 1781, are typical of the charges to many parishes under this head:

"June 2, Four poor Women, 8d."
 "June 8, Four Men and Three Women, 1s. 9d."
 "June 18, To Four Poor Women, 1s. 6d."
 "June 20, Two Women, 4d."
 "For a Woman Lying Inn at Walter Richardson's, £1 2s. 10d."
 "June 24, A Poor Woman, 2d."
 "June 28, Two Women, 4d."
 "June 30, A Woman, 6d."

During the same period nine men were relieved. *Rugeley Parish MSS.*

at hay and harvest time, suggest the inability of such women to secure either constant employment or adequate wages for subsistence. Among the urban population more women were brought up to a trade. In London, however, unemployment among women was seen at its worst. Here pauper trades and casual unskilled labour contributed in no small degree to the social problems of the city. Crime and prostitution, and not infrequently starvation¹ and suicide, followed inevitably in the wake of unemployment. At an inquest upon a woman who had drowned herself in 1752, Fielding, the Bow Street Magistrate, commented on the fact that so many women had lately committed suicide, "for hardly a week passes without one or more instances of that kind, and few or no men have been for some time known to have committed the crime. Perhaps the distress to which some females have been lately reduced may in some measure account for it."² Sixty years later the Police Reports of the Metropolis give an appalling record of prostitution and crime to which women were reduced by their inability to obtain regular employment. "Sir," some of them are reported as saying, "we do not thieve from disposition, but we thieve because we cannot get employment; our character is damned and nobody will have us."³ Much of the distress occurred among domestic servants, for although domestic service had always been the chief employment for women, yet in London the supply always exceeded the demand. Lack of employment in rural districts sent young women, untrained for anything else, flocking to the city. "The number of young women that fly thither is almost incredible,"⁴ says Arthur Young in 1771. Employment for all was not available and many of those who entered service found it a precarious and uncertain occupation.⁵ The overstocked market resulted in much irregularity of employment. As late as 1834, when the Poor Law inquiry was made, many London parishes included "female household servants" among the classes "most subject to distress."⁶

In the period prior to the Industrial Revolution, therefore, while the majority of married women in the agricultural and industrial classes

¹ In 1763 a prospective purchaser of a house in Stone-cutter Street, found in two rooms, three dead women terribly emaciated, and in a garret two women and a girl of sixteen, two of whom were on the verge of starvation. Two of the dead women had been load carriers in Fleet Market. It is unlikely that this could have been an isolated instance of starvation among casual women workers. George, *London Life in the 18th Century*, p. 171.

² *Covent Garden Journal*, June, 26, 1752.

³ *P.P. Police Reports*, 1816, V, p. 143, *eid.* John Townsend. Prostitution was one of the most serious social problems in London at the end of the eighteenth and in the early nineteenth centuries. In 1816 some London daily papers estimated the number of prostitutes in London as 100,000. This was obviously an exaggeration in view of the fact that the population of London was reckoned at 1,500,000; but a more moderate estimate put their numbers at "at least 40,000." An Address to the Guardian Society, in *The Pamphleteer*, vol. 21, pp. 243, 245.

⁴ *Farmer's Letters to the People of England*, 2d ed. 1775, p. 354.

⁵ Many of the London prostitutes were said to be drawn from the servant classes. "I think many prostitutes upon the town are servant girls, who have been driven there through the caprice of their masters or mistresses, who frequently discharge them, and refuse to give them any character. I have had many complaints from female servants personally to me upon that subject; I may say, two or three hundred." *P.P. Police Reports*, 1816, V, p. 229, *eid.* J. N. Lavender.

⁶ *P.P. Poor Law Report*, 1834, XXXVI. Returns from Parishes.

shared the activities of their husbands and had fairly stable employment in their homes, the position of many single women and those who were thrown upon their own resources was often one of extreme difficulty. Lack of training and lack of openings for employment were rightly regarded as being largely responsible for "the prevalence of profligacy and misery among the lower classes of females, not merely in London but in the kingdom at large."¹

The Industrial Revolution, which was to establish a new order of things, introduced changes of vital importance to women. One industry after another was taken from the home by invention and the development of large scale industry; in the process the family wage disappeared, and agrarian and industrial changes combined to deprive women of their earning capacity in the home. In the misery and distress of the transition, these changes at first appeared to affect many women adversely. The family income was seriously depleted by the loss of their own earnings, and for a time, until men's wages were readjusted to meet the change, lack of employment for married women had serious consequences, contributing in no slight degree to the rise in poor rates at the end of the eighteenth century. When, a little later, working women were reabsorbed into industrial work outside the home, they were regarded by many contemporaries as victims of the new industrial régime.

We are now sufficiently far removed from the initial stages of the Industrial Revolution to be able to attempt a dispassionate survey of its changes and their effects. In spite of much distress which accompanied the transition—due in part to reorganisation, in part to the dislocation produced by the French Wars—the Industrial Revolution has on the whole proved beneficial to women. It has resulted in greater leisure for women in the home and has relieved them from the drudgery and monotony that characterised much of the hand labour previously performed in connection with industrial work under the domestic system. For the woman worker outside the home it has resulted in better conditions, a greater variety of openings and an improved status.

The object of the present study is to give some account of women's work in industry, agriculture and trade on the eve of the Industrial Revolution, and to trace the effect of its changes and subsequent developments on their employment and economic position. The period taken for review is roughly 1750-1850—the period of greatest change so far as women's activities are concerned—and the study has been limited to those which were definitely affected by the industrial and economic reorganisations of this time. Domestic servants, and such workers as dressmakers, milliners, slop sewers, frame-work knitters and boot and shoe makers, whose industries continued without alteration until later in the nineteenth century, have of necessity been left out of account.

Women's work in agriculture has been dealt with at some length, since at the opening of our period the population of England was mainly rural, and agriculture employed the majority of the people

¹ *Report of Society for Battering Condition of the Poor*, vol. iv, p. 62, Append.

INTRODUCTION

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in the old English village. Moreover, England was not really industrialised until about the middle of the nineteenth century; the first part of this study, therefore, is devoted to women's employment in agriculture and the agrarian revolution.

PART I

THE EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

CHAPTER I

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

In 1750, England was still in the main an agricultural country, over the greater part of which the old type of rural organisation persisted with its open-field farms and common lands. During the next seventy years great changes took place. As in the industrial world large commercial undertakings took the place of many of the domestic industries, so in agriculture the large enclosed farm succeeded smaller occupations in the open village. In the past, farming had been conducted mainly for subsistence and to supply the needs of the immediate community; it now became a capitalistic trade, aiming at increased production to supply the new markets in the growing industrial areas.

These economic changes were accompanied by far-reaching social effects. The old village organisation was broken up, and a new social structure evolved. For some, enclosures and engrossing meant increased wealth and a rise in the social scale; a greater number lost their proprietary interest in the soil, and with it their economic independence. The social changes accompanying this organisation are reflected in the lives of the women of the period, who then contributed to a greater extent than at present to the maintenance of the family. Not only did the changes of the agrarian revolution affect the position of their husbands which women naturally shared, but they also exercised an important influence on their own productive capacity with which was involved their own economic independence. The mistress of a large farm, who at the beginning of our period was actively concerned in the management and productive work of a large household, had at the end of it as a result of the increase in wealth, joined the ranks of the leisured classes. The wife of the small freeholder or tenant farmer, who lost his land, became dependent upon her husband, because with the land went her opportunity of contributing to the resources of the family. If ultimately she became a wage earner, it was at a scale on which she could not adequately maintain herself, still less contribute to the support of the family. In the following pages an attempt is made to describe the conditions of women's lives on the eve of the agrarian

revolution and to show how their work and economic position were affected by it.

In considering women's work in agriculture, it is not necessary to enter into the legal classification of people on the land; it is simpler to consider them as farmers' wives on both large and small holdings, servants in husbandry and cottagers' wives, whose husbands eked out their small allotments by occasional earnings as day labourers, and who themselves were often accustomed to work for wages at hay and harvest.

FARMERS' WIVES

In the eighteenth century it was still customary for the wife of a large farmer to take an active share in the management of the household, although there were some households in which the mistress had already handed over the main responsibilities to a servant.¹ In such cases a wealthy farmer's wife often took a keen interest in the purely agricultural side. Marshall, in 1782, mentions a large occupier of £17,000 a year, who was able to manage without a steward or bailiff, because he had the assistance of "his lady, who keeps his accounts,"² and two farmers who went to investigate Coke's agricultural experiments at Holkham, after riding round the estate with Mrs. Coke, expressed their "agreeable surprise in meeting with an amiable lady in high life, so well acquainted with agriculture, and so condescending as to attend two farmers out of Kent and Sussex a whole morning to show them some Norfolk farmeries."³

In the days when almost all the food and a good deal of the clothing were provided at home, the household management of a large farm was no light undertaking. In addition to the purely domestic side, the farmer's wife had also charge of the dairy—including the care of calves and pigs—the poultry, the garden and orchard and all financial dealings connected with them. The butcher, the higger and the cheese factor who came to make purchases at the farm, usually transacted their business with the mistress. In his *Survey of Devonshire*, Vancouver describes a custom which was not confined to that county, by which the wife undertook to support the household out of the profits of her own domain. "It is a common practice among them on marriage, to give to their wives what is called pin-money; this consists of poultry, pigs, and the whole produce of the dairy; with which supply the wife is expected to clothe and (exclusive of bread, corn, and other vegetables) support the whole household; and here it is but common justice to say, that the industry and attention to business of the farmer's wives and daughters, with the neatness displayed in all their market ware at Exeter, and in other large towns, are subjects deserving the highest praise."⁴ An ability to deal in business

¹ "A woman servant that taketh charge of Brewing, Baking, Kitching, Milk-house, or Maulting, that is hired with a Gentleman or a rich Yeoman (whose wife doth not take the pains and charge upon her) shall not take wages by the year with meat and drink above 40 shillings." *Justices Assessments of 1703*. Thorold Rogers, *History of Agriculture and Prices*, vol. vii, p. 610.

² Marshall, *Rural Economy of Norfolk*, vol. ii, p. 201.

³ *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xx, p. 251.

⁴ Vancouver's *Devonshire* (1808), p. 112.

matters was as necessary to the farmer's wife in her sphere; as it was for her husband in his, and the well-being of the family depended not a little on the business capacity of the mistress.

Apart from the supervision of the dairy and stock the domestic management of a farm called for a good deal of organisation. A large farm in Oxfordshire in 1768 had living in it seventeen men, five boys and five maids in addition to the family;¹ a household of twenty was common, while day labourers also were sometimes given partial board. On farms such as these one maid was necessary for the brewing and baking alone; another was required for the laundry and the rest divided among them the work of the dairy, milking and the care of stock, household work and winter provisioning. In the evenings all were expected to assist in the sewing and in spinning flax and wool, for every farm provided its own yarn for linen, blankets and a certain amount of clothing for the members of the family. Everything came under the supervision of the mistress and not a little of her time was taken up in training the maids in their respective duties.

On a smaller holding, the farmer's wife, having less assistance, was more actively engaged in manual work. On many farms the entire labour was performed by the members of the family alone, and where this was the case a good deal of outdoor work fell to the lot of the women. A North Country farmer writing in *The Farmer's Magazine* in 1801 speaks of the small occupier's "necessity of turning out his wife or daughter to drive the plough in the depth of winter." The wife was obliged to undergo the drudgery of outdoor work as "upon such farms there is little occasion for day-labourers, except an old woman or two which they employ in harvest."²

In other respects their work was similar to that on a large farm, and since raising the annual rent was a matter which required the utmost industry among smallholders, the greatest care was taken to make the most out of their dairies, poultry and eggs. On a large farm dairy produce was often sold to the badger or higler who collected eggs, poultry and butter at the farm; on a smaller holding the wife or daughter of the farmer was accustomed to take her produce to the market where she retailed it herself. Many housewives and dairymaids rode into market on horseback, their butter, poultry and eggs carefully packed in panniers; and at the Norwich market, which Marshall believed in 1789 to be "beyond comparison the first in the kingdom," the women also supplied veal, pork and lamb.³ Norfolk was already celebrated for its turkeys and the skill of the housewives of the county in breeding and rearing poultry: "Poultry of every species are sold, in the markets, ready picked and skewered fit for the spit; and are in general, so well fatted, and dressed up in such neatness and delicacy, as shew the Norfolk housewives to be mistresses in the art of managing poultry."⁴ The farmers' wives of Sussex bred "the fattest geese and largest capons" for the London market, and from Suffolk came every year the great droves of turkeys; of Stratford-on-Stour it was said

¹ Young, *Northern Tour* (1771 ed.), vol. iii, p. 340.

² *Op cit.*, vol. ii, pp. 310, 308.

³ Marshall, *Rural Economy of Norfolk*, vol. 1, pp. 195-6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

"that 300 droves of turkies have passed in one season over its bridge towards London, computed at 500 in a drove one with another."¹

On many small farms it was necessary to engage in some form of domestic industry to eke out the proceeds from agriculture. In Westmorland and Cumberland farmers' wives spun their own wool and brought the yarn to market every week;² on Welsh farms flannel was produced for the market and in woollen districts a few pieces of cloth were made and sold each year. More often as in Shropshire, the home-grown flax was made up into linen. "Besides brewing, baking, providing for the family where workmen are maintained in the house, and managing the dairy," writes the Reporter, "the farmer's wife, with the assistance of her maid-servants in the evenings, and at spare hours, carries on a little manufacture, and gets up a piece of linen cloth for sale every year."³ Where manufacture was not carried on for sale, it was still customary in the North in the mid-eighteenth century to produce a "coarse grey woollen cloth, made from a mixture of black and white wool, for the clothing of the farmer and his family." One or two black sheep were kept to provide wool for the stockings of the family, and during the winter flax was spun for sheets, table linen and shirts.⁴

On the death of a farmer who had no son to succeed him, it was customary for his widow or daughter to retain the holding and take over the entire responsibility of the farm. The fact that the wife usually shared the business transactions of her husband, and had already experience of buying and selling stock, enabled her to run a farm with greater ease than if she had only been concerned with the domestic side of affairs. Arthur Young and other agricultural writers make frequent mention of women who were successfully managing their farms. On one of his tours Young writes: "At Henley, I was very glad to find that Mrs. Clarke had kept the lucerne, which the late Mr. Clarke sowed; and very much to the credit of this female cultivator, I found it without a weed and in admirable tilth." At Little Malvern he went purposely to view the farm of Mrs. Williams who "had some meadows of extraordinary fertility." In Oxfordshire, Mrs. Latham of Clifton had "one of the completest sheep-yards, if not the most so, in this county"; Mrs. Hall of Little Brickhill, Buckinghamshire, on a farm of 500 acres, kept "breeding ewes for fattening lambs for the London market."⁵ The awards made to women by the new agricultural societies at the end of the eighteenth century when agricultural improvements were beginning to be more widely adopted, give abundant evidence of the interest and experiments of a large number of successful women farmers.

DAIRYWOMEN

The most important and the most productive branch of women's work in agriculture in the eighteenth century was dairy-farming.

¹ Postlethwayt's *Dictionary* (1775): Articles, Suffolk, Surrey.

² Young, *Northern Tour* (1771 ed.), vol. iii, p. 135.

³ Plymley's *Shropshire* (1803), p. 123.

⁴ Strickland's *East Riding*, pp. 283-4.

⁵ *Annals*, vol. viii, p. 82; *Ibid.*, vol. vi, p. 123; Young's *Oxfordshire*, p. 301; Priest's *Buckinghamshire*, p. 57.

A certain amount of butter and cheese, at least sufficient to supply the needs of the household, was made on every farm, and probably most farms provided some surplus for the market. Here, dairying was only one of the many activities of the farmer's wife, but where dairying was the main object the success or failure of the whole enterprise depended almost entirely on the women concerned. So responsible was their work that on all but the largest farms, the mistress superintended every stage of the business and performed all the more difficult operations herself. Scientific principles were almost unknown in the eighteenth century dairy and successful results therefore depended on the accurate judgment and experience gained from daily practice and minute attention; hence the necessity that the mistress herself should be responsible for the actual process of cheese-making. Her assistants helped at different stages and in the intervals were engaged in pressing, salting, turning, cleaning and wiping the cheeses already made.¹ On the wealthiest farms where the mistress wished to be relieved of this arduous work, the greatest care was taken in choosing an experienced dairymaid as manager.

The dairymaid was not only concerned with the actual making of butter and cheese. On her knowledge of the stock and the quality and quantity of milk produced, the farmer often depended for advice on his sales and purchases. "The woman who manages a dairy," says Mr. Poyser in *Adam Bede*, "has a large share in making the rent, so she may well be allowed to have her opinion on stock and their 'keep.'" The rearing and feeding of calves and pigs, and in many cases the arrangements in connection with their sale were also entrusted to her. In addition the dairymaid often took her butter to the nearest retail market and was responsible for the sale of her cheese at the annual Cheese Fair. When large quantities were produced for distant markets, she bargained for her sale with local factors, who in turn treated with the agents of cheesemongers in London and other towns.²

Thus the mistress of a dairy farm had many responsibilities. It was not sufficient for her to be a skilled worker herself; she had also to be a good business woman, and on her care and management and the training of her maids the success of the farm depended. In some districts it was believed that unless the dairy was under the interested

¹ The cheeses on the shelves of the dairy had to be lifted and turned every two or three days, and after a final washing and polishing, were transferred to the cheese chamber. The floor of this room was rubbed periodically with bean tops, potato haulm and fresh herbs "to encourage a blue coat to rise", and to give the cheese that "desirable appearance, which is at once an indication of its goodness and of the skilfulness of the dairy-maid." Factors usually bought up large dairies three times a year, and if for any reason the dispatch were delayed, says Marshall, every upper room in the farm would be full of cheeses. *Rural Economy of Gloucestershire*, vol. 1, pp. 286 seq., 315.

² From Yorkshire many thousand firkins of the best butter were sent yearly to the London market, while an inferior quality went to the woollen districts. Great quantities of salted butter, "not so good as that from Yorkshire", came from Suffolk and Cambridge, and "the powerful influences of the London prices" also brought considerable quantities from distant farms in Devon and Dorset. Marshall, *Rural Economy of Yorkshire*, vols. 1, p. 293, ii, p. 196; Postlethwayt's *Dictionary*: Article, Britain.

management of the farmer's wife it could not be completely successful. The Reporter for Cambridge says: "The farmers whose wives attend the dairy, say nothing pays better than cows; but all agree that they are unprofitable unless that is the case." In Essex it was considered: "So much depends upon the unwearied exertions of the mistress, both early and late, that unless the farmer's wife is able and willing to encounter such fatigue, little profit can accrue to the farmer therefrom."¹ On a bachelor's farm, the dairywoman ranked as mistress of the household and lived under the most favoured conditions.

In wealthier houses by the end of the eighteenth century, the management of the dairy was not so frequently undertaken by the mistress as formerly, although there were still gentlewomen who took an active interest in this work. The correspondence of Mrs. Chevalier, of Aspal, Suffolk, shows that her dairy was entirely under her own management, and that she was intent on obtaining the best results. "In the conversation I heard on your purchasing cows," she writes to Arthur Young, "I observed that you inquired after large and handsome ones; but I have often known little cows not at all remarkable for beauty, give more milk than the greatest: for instance, at present, the smallest cow we have, a cream coloured polled one, gives more milk than any of the rest, though some are almost double the size." She goes on to describe experiments she has lately made for comparing the quality of milk from a Suffolk polled cow, with that of a horned one giving a greater quantity, and she describes a special method of her own in rearing calves which has proved very successful.² The writer of the *Buckinghamshire Survey* found that Mrs. Freeman's dairy at Fawley Court was the only one in the county "where the cows are constantly milked three times a day, by which means Mrs. Freeman is quite sure the quantity of milk is increased."³ Other references to gentlewomen who gave personal attention to the dairy are made by Marshall and the other Reviewers, but such were evidently becoming the exception towards the end of the eighteenth century.

The high estimation in which a superior dairywoman was held was due to the fact that upon her skill not only the quality but also the quantity of cheese depended.⁴ Occasionally we find the output of a dairymaid was used as a basis for wages. Mrs. Chevalier writes: "A farmer at Baddingham, who has 48 cows, and has neither wife nor housekeeper, hired a dairymaid at 9d. per firkin of butter and wey of cheese; and her wages came to 46 19s. 5d., the number must therefore have been 186, or very near 4 per cow."⁵

Besides being the most skilful, the work of the dairywoman was without question the most arduous of all women's labours in the agricultural sphere. The idyllic picture of dairymaids "dabbling

¹ Gooch's *Cambridge*, p. 268; Young's *Essays*, vol. ii, p. 285.

² Young's *Suffolk*, p. 184 *seq.*

³ Priest's *Buckinghamshire*, p. 289.

⁴ Prizes of five guineas, or a cup of that value, were offered by agricultural societies "to the dairywoman, who shall make for sale in one year the greatest quantity of cheese, in proportion to the number of cows, being not less than twenty." *Annals*, vol. xxxviii, p. 278.

⁵ Young's *Suffolk*, pp. 186-7.

in the dew" has no counterpart in eighteenth century records. The hours of labour in a cheese dairy were almost incredibly long; the work was never finished and ordinary routine filled the entire day. Milking began at 3 a.m. or 4 a.m. according to the season. A contemporary describes a farmer's wife, whose maids were not down by 3 a.m., bustling into their apartment with the cry: "Come! Dunderheads, Dunderheads, will you let the sun burn your eyes out?" On some farms there were sufficient dairymaids to do all the milking; on others the labourers' wives and daughters assisted, the general arrangement being ten or twelve cows to each milker. The cows were usually milked in the pastures some distance from the house, and where the quantity of milk was too great to be carried home by the maids, it was brought by labourers in large wooden vessels, or in tubs slung across the backs of horses.

When the milk came home, the actual making of butter or cheese began, and on a large dairy farm the process of making cheese was gone through twice daily. The first making lasted until 3 p.m. or 4 p.m. and with the afternoon's milking the whole business began again and lasted until late in the evening. The manual labour on a big farm was severe. "It is customary," said Marshall in 1788, "even in the largest dairies, for the ostensible manager whether mistress or maid, to perform the *whole* operation of making cheese; except the last breaking, etc., and the vatting; in which she has an assistant. But this in a dairy of 80 or 100 cows, is too great labour for any woman; it is painful to see it. In one instance in this district [Glos.] a man was employed in this laborious department, and, in a large dairy, it is certainly a man's work."¹

The appearance of a male assistant in the dairy was a new feature. Hitherto the whole business of dairying had been in the hands of women. Their knowledge was purely empirical and the art of butter and cheese-making was handed down from mother to daughter, with the result that individual practice differed considerably. Twamley, a cheese factor, whose experience of the widely differing methods of dairymen led him to compile a treatise on different usages and their advantages, was well aware of the difficulty of inducing dairymen to adopt new methods, or rules which "are different from their own, and what hath always been practised by their Mothers, to whom they are often very partial, as having been esteemed the best Dairywomen of their time."² His acknowledgment that any suggestion of his would be received incredulously: "What does he know of Dairying, or how should a Man know anything of Cheese making?", shows how essentially a woman's business this was. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, however, on some of the larger farms of Cheshire, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, a man was sometimes employed as an assistant, not in the actual making, but in the later processes requiring greater physical strength. "The weight of a large Cheshire Cheese," says Twamley, "is too great to be wrought by a Woman, and turning, rubbing, washing, and cleaning, is more than one Man can easily perform; 'tis common on large Dairys, to meet

¹ *Rural Economy of Gloucestershire*, vol. ii, p. 156.

² Twamley, *Dairying Exemplified*, 2nd ed., 1787, p. 10.

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with Cheeses, Eighty, one Hundred, one Hundred and Twenty, or even one Hundred and Forty pounds a Cheese, which requires considerable strength to manage."¹ But in spite of the heaviness of the labour women continued unaided on many farms well into the nineteenth century. Of cheese making in Cheshire the Reporter says in 1808: "The labour of turning and cleaning cheese is performed almost universally by women; and that in large dairies, where the cheeses are upwards of 140 lbs. each upon an average: this they do without much appearance of exertion. and with a degree of ease, which is a matter of surprise even in this country."² Custom probably enabled dairymen to lift these weights without "much appearance of exertion," but their work certainly had ill-effects. When the Commissioners of 1843 investigated the conditions of women's work in agriculture, they found that so far as health was concerned, the only bad results were to be observed among dairymen, who suffered severely from the consequences of over-exertion due to their long hours and the lifting of unsuitable weights.

In a butter dairy the hours of labour were much shorter and the work was not nearly so heavy. On a small farm churning only took place two or three days a week, and on other days unless skim-milk cheese were made, the business of the dairy was over early in the morning, and the maids spent the rest of the day in spinning and other household work. On larger farms a boy or a man was sometimes kept to assist in churning, but it was heavy and unpopular work and attempts were being made at the end of the eighteenth century to introduce some form of machinery to take the place of hand labour. A mill worked by a horse, by means of which one or more churns could be turned had already been introduced into some Buckinghamshire dairies in 1794, thus making it possible for the dairymen to undertake the whole business herself on the largest farm and doing away with the difficulty of procuring men to turn the churns. This in itself, says the Reviewer, "would be no small accommodation to the farmer, whose men servants make many objections to this employment (which is certainly very laborious) and generally set about it with an ill will, often quit it before it is finished, and as often contrive to get out of the way, when likely to be wanted for this operation."³

Dairies varied in size from county to county. At the end of the eighteenth century a full-sized dairy in Gloucestershire averaged from 20 to 30 cows, and 40 was considered large; in the Vale of Evesham the average was from 50 to 80; farms of 100 were common in Cheshire; in the famous cheese districts of Wiltshire dairies of 200 were sometimes found, although the average remained around 40 to 60; in Shropshire and the Midlands 20 to 30 was the usual number.⁴ Butter dairies were on the whole much smaller than those found in cheese districts, except where large adjacent markets created a big

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

² Holland's *Cheshire*, p. 282.

³ James and Malcolm, *Survey of Buckinghamshire*, 1794, pp. 15-6.

⁴ *Rural Economy of Gloucestershire*, vol. ii, p. 106, vol. i, p. 219; *Annals*, vol. viii, p. 60; *Annals*, vol. iv, pp. 171-2; Marshall, *Rural Economy of the Midlands*, vol. i, p. 349.

demand as in the west of Norfolk and Cambridge, and other districts supplying the London market. The proportion of maids employed in the dairy varied from district to district, but on an average one maid was employed for every ten cows.¹ In 1776 the weekly produce of a Shropshire farm of eight cows was estimated at five cheeses of an average weight of 45 lbs. each, and 20 lbs. of butter, valued together at £1 15s. 6d.² The weekly output of a dairymaid who was responsible for ten cows would therefore be a little more than this. Many medium sized farms made from 60 to 70 lbs. of cheese daily, while as much as 3 cwt. was the average daily production of some of the Wiltshire dairies.³ In 1790 the season's production of a small Midland dairy of 21 cows was four tons, but on large Wiltshire farms where production for market went on all through the year, as much as 25 tons of cheese might be made.⁴

The following examples give some idea of the amount of cheese made by individual dairymaiden in the days when dairying depended entirely on hand labour. The prize offered by the Manchester Agricultural Society for the largest amount of cheese made for sale by any one dairymaid was in 1801, awarded to Anne Priestnall of Oughtington-hall, who made 3 tons 4 cwt. of cheese during the season.⁵ Mrs. Pike, a Berkshire dairymaid who in the early nineteenth century was famous for small cheeses of about five pounds weight, "made in the shape and external figure of pineapples," which for their "peculiar richness and delicacy of flavour," sold at a considerably higher price than ordinary cheese—was in good years accustomed to make about two tons of these small cheeses.⁶ Curious shapes and colouring matters were popular with eighteenth century dairymaiden. Sometimes cheese was made to represent a hare sitting in form; sage leaves and marigold flowers were used for colouring, while cochineal also was used by the "curious," and had, Twamley says, "a pretty effect in the hand of an ingenious Dairymaid, in making figures of flowers, trees, etc., in cheese."⁷

The financial value of women's work was far greater on a dairy farm than in any other branch of agriculture, since the prosperity of such a farm depended almost entirely on their results. The statement that the dairymaid had a good deal to do with the payment of the rent is borne out by the examples quoted by Arthur Young. On a small farm rented at £90 a year, the season's butter and cheese sold for £140, and on a larger farm of £185 rental, 121 firkins of butter and 65 weys of cheese brought in £306 8s. 6d.⁸ A letter written by Mrs. Chevalier

¹ In the review of districts visited on his Eastern Tour, Arthur Young gives the highest number of cows to a maid as 25, the lowest as 10, and the average as 13. *Op. cit.*, vol. iv, p. 293.

² *Annals*, vol. iv, pp. 171-2.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. viii, p. 60.

⁴ Marshall, *Rural Economy of the Midlands*, vol. i, p. 361; Twamley, *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁵ *Annals*, vol. xxxviii, p. 288.

⁶ Mavor's *Berkshire* (1808), p. 376.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 71, 72.

⁸ *Annals*, vol. v, pp. 206-7. A "firkin" is 36 lbs., and a "wey" varies from 2-3 cwt.

is interesting in showing the profit made by a dairy in a gentleman's house, which naturally would not be conducted with the same economy as a farm: "In the year 1784, I made from five cows to the amount of £42, besides the milk and cream consumed by a family fourteen in number; nor was that a more productive year than common; for I have done it more than once; and I am informed that £7 per cow is very common in this country, large dairies through, on an average."¹ From this it will be seen that the farmer's wife who managed a dairy, made a considerable contribution to the family income.

The wages of dairymaids varied as much from one parish to another as from county to county. In 1771, in the districts visited by Arthur Young on his Eastern Tour, the highest wage paid to a dairymaid was £5 per annum, the lowest £3 and the average £3 12s. An undermaid usually received from £2 10s. to £3.² In all cases food and lodging were provided in addition to these wages, but it was generally understood, at any rate up to the end of the eighteenth century, that the spinning done by the dairymaid after the work in the dairy was finished, supplied her wages. "I found it pretty well ascertained," wrote Young in 1786, "that the dairymaids spin either hemp or wool to the full amount of their wages; that is from 3d. to 4½d. a day, except on Saturday, and then only 2d. and that the butter, milk, and cheese of the dairy contribute greatly to their food."³ In a cheese dairy during the summer, the work lasted from early morning to late at night, and it was only during the winter that the women could be employed in "carding, spinning, and other housewifery business."

WOMEN SERVANTS IN HUSBANDRY

The farming economy of this time included another class of women workers known as servants in husbandry, more numerous than dairymaids since they were to be found on every farm where labour was employed at all. Estimates of the number of servants required for specimen farms include such items as "3 maids, or the labour of 3 women"; and again "8 maids, or women working on the farm." Their work, as the description "in husbandry" denotes, was mainly outdoor agricultural work, and consisted of such tasks as weeding, following the harrow, leading horses at the plough and feeding the stock. At such times as they were not employed in the fields, they were engaged in domestic duties in the farmhouse.

Servants in husbandry of both sexes were generally hired at the statute fairs held at different seasons all over the country. To the Polesworth Statute in Warwickshire men and women servants came on foot distances of twenty and thirty miles, the number in the statute yard sometimes being estimated at between two and three thousand.⁴ It was customary for those seeking employment to wear some distinguishing badge; in the North, a "large posie or bouquet of flowers" was worn at the breast, while in Southern Counties it was more usual

¹ Young's *Suffolk* (1797), p. 186.

² Young, *Eastern Tour*, vol. iv, p. 293.

³ *Annals*, vol. v, p. 207.

⁴ Marshall, *Rural Economy of the Midlands*, vol. ii, p. 19.

for the badge to denote the occupation. "A carter exhibits a piece of whipcord tied to his hat; a cowherd has a lock of cow-hair in his, and the dairymaid has the same descriptive mark attached to her breast."¹ The majority of servants came from the class of small farmers and cottagers, and from childhood had been accustomed to the care of animals and all kinds of farm labour. The term of hiring was usually for one year, except in those places where care was taken to prevent strangers acquiring a settlement, a care which was increasingly exercised with the rise of poor rates towards the end of the century. Some parishes went so far as to impose a fine on any parishioner who settled a newcomer by hiring or otherwise.² The difficulty was evaded by hiring for a period of eleven months, 364 days, half-yearly periods or other expedients which sometimes inflicted real hardships on the persons concerned.³

Women servants in husbandry seem to have shared the heaviest work of the farm, few tasks if any being considered too severe for them. Pringle declared it was painful to see the servant maids of Westmorland "toiling in the severe labours of the field. They drive the harrows, or the plough, when they are drawn by three or four horses; nay, it is not uncommon to see sweating at the dung cart, a girl, whose elegant features, and delicate nicely-proportioned limbs, seemingly but ill accord with such rough employment."⁴

In the South Western Counties, and particularly in Devonshire, where the custom persisted after it had been discontinued elsewhere, it was still the common practice to apprentice pauper children of both sexes to farming, with the idea of training them as servants in husbandry. In these counties the female apprentices seem to have been put to every type of field work, and tasks which Pringle considered so unsuitable for the women of Westmorland, were here thought not too severe for children of ten and twelve years of age. The following account of her apprenticeship in the early days of the nineteenth century, was given by a Devon woman before the 1843 Commissioners. At the age of nine she had been sent to a farm on which there were three other girls and four boy apprentices: "I used to be employed when I was apprenticed in driving bullocks to field and fetching them in again; cleaning out their houses, and bedding them up; washing potatoes and boiling them for pigs; milking; in the field leading horses or bullocks to plough; maidens would not like that work now. Then I was employed in mixing lime to spread, digging potatoes, digging and pulling turnips, and anything that came to hand like a boy. I reaped a little, not much; loaded pack horses; went out with horses for furze. I got up at five or six, except on market mornings twice

¹ Eden, *State of the Poor*, vol. i, p. 33.

² *Ibid.*, vol. iii, p. 743.

³ Although no doubt some servants changed their places with each successive hiring, the prizes awarded by agricultural societies "to encourage diligence and industry in Servants of both Sexes employed in Husbandry", show that many were re-engaged from year to year. Recipients of such premiums in Devon in 1794 included one woman who had served 46 years, another 40 years, and two more 34 years on the same farms. *Annals*, vol. xxix, pp. 203-4.

⁴ Pringle's *Westmorland* (1794), p. 303.

a week, and then at three. I went to bed at half-past nine. I worked more in the fields than in the house."¹ That these tasks were the customary ones required of apprentices and were in no way exceptional is amply borne out by the evidence of other witnesses before the 1843 Commission, and also by contemporary writers. In 1808, Vancouver, an advocate for apprenticeship where boys were concerned, declared that the treatment of girls required "that some further regulations shall be made to soften the severity of their servitude. Scraping the roads, lanes, and yards, turning over mixings and filling dung-pots, is at best but a waste of time, and a feeble effort of infantile strength. What can a female child at the age of ten or twelve years be expected to perform with a mattock or shovel? or how will she be able to poise, at the end of a dung fork, any reasonable weight, so as to lift it into the dung-pots slung upon the horses' backs, for hacking out the manure to distant parts of the farm? Even driving the horses after they are loaded, is by no means an employment proper for such girls, being altogether incompatible with the household and more domestic duties they ought early to be made acquainted with."²

Originally it was expected that when girls were apprenticed to husbandry they should also receive some domestic training, and in some cases they did so. But the disinclination of many people to receive parish apprentices prevented some of them obtaining those advantages which were claimed for the system. Occupiers of £10 per annum were required to receive parish apprentices in turn, and although by the end of the eighteenth century magistrates had extended the liability to £20, it was still a hardship for many such occupiers to take an apprentice, especially where there was already a large family of children. Unfortunately, from the extreme poverty of their parents, compulsory apprenticeship of poor children in the South Western Counties was very general; hence it often happened that they were sent to families unwilling to receive them and consequently met with unfortunate treatment, being subjected to the meanest drudgery. In such cases it was simpler to turn the girls out into the fields than to give them any training in domestic duties and the suitability of their occupations for their age and strength was not taken into consideration.

* Runaways among parish apprentices of both sexes were common; more frequently in the case of girls, dislike of their occupations drove them into premature marriages which terminated their servitude. The disadvantages of the system were by no means confined to the apprentices. Many farmers complained that they had to receive into their households apprentices who were unsatisfactory in character, and whose behaviour, especially towards the end of the long period of apprenticeship caused infinite trouble. Consequently the mutual desire to be freed from obligation caused ill-treatment by the master

¹ *P.P. Report on Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture*, 1843, xii, p. 109. Evidence Mary Puddicombe.

² *Vancouver's Devonshire*, p. 360.

as well as misconduct in the apprentice.¹ In theory, much that was good could be argued in favour of the system as a training for servants in husbandry, but in practice apprenticeship was often unsatisfactory to both parties, and in the case of girls was sometimes attended by serious evils. By the end of the eighteenth century the custom which had once prevailed widely, was only general in the South Western Counties, although it was also to be found in Lancashire and a few districts in the Midlands. In Devonshire where the system persisted longest there was even then wide difference of opinion with regard to compulsory apprenticeship and this gradually brought about the end of the system. For some years before it ceased, the younger girls at least were withdrawn from the heavier and more unsuitable types of field labour.

The wages of women servants in husbandry were on the whole very similar to those of dairymaids, sometimes being a little lower. In Devon (1796) the yearly wage was £3 or £3 3s.,² but the wages of all servants in Devon were low compared with most other districts where the wage varied from £3 10s. to £5. In Durham (1794), where wages were higher than the average, women's wages varied from £4 to £6,³ while in Cumberland (1793), where men were paid from £9 9s. to £12 12s. a year, the women, says Eden, "who here do a large portion of the work of the farm, with a difficulty get half as much. . . . It is not easy," he adds, "to account for so striking an inequality; and still less easy to justify it."⁴

COTTAGERS' WIVES

The people who set out in life as servants in husbandry ultimately became the cottagers and squatters of the old open village. Although wages were small, their expenses while living with the farmer were few, and the prospect of renting a cottage and working for themselves was an incentive to steadiness and thrift. After a few years it was possible for them to marry and start housekeeping either as cottagers or squatters according to their means. For a few pounds the squatters could build for themselves a hut on the edge of the common, around which they enclosed and cultivated a piece of the waste.⁵ The cot-

¹ Hence the attempts to encourage good behaviour in the last years of apprenticeship: "To a female parish apprentice (who has been for the greatest part of her apprenticeship employed in the different branches of agriculture), who shall produce the best character from her master of her behaviour in the last three years of apprenticeship ending in the year 1798, £3 3s." Premium offered by the Devon Agricultural Society, 1796, *Annals*, vol. xxvii, p. 334.

² Marshall, *Rural Economy of West of England*, vol. i, p. 109.

³ Granger's *Durham*, p. 44.

⁴ Eden, *State of the Poor*, vol. ii, p. 47.

⁵ Such settlements were in reality encroachments on the rights of other commoners, and permission to build was therefore sometimes refused. Thus at Chattris, the squatters had erected a great number of cottages on the waste and the complaints of commoners finally prevented further building. "The ease of doing it before," says Arthur Young, "was a great encouragement to industry and good morals; for a young couple who intended marrying were frugal and saving, in order to have money enough to provide their habitation. Some of these did not cost them more than from £10 to £15." *Annals*, vol. xxxvi, pp. 548-9.

tagers either owned or rented houses which carried with them certain common rights, such as the pasturing of specified animals and the right to cut turf from the waste ; while in some cases common field rights also were obtained. There were therefore certain distinctions among the cottagers as a class. Some who owned or rented a few strips in the common field were hardly to be distinguished from the small farmers. They worked their own land and only occasionally chose to become wage earners at such times as hay and harvest, when the rate of pay was higher than usual. Others with minute holdings, or merely a garden enclosed from the waste and possessing certain rights of common, were practically day labourers, and worked for wages whenever work was available, leaving their stock and allotment of land entirely to the care of their wives and children. The training that both men and women received as servants in husbandry enabled them to continue on a smaller scale the methods and habits of the farmhouse, and this, with industry and economy ensured a fair measure of comfort. Their children, moreover, at a very early age grew accustomed to the care of animals and helped in the dairy and garden, all of which was a considerable advantage to the farmer when the children in their turn went out to service. Loud were the complaints after enclosures, that the children of the landless labourer made but poor servants, since they came unpractised in the most elementary affairs of husbandry and depended upon the farmer for the training which in previous years had been acquired at home.

The crops grown by the cottagers depended upon the amount of land they held. Those who had strips in the common fields had necessarily to follow the rotation of crops there, while those who had only a small enclosed plot grew generally a little wheat, rye and barley, rarely sufficient for their own consumption ; peas and beans for a pig, hay for winter keep of the cow and vegetables for the family.¹ Whenever the husband worked mainly as a wage earner, the crops and the stock were left to his wife, who could manage the greater part of the work with assistance at hay and harvest time. A writer in the *Annals of Agriculture* thus describes the cottagers in his neighbourhood : " The wives and daughters milk and manage the cows, with occasional assistance from their husbands ; but the latter are not prevented from working for their masters the farmers, or pursuing their trades, with great regularity, throughout the year, except for about a week in hay harvest ; and for a few days at other times, when the gathering of their manure, or some work which the women cannot perform, demands their attention."² The amount of food raised by the women in their gardens was in many cases a quite substantial contribution to the food of the family, and was often sufficient with the produce from the stock, to change what would have been mere subsistence on wages alone, into an abundant food supply. The wife of a squatter called up as a militia man, assured Arthur Young that she and her children would have perished had it not been for her land

¹ Stephen Addington, *An Inquiry into the Reasons for and against Inclosing Open Fields* (1772), p. 33.

² *Op cit.*, vol. xlii, p. 103.

enclosed from the waste, on which she had grown wheat and rye, and "had also cabbages, potatoes and other things."¹

Careful garden cultivation by spade and hoe on these little plots, often produced crops superior to those on the ploughland of neighbouring farms. The following account of the work of a collier's wife in Shropshire gives some account of the amount of food that could be raised by hand culture on a small enclosure from the waste. Jane Millward had 1½ acres on which she grew potatoes, wheat and garden produce. At first she depended on the neighbouring farmers to plough and harrow her land for the potatoes and wheat, but finding that they neglected her land until their own work was over, she resolved to be independent and do the whole by hand with some little assistance from her husband in taking up the crops. After thirteen years' cultivation her crop of wheat was "four times the general averaging crop" of the farmers around. "Her crops of wheat have been of late always good, and even this year, which in this country has not been favourable for the wheat crop, she has thrashed out fifteen Winchester bushels from her thirty-four poles, though part of her wheat has suffered by the mildew. . . . The straw of her wheat she carefully preserves for litter to her pig and to increase her manure. . . . She has sixteen poles for her garden, upon which she plants peas, beans, and a part with cabbages . . . she sells her early potatoes and peas and cabbages at Shrewsbury, and boils the turnips for her pig. The only other expense of feeding her pig, is two or three bushels of peas, and when fit to kill, it weighs about 300 lbs."² Estimating the family consumption of wheat at half a bushel a week from only half her land, Jane Millward provided her family with bread for more than half the year, and in addition she had a large crop of potatoes and other vegetables as well.

Just as the land held by the cottagers varied in amount, so did the live stock they maintained. Some only had a pig and poultry, others added a cow, while more successful cottagers turned out a considerable number of animals on to the commons. A contemporary writing on enclosures states that he could mention many labourers, hired out to the farmers in his neighbourhood, whose wives at home kept "two or three milch cows, two or three calves a rearing: forty or fifty sheep, two or three hogs, and poultry consisting of chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys: to the amount in number of fifty to one hundred in a year, according as they may have had success. . . . By this means," he adds, "I have known instances of the wife's management of the live stock, together with the earnings of herself and her children in haytime, and harvest, etc., produce nearly as much money in the course of the year, as her husband by all his labour during the same time."³ He was taking no extreme view when he declared that the wife earned as much money from her stock as the husband did in his year's wages. The large flocks of geese which were turned out on the commons were said

¹ *Annals*, vol. xxxvi, p. 589.

² *Report of Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor*, vol. v, pp. 84-9.

³ *Political Enquiry into the Consequences of Enclosing Waste Lands* (1785), pp. 44, 46.

to "pay more than their owner's otherwise hard earned rent";¹ sometimes they brought in as much as £20 a year to their owner.² The sale of eggs, butter, milk, fruit and vegetables brought in a considerable sum. Girdler speaks of some who relied on the commons for a livelihood, who were able to "support large families by selling their sweet little mutton, and their calves, pork, pigs, geese, and other poultry; butter and eggs."³ Cobbett estimated that the profit from a cow was equal every week to two days of the man's wage,⁴ and Babington thought that the wives of his cottagers gained a clear profit of from £4 to £8 on every cow they kept, most of them keeping two.⁵ In addition they had the profits on their gardens and their harvest earnings.

One of the greatest advantages of the old system then, was that while the labourer was earning a money wage or cultivating his strips in the common field, the commons gave his wife an opportunity of contributing to the family maintenance to an extent which varied according to her stock and industry. In addition she supplied her family with a good deal of their food. From the cow she had cream for butter, milk for cheese and skim milk for porridge, while her stock also provided her with bacon, poultry and eggs. Those who kept bees, and many of them did, had honey to use for drink and sweetening, and wax with which to make their rush lights for the winter. The wheat and rye grown in their allotments was mixed for bread, baked in an oven heated by furze from the common. Some had no land to grow corn for themselves, but the gleanings at harvest time over the open fields went a long way to help out the bread supply. The amount gained in this way was surprising. Speaking of Rode in Northamptonshire, Eden says: "Several families will gather as much wheat as will serve them for bread the whole year, and as many beans as will keep a pig."⁶ Many were able to keep a pig by this means alone. Five or six bushels of wheat is commonly given as the amount a woman herself would glean, and when the price of a bushel of wheat was almost double the weekly wage of a labourer, it will be seen how profitable was this harvest gleanings.

From enclosure awards widows and unmarried women seem fairly frequently to have been tenants of cottages with common rights, and to have rented or owned small plots of land. In this way they seem to have been able to earn their own livings and in the case of widows to bring up their children. The most usual method adopted was to set up as a dairy woman, especially if it were a grazing district where there was often a difficulty in procuring small quantities of milk and butter. Here a woman with a cottage and rights of common could easily gain a living for herself by supplying the non-farming population with a regular supply of eggs, milk and butter. Parish officers were

¹ *Enquiry into the Advantages and Disadvantages resulting from Bills of Enclosures* (1780), pp. 64-5.

² Jackson's *Oxford Journal*, September 11, 1830, quoted Hammond, *Village Labour*, p. 88.

³ Girdler, *Observations on Pernicious Consequences . . . Ragrating* (1800), p. 42.

⁴ *Cottage Economy*, pp. 105-6.

⁵ *Annals*, vol. xlv, p. 103.

⁶ Eden, *State of the Poor*, vol. ii, p. 547.

often willing to assist widows in the purchase of a cow to enable them to become self supporting and to save further charges on the rates. The following entry in the Duffield overseers' accounts in 1773: "Wid^r. Webster toward a Cow, o 12s. 0d.," is typical of several such payments in the parish book.¹

The eighteenth century was still the day of small local industries, and many of those partly engaged in agriculture were also employed in the many different industries then to be found in rural districts. Agricultural work was not therefore the only productive work of many cottagers' wives. For some of them agriculture was only a by-employment and the greater part of their time was spent in industrial wage earning. In the woollen districts for example, nearly all the labourers' wives were engaged in spinning worsted and yarn, or in other processes of the industry; in Bedfordshire, lace-making employed at least three-quarters of the female population, while straw plaiting and knitting employed women in other counties. But the earnings of such women and the different industries in which they were engaged are subjects requiring separate treatment; they are only mentioned here because the rural population was made up of domestic workers as well as those primarily engaged in agriculture. While many of the lace-makers and spinners devoted all their time to these occupations, most of the women engaged in agriculture gave at least a little time to domestic manufacture. In many households some of the woollen and linen clothing was provided at home; mother and children were all engaged in spinning linen or woollen thread which was sent to the local weaver and received back to be made up for the family. Eden's description of the North in 1797, was true for many parts of England earlier in the century: "Almost every article of dress worn by farmers, mechanics and labourers, is manufactured at home, shoes and hats excepted. . . . Although broad cloth purchased in the shops, begins now to be worn by opulent farmers, and others, on Sundays; yet there are many respectable persons, at this day, who never wore a bought pair of stockings, coat, nor waistcoat in their lives: and, within these twenty years, a coat bought at a shop was considered as a mark of extravagance and pride, if the buyer was not possessed of an independent fortune."²

Where the cottagers had no sheep of their own they usually managed to buy enough wool from the farmers for the needs of the family. Linen clothing, sheets, towels and tablecloths were sometimes obtained from their own little crops of hemp and flax, and quite often from the thread obtained from nettles.³ According to Arthur Young and several of the Reviewers, many of the cottagers with gardens kept a little plot for hemp from which they spun and sometimes wove their own linen, selling any surplus. In Shropshire it was estimated that a cottager's hemp-yard (ten or fifteen perches of land rented from the farmer at 18d. to 2s. 6d. a year) would, with his wife's industry pay the rent of the cottage.⁴

¹ *Duffield Parish MSS. Overseers' Accounts*, September 4, 1773.

² Eden, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 544-5.

³ Prothero, *English Farming Past and Present*, 3rd ed., p. 30.

⁴ The crop from two shillings' worth of seed would produce from two to three dozen pounds of tow. The woman's work was to gather and spread the crop on grass land where it remained exposed for about a month or six weeks and was

Besides the sale of surplus garden and dairy produce there were a few other ways in which cottagers' wives sometimes earned a small money wage. Almost all of them were accustomed to work at hay and harvest time, and for a few there was a little seasonal work such as weeding, stone picking and manuring the fields. On the larger farms some of them were employed to assist in milking for which they earned a weekly wage of 1s. to 1s. 6d. A woman who before marriage had been a laundry maid often continued her work afterwards, and if good, was able to earn a steady and higher wage than was obtainable from most by-employments. One such woman quoted by Eden, earned £7 19s. a year in this way, a very substantial addition to the wages of her husband, a labourer earning £15 8s. per annum.¹ Readers of *Our Village* may remember that the most prosperous pair described by Miss Mitford were a laundress, "with twenty times more work than she can do, unrivalled in flounces and shirt frills, and such delicacies of the craft," and her husband, "partly a farmer, partly a farmer's man." A few women by baking or brewing for their neighbours earned little sums varying from 6d. to 2s. a week.²

Thus among the cottagers as a class, the family income was made up of the wages of the man, the profits from the stock on the common, which depended mainly on his wife's industry, and earnings from any by-employment in which either the cottager or his wife, or the family as a whole was engaged.

While there were many who gained great advantages from the commons, conditions in the open village were by no means idyllic, and the existence of extensive commons did not necessarily mean that the poor as a class were better off. Contemporary accounts of unenclosed villages show that in addition to the prosperous cottagers, there were often many whose conditions were much less favourable and some living in extreme poverty. Conditions in the open villages varied; some commons were overstocked, particularly with sheep, and the cottager's cow in consequence was almost starved.³ Again there were many who never managed to afford a cow, and instances of high poor rates in open villages prove the existence of numerous poor even where there were extensive commons which might have been expected to maintain them without assistance.⁴ In some cases abuse of the commons indirectly increased the poverty and wretchedness in a village. Industry was no more a universal characteristic then than now, and some who could just make ends meet by turning out a few animals and poultry on the waste, shirked the regular labour

submitted to frequent turnings before being carried home for the first breaking. It was then sent to the hickler who gave it a further dressing and brought the tow to a proper state for spinning. The yarn was spun at home, whitened, and sent to the weaver, who returned for each dozen pounds of tow about ten ells of cloth which sold at about 3s. an ell. Thus the value was about £4 10s., "about half of which may be reckoned for the woman's labour and profit, after the rent of the land, seed, dressing, whitening and weaving expenses are deducted." Plymley's *Shropshire* (1803), pp. 177-8.

¹ Eden, *op. cit.*, vol. ii, p. 621.

² *Ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 448, vol. iii, pp. 767, 904.

³ Stone, *Suggestions for Rendering the Inclosures of Common Fields and Waste Lands a Source of Population and Riches* (1787), p. 74.

⁴ Eden, vol. iii, pp. 784-9, 728-30. *Annals*, vol. v, p. 222.

by which they could have improved their position. Such people immediately looked to the parish to make good any loss suffered among their cattle, hence the contention that the commons increased idleness and acted as an obstacle to industry, "for, some few excepted, if you offer them work, they will tell you, that they must go to look up their sheep, cut furzes, get their cow out of the pound, or perhaps say they must take their horse to be shod, that he may carry them to a horse race or cricket-match."¹ Those who preferred a "precarious and vagabond existence," flocked from enclosed parishes to the best and most extensive commons, and tried every stratagem to gain a settlement where they might enjoy the greatest privileges. In such places the small amount of day labour available in the open village was insufficient to provide work for all, and greater claims were therefore made upon the rates.² The fact was that common rights were inadequate in themselves. While they proved a great advantage to industrious cottagers who either held some arable land or worked for others, they probably lessened the incentive to industry among the idle and indolent and committed them to an easy, but poverty-stricken life.

While some were thus encouraged in laziness, there were many, however, to whom the commons acted as an incentive to industry and thrift. Especially did they encourage industry, skill and good management on the part of the wife in the cottage class, on whose efforts the comfort and well-being of such families so greatly depended. By taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by the open field system, the stock could gradually be increased, a few strips acquired in the common fields, and the prosperous cottager entered the ranks of the small farmer. Arthur Young's description of Blofield, Norfolk, before enclosure shows the possibilities of the system. Thirty families had settled on the edge of the common, enclosed 30½ acres of land and built themselves good and comfortable houses. "They have 23 cows and 18 horses among them. Average of land 1½ acre, average of live stock 1½ head. Only 16 have cows, 8 neither cows nor horses, and 11 less than an acre of land each. 150 souls thus established have cost the parish (by a very inflated account) £24; while 110 others, the rest of the poor, burthened it £150, in the same half year." Thus the commons here had prevented thirty industrious families becoming chargeable, and had, he estimated, saved the parish £180 during the half year.³

Unfortunately for the industrious poor, the enclosure movement was changing this state of affairs for one in which no amount of thrift and industry could give the labourer a chance of an interest in the soil. The deprivations from which the poor were suffering where enclosures had already taken place were known to Arthur Young when he was at Blofield, and caused him some melancholy apprehension for those who were still in enjoyment of their privileges: "I viewed their little farms with singular pleasure, yet with a sinking heart at the thought

¹ Arbuthnot, *An Inquiry into the connection between the present high price of provisions and the size of farms* (1773), p. 81.

² Howlett, *Enclosures a cause of Improved Agriculture* . . . (1787), p. 82.

³ *Annals*, vol. xxxvi, p. 449.

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of the evils an ill-framed act of enclosure might bring upon them. Suppose the commons divided in proportion to value of the lands already enclosed throughout it, the regulation so common in enclosures, the whole mass of these people are ruined at one stroke. A cottager here who keeps three cows might get half an acre. To set fire to his house would be an equal favour."¹

Subsequent events were to prove him completely justified in his foreboding and his estimate of the damage enclosure brought the industrious poor.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 556.

CHAPTER II

THE AGRARIAN REVOLUTION

THE second half of the eighteenth century saw the speeding up of those economic changes destined to sweep away the rural organisation which had existed for centuries and to substitute the modern system of the large farm and the landless labourer. Before the revolution farming had been carried on mainly for subsistence, and although London and one or two other large towns had drawn their provisions from all parts of the country, yet in the main, each district supplied its own needs and the simple requirements of food, drink and clothing were provided at home. Economically this was no longer possible. The reorganisation of industry, accompanied by the concentration of people in the new towns and the increase in population, made it imperative that the food supply of the nation should be increased if the ever-growing demands of the new industrial centres were to be satisfied. Moreover, a rise in the price of corn about the middle of the century was an additional incentive to farmers to grow more corn and increase their production. New methods and cultures had already been introduced but so far little attention had been paid to agricultural writers who advocated them, partly because the good harvests which persisted throughout the first half of the century satisfied the demand, and the low price of corn did not seem to justify the sinking of capital in improvements. From 1765 to the end of the Napoleonic Wars, however, there were few really good harvests, and in many places the land was becoming increasingly unproductive as a result of continued neglect and the defective methods employed. The high prices brought about by the increased demand for a diminishing supply of wheat were not only maintained throughout the latter half of the century, but were sent still higher by the war and Napoleon's Continental System which hindered the importation necessary to support the increased population.¹

In these circumstances, from the national point of view, it was impossible to continue an agricultural system which in the main was only locally self-supporting, while from the farmer's point of view every effort had to be made to grow more corn and to take advantage of increased prices. With the prospect of big returns many were prepared to sink capital and improve the land, but it was impossible to try the new methods and cultures in the old open-field system. Root crops could not be introduced by the more progressive farmers

¹ "From 34s. 11d. in the period 1715 to 1765 the price of wheat rose to 45s. 7d. in the period 1760 to 1790, and to 55s. 11d. in the following decade. From 1805 to 1813 the annual average price was never below 73s. and often over 100s. In 1812 it reached 122s. 8d." *Levy, Large and Small Holdings*, pp. 10, 11.

where common grazing rights existed over the fallows and arable fields from harvest to seed time.¹ The old village strip system was notoriously wasteful, while scattered holdings prevented the extensive culture of corn which had now become the object of wealthier farmers. Large farming was necessary for big profits, hence the demand for consolidated holdings not only led to the enclosure of arable fields, but in the reorganisation which followed, the prospect of higher rents from big corn-growing farmers induced landlords to dispossess their smaller tenants and to throw their holdings together for the benefit of men with capital.² This "engrossing of farms" continued into the early days of the nineteenth century, and under the pressure of war, small holders and cottagers not only saw their little pieces of land absorbed into greater holdings, but the commonable wastes also were enclosed with increasing rapidity in order that all available land might be brought under improved cultivation. By the end of the war the reorganisation was almost complete; the old village communal system had given way to individual holdings and agriculture had become a capitalised trade.

For large farmers and landowners this was a period of great prosperity. The higher wages paid to artisans in the growing industrial towns meant new markets for agricultural produce and the close of the century saw an increase in rents which varied from two to five times the amount paid in 1770.³ For others in the rural community came pauperization and acute distress, which might have been greatly mitigated if only those who stood to gain by enclosures had not been blind to a consideration of the rights of smaller men.⁴

At first, the general tendency during this period of social and economic change was for the productive work of women to decrease. The wives and daughters of farmers whose wealth was suddenly increased,⁵ sought a more leisured life and no longer concerned themselves with agricultural affairs, while at the same time, developments in the textile industries relieved them of their responsibilities in that direction. The wives of tenant farmers and cottagers who were deprived of their land as a result of enclosures and engrossing, lost the opportunities of productive work they had had in their own homes, and this, combined with the decline of some of the domestic industries reduced them for the first time to a position of complete economic dependence upon their husbands. As time went on, however, and enclosures were followed by new cultures and improved methods, various forces combined to create a new class of women wage earners in agriculture from among the wives of labourers who had lost other opportunities of supporting

¹ Up to 1773, the consent of all partners in the open field was necessary to alter the rotation of crops or to introduce new ones.

² "In numbers of villages twenty, thirty, and even forty or fifty farms were absorbed by one or two large farmers and thrown together into large holdings." Levy, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-7.

³ Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁴ For the enclosure movement see: Gonner, *Common Land and Enclosure*; Hammond, *The Village Labourer*; Johnson, *The Disappearance of the Small Landowner*.

⁵ "The gains made by the change were enormous. It was said that individual farmers often made as much as £18,000 to £20,000 in a short time." Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

themselves. But although enclosures in this way provided a considerable amount of field work for women, it will be seen later, when examined in more detail, that the wage-earner was at a considerable financial disadvantage as compared with the cottager's wife under the old system, since the wages that could be earned were barely sufficient for the most inadequate standard of individual subsistence.

In considering the changes which took place in the lives of the rural population as a result of the revolution, it is necessary to remember that they were gradual in their development and were not simultaneous throughout the country. The enclosure movement was proceeding slowly in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, and had, indeed, never ceased from the sixteenth century onwards, but the period of greatest activity coincided roughly with the reign of George III. (1760-1820).¹ The resulting changes varied in number and character. The general trend of events held true for the whole rural population but came about in slow and unequal fashion, varying from district to district according to time and locality.

AGRICULTURAL PROGRESS AND WOMEN EXPERIMENTAL FARMERS

The enclosure movement was in reality the outcome of enthusiasm for agricultural improvement and experiment. The majority, no doubt, only desired new methods and new cultures because they stood for higher rents and bigger profits, but others were actuated by a genuine interest in scientific progress. Before passing on to a discussion of the social effects of the revolution, it is interesting to note the extent to which women shared in, and were influenced by the new ideas. Throughout the seventeenth century various agricultural writers had advocated the growth of turnips, clover and artificial grasses with little success, and their cultivation had not, up to the mid-eighteenth century, extended beyond a few favoured districts. Then the sudden impetus given to corn growing, and the prospect of agriculture becoming a good investment for capital, created an interest which developed under the ardent teaching of Arthur Young into a great enthusiasm for improvement. Farming became the "reigning taste," and the most fashionable pursuit of the time. The example of "Farmer George," who established a model farm at Windsor, was followed by the great landowners until there was "scarce a nobleman without his farm," and in the opinion of Arthur Young there were "more experiments, more discoveries, and more general good sense displayed, within these last ten years in the walk of agriculture than in an hundred preceding ones."² It was true the new fashion was a profitable one, which meant increased rents for owners, greater profits for farmers and an increased food supply for the nation. In these circumstances it is not surprising that all sorts of people turned farmers. "Physicians, lawyers, clergymen, soldiers, sailors, merchants. The farming tribe is now made up of all ranks, from a

¹ Whereas between 1702-1760 about 400,000 acres were enclosed, from 1760-1820, about 5,686,400 acres were enclosed. Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 24. Hasbach, *History of the English Agricultural Labourer*, p. 58.

² *Rural Economy* (1770), p. 173.

duke to an apprentice." In this "rage for agriculture" the women of the period were not to be left behind. Many of them threw themselves whole-heartedly into the new interests. They studied, subscribed to, and some of them contributed to, the agricultural publications of the day, while members of the aristocracy in the van of fashion started their own experimental farms on which they tried the new cultivations. There is ample evidence to show that some of the women farmers were keenly interested in experiments and improvements; some of them were known as being among the foremost of the improving farmers in their districts and as achieving no small measure of success in their work.

The extent to which women personally undertook the supervision of their farms and the carrying out of experiments, is shown best perhaps, by an examination of some of their agricultural correspondence. The following letter, which was published in the *Annals of Agriculture*, gives an excellent idea of the thoroughly practical way in which one woman undertook to set "an example to the farmers" of her neighbourhood:¹

"Sir,

"I would very much thank some of your ingenious correspondents, if they would point out any successful means of destroying fern. I have succeeded in improving pasture land in so short a period of time, as to surprise my neighbourhood, which consists of very slovenly farmers, tho' in a populous part of Gloucestershire.

"I bought a small estate, and took possession of it in the month of July, 1803. I mowed the crop immediately, and had only nine ton of hay off fifteen acres, and it was so full of weeds, rushes, mint, etc., that my horses would not touch it. I found the land not only poisoned with springs, but full of great rocks, laying above ground, and partly covered with thorns, orles, old stumps of trees, etc.; added to this there was scarcely the vestige of a fence. I had the rocks blown up, broken small, and laid in the drains: all the trees grubbed up. I had 576 perches of under-drains made, and as much open ditching, besides a large ditch under every hedge. I grubbed close to the hedge-rows, and sowed hayseed. This work was all concluded, and the ground cleared, by the end of March. In July following, I mowed the fifteen acres, and had thirty ton of hay, all of the best herbage. The next winter (1804), I dressed the land with dung, and my crops continued to improve. My fences are now all made, and I have planted 4,000 quick plants in the dead places, besides elms in the hedge-rows, etc. I have still eight acres to improve, which I have not yet undertaken, as the quantity of fern has rather discouraged me. I was directed to mow the fern, which I have done, without finding it at all decrease.

"As a woman undertaking to farm is generally a subject of ridicule, I bought the small estate by way of experiment: the gentlemen of the county have now complimented me so much on having set so good an example to the farmers, that I have determined on taking a very large farm into my hands: and should my present communication be thought worthy of reception, I may perhaps in future, be tempted to address you again. The paragraph in your *Annals* of this month respecting Grass Improvement, encouraged me to ask information about fern,

"I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

"E.G."

A. Young, Esq."

¹ Vol. xliv, pp. 477-8.

Mrs. Clarke, another contributor to the *Annals*, sent a detailed account of her experiments in wheat growing, giving a comparison of the results obtained by the old method of sowing broadcast and the new way of planting the seed. Arthur Young, as Editor, showed his appreciation of the account by asking for details of further experiments: "This very ingenious lady conducts her husbandry with so much attention and good sense, that I have little doubt of her making very useful experiments, the communication of which to the public will add to the present obligation."¹ A still more "ingenious" experimentalist wrote for publication an account of an original attempt to grow potatoes from the eyes and shoots which spring from the tubers and are usually broken off and thrown away. She first tried her experiment in 1795—a year of war and scarcity—when great efforts were being made to conserve the national resources in every possible way, and hoped by this method to effect a "great saving of valuable food by using the shoot for the future crop, instead of the potato." The next year she experimented on a larger scale and planted 6 acres 13 roods with shoots and eyes. Her crop amounted to 1676 bushels of potatoes, which at 1s. per bushel realised £83 16s. 0d. "When it is considered," she wrote, "that nothing is used for the seed of the future crop, but what is absolutely useless and of no value, the gain of the potatoes, will, I think, appear to be of great advantage to the planters, and to the public."² It is not possible here to give any account of the experiment which was carried out with scientific care and attention and recorded in clear and accurate detail. Arthur Young, commenting on the methods employed wrote: "It is with great pleasure that I insert this very interesting paper. It is highly satisfactory, and proves clearly that the method detailed is of real importance, and as this very ingenious lady intends prosecuting her trials next year in a field better prepared for the experiment, I have no doubt but she will command a yet more brilliant success. . . . When female cultivators can thus form and register their experiments, it is with reason I wish for more such correspondents."³

These examples of personally conducted experiments are typical of others which show that women were included among those who were seriously interested in scientific progress and who wished to contribute something to the knowledge of new methods. Others we find were pointing out the advantages to be derived from new crops. Mrs. Coke, of Fishponds, near Bristol, for instance, cultivated chicory and found it "of such incomparable use for her hogs," that she recommended it to all the neighbouring colliers and induced them to have each a bit of land thus cropped for their pigs.⁴

Those fashionable members of society who were interested sufficiently in the new agriculture to set up their own experimental farms were in a slightly different category from the serious experimentalists described above. The motive behind such farms appears to have been a twofold one; the amusement and pleasure of the owners,

¹ *Annals*, vol. ii, pp. 289-90.

² *Annals*, vol. xxviii, pp. 324-333.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Annals*, vol. xxx, p. 308.

entitling them to a fuller participation in what was the most popular pastime and most discussed subject of the age, together with the praiseworthy intention of arousing sufficient interest as to induce surrounding farmers to improve their own practices. The influence of beautiful, well-cultivated farms probably did much to arouse interest in new crops and rescue farmers from their old-fashioned routine.

One of the earliest of the new cultivators was Lady Coventry, whose farm was enclosed from the "surrounding barren common, covered with furze, brakes and rubbish," and Arthur Young's attention was drawn to it by its "curiously perfect" fencing and its levelled ditches. We know little of the methods employed there, but we are told that "her ladyship interested herself much in the business of the farm, and loved it as an amusement."¹ Mrs. Bouverie's farm was established for the definite purpose of introducing improvements and as such received praise from Marshall: "Mrs. Bouverie's farm is not only laid out with judgment, and kept with singular neatness, but is cultivated in a superior manner. The size of this charming farm is that which is most desirable, when amusement and the commendable design of introducing improvements, and setting examples, are the principal objects in view; namely, two to three hundred acres. . . . The lands, in general, at the time I was favoured with an opportunity of viewing (1790) were clean and in high condition . . . deviations being occasionally introduced, with the laudable intent of improving the established practice of the country."²

Perhaps the most highly cultivated of these farms was that belonging to the Marchioness of Salisbury. Arthur Young found her experimental ground "one of the most interesting spectacles" he saw in Hertfordshire, and of the crops he says: "They are well worth viewing, and do no slight honour to the talents of the cultivator. . . . I cordially wish the field to be so productive of pleasure to its Mistress, as to give charms to the country, sufficiently to rival the great foe to experiment—London."³ Lady Melbourne had two farms in Hertfordshire. She seems to have been specially interested in the introduction of drill husbandry, which was very little practised in that county. She herself was one of the principal drillers and followed the method of Mr. Duckett, "of whose implements her Ladyship has a complete set for the culture."⁴

Besides the introduction of new crops and improved methods of cultivation, the third aspect of the new farming, the scientific breeding of stock, received its fair share of attention from women farmers. Hitherto the "motley mixture" of sheep and cattle turned out on to the commons had prevented any serious attempts to improve stock, and it was not until the introduction of turnips had solved the question of winter keep, and the lifelong investigations of Bakewell (1725-1795) had shown what could be achieved, that real interest in the question was aroused. After enclosures improvements went on more rapidly and the awards and premiums offered by the newly formed agricultural

¹ *Annals*, vol. vi, pp. 125-7.

² Marshall, *Rural Economy of Southern Counties*, vol. 1, pp. 52-3.

³ Young's *Hertfordshire* (1801), pp. 232-3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 40.

societies did a great deal to stimulate interest in different counties. The names of women occur frequently in the lists of awards published by county societies and women farmers are associated with scientific attempts to improve particular breeds. Thus Arthur Young writes with reference to South Down sheep: "Until very lately five guineas was the highest price in the South Down breed: but through the exertions, new in that country, of Mr. Ellam, Miss Hayes, and Lord Sheffield, improvements have lately been made, and they begin now to hear of ten guineas."¹ We find a Sussex breeder, Mrs. Borer, entering her rams and ewes in six different classes for the awards offered by the Sussex Agricultural Society,² and from the lists published by other societies, women seem to have been successful as prize-winners fairly frequently.³

At the same time premiums offered by agricultural societies for general improvements in farming were not infrequently won by women working smaller holdings. The records of the Cardigan Society which are specially interesting for the diversity of premiums, include the following awards to women during the two years 1796 and 1798:⁴

- To Margaret Davies, "for reclaiming about 5 acres of unprofitable land;" £2 2s. 0d.
- To Mrs. Jenkins, "for having made a watercourse that will overflow upwards of 15 acres of meadow and pasture;" £3 3s. 0d.
- To Mrs. Magdalene Evans, "for the best crop of buck wheat, upon 8 acres of land;" £3 3s. 0d.
- To Eliz. James, "for having raised 202 bushels of clean, marketable raygrass seed;" £3 3s. 0d.
- To Alverina Morgan, "for the second quality of wheat raised after potatoes and buck wheat;" £2 2s. 0d.

SOCIAL CHANGES IN THE FARMHOUSE

But while women who were interested in the new agriculture showed their activity in many directions, on the other hand, the wives of farmers enriched during this period tended to withdraw from an active participation in affairs. Throughout the eighteenth century the standard of comfort had gradually been rising, particularly among the upper classes, and we have seen that it was becoming rare towards the end of the century for a gentlewoman to undertake the personal responsibility of her household and dairy. It now became the ambition of the wealthier farmer's wife to emulate the example of upper class women and achieve "gentility" by having "nothing to do."⁵ Davies maintained that it was increased luxury and the consequent necessity for a larger income that led the landowner in the first instance to unite

¹ *Annals*, vol. xvi, p. 59a.

² *Ibid.*, vol. xxxiii, p. 413.

³ The Cardigan Society for example, awarded to Margaret Griffith, the second prize for the best three-year-old cart stallion colt produced and bred in the lower district; Mrs. Evans of the Abbey was the owner of the best bull produced and bred in the upper district; and Mrs. Magdalene Evans was awarded a prize for the second best two-year-old bull. These entries are typical of many others, both in this and other societies. *Annals*, vols. xxix, p. 300; xxxi, p. 327; xlii, p. 133.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vols. xxix, pp. 301, 303; xxxiii, p. 483; xxxi, pp. 327, 329.

his small farms into one, so that he might raise rents to the utmost and avoid the expense of repairs. Similarly the rich farmer engrossed as many farms as he was able to stock and on the profits of several farms lived in greater credit and comfort than he otherwise could have done.¹

The change from small to large farming not only saw the farmer's wife relieved from immediate domestic cares, but in many cases she no longer exercised control over or took any interest in the business management and financial affairs of the farm. The large arable farmer was mainly concerned with corn-growing and was inclined to despise the smaller profits obtainable from dairying and stock. Moreover, it has been shown that these things could only be financially profitable when the mistress was willing to give them the laborious care and attention which came from interested management. On the new farms, therefore, the dairy was no longer run as a business undertaking, but was merely retained to satisfy the needs of the family. With this change came a corresponding reorganisation in the distribution and marketing of dairy produce. On the small farm the profits of the dairy had been an important factor in providing the rent, and therefore what was known as the women's market had always been plentifully supplied with butter, cheese, eggs and poultry. Contemporaries now began to complain bitterly of the shortage of these things and the difficulty of obtaining them, especially in country districts. The women's markets in the country towns practically disappeared and the position of the "middleman" became increasingly important. On the grass farms which now became the main source for the supply of dairy produce, the farmer, following the example of the corn growers, preferred to deal with the wholesale buyer, instead of retailing any goods locally. Wives, daughters and dairymaids no longer in such numbers made their weekly expedition to market; in their place we find dealers in butter, cheese and poultry who contracted for the whole produce of dairies in grazing districts for years together. The position is summed up in characteristic language by Girdler: "We have no longer our markets filled with Pork, Pigs, Geese, Poultry, and Butter as formerly, for little of these articles is produced by large Farmers, other than for the use of their own families; and a Farmer, now become a Gentleman, by swallowing up the farms of his neighbours, would be much affronted to have it even supposed that he would concern himself about such *small matters*, and the fine lady, his wife, would faint at the idea of attending at market, like her mother or grandmother, with a basket of butter, pork, roasting pigs, or poultry, on her arm. Hence, all our Butter and Cheese comes from grass farms only, through the medium of Monopolizers; and a scanty supply of pork, pigs, and poultry, is produced by a new set of persons unknown to our ancestors, who raise and feed them with corn purchased from the rich Farmers."²

Under the new system, there was not the same incentive for the farmer's wife to develop the business ability which had been essential before, and this, from one point of view, together with the release from

¹ D. Davies, *The Case of Labourers in Husbandry* (1795), p. 55.

² *Observations of the Pernicious Consequences of Forestealing, etc.*, p. 9.

all responsibility, was a distinct loss. The market and the many-sided activities of the household had provided excellent opportunities for the development and exercise of practical skill and business acumen which had no counterpart in the leisured life now adopted. The training in financial affairs and the knowledge that the family income consisted of the joint earnings of the farmer and his wife not only added interest to women's lives, but also tended to a development of independence and initiative. Unfortunately the type of education which the daughters of wealthy farmers now began to receive gave no adequate substitute for the training thus lost, and was often such as to create a supreme contempt for all kinds of domestic and business ability. Greater freedom from the everlasting round of daily toil was much to be desired and the leisure won would have been all to the good had it been accompanied by any real education and satisfying interests. Unfortunately for some decades more these were completely lacking; hence, in many respects the lives of the new generation compared unfavourably with those of their predecessors.

The changes demanded by the rise in the standard of comfort aroused much heated criticism among contemporaries, many of whom considered that the new attitude adopted by women was in the main responsible. Up to this time, it had been customary for the farmer's family to live in the great kitchen, in most cases sharing the same table as their servants. With the desire to "live better," came the separate table, and then, perhaps with the idea of avoiding the dissatisfaction of servants, came the small dining room for the family, "opening into the kitchen, with glass in the door or the wall, to see that things go right;" while a fire in the parlour was still an event that denoted company.¹ By the end of the eighteenth century, "foolish farmers" at any rate, had gone to greater lengths. "I see sometimes, for instance," wrote Arthur Young, "a pianoforte in a farmer's parlour, which I always wish was burnt; a livery servant is sometimes found, and a post-chaise to carry their daughters to assemblies, these ladies are sometimes educated at expensive boarding schools, and the sons at the University, to be made parsons, but all these things imply a departure from that line which separates these different orders of beings; let these things, and all the folly, foppery, expence, and anxiety that belongs to them, remain among gentlemen. A wise farmer will not envy them."²

Another entertaining description of the farmer before and after enclosure was written by a *Country Farmer*:

"Their entertainments are as expensive as they are elegant, for it is no uncommon thing for one of these new created farmers to spend ten or twelve pounds at one entertainment; and to wash down delicate food, must have the most expensive wines, and these the best of their kind; and to set off the entertainment in the greatest splendour, an elegant sideboard of plate is provided in the newest fashion. As to dress no one that was not personally acquainted with the opulent farmer's daughter can distinguish her from the daughter of a Duke by her dress, both equally wishing to imitate something, but they know not what.

¹ *Annals*, vol. xvii, p. 152.

² *Ibid.*, vol. xvii, pp. 156-7.

"View the farmer before the land was enclosed, and you will find him entertaining his friends with part of a hog of his own feeding, and a draught of ale brewed from his own malt presented in a brown jug, or a glass, if it would bear it, which was the utmost of his extravagance: in those happy days you might view the farmer in a coat of the growth of his flock; and spun by his industrious wife and daughters, and his stockings produced from the same quarter of his industry, and his wife and daughters clad from their own hands of industry, and their own flock."¹

The fact was that the farmer was merely endeavouring to keep pace with other members of society whose wealth was increasing. He saw manufacturers, shopkeepers, tradesmen, all introducing better furnishings and a higher standard of comfort and he simply aimed at advancing with the times. His profits, as a result of the high price of corn, were not only great, but "exorbitant," according to one who signed himself *An Honest Farmer*; and the large fortunes which many of them made enabled them to live in very different fashion from their predecessors. "Our wives," said the *Honest Farmer*, "have their Toilettes, and their Entertainments; Trifles, Jellies, Syllabubs, and Sweetmeats, are become Things of course; a Chaise serves for a Padding Cart, and every Thing has the Air of Grandeur, Elegance, and affected Urbanity. Our Daughters, instead of being taught their Duty, and the Business of a Dairy at home, receive their Education at a Boarding School, are taught to dance, to speak French, and to play upon the Harpsicord."²

As a result of these social changes a more expensive class of servants became general.³ Hitherto women servants on the farm had often been "maids of all work," and the more specialised branches of domestic work had either been done by the mistress herself, or under her direct supervision. A better class of servant was necessary if the mistress was to be relieved of all responsibility, and on a far greater number of farms, therefore, we now begin to hear of a cook, laundry maid, nursemaid and sewing maid, whose wages rise as high as nine or ten guineas per annum, instead of the old rate of four or five guineas for the servants in husbandry. At the same time the man servant in husbandry disappeared from the farmhouse.

These changes were more pronounced in the next generation. It was not to be expected that "the race of finiking and half-genteel, and wholly ridiculous boarding school misses" as they were described by one contemporary, should have the same interests as their mothers, brought up in the dairy and domestic concerns, and it was perhaps due to their influence that we find the family now transferred to the parlour. The better furnishings included a carpet and "bell-pull," a mahogany table, fine chairs, a sofa and "half a dozen prints in gilt frames hanging up; some swinging bookshelves with novels and tracts upon them."⁴ John Robey's satiric gibe sums up the contrast in apt and amusing fashion:⁵

¹ *Thoughts on Enclosures . . . by a Country Farmer* (1786), p. 21.

² British Museum, Add. MSS. 27,827, f. 101.

³ Batchelor's *Bedfordshires* (1808), p. 581.

⁴ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, pp. 241, 245.

⁵ Quoted by Lord Ernle, *The Land and its People*, p. 95.

1743

Man, to the Plough,
 Wife, to the Cow,
 Girl, to the Yarn,
 Boy, to the Barn,
 And your Rent will be netted.

1843

Man, Tally Ho
 Miss, Piano,
 Wife, Silk and Satin,
 Boy, Greek and Latin,
 And you'll all be Gazetted.

THE BOARDING OF LABOURERS IN THE FARM

It was perhaps natural that the host of contemporary pamphleteers who saw the higher standard of living on the one hand, accompanied by the pauperization of the labourer on the other, should consider that the former was responsible for the evils connected with the latter. An intense interest was taken in the rapidly rising poor rates and those who considered engrossing and its attendant evils the chief cause, had no words too bitter for the new standard of luxury and a system which no longer maintained the labourers within the farmhouse. This to them was responsible for innumerable evils—drunkenness, increased immorality, early and improvident marriages and the consequent pauperization of the whole labouring class.

The belief that the wives of farmers were in the main responsible for this change led to a good deal of unjustifiable criticism as well as that which was merited. There were some so conservative in their views that any progressive change in dress or custom was resented. Even the country woman who gave up tight stays and plaited sleeves for a gown on weekdays as well as Sunday, was not without her critics who railed at gowns as a luxury.¹ Others objected because women no longer occupied themselves in carding and spinning and providing garments for the family. "However the wives and daughters of great farmers in the present day may look upon these employments with disdain," says one writer pompously, "they were such as princesses, and other females of the first distinction in ancient times, considered it a part of their duty to be engaged in"²—a stupid and unfair criticism when the cheapness of clothing and material no longer justified the time and labour involved in home manufacture.

The greatest agitation, however, raged round the vexed question of the boarding of labourers. It was quite true that as the large farm system developed, the custom of employing annual servants who lived in the farm declined in favour of day labourers who were responsible for their own board and lodging. It seems probable that the new system was first adopted in connection with the extra harvest labour. However many labourers the farmer's wife had to provide for in the ordinary way, the number was doubled or trebled in harvest time, sometimes as many as forty additional people being lodged

¹ *Annals*, vol. xxviii, pp. 632.

² Davis (W.), *Hints to Philanthropists*, etc., p. 96.

and fed. This, added to the fact that the arduous nature of the work demanded large quantities of the most substantial food, all of which had to be prepared in the farm itself, must have made the life of the farmer's wife scarcely worth living at this time.¹ It is easily understandable that as soon as the large occupiers found their profits increasing, they were willing to give the extra harvest hands a higher wage so that, "the labourers finding their own victuals, drink, and lodging," their wives had not the "trouble and fatigue of providing provision in their own houses."² With the early days of the nineteenth century the numbers of yearly servants who were boarded diminished rapidly, and in most cases the discontinuance of the system was put down to the greater refinement of living and the education of farmers' wives. "In the present day," says Davis in a typical criticism, "the wives and daughters of great farmers . . . have been educated at boarding schools, where they have learnt anything but the correct use of their mother-tongue, the command of the substantial rules of arithmetic, and those arts of economy, without which no station in life, either high or low, can be well, or durably maintained. Of course, the false pride they acquire, by an unsuitable education, makes them esteem it a drudgery to carry eggs, butter, or poultry to market, or to provide suitable food for a number of workmen. The latter are consequently obliged to get their board and lodging where they can; probably at some public house, where their time and their money are spent alike unprofitably. Can we wonder that such men become paupers as soon as they get married, and have a family; and that they continue paupers as long as they live?"³

There was no doubt a good deal of truth in Cobbett's contention, that the house was "too neat for a dirty-shoed carter to be allowed to come into." But quite apart from the enormous amount of labour involved in providing for a large number of resident labourers, which in many cases meant nothing less than drudgery, there were other reasons why the farmer's wife should use all her influence to bring about a discontinuance of the system. Many a master or mistress found that it was "not pleasant having so many female servants and young men about."⁴ Not only was a big household of unmarried servants "very unmanageable" at times,⁵ but cases of immorality were not infrequent and added considerably to the difficulty of regu-

¹ The following was the fare given to harvest men boarded in the house in Cambridge:

" 6 a.m. 1 pint of strong beer, bread and cheese.
8 a.m. Breakfast, cold meat and beer.
11 a.m. 1 pint of strong beer, bread and cheese.
1 p.m. Dinner, one day roast beef or mutton (pork will not do), and plain plum pudding; next day boiled beef or mutton, and plum pudding.
4 p.m. 1 pint of strong beer, bread and cheese.
7 p.m. Hot hash, or hot mutton pies.
Saturday night an addition of good seed-cake of one pound, covered with sugar, and a quart of strong beer poured over it."
Cobbett's Cambridge (1813), pp. 288-9.

² *Young's Norfolk* (1804), p. 517.

³ Davis, *Hints to Philanthropists*, p. 97.

⁴ *P.P. Report on Agriculture*, 1803, v, p. 440.

⁵ *The Farmer's Magazine*, 1800, vol. i, p. 380.

lating the household. Moreover, judging by the advice given to the good housewife in old books of husbandry, her task was likely to be complicated still further by the dishonesty of servants.

The desire for greater comfort rendered possible by the flourishing state of agriculture, had undoubtedly an influence in terminating the practice; but at the same time it is questionable whether the fact that the women disliked the trouble of it would have been sufficient in itself, apart from economic considerations which were stronger forces working to the same end. In the open field system, when there were few day labourers available, farmers were often obliged to hire their men from distant parishes. It was therefore often necessary, and generally more economical, to board and lodge such servants as they required. But after enclosures and the throwing together of small holdings, the supply of day labour often exceeded the demand and the farmer could command as many men as he wanted without burdening himself permanently with indoor labourers.¹ Where this was not the case, as in parts of Yorkshire and in other thinly populated districts, the custom of hiring yearly servants was still retained after the practice of employing day labourers had become established elsewhere.² Then too, the household on a farm of any size was already as great as could be run with any convenience and it would have been impossible to increase the number of labourers in proportion to the size of the new large farms of the early nineteenth century. Nor indeed was their labour necessary all the year round. The new cultures demanded "spasmodic" labour; periods of great activity were followed by slack times and if the farmer had engaged annually all the men he needed at his busiest season he would have had to pay and feed them during the months when he had nothing for them to do.

Moreover, the rise in prices after 1795 was probably as responsible for putting an end to the custom as the desire for greater comfort.³ Instead of being more economical to board labourers it now became more expensive. "Why," asked Cobbett, "do not farmers now *feed and lodge* their workpeople as they did formerly? Because they cannot keep them *upon so little* as they give them in wages. This is the real cause of the change."⁴ It is interesting to notice that in Westmorland, Cumberland and Wales, partly because day wages were higher and partly because the style of living was much cheaper than in the Southern Counties, the labourers continued to be boarded; while in evidence given before the Lords' Committee on the Poor Laws in 1831 when prices had dropped again, it was stated that the cheapness of provisions was inducing some farmers to board their labourers once more.⁵

These facts, then, show that other considerations have to be taken into account and that farmers' wives were not entirely responsible

¹ P.P. *Poor Laws*, 1834, xxviii, p. 681A.

² Strickland's *East Riding of Yorkshire* (1811), p. 260.

³ "The great advance in the price of provisions has apparently contributed to diminish the number of domestic servants of every description." Batchelor's *Bedfordshire* (1808), p. 580.

⁴ *Rural Rides*, October 20, 1825.

⁵ P.P. *Lords' Committee on Poor Laws*, 1831, viii, p. 113.

for a change which brought down on them the censure of contemporaries. Although the latter saw no good at all in the new state of affairs, it was not without its benefits to both parties. It is true the social cleavage between master and man was greater, tending to less sympathy and understanding; and the labourers in many cases lived worse on their wages than in the farms. Fewer maids were required, and as a result of the young people of both sexes remaining in their homes instead of going into service, the overcrowding in cottages became acute. On the other hand, many labourers gained by a freer life and a greater sense of independence in their own cottages. Sleeping accommodation on farms was often of the most primitive type. A long, low loft was often all that was considered necessary for large numbers of both men and women servants, and after the increase of the window tax, it was common to find that any window which had existed in the servants' quarters had been blocked up; thus the misery of darkness was added to that of overcrowded, ill-ventilated rooms.¹ From the moral point of view, overcrowding in the cottages could have been no worse than the conditions on some farms. One witness before the 1833 Committee stated emphatically that in this respect the new state of affairs was better than the old.²

REORGANISATIONS IN DAIRY FARMING

The large farm system was not only confined to corn growers; dairy farmers and graziers were just as eager to take advantage of the engrossing movement and to create great farms for themselves. In view of the new standards of comfort the question arises: What happened on the dairy farms where the work of women was so arduous, incessant, and yet at the same time of such importance as to require the constant application of the mistress herself? The search for an answer to this question throws light on new developments that were taking place with the engrossing of farms and it is interesting to speculate how far these were due to the influence of women and how far they were due to other circumstances.

One result of the large farm system as we have already seen, was that there was far less dairying in the general way then there had previously been.³ Small farms supplying their produce locally gave way to big corn growers and under the pressure of the war, dairy farmers themselves ploughed up pasture in the hope of higher profits. In some districts, particularly in the Midlands and the Home Counties, dairying was given up in favour of grazing. In Middlesex, the Reviewer blames the farmers' wives entirely for this change of policy. "The dairy," he says in 1807, "is pretty nearly excluded from the domestic economy of the farm houses in this county, as the farmers' wives for the most part, have neither inclination, industry, nor skill, sufficient for the management of a dairy; and in suckling, the business

¹ Plymley's *Shropshire* (1803), p. 106.

² *P.P. Report on Agriculture*, 1833, v, p. 440.

³ The result was an increase in the prices of dairy produce. In Buckinghamshire before enclosure, butter was to be bought at 6d. a pound, and milk at 1d. per quart and less. Afterwards, milk was not to be had at any rate, and butter not under 14d. per pound. *General Report on Enclosures*, 1808, p. 260.

is performed by men, as the women (even the servants) will not go into a dirty cow-house, and submit to the drudgery of milking, and attending the calves."¹ Later, referring to the fact that the dairy was losing ground in other districts too, he says: "This is the necessary consequence of the present mode of educating young women who are to be farmers' wives, which disqualifies them for going through the labour and attention necessary for the well managing of a dairy; nor can servants be procured on whom the farmer can depend for this branch of the business."² He was, however, only stating half the facts of the case when he said that grazing was due to the new education of women and their consequent disinclination to endure the drudgery of the dairy. In his scorn for the new standards, he forgot, or refused to acknowledge, that the prosperity of London had created a great and increasing market for veal, and that farmers of Middlesex as well as those of Norfolk found that it paid to give up their dairies and take to grazing.³ "Even the tradesman who formerly was contented with a shoulder of mutton," says Arbuthnot,⁴ "must now have his fillet of veal." Enclosures too were having a similar influence. When many dairy farmers could rear their young stock on the common pastures, it paid to dairy, says Marshall,⁵ but since the common pastures have been converted into feeding pieces, they have found grazing answer better than cheesemaking.⁶ Especially was this so, he adds, if farmers "happen not to have a 'dairily' wife or house-keeper."⁷

Where the disinclination for the heavy work of the dairy coincided with some profitable alternative such as grazing, the solution was fairly simple, but what was to be done on those large farms in the purely dairying districts of the West and South? Here it was imperative that the work of the dairy should be carried on, and since the mistress of the farm was no longer prepared to undertake it and it was too important to be left to servants—the whole profits of the farm being involved—we find the problem solved by an entirely new development known as the "letting of dairies." A new class known as "dairymen" appeared, and with them the control of what had hitherto been entirely a woman's trade, began to be transferred to men.

The working of the new system is described by Stevenson, the Reviewer of Dorset. "The dairy and cheese-making processes are too servile employments for the wives of the large farmers, and indeed it would be absurd to suppose the wife, or daughters of a man possessed of £10 or 15,000 would engage in the drudgery of the dairy. Some of the farmers let as many as a hundred dairy cows to three or four dairymen."⁸ In this way the wife of the large dairy farmer severed entirely her connection with the dairy; in future the work was not

¹ Middleton's *Middlesex* (1807), p. 409.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 427-8.

³ *General Report on Enclosures* (1808), p. 261.

⁴ Arbuthnot, J. *An Enquiry . . . prices of Provisions and the size of Farms* (1773), p. 55.

⁵ Marshall *Rural Economy of Midland Counties*, vol. ii, p. 274.

⁶ Stevenson's *Dorset* (1812), p. 387.

even performed in her house. Her husband provided each dairyman with an agreed number of cows at a fixed sum for the year, which usually commenced at Candlemas. The number usually averaged between thirty and forty, and the rent varied, as much as £6 10s. per cow being charged for a good breed. The farmer supplied summer pasture and winter keep and provided a house and dairy for the renter and his family.¹

This new system began towards the end of the eighteenth century. In 1794 Billingsley said that dairymen were scarcely known in counties beyond Somerset, but the practice existed at the same time in Dorset, and very soon afterwards was to be found in Devon, Wiltshire, and Hampshire.² In Billingsley's opinion it needed checking at once: "This practice of letting dairies must have originated, either from *pride*, or *indolence* on the part of the farmer's household, and ought in my opinion to be checked by the landlord. When the female part of a farmer's family is unemployed (and without a dairy that must be the case throughout the greater part of the year), dissipation, folly and extravagance take the lead, and domestic care and industry are entirely forgotten. Were I a gentleman of fortune, I would never let an estate to a farmer, whose family was too proud, or too indolent, to undertake the management of the different departments thereof."³ As a delegation of labour, the new system was an improvement on the old. The work in a large dairy as has been shown, was far too great for any woman, however strong, however able; while from the point of view of results the small dairy was often superior. But, whereas the farmer's wife in the past had been responsible for every branch connected with the dairy—rearing and selling the calves, bargaining with the factor for the highest prices obtainable for her cheese—the wives of the new dairymen had a more limited sphere, since their work tended to be confined to the making of butter and cheese alone, and they cannot therefore be considered as the actual controllers of the business. The dairyman himself was probably more actively interested than the farmer had ever been, for while the latter had had his time fully occupied in other business of the farm, the dairyman was provided with the necessary crops and food and could devote all his attention to the profits of the dairy. The management of this branch and the marketing, therefore, fell into his hands.

The success of the large farmer in any branch of agriculture thus promoted a new sphere for his wife. The strenuous practical training no longer necessary gave way to an education designed solely to fit for social activities. The farmer's wife now drove, not indeed to market, but to an Assembly in a post chaise. In the change she sacrificed her former economic independence according to the extent to which she ceased to manage her household and contribute to the wealth of the family, but for her, the new conditions meant an advance in the social scale and did not entail any material hardship.

¹ Claridge's *Dorset*, p. 14; Billingsley's *Somerset*, p. 150.

² Vancouver's *Devonshire*, p. 231; Marshall, *Review of the Southern Department* pp. 239, 349.

³ Billingsley's *Somerset*, p. 150.

DISAPPEARANCE OF THE SMALL FARMER

Very different was the position of the wife of the small farmer, who during the same period lost his hold on the land and was thereby reduced to work as a day labourer competing with cottagers and squatters for employment. The decline in the number of small farmers was spread over a number of years. In considering this class a distinction must be drawn between the small farmer owner and the small occupier or tenant farmer. While the throwing together of small holdings dispossessed many small tenant farmers, the enclosure movement did not necessarily either diminish the number of small owners or bring them immediate hardship.¹ Lord Ernle has shown that many of them, except where "the area was so small as not to pay for the cost of fencing," managed to survive the expenses of enclosure and retain their land for a time. During the war high prices enabled them to compete with their greater neighbours, and the successes of some undoubtedly persuaded them to sell their estates and engage in trade or become tenants of larger occupations. Not until the agricultural depression of 1814-1835 did the small owners suffer severely. Then the agricultural distress, the increase in taxation, the enormous rise in poor rates and the loss of employment due to industrial developments ruined many and compelled them to part with their land.² The far greater class of tenant farmers, however, suffered earlier.³ The aim of many enclosures was the consolidation of holdings in the hands of a few individuals, and where this was so and holdings were thrown together, previous occupiers were given no option of renting land under the new system. The only courses open to them were either to leave the land entirely and take up new occupations in the towns as many of them did, or to find employment as labourers on the new large farms. In almost the same position were the common-right cottagers and very small partners in the open-fields. For some of the latter the expenses of enclosure and fencing were too heavy to be met and in such cases the land was sold at once, often for a trifling sum. In the case of cottagers the small compact allotment received on enclosure often went to the landlord, whereas the occupier had often enjoyed the common right; even where the owner occupied the cottage, the new piece of land did not in many cases compensate

¹ The Reports of the Board of Agriculture suggest an increase in the number of small owners up to 1815. See also E. Davies, *The Small Landowner, 1780-1832*, in *The Economic History Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1927. At the same time, life-hold properties of different sorts, which were common in Midland open fields, probably diminished on enclosure. "Although life interests in land being real property, could not be swept away by an enclosure Act, the promoters of an enclosure would naturally see to it that as many as possible of these interests should have run out, or have been bought out or exchanged, before the enclosure was undertaken." Clapham (J. H.), *Economic History of Modern Britain*, p. 100.

² Prothero (Lord Ernle), *English Farming*, p. 298.

³ According to E. Davies, by 1780-86, occupying owners, "including the freeholders, copyholders, and lessees for lives, had ceased to be an outstanding feature of English rural economy." The Land Tax Assessments in certain Midland Counties showed nearly 90 per cent. of the land was then in the occupation of tenants at will or tenants on short lease. *Economic History Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1927), p. 112.

for the loss of common rights and pasture.¹ Without these he was unable to maintain the same stock as before; no stock meant no manure, and without manure his arable land was useless. He was therefore forced to sell both his stock and the land. Squatters and customary users of common who could prove no legal rights, rarely received any compensation for their losses by enclosure, although the few cases in which an equitable claim was recognised show how easily this might have been done in the majority of cases.²

The disappearance of the small farmer was not entirely due to enclosure, although from all sides came complaints that consolidation of holdings was in the main responsible. Many who survived the early stages of the change had neither the capital to introduce necessary improvements nor the ability to compete in new markets. Again, as a result of industrial development and the final separation of agriculture and manufacture, it was impossible for many small farmers to continue on the old lines. Contemporary opinion on the widespread disappearance of the small farmer probably exaggerated the extent of the change,³ but there is no doubt that the general tendency of the period was for the number of small farms to diminish and for an increasing number of agriculturalists to become dependent on wages alone.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE LABOURERS

How were the women of these classes affected by the changed position of their husbands? In the first place, from the point of view of production, the result in the lives of these women bears a curious, though superficial, resemblance to that already described in the case of wealthier women. In both cases, for a time at any rate, the productive work of women tended very greatly to decrease; but whereas on the one hand it was from choice, on the other, it was from the lack of any opportunity to continue. It has been seen that the wife of the small farmer or cottager had been fully employed in her own home, in the care and management of the stock and garden and that by her earnings she had contributed considerably to the well-being of the family. But with the land and the stock went a woman's opportunities of earning and when these disappeared, it mattered little how willing and anxious she was to work; she could no longer assist in the support of the family, nor could she maintain her own economic independence. As Davies pointed out, wives and families had been previously well-occupied at home, but now he says, "few of these are constantly employed except in harvest, so that almost the whole burden of providing for their families rests upon the man."⁴ Some of the more fortunate cottagers were allowed to retain their gardens, or were given a small allotment of land in exchange for common rights, and these, Davies says, were able to "breed a few fowls, with which they buy what sheets and blankets they want"; but in many cases the cottages

¹ Gonner, *Common Land and Inclosure*, pp. 262-5.

² Clapham, *Economic History*, pp. 116-7.

³ Clapham, *The Growth of an Agrarian Proletariat*, in *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 1923, vol. i, no. 1, p. 92.

⁴ Davies, *The Case of Labourers in Husbandry* (1795), p. 56.

were pulled down, their gardens engrossed into farms and the families crowded into old farmhouses without a scrap of garden where they were seldom allowed to "keep a pig or a chick."¹ Among those who suffered most were the widows and single women whose common rights had enabled them to provide for themselves. For many of them there was now no alternative but the parish. Some few managed to earn a little by spinning or other of the domestic employments but these too were failing at the same time. Others were able to get a little agricultural day labour, but until the early nineteenth century when the new cultures were more extensively adopted, and when from a variety of causes a new class of women day labourers was called into existence, there was little opportunity of steady agricultural day labour for women, certainly nothing to compensate for the employment of which they were deprived. The question began to receive increasing attention from the pamphleteers of the time, and by them, especially by writers on the poor law, this lack of employment for women was regarded as one of the great and growing evils of the times.

The economic position of the family deprived of land and common rights and of the profits of the woman's labour was vastly different after enclosure. "An amazing number of people," said Davies, "have been reduced from a comfortable state of independence, to the precarious condition of mere hirelings, who when out of work come immediately on the parish." Hitherto, day wages had been an additional source of income for most of the small farmers and many of the cottagers; but now, not only men, but women and children also became entirely dependent on a system which was not only inadequately remunerative at its best, but which subjected its victims to all the vagaries of an overstocked labour market, seasonal unemployment and the fluctuations of prices.

For the women of this class there now began a desperate struggle to make ends meet in the family budget; and though the standard of living was gradually reduced to subsistence level, it was impossible in many cases to balance income with expenditure. The new style of living proved that the first half of the century, when salt beef and black bread had given way to fresh meat and wheaten flour, had indeed been "the golden age of the English peasant."² The loss of the commons not only entailed the loss of profits from the sale of dairy produce, but it also meant that the family in future was deprived of milk, butter, cheese and such things as they had provided for themselves. Money wages in the past had been based on the understanding that the family had other resources, and when these disappeared, instead of wages increasing, the standard of living had to be reduced to fit the purchasing capacity of wages. This, however, was not all. Throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century food prices were gradually rising, until with the war they reached famine heights, and although wages rose slightly, especially after the great increases of 1795, they by no means kept pace with prices. Nathaniel Kent writing in 1796, estimated that whereas in the forty or fifty years previous, wages had risen by 25 per cent., the prices of provisions

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 16.

² Prothero, *Pioneers and Progress of English Farming*, p. 39.

had increased by 60 per cent.¹ Speaking of the later increases during the war, Lord Ernle says: "Unfortunately, it is equally certain that, even if wages had doubled, the price of provisions had trebled. In other words, effective earnings had diminished by a third."² Faced with this problem, the decline in the standard of living is easily understandable; even by feeding her family on bread and potatoes, the mother of a large family could not with the greatest economy make ends meet and was perforce obliged to make application to the parish.

We realise something of the struggle from an examination of the household accounts which were collected by Davies and Eden. Davies, who was Rector of Barkham in Berkshire, gives the income and expenditure of six families in his parish for the year 1787, which worked out as follows:³

	No. in family.	Yearly Expenses.	Yearly Earnings.	Yearly Deficit.
		£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
i.	7	30 18 9	22 2 0	8 16 9
ii.	7	30 9 0	23 8 0	7 1 0
iii.	6	27 4 7	22 2 0	5 2 7
iv.	5	25 0 9	23 8 0	1 12 0
v.	5	26 18 8	23 8 0	3 10 8
vi.	4	24 14 9	22 2 0	2 12 9

An analysis of the weekly expenditure gives interesting details as to how the money was laid out. For purposes of comparison, No. 4, the best off, and No. 1, the worst off, are cited. The first family consisted of a man, his wife and five children, the eldest of whom was eight years old. Their weekly expenditure was as follows:⁴

	s.	d.
Flour, 7½ gallons, at 10d. per gallon	6	3
Yeast, to make it into bread, 2½d. ; salt, 1½d., ...	0	4
Bacon, 1 lb. boiled at two or three times with greens; the pot liquor, with bread and potatoes makes a mess for the children, ...	0	8
Tea, 1 ounce, 2d. ; ½ lb. sugar, 6d. ; ½ lb. butter or lard, 4d., ...	1	0
Soap, ½ lb. at 9d. per lb.	0	2½
Candles, ½ lb. one week with another at a medium, at 9d., ...	0	3
Thread, thrum, and worsted, for mending apparel, etc., ...	0	3
Total	8	11½

For eight months in the year the man earned a weekly wage of 7s., which was raised to an average of 8s. by task work in the other four. By occasional day labour at bean setting, hay and harvest, the wife earned what amounted to an average of 6d. a week. Their total weekly income therefore was 8s. 6d., which fell short of expenditure by 5½d. This, however, was exclusive of "house-rent, fuel, clothing, lying in, sickness, and burials," for which Davies estimated a weekly charge of 2s. 8½d. for a family of five, 2d. extra being added for each child

¹ *Notes on the Agriculture of Norfolk*, p. 165.

² *English Farming Past and Present*, pp. 314-5.

³ *The Case of Labourers in Husbandry*, p. 18.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 8.

after the third ; hence in this family the weekly deficit would amount to 3s. 5½d.

The fourth family, man, wife and three children under five, was in a much more favourable position, and had actually a surplus of earnings over weekly expenditure amounting to 2s. 0½d. There were two children fewer than in the other family ; this, and the fact that they had sufficient garden ground for planting a good patch of potatoes, enabled them to cut down the cost of bread, and, Davies says, they had also credit enough to buy a sack of flour at a time, by which they gained something. They were, moreover, favoured in the article of meat :

Flour, 3 gallons per week, at 10d.	s. d.
Yeast, 1d., salt 1½d.	2 6
Bacon : the farmer of whom they rent their dwelling, lets them have a fatted hog, weight about 14 score (on condition of their not keeping any pigs or poultry), at 1s. per score under market price : this at 6s. 6d. per score (1787), comes to £4 11s. and as it lasts the family the whole year, it is per week exactly 1 9	
Cheese, about 28 lbs. at 4½d. per lb., 10s. 6d. per annum, per week	0 2½
Tea, ½ lb. per month, at 3s. per lb., per week 2½d., sugar 8d., butter 4d.	1 2½
The wife, having an infant at the breast, and fancying very small beer better than mere water, brews a peck of malt once a month, which costs 1s. 4d., this is per week	0 5
Soap, 3 lbs. at 9d. per lb. lasts 2 months, per week	0 3
Candles, ½ lb. at a medium 3d., thread and worsted 2d., ...	0 5
Total	6 11½

The man's wage was 8s. a week throughout the year, which was raised by another 4d. by diet in his employer's house for six weeks during harvest, or 18s. instead ; his wife earned about 8d. a week, bringing the total to 9s. But although weekly expenditure left a surplus of 2s. 0d., when the annual outgoings of rent, fuel, clothing, etc., were deducted, there was still a deficit of 7½d. a week.

Davies points out that his account of earnings made no allowance for loss of time which occasioned additional distress, while his allowance for fuel was much below the cost in many parts of the kingdom. None of the families he examined ate any fresh meat and few could afford more than one pound of bacon weekly. As for tea, the use of which by the poor raised such an outcry, as being an extravagant luxury, one or one and a half ounces of the poorest quality served a family for a week. Malt was so heavily taxed that small beer, which had hitherto been considered one of the necessities of life, was quite out of reach, "except against a lying-in or a christening." None of the families spent anything on milk, which before enclosures had been a principal article of diet. By the consolidation of holdings many of the poor had been obliged to sell their cows, and the big farmers could not be bothered to retail small quantities of milk.¹ Labourers com-

¹ *The General Report on Enclosures* gives evidence of the decrease in the number of cows. The return from Tutry, Bedfordshire, is typical of many other parishes. "To my knowledge, before enclosure, the poor inhabitants found no difficulty in

plained bitterly that the milk they needed was thrown to pigs and calves.¹ Weak tea, therefore, was the last resource of the poor; without it they would have been reduced to bread and water. According to Davies' estimate a family needed at least £30 5s. a year to live in tolerable comfort and independent of parochial assistance; the average earnings of the families cited by him, however, were only £23, and the deficit had to be made good either by poaching, stealing, debt, or resort to the parish.²

Eden's budgets and those quoted by other contemporaries tell the same tale of impoverished diet, inadequate clothing and increasing debt. The accounts of a Northamptonshire family in 1791³ show how difficult it was for a labourer to remain solvent even when the efforts of the entire family were exerted to the utmost. By means of task work and extra wages obtained by moving up the country with the harvest, the wages of the labourer and his son amounted to £29 18s., and an addition of £5 4s. earned by the mother and children at lace-making brought the total income to £35 2s. 0d., which was considerably above the average of the Berkshire families. By cutting down the weekly expenditure for food, soap, candles and thread for seven persons to 10s. 3d., or roughly 1s. 5d. per head, the yearly expenses were reduced to £33 16s. 8d., thus leaving a surplus of £1 5s. 4d., "to lay up or expend in additional clothes." But as before, no fresh meat was bought; barley bread was eaten half the year; only 1s. 0d. a week was spent on tea, butter and sugar; 12s. 0d. only was allowed for wood—the cost of which was £2 8s. 0d. if all had to be bought—and £2 0s. 0d. only was assigned for the clothing of the wife and children, a hopelessly inadequate sum to clothe six persons for a year. When the greatest industry on the part of all members of the family resulted in a bare subsistence and allowed no reserve for sickness, unemployment and old age, there is little wonder that the labourer was overwhelmed by the hopelessness of his position. Sooner or later, in spite of the exertions of his family, the lack of reserves to tide over a difficult period would drive him to the parish. Faced with this fact, the incentive to continue the struggle for what seemed an impossible independence gradually weakened, and the parish became the first, instead of the last resource.

The housewife's difficulty in laying out the family income was not only due to the inadequacy of wages to meet increasing prices; it was complicated by other factors which made distress more acute. Not only had money wages to be stretched to purchase such things as had previously been provided at home, but the labourer's wife now found herself compelled to purchase everything in the dearest market. When the labourer could buy a small quantity of corn from the farmer, "his wife carried it to the mill, had it ground and dressed, and then

procuring milk for their children; since, it is with the utmost difficulty they can procure any milk at all. Cows lessened from 110 to 40," p. 150. John Deason, writing in the publications of the Labourer's Friend Society, says he remembered 600 cows kept in his parish before enclosure; afterwards there were only 100, p. 212.

¹ Eden, *State of the Poor*, vol. ii, p. 587.

² Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

³ *Annals*, vol. xvi, pp. 500, 501.

brought it home, and baked it for the family." The great farmers, however, preferred to deal in a wholesale way with the miller, and when finally the labourer's wife bought her bushel of flour, instead of paying 3*d.* or 4*d.* a bushel for grinding, she now had to purchase at a price which included the profits of the mealman and shopkeeper, which had before been saved.¹ The impossibility of laying in any store of provisions and groceries led to the establishment of village shops, which were described by one contemporary as "nearly as great a nuisance in country places as ale-houses."² Exorbitant prices were demanded for goods of the worst description and the long credit given so often involved the labourer in debt, that he was powerless to expostulate against inferior goods and dishonest weights.³

The critics who explained the miseries of the poor by their dependence on village shops and bad management of income were loud in their denunciations of the housewives who at this time began to rely on the village bakehouse. In this they saw only laziness and helplessness in the women concerned and failed to realise that free fuel went with the commons, and that the scarcity and high price of fuel, unless it could be stolen from the hedgerows or begged, prevented many labourers' wives from doing any cooking at home.

It was this more than anything else that in the South reduced the labourer's diet to the monotonous one of bread and tea. In the North, where furze, heath and brushwood could still be obtained at an inconsiderable expense, the housewife was enabled not only to spend a smaller proportion of earnings on food,⁴ but also to provide a variety of dishes unknown in the South. Vegetables could be used to a far greater extent. There was no difficulty in obtaining milk as in the South and the poorest labourers could use it plentifully with hasty pudding (oatmeal porridge) and boiled potatoes. Although little fresh meat was eaten, on the whole the food in the North was far superior to that in the South. Of Dorset labourers, for example, it was said in 1789: "Many working men breakfast and dine on dry bread alone, without either cheese or drink of any kind; their meal is supper, and that generally no better than unpeeled potatoes and salt, or barley-cake fried, and water."⁵ Unfortunately the bread diet to which the southern labourer was reduced was the worst that could have been adopted in view of the rising price of wheat, and in the scarcity at the end of the century the entire wages of the family were insufficient to purchase bread alone, leaving out of account all such

¹ Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

² Turner's *Gloucestershire* (1794), p. 26.

³ The disadvantage of this system to the poor may be judged from the statement of one such shopkeeper, who explained his ability to give such long and doubtful credit by the fact that "he bought his goods cheap, and that if one in three of his customers paid his profits were very satisfactory." *P.P. Report on Poor Laws*, 1834, xxviii, p. 21A.

⁴ In Cumberland and Westmorland the housewife usually baked in one day enough barley or oatmeal bread to serve the family for a month. *Eden*, vol. i, pp. 510, 512.

⁵ Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 149: Return of Rev. Mr. Etterick.

necessaries as fuel, rent and clothing.¹ This was the situation which led to the adoption of a family bread allowance from the Poor Rate, which in turn brought its complication of evils in the early nineteenth century.

Perhaps the best summary of the labourers' condition is contained in the description given by Davies of his parishioners: "I could not but observe with concern their mean and distressed condition. I found them in general but indifferently fed; badly clothed; some children without shoes and stockings; very few put to school; and most families in debt to little shopkeepers. In short, there was scarcely any appearance of comfort about their dwellings, except that the children looked tolerably healthy. Yet I could not impute the wretchedness I saw either to sloth or wastefulness. For I knew that the farmers were careful that the men should not want employment, and had they been given to drinking, I am sure I should have heard enough of it. And I found the women, when not working in the fields, well occupied at home; seldom indeed earning money; but baking their bread, washing and mending their garments, and rocking the cradle."²

For clothing as for food, the women of the North were more favourably placed than those in the South. Davies' parishioners could spare practically nothing for clothes; even those who were provident enough to supply themselves with a small stock before marriage were reduced to a ragged state from their inability to renew their garments afterwards, "and then the women spend as much time in tacking their tatters together, as would serve for manufacturing new clothing."³ In the North, where real wages were higher due to the competition of mines and manufactures, where less had to be spent on food and more people were still in possession of some little land and a cow, many housewives could still afford to make the clothing

¹ Arthur Young speaks in 1799 of families he knew in Suffolk, of eight or nine persons earning in all no more than 11s. a week. An allowance of 4s. from the parish brought the total to 15s., while at the parochial estimate of half a stone of flour per head, the cost amounted to 20s. Such a family suffered a deficiency of 5s. a week in bread alone, for a bread and water diet, exclusive of other necessities. *Annals*, vol. xxxiv, p. 188.

Even worse was the condition of those families who preferred to manage without parish assistance. George Barwell, who brought up a family of "five or six sons and daughters" on a weekly wage of 6s. or 7s. told Marshall that he had frequently been "hard put to it." He had sometimes "barely had bread for his children, not a morsel for himself, having often made a dinner off raw hog peas." Marshall, *Rural Economy of Midland Counties*, vol. ii, p. 217.

The cost of a Cumberland labourer's fare as given by Eden was as follows:

	s.	d.
Breakfast, hasty pudding and milk	0	1
Dinner, potatoes	0	0½
butter or bacon	0	0½
milk and bread	0	0½
Supper, boiled milk and bread	0	0½
	0	3

He adds that this, however, was more than any poor person spent on a day's provisions. *State of the Poor*, vol. ii, p. 74.

² Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

of the family.¹ Although the clothing sold by the shops was often cheaper in the initial outlay, home-spun garments were generally considered superior in warmth and durability. But the women in the South and wives of the poorest labourers in the North, could not even afford to purchase the raw material to spin at home. If any surplus remained for clothes at all, necessity demanded the finished article at once, and the purchase was made from the second-hand dealer or the village shopkeeper. Because they had no reserves and could not afford to wait for the home manufactured article, the practice of providing clothing at home fell into disuse, and dependence upon the sloop shop, the result in the first place of economic conditions, was wrongly imputed to idleness and lack of skill.²

The change in the material condition of the labouring classes was followed by a general hopelessness and moral degradation which was far more serious in its consequences. Deprived of those privileges and interests which had fostered thrift and encouraged a careful management of resources by the prospect of a rise in the social scale, the landless labourer was reduced to a state in which independence itself was impossible and in consequence self-respect and all desire for self-improvement disappeared. The decline in housecraft, originally the outcome of economic causes, was aggravated by the general degradation, until finally it became itself a factor in a more complete demoralization. Unable to give warmth, comfort and any variety of food to her family, the housewife lost interest and the condition of the home went from bad to worse. In despair the labourer sought comfort at the ale-house and his wife the solace of tea-drinking with her neighbours. Too often contemporaries were inclined to see in these habits the causes of the labourer's distress, a view that was

¹ Eden, *State of the Poor*, vol. i, p. 554.

² Eden gives an interesting comparison of the prices of home made clothes in Cumberland and those in a London sloop shop.

Cumberland.

"Women's dress generally consists of a black stuff hat of the price of 1s. 8d.; a linnen bed-gown (stamped with blue), mostly of the home manufacture, this usually costs in the shops about 5s. 6d.; a cotton or linnen neck-cloth, price about 1s. 6d.; two petticoats of flannel, the upper one dyed blue, value of the two about 11s. 6d.; linnen shift, home manufacture, 2½ yards at 1s. 5d. the yard. Women generally wear stays, or rather boddices, of various prices. Their gowns are sometimes made of woollen stuff: 6 yards at 1s. 6d. the yard. The women, however, generally wear black silk hats and cotton gowns on Sundays and holidays."

"The following are the prices of cloathes, as sold in a sloop shop in the neighbourhood of London:

	s.	d.
A common stuff gown	6	6
Linsey. woolsey. petticoat	4	6
A shift	3	8
A pair of shoes	3	9
Course apron	1	0
Check apron	2	0
A pair of stockings	1	6
A hat, the cheapest sort (will last two years) ..	1	8
Coloured neck handkerchief	1	0
A common cap	0	10
Cheapest kind of cloak, (will last two years) ..	4	6
Pair of stays (will last six years)	6	0

Eden, *State of the Poor*, vol. i, pp. 556-8.

vigorously combatted by Howlett as early as 1787. "Whatever their vice and immorality," he wrote, "I must again maintain it has not originally been the cause of their extreme indigence, but the consequence." Davies also declared that the "charge of mismanagement made against labouring people seems to rest upon no solid ground. For a long time past their condition has been going from bad to worse continually. Small indeed is the portion of worldly comforts now left them."¹ As a remedy he suggested: "Give to some the ability to keep a cow, and then all will have milk. Give to all the ability to drink small beer at home, and then few will frequent ale-houses."

How closely the use of a little land and the ability to keep a cow was bound up with independence is shown by the reports from a few favoured districts where the poor retained their cows, and from those estates where thoughtful landlords provided their cottagers with a little land. Whereas in those parishes where the land had been "thrown to the farmers," the poor rates had "increased in an amazing degree, more than according to the average rise throughout England,"² the inquiry conducted by the Board of Agriculture revealed the fact that in forty-eight parishes where the poor were allowed to have land and cows, "not one of them receive anything from the Parish ! even in the present scarcity."³

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 40.

² Earl of Winchelsea's Letter to the Board, *Communications to the Board of Agriculture*, vol. iv, p. 358.

³ Young, *An Inquiry into the Propriety of Applying Wastes to the Better Maintenance and Support of the Poor*, 1801, p. 142.

CHAPTER III

THE APPEARANCE OF WOMEN DAY-LABOURERS

As the eighteenth century drew to a close an increasing number of labourers, feeling the effects of enclosures and the loss of by-industries, were reduced to the conditions described in the last chapter. Wages alone were obviously so inadequate for the maintenance of their families that it became imperative to increase the family income by whatever means were possible. In these circumstances their wives, unable any longer to supplement their husbands' wages by work at home, were forced to enter the ranks of wage earners and become like their husbands, day labourers in agriculture.

From the earliest times there had always been a small amount of daily work done by women, but it was mainly seasonal and for short periods only. The old open village provided little day labour of any kind and still less of the type that was customarily performed by women. The small occupiers worked their holdings themselves with the assistance of their wives and children who took part in almost every kind of work. On the large farms the men and women servants in husbandry were sufficient for all the ordinary labour connected with the three-field system and the common rotation of winter corn, summer corn and fallow, with a crop of peas or beans sometimes taking the place of the latter. The men whose holdings were too small to maintain them entirely, eked out their income with some kind of domestic industry and occasional day labour, either on the enclosed farms of the neighbourhood or when hay, harvest and threshing provided extra work on the open-field farms. Similarly the women were engaged with their stock and gardens and many of them earned a little in spinning, or some other domestic employment; but apart from harvest, there was little opportunity for women to do much in the way of agricultural day labour.

At hay time and harvest, when the difficulty was to find sufficient helpers, women had always worked, whether they lived in country or town. At this time manufacturers and tradesmen from the more populous districts flocked into the country to assist, and even women who spent the rest of the year in spinning, left their wheels to work for some weeks in the harvest fields. Other tasks at which women had worked from early times were weeding among the broadcast corn, winnowing, stone gathering, sod-burning and todding, scaling, and crow-keeping.¹ In the Middle Ages they had been thatchers, ditchers and sheep-shearers too, but by the eighteenth century only a few references are to be found of women as assistant thatchers and it was not until

¹ Todding—turning the sods when pared and burnt; scaling—breaking and spreading manure; crow-keeping—bird scaring.

the late war that women's skill in this work was revived and recognised. Most of these tasks were seasonal ones and would only employ a few women occasionally; it was not until the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries that agriculture presented opportunities of more regular employment to any number of women. Then the appearance of the large farm, the more extensive culture of new crops, the wider adoption of improved methods, the more regular weeding and cleaning together with the frequent hoeing of turnips and other root crops, created a great deal of irregular labour of a type that women could do as well as men; hence the gradual growth of a new class of women day labourers.

But at first, improved practices did not keep pace with enclosures; many conservative farmers at the end of the eighteenth century remained unconvinced of the success and desirability of new methods, and therefore in many districts there was still no employment to take the place of that which women had lost in their homes through the disappearance of the commons and small holdings. Unfortunately hand spinning, the most important domestic industry for women of the rural population, was becoming unprofitable and indeed unobtainable at the same time. The consequent lack of employment for women and children just when the labouring classes were beginning to suffer from the rise in prices threw increasing numbers of them upon the poor rates, and was the subject of many complaints from contemporary writers.

Eden, writing at the end of the century, makes frequent reference to this problem. In Lincolnshire, for instance, he says there was very little for women to do; a few were engaged in weeding corn, but in winter there was little or no employment except in spinning, in which the earnings were so extremely low, that scarcely one person in ten would apply for it.¹ In Pembroke, although women assisted in harvesting, weeding and stone picking, their earnings were "very inconsiderable," and employment for labourers' wives and children was much wanted.² This was a district where after enclosure the old rotation of wheat, oats and barley had been continued, and where there had been therefore no increase in the demand for women's labour. In Somerset the wife of a labourer earned by haymaking, todding, scaling and weeding £2 13s. 2d. in the year, or roughly 1s. 0d. a week, but was mainly employed at home in spinning and other family work.³ Arthur Young, in 1786, and Tuke at a later date, made similar remarks on the lack of work for women in certain districts in Yorkshire.⁴ From the information Davies collected in 1787, he estimated that labourers' wives could earn on an average from sixpence to a shilling weekly the year round, which considering the time spent in harvest labour does not work out at a day a week for the rest of the year. In Gloucestershire, the average earnings of a labourer's wife were given as 6d. a week by spinning for 39 weeks, and a total

¹ Eden, *State of the Poor*, vol. ii, pp. 398, 404.

² *Ibid.*, vol. iii, p. 898.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, p. ccc. Appendix.

⁴ Young, *Northern Tour* (1771 ed.), vol. ii, p. 6; Tuke, *North Riding of Yorkshire* (1794), p. 92.

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of £2 11s. 6d. for the other 13 weeks employed in agriculture. Her time was spent in the following manner:¹

	£	s.	d.
Bean or pease setting, for 3 weeks at 7d. a day		10	6
Fruit picking, 2 weeks at 4d.		4	0
Haymaking, 2 weeks at 4d.		4	0
Gleaning, or leasing 6 bushels at 5s. 6d. per bushel	1	13	0
Total	2	11	6

Sometimes earnings were higher, as in thinly populated districts of Durham, where women were accustomed to undertake work done by men in other counties and could sometimes earn as much as 2s. od. weekly. Others again were prevented by family ties from earning anything.² On the whole, therefore, before the new farming began, the earnings of women as day labourers in agriculture, apart from hay and harvest, were almost insignificant.

WOMEN'S WORK AND WAGES AT HARVEST TIME

Women had always assisted in harvest work, since the regular labourers were never sufficient in the days when the entire harvest had to be cut and gathered by hand labour. Although the work was strenuous and carried on through long hours, the harvest field was always associated with fun and merry making, and women who were at other times engaged in industrial work regarded this season "as a relaxation to domestic confinement and less agreeable employment."³ Women as well as men were to be found in the large companies of migratory harvesters, who invaded thinly populated areas where wages were likely to be higher than elsewhere. Occasional references in parish accounts suggest that the overseers sometimes paid the travelling expenses of single women to districts where they could get work for this season.⁴ From the North and West Ridings of Yorkshire, great numbers of men and women came to Malton to be hired by farmers on the Wolds and the eastern districts.⁵ Usually the workers were hired for a month or more according to the requirements of the farmer, who conveyed them "home on horseback," kept them "well with meat and drink," and worked them "almost day and night." In 1764 women in this district were paid 6s. a week, all with "meat, drink, washing and lodging."⁶

The actual work done by women at harvest time varied according

¹ Davies, *Case of Labourers in Husbandry*, p. 162.

² In explaining the low earnings of many labourers' wives Davies says: "These women commonly begin the world with an infant, and are mere nurses for ten or twelve years after marriage, being always either with child, or having a child at the breast; consequently incapable of doing much other work besides the necessary business of their families, such as baking, washing, and the like . . . if in summer they are able to go to harvest work, they must pay some person a shilling a week out of their earnings for looking after their children." *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³ Marshall, *Rural Economy of Yorkshire*, vol. i, pp. 387-9.

⁴ "To Jane Gregory, to bear her charges into the hay country, 2s." *Hitchin Overseers' Accounts* (1730); Hine, *History of Hitchin*, vol. i, p. 233.

⁵ Leatham's *East Riding* (1794), pp. 31-2.

⁶ *Museum Rusticum*, vol. ii, p. 96.

to the custom of the locality and their occupation during the rest of the year. In the North and West, where women did a great deal of the ordinary agricultural work on small holdings, they shared the heaviest labours of the harvest field. In Yorkshire and Lancashire nearly all the reaping was done by women at a considerable saving to the farmer, since women's wages were only half, and sometimes less than half those paid to men for the same time. In the Vale of Pickering (1787), women had 10*d.* a day for reaping, while a man's wage for binding the sheaves was 2*s.* a day.¹ In some parts of Scotland and in Carmarthen and Pembroke, the discrepancy in wages was not so great; the fact that "a good stout woman" could "reap very nearly as much as those men that come to the harvest," was acknowledged by a difference of only 2*d.* a day between the wages of a man and woman.² In districts where women were hired for the entire harvest and boarded in the farm house their wages were usually 5*s.* to 6*s.* a week.³

In the Southern and Eastern Counties where women were more generally engaged in domestic industries such as spinning, lace-making and straw plaiting, the majority took a less strenuous part at harvest time, and did the lighter work of raking, gathering and gleaning. Women who were accustomed to farm labour did a certain amount of reaping, especially in assisting their husbands, but not to the same extent as in the North.⁴ Gleaning over the great open-fields was a much more profitable employment than after enclosure. So great were the "clouds of gleaners" which "strolled about from parish to parish" that in some districts it was necessary for the parish to preserve the gleaning for its own people.⁵ Arthur Young points out that this was often as profitable as actual work in the harvest. In 1791 the gleanings in wheat alone of a woman and three children in Dunmow were worth nearly £5, and, at the price of wheat in 1795, would have been worth more than £7, while the aggregate gleanings of the parish (200 gleaning families), amounted to nearly £400.⁶ He admits that this was above the average, owing to the crop being "root fallen," but reports from other parts of the country show that gleaning was always very well worth while, and explain the statements that in some districts few women were accustomed to reap because they earned more by gleaning.

From the records of agricultural societies which sometimes offered prizes for women's harvest work, the amount a woman could reap alone in any one harvest seems to have averaged between six and eight

¹ According to Marshall, it was rare in this country "to see a sickle in the hand of a man; reaping . . . being almost entirely done by women. Three women and one man make a sett; who of a middling crop do an acre a day." The man's work was to make bands and bind the sheaves as they were cut by women. "Thus wheat which in Surrey would cost 10*s.*—12*s.*, and which in any country I have observed in, would cost 7*s.* or 8*s.*, is here cut for 4*s.* 6*d.* an acre." *Rural Economy of Yorkshire*, vol. i, pp. 387-9.

² Hassall, *Carmarthen* (1792), p. 24; *Pembroke*, (1794), p. 25.

³ Young, *Northern Tour*, vol. ii, p. 4; *Museum Rusticum*, vol. ii, p. 96.

⁴ Vancouver's *Essex* (1795), p. 162; Pearce's *Berkshire* (1794); Young's *Oxfordshire* (1809), p. 318.

⁵ Marshall, *Rural Economy of Norfolk*, vol. i, p. 220.

⁶ Young's *Essex*, vol. i, p. 310.

acres. The Bath and West of England Society in 1800 awarded two guineas to Philadelphia Bateman for reaping eight acres of wheat, and one guinea to Sarah Cook for seven acres one rood. Since on an average a woman reaped about a third of an acre a day this was probably as much as she could accomplish while the harvest lasted. The prize of one guinea awarded by the same society to "Mary Edwards, a young woman of sixteen, for meritorious labour in harvest," shows the early age at which women undertook this strenuous work.¹

In either case, whether a woman's time was spent in working for wages or in gleaning, it was generally assumed at the end of the eighteenth century, that the yearly rent of the labourer's cottage was paid by the harvest labours of his wife and children.

REASONS FOR THE APPEARANCE OF THE NEW DAY-LABOURERS

While harvest work was, till the early part of the nineteenth century, the chief day employment of women in agriculture, there was growing up in the latter half of the eighteenth century, a class of women labourers whose numbers increased rapidly as the new century advanced. There were several reasons for the appearance of this new class of women workers—the inadequacy of the male labourer's wage, the loss of by-industries, the new capitalistic farming with its demands for cheap, irregular labour, and lastly the French Wars which withdrew many men from agricultural work. The increase in the number of women labourers was not apparent in all parts of the country at the same time. In districts where labour was subsidised out of the Poor Rates, and where the system of allowances enabled many to live without actual employment, it was not until after the new Poor Law in 1834 that the increase was specially noticeable.

The first factor in promoting the growth of this new class—the inadequacy of the male labourer's wage—has already been dealt with. It is only necessary to refer back to the household budgets to see what inducement there was for the labourer's wife to work for any small wage that could be obtained. In view of the failure of domestic industries, agriculture was, for the greater part of the rural population, the only possibility. Moreover it was work to which many of them were already accustomed from their previous experience on small holdings and their employment as servants in husbandry.

ATTEMPTS TO PROVIDE AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYMENT FOR DISTRESSED SPINNERS

The introduction of spinning machinery caused the greatest distress in those villages in which women had spent the greater part of their time spinning the yarn sent round by neighbouring manufacturers. For some time after machines were in use hand labour continued; but as competition became keener, the rates for hand labour became less and less, until finally the remuneration for a day of twelve hours spent in spinning amounted only to a few pence. Although the wage earned was almost negligible in comparison with the labour involved, the industry was continued in many districts as least during the winter

¹ *Annals*, vol. xxxviii, p. 110; xxxii, p. 246.

months when no other work was available. Finally, however, it no longer paid the manufacturer to send out his work when it could be done more expeditiously and cheaply in his own manufactory. For those families in rural areas which had been partly dependent on the woollen industry, the only alternatives were parish relief and some form of agricultural work. In some districts where the rise in poor rates due to this and other causes was alarming, the parish officers, in their endeavour to keep down the cost of relief, arranged with a manufacturer to continue the supply of wool to women and children and undertook to pay any loss he might sustain in so doing out of the parish funds. But at most this could only be a temporary expedient and on all sides it was realised that the lack of suitable employment for the wives and daughters of cottagers was an "increasing evil," demanding immediate attention if poor rates were to be kept within limits. Already in some places, while spinning was still available, the low wages had driven women to seek more highly paid work in agriculture during the summer season;¹ but in many districts there was little or nothing women could do in the way of field work in many months of the year, and it was not until spinning failed altogether that landowners and others concerned in the payment of poor rates began to suggest various ways in which agricultural employment might be provided for women and children. In the more advanced farming districts, the drilling instead of broadcasting of certain crops had already been introduced, as had also the setting of wheat by hand, and farmers who had used these methods with success now urged their widespread adoption with the definite aim of giving employment to women and children. A writer in the *Annals of Agriculture* explained that at Tetbury, Gloucestershire, where many women had been engaged in wool spinning, a school of industry had been opened by the parish, but it was proposed as soon as the season would allow "that all the women and children who are of an age proper for it, shall be employed in field work in preference to the house, as well for the sake of their health, as for the benefit of the occupiers of the land." The writer expresses "great hopes that the farmers of the parish may be induced to drill all their turnips, as well as pease and beans, as the hoeing may then be done by the women and children."² Elsewhere to encourage this practice, agricultural societies began to include prizes for women hoers of turnips, for the greatest number of acres hoed, and for the neatest work.

Similarly the dibbling of wheat by hand was advocated as a means of providing employment. Not only was it advantageous in saving seed to the farmer, but, it was argued, the new method could be "a means of subsistence to thousands of women and children at the dead season of the year, when there is a general want of employment. It

¹ In the Fen district of Huntingdon, for example, there was still constant employment in spinning in 1793, but it was said to be "a very indifferent means of employ, and they always prefer out-of-doors work when the season comes on." At Ormsby, in Norfolk, it was stated in 1795, "very little is made of spinning in this neighbourhood at this time, as most of the people in the villages are employed in agriculture"; and again in Durham at the same time, the wage in spinning was stated to be small compared with what women could earn in agriculture. *Annals*, vols. xxi, p. 170; xxvi, p. 15; xxv, p. 662.

² *Annals*, vol. xxxiv, p. 149.

is at this period that most women and children consider themselves as laid up for the winter, and become a burthen upon the father of the family, and in many cases upon the parish. The wife is no longer able to contribute her share towards the weekly expenses. . . . In a kind of despondency she sits down, unable to contribute anything to the general fund of the family, and conscious of rendering no other service to her husband, except that of the mere care of his family."¹ The attitude revealed in this last statement is somewhat astonishing to the modern mind, but as yet, there was a complete lack of appreciation of the value of women's work in the home and in rearing and caring for children.

The increasing amount of work found for women on the new large farms shows the influence of the new crops and cultures in providing day labour for women. Without them, the class of women day labourers could not have been produced; the insufficiency of the man labourer's wage and the loss of domestic industries were additional causes working to the same end, but were only able to produce this effect in conjunction with the new farming and capitalistic enterprise. The simple rotation of crops in the open village offered little scope for day labour, but under the new system at the busy seasons of planting, hoeing and gathering crops, the regular labourers of the farm were insufficient and if their numbers had been increased they could not all have been employed steadily at other seasons of the year. Moreover, the new farmer took his business seriously; he was prepared to sink capital in his enterprise in an endeavour to provide for the new markets, but in return he looked for big profits on his capital, and in order to reap the greatest advantage on expenditure it was necessary that the cost of production should be as low as possible. In the women of the agricultural community he found his supply of cheap irregular labour; the new crops provided work they could easily do, and the loss of economic independence made it necessary for them to take whatever opportunities occurred of increasing the family income.

THE TASKS OF WOMEN LABOURERS

It was soon found that women could be employed to hoe turnips and other root crops at a much cheaper rate than was being paid to men for this work. In Northumberland, when turnips were first introduced they were hoed by gardeners and other men at "extravagant wages," and an attempt was soon made to reduce the cost by employing women. "The late ingenious Mr. Ilderton," states the Report of 1797, "had the merit of first reducing the price of hoeing, by teaching boys, girls, and women, to perform the work equally as well, if not better than by men. . . . In a short time they became expert hoers; and in a few years all the turnips of the county were hoed by women and boys at half the expence, and better than by men."² By the end of the eighteenth century the practice of employing women for turnip culture had spread to most districts.

Agricultural improvements were as much concerned with increasing

¹ *Reports of the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor*, vol. iii, p. 91.

² Bailey and Cully, *Northumberland (1797)*, p. 81.

the yield of old crops as introducing new ones, and to this end not only did drilling and hand sowing supersede the broadcasting of crops, but far greater attention was paid to hoeing and cleaning than previously. When Marshall visited Gloucestershire in 1789 he found beans growing as wild as the weeds among which they were hidden; peas were lost among poppies and marigolds, while wheat and barley crops were choked by couch-grass and thistles and entwined with bindweed. The yield of wheat was appallingly low, and it is not surprising that strenuous efforts were made to introduce the use of the hoe to backward farmers. During the war when the food supply was in danger and increased crops were an absolute necessity, the practice of hand-hoeing and weeding corn extended rapidly. Here too women were increasingly employed, not only as an encouragement to industry, says Marshall, but, he adds significantly, "what is equally beneficial to the farmer, the wages for Men's labour are lowered."¹ By 1807 women had almost displaced men in corn hoeing in Gloucestershire and were being employed to a great extent in other parts of the country.²

The setting of crops was also work which could be undertaken by women and many of them found employment in setting peas, beans, potatoes and wheat, and in transplanting cabbages, madder, rape and other plants. For bean planting each woman was provided with a "setting pin" and a "tuckin" or satchel hung round the waist in which the beans were carried. Payment was made either by the bushel or the acre, but the former method was considered by some farmers to be injudicious, since it subjected the worker to the temptation of "clumping" or dropping more than one bean into each hole. Readers of *Our Village* may remember Miss Mitford's description of the long fatiguing day and stooping position of the bean-setters, and her opinion: "It seems to me, considering the temptation, that not to clump is to be at the very pinnacle of virtue." An expert planter, however, could work with great rapidity, and at 20d. a bushel, a good hand in Worcestershire (1794) earned from 14d. to 20d. and a quart of cider a day. In Gloucestershire, Rudge estimated the average wage in 1807 as from 10d. to 14d. a day.³

The harvesting of root crops was also work in which large numbers of women came to be employed. On farms where such crops were extensive the main business of women was to gather the roots after they had been ploughed up, cut and clean them and in some cases pack them for market.⁴ Elsewhere it was customary to dig or fork up such

¹ *Rural Economy of Gloucestershire*, vol. i, p. 100.

² Rudge's *Gloucestershire*, p. 116; Young's *Norfolk*, p. 350; Farey's *Derbyshire*, vol. ii, p. 99.

³ Pomeroy's *Worcestershire*, Appendix II, p. 4; Rudge's *Gloucestershire*, p. 125.

⁴ The following entries in the accounts of a farm belonging to the Marquis of Salisbury give some idea of the large numbers of women employed in this work: Expense of cropping 17 acres of land in 1795:

	£	s.	d.
4 Horses five days ploughing up carrots	3	0	0
Women for picking up and cutting ditto	11	3	6
Women cleaning parsnips	7	0	0
Women cleaning and cutting beetroot	2	0	0

The rate of pay for each woman was probably 6d. or 9d. per day. Young's *Hertfordshire*, p. 234.

roots as potatoes, while turnips and others were pulled by hand. Women engaged in potato digging considered it one of the most strenuous occupations and sometimes received higher rates of pay. Turnip pulling was almost worse since the hands were often reduced to a raw and blistered state by continued friction.

Weeding, stone gathering and meadow dressing were occupations in which a few women had been employed from very early times, but it was not until the latter half of the eighteenth century that this sort of work became in any way general and English agriculture became characterised by its neatness. All kinds of crops, and roots particularly, were submitted to numerous cleanings by hand, hoe or weeding hook.¹ In dressing meadows, stones and wood were assiduously gathered off and dung and mole hills were spread repeatedly throughout the year. Weeding not only provided employment for women in farm labour; they were also engaged in market gardens, and entries in household accounts point to their having been employed fairly frequently in the gardens of private families.² Arthur Young found women working in the market gardens in the Vale of Evesham in 1768, and at the same time in the "kitchen" gardens at Hammersmith, every twenty acres were said to employ four women in the winter and twenty in the summer at five shillings a week.³

Thirty years later the fruit and vegetable gardens of Kensington, Hammersmith, Chiswick, Brentford and Twickenham extended over three thousand acres of land, and a whole army of women was employed in setting and producing the crops. Their time was spent in digging, hoeing, trenching, harrowing, planting, and gathering and marketing fruit and vegetables which were carried daily to London for sale in the season. Both men and women were employed in the winter but with the spring their numbers were greatly increased. In 1807 Middleton considered that the people employed in summer numbered at least 30,000, the majority of whom were women.⁴ Many of them were Welsh women who made a yearly journey to London on foot in the spring, and returned home with their earnings at the end of the season. "The number of women (mostly from North Wales)," says Middleton, "who are employed by the farmers and gardeners round London, during every summer season, in weeding and making hay, in gathering green pease and beans, in picking fruits, and carrying strawberries and other tender fruit to market is astonishing. Their industry is unequalled in Britain, or perhaps in the world. The fruit women will labour several hours in the garden, and go to and from the London markets twice a day, though at from four to seven miles distance."⁵

¹ A single crop of carrots in 1769 provided employment for women weeding as follows:

May.	20 women weeding 4 days at 6d.
June.	20 women weeding 4 days at 6d.
July.	10 women weeding 6 days at 6d.

Young, *Eastern Tour*, vol. i, p. 364.

² To Mary Norton for weeding 5 Days and $\frac{1}{2}$ at 6d. pd. 2s. 9d.

To Ditto for allowance for Beer at 1½d. pd. 0s. 9d.

To Eliz. Mace for weeding 5 Days and $\frac{1}{2}$ at 6d. pd. 2s. 9d. . . .

Parson Woodforde's *Diary*, vol. ii, June 14, 1783.

³ Young, *Northern Tour* (1771 ed.), vol. iii, pp. 312, 361-2.

⁴ Middleton's *Middlesex* (1807), pp. 323-5. ⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 497-8.

Such fruits as apples, pears, cherries, plums, walnuts, raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries and currants were gathered by the measure and carried to London by the journey. Their hours of labour were in the summer from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and in winter from light to dark; "but the price of their labour," says Foot, in 1794, "is only half of what is paid for the same work to their fellow labourers of the other sex."¹ In summer they had the doubtful privilege of working over hours, for which they were paid in proportion to their regular wages. Considering the long journeys which some of them had to make with their fruit, they must have availed themselves of this opportunity. "A woman is only paid 6d.," says Eden, in 1796, for carrying a very heavy basket of fruit from Ealing or Brentford to Covent Garden, near 9 miles. They, however, sometimes make two trips in a day."² When working in the gardens, women had (1807) 1s. 0d. a day in summer and 10d. in winter.³

WAR-TIME EMPLOYMENT

Although it is difficult to form any precise estimate of the extent to which women were employed in day labour in the latter half of the eighteenth century, it is certain that their numbers were increasing towards the end of the century and equally certain that the Napoleon 'c War was responsible for a further increase in their numbers. It has been estimated that one in every six male adults was engaged in the war either by land or sea,⁴ and judging from the amount of relief which some agricultural parishes received for men serving in the county militia, it is probable that a big proportion of the forces was drawn from agricultural districts. While this would cause a certain shortage of labour, the great increase of arable farming to satisfy the corn demand added to the deficiency. Farmers in some districts were "obliged to hunt for labourers,"⁵ and were hard put to it to find as many as they required. They were, therefore, only too glad to employ women and children whenever possible and in districts where women could still earn more by domestic industries than by field work, we find farmers complaining that they could not get enough women to work for them. Of Buckinghamshire where lace and straw plaiting gave better remuneration, St. John Priest says: "The consequence is, that the farmer suffers: no woman nor young persons will work in the fields; and the fact is, that but in very few places in Buckinghamshire were women to be seen in the fields."⁶ At the same time the domestic manufacture of shirt buttons in Dorset, excited dissatisfaction among the farmers there. "They cannot get women to weed corn for 9d. a day, when they can earn 12d. or 18d. in button making," says the *Reviewer*.⁷ But there were few districts where domestic industries were still profitable enough to compete with agriculture, and for other

¹ Foot's *Middlesex* (1794), p. 29.

² Eden, vol. ii, p. 419.

³ Middleton's *Middlesex*, p. 498.

⁴ Lord Ernle, *English Farming Past and Present*, p. 316.

⁵ P.P. *Report on Agriculture*, 1833, v, p. 243.

⁶ *Buckinghamshire* (1813), pp. 81-2.

⁷ Stevenson's *Dorset* (1812), p. 453.

parts of the country there is evidence to show that women were very generally employed during the war. Witnesses before the Lords' Committee on the Poor Laws in 1831, and before the Committee on Agriculture in 1833, referring to conditions during the war, stated that there was then "constant employment for women, and for boys at an early age, which lightened the burden upon the heads of the families"; and although prices were higher, the condition of the labourer was better because wives and children "were regularly employed during those years."¹ One farmer giving evidence stated that at that time on a farm on 360 acres he "generally employed from sixteen to twenty women every day for farm work."²

A good deal of this extra war-time labour was work which women could do as well as men and had it not been for the agricultural depression which followed the war, a greater proportion of women would doubtless have continued in employment. As it was, the cheapness of their labour caused them to be preferred to men in some types of work, even where men were thrown out of employment in consequence. In the heavier types of farm work this was not likely to happen, since cheapness was no compensation for lack of strength. The statement, however, that women employed on heavy jobs made way for men immediately after the peace, is interesting in showing that during the war women undertook all kinds of work and not merely the lighter field labours.³

THE EXTENT OF WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT, 1780-1815

It would be of considerable interest if the gradual increase in the number of women labourers through the latter years of the eighteenth century up to the end of the war could be followed, but no statistics are available to show the proportion of women employed or the amount of work they were able to obtain. Opportunities depended upon the crops grown and the custom of the district, while conditions of employment in one parish were often quite different from those prevailing in the next. In the absence of statistics it is impossible to make statements of any accuracy concerning women's agricultural employment at this period, and the only indications of its extent are the vague generalizations sometimes made by the Reporters to the Board of Agriculture. Thus, in the North Riding (1794), "the industry of the female sex" in agriculture was extolled as "an excellent example to those of most of the counties south of it"; besides work in harvest, the turnip and potato crops, much of the light farm work was said to be done by them.⁴ In Northumberland (1790), it was stated, "our girls are all employed in agriculture."⁵ The Reporters of Cumberland (1792), found women performing tasks which were ordinarily the work of men in other counties and were particularly disgusted to find that "along the coast, more than half the carts are driven by females, and

¹ *Op. cit.* P.P. 1831, viii, pp. 60, 65, 68, 144. P.P. 1833, v, p. 531.

² *Ibid.* P.P. 1833, v, p. 11.

³ P.P. Report on Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, 1843, xii, p. 27.

⁴ Tuke's *North Riding of Yorks*, p. 94.

⁵ *Annals*, vol. xiv, p. 471.

many of these under 20 years of age, with as fine forms and complexions as ever nature bestowed on the softer sex."¹ Of the Fen district of Lincolnshire (1799) it was said that the state of the land prevented women having that "general employment they ought to have; but besides weeding and haymaking, they are employed in collecting the sods from off breach land, picking up twitch to burn, knocking about muck, spudding of thistles, and gathering, spreading, and turning of flax."² In Rutland (1809) agriculture was the chief employment of women in the summer.³ In Cornwall (1811), "the women everywhere in the county, perform a large share of the rural labour, particularly the harvest work, weeding the corn, hoeing turnips, potatoes, etc., attending the threshing machines; by the latter business they have more employment in the winter than they formerly had."⁴ The women of South Wales, Lipscomb tells us (1792), shared "the most arduous exertions and business of husbandry, and they are very commonly seen either driving the horses affixed to the plough, or leading those which drew the harrow."⁵ Similar references to women's employment in various branches of agriculture were made by the Reporters in other counties, suggesting that women were being employed in increasing numbers, especially where new cultures were being adopted.

More definite information as to the actual number of days worked a year by some women labourers is available from the records of a few agricultural societies. The Sussex Society, in 1798, for instance, published the following awards made to the wives or widows of labourers who had done the greatest number of days' work in husbandry between October 1797 and 1798:⁶

- £4 4s. od. to Mary Blunt, widow, for 185 days.
- £3 3s. od. to Mary Carver, wife, for 124 days.
- £2 2s. od. to Mary Taylor, wife, for 112 days.
- £1 1s. od. to Mary May, wife (aged 75 years) for 86 days.

Similar awards made by the Essex Society in 1801 had a higher average; awards of one guinea each being made to the wives of four labourers and one militia man for 200, 163, 150, 102 days respectively.⁷

For the greater proportion of women labourers in this period, apart from the special system which existed in the North, work was irregular. They were hired for a few days at a time—it might be for the planting of a particular crop—and then would come a period of inactivity until weeding or hoeing was required. In some districts and on a few farms, women were employed as labourers steadily throughout the year at a weekly wage. In Cleveland (1809-1815), the wages of women labourers were 4s. 6d. a week,⁸ and on a large farm at Corsley, Wiltshire, four women were working during the first decade of the nineteenth century

¹ Bailey and Cully, *Cumberland*, p. 184.

² Young's *Lincolnshire*, p. 398, n.

³ Parkinson's *Rutland*.

⁴ Worgan's *Cornwall*, p. 159.

⁵ *Journey Into South Wales*, pp. 111-2.

⁶ *Annals*, vol. xxxii, pp. 85-6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. xxxviii, p. 21.

⁸ Publications of the Labourers' Friend Society, p. 303.

at a weekly wage of 4s. 6d. After 1830, when the farm was larger, their numbers were increased to six.¹

THE BONDAGE SYSTEM

The women of Northumberland and Durham were perhaps more regularly employed in day labour than those of any other district, due to what was known as the "bondage system."² In the thinly populated areas each farm was dependent on its own resources for labour, and was therefore provided with a number of cottages in which the labourers (locally hinds), hired by the year, were housed. Wages were paid in kind, and included so many bushels of oats, barley, wheat, peas and beans, potato ground and cow pasture, and so much wool for the women to spin into yarn, which was either knitted into stockings or sent to be woven into blankets. In return for these advantages the hind was bound to work for a year, and in addition, to provide a woman labourer known as a bondager, to work at daily rates whenever she was required by the farmer. Usually the bondager was some member of the hind's family; his daughter, sister, or more rarely his wife, who was often prevented by her family from constant work in the fields. If the hind had a young family and no one who could serve as a bondager, he had to hire a woman, board her, and pay her yearly, or half-yearly wages, while from the farmer he received wages for as many days as she was required. These daily wages for the bondager, being part of the hind's conditions, were lower than the usual rate and any other woman in the family, if employed, received the customary daily rates.

Descriptions of the bondage system at the end of the eighteenth century give no indication as to when this custom of supplying a woman labourer for regular work originated. It seems hardly possible that it existed in 1768, since Arthur Young who was then in the district, does not mention it, but merely says that the labourer's conditions included a money payment of 5s. for his wife's work in hay and harvest.³ A statement in the Report of 1843 suggests that the custom was a fairly recent one: "Owing to the thinness of the population, the great farmers who have suddenly sprung up on the borders find some such system necessary in order to carry out their agricultural operations."⁴ Again, in a letter written to the Poor Law Commissioners, the work of women and children in the North was attributed to "the early introduction and extensive adoption of the turnip husbandry."⁵ As, according to the Reporters of Northumberland, women were first engaged in turnip culture about 1770, the system would seem to have been introduced along with the new cultures and the large farm; the one provided, and the other demanded, women's employment.

Although the more extensive culture of turnips and potatoes gave

¹ Davis (M. F.), *Life in an English Village*, p. 55.

² For descriptions of the bondage system, see *P.P. Report on Poor Laws* (1834), xxxvii, pp. 462 ff.; *P.P. Lords' Commission on Poor Laws* (1831), viii, p. 128; *P.P. Report on Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, Northumberland.

³ Young's *Northern Tour* (1771 ed.), vol. iii, p. 68.

⁴ *P.P.* 1843, xii, p. 298.

⁵ *P.P. Poor Laws*, 1834, xxxvii, p. 52c.

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more regular employment to women in the North than elsewhere, yet wherever new crops were grown and improved methods adopted, the employment of women as day labourers rapidly increased. Apart from the busier times of planting and harvesting crops, there was a good deal of intermediate labour on which women were employed. Arthur Young estimated that as a result of new crops and drill husbandry, the farmer needed five times as many hands in summer as in winter.¹ He therefore desired to have at hand a supply of labour upon which he could depend just at busy periods without the obligation of providing employment for the rest of the year. His problem was solved partly by the employment of women and children, and had they not been available it is probable that much of the work demanded by the new cultures would have remained undone, or that the expense of employing extra men would have deterred many from adopting new methods. But at the same time, the change in the economic position of women resulting from the agrarian revolution and the decline of rural industries compelled them to accept any opportunity of supplementing, in however slight a degree, the inadequate wages of their husbands. Thus the farmer's demand for cheap occasional labour was met by the appearance of the woman day labourer.

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¹ Young, *Rural Economy*, pp. 335, 336.

CHAPTER IV

AGRICULTURAL DEPRESSION AND THE POOR LAW

It has generally been assumed that women's day labour in agriculture did not exist to any extent until after 1834, when the abolition of allowances in aid of wages paid under the old Poor Law brought into employment the wage earning powers of the entire family. But the details given in the last chapter show that the exploitation of women's labour in connection with large farming and the insolvency of the labourer had already begun at the end of the eighteenth century, and that in some districts in the first decade of the new century the majority of the women of the rural population were already employed in agriculture—a state of affairs for which the war was partly responsible. With the peace came a long period of agricultural depression in which the farmer's distress led to unemployment and the pauperization of the labouring classes. The decrease in women's employment during this period, in consequence of the general unemployment in all branches of agriculture, seems to have given rise to the suggestion that their appearance in agricultural work after 1834 was a new feature and primarily due to the new Poor Law. The number of women workers undoubtedly increased after that date, but so did the number of men who again found regular employment, especially in those counties where the facility in obtaining allowances had caused the demoralization of the labouring classes to be most complete. The necessity for women to contribute to the family income was not a new thing in 1834; their help had been as essential from the end of the eighteenth century—when the increase in the number of women labourers is first noticeable—up to the end of the war. When the system of allowances became more general, however, in those districts where it was adopted there was neither the same necessity nor opportunity for women to work as before, since the poor rates either made up the labourer's wages according to the needs of his family or gave him unemployment relief. Afterwards, when he was again entirely dependent on his own inadequate wages, there was nothing for it but that his wife and children should endeavour to make up for the lost allowances and obtain employment again. The position, therefore, was not a new one. Moreover, even during the depression a certain amount of women's labour went on. In some districts, especially in the North, it never ceased; while in other parts of the country the amount varied very greatly. Much depended on the way in which the old Poor Law was administered; it is therefore of interest to examine its influence and its effects during this period of agricultural distress on women's employment and their economic position.

AGRICULTURAL DISTRESS

The depression began in 1814; from then on to 1834 agriculture was intimately connected with poor relief. Employment was either found or provided by the parish officers and wages were paid or supplemented by the overseers. The causes of the distress—land speculation and inflation of prices during the war—are well known. Within two years (1814–1816) the effects were felt in every branch of agriculture. The inquiry conducted by the Board of Agriculture in 1816 showed that in spite of a 25 per cent. reduction in rents, there were farms vacant for which no tenants could be found; others were about to be relinquished and landlords who were unable to carry on the farms themselves were obliged to allow the land to fall out of cultivation. But while rents were falling and profits were non-existent the poor rates rose steadily and threw additional burdens on the land. Farmers could neither employ nor pay their labourers who were consequently thrown on the parish, and the numbers of unemployed were added to by the men disbanded from the army and navy and by the thousands of industrial workers who also lost their occupations at the end of the war.¹ In the small country towns trades-people suffered badly from the inability of farmers to pay their way and from their drastic reduction of expenditure on all sides. "Their daughters," says the Agricultural Report of 1816, "come no longer to the milliners and dancing masters, etc., who have thus lost by far their best customers."²

For the labourer who had barely managed to struggle through the difficult days of scarcity and high prices during the war, the agricultural depression spelt disaster. The fall in prices was of little benefit to him, since it was accompanied by unemployment and a reduction of wages due to farming losses and the overstocked labour market. Some few made their way into industrial towns where employment seemed more likely, and some who themselves remained on the land sent their children to industrial employment.³ The greater number, however, had no alternative but to remain where they were and become recipients of parish pay, either in the form of supplemented wages or relief.

THE OLD POOR LAW

In the early years of the reign of George III various alterations had been made in the administration of the Poor Law. The Act of 1722 (9 Geo. I. c. 7) which had established a workhouse test for poor relief was modified by Gilbert's Act of 1782 (22 Geo. III. c. 83), which, in order to relieve winter unemployment, allowed the able-bodied poor to be maintained outside the workhouse. In any parish which adopted the Act, the unemployed could apply to the parish officers, who were obliged to find them work and maintain them out of their earnings. Any surplus which remained had to be handed over to the

¹ *Agricultural State of the Kingdom* (1816), p. 71.

² *Ibid.*, Part II, p. 31.

³ In Birmingham, for instance, there was said to be "a great influx of persons from the country" in the three years following the peace. *P.P. Lords' Commission on Poor Laws* (1818), v, pp. 176, 177, 179.

poor, while if their wage were insufficient for adequate maintenance the deficiency might be made up out of the rates. Thus where the Act was adopted there was no longer the necessity for the poor to exert themselves in seeking for employment or the incentive to retain what they had. Without any effort on their own part the able-bodied poor in future were sure of employment from the parish or in any case of maintenance. A further step in the pauperization of the labourer was the payment of allowances from the rates to supplement inadequate wages. This was an extension of an old seventeenth century practice adopted to meet the rising prices at the end of the century. Such allowances in the seventeenth century had sometimes been given to labourers in full work, whose wages were too low to support a large family of children,¹ but it was now applied far more generally. Rather than raise wages, which might be difficult to lower when prices had fallen again, the magistrates at Speenhamland drew up a scale to supplement earnings from the rates, in proportion to the price of bread and the size of a man's family. The example was followed in other counties, with the result that where this system was adopted, employers reduced the rates of pay, knowing that the necessary additions would be made up from the poor rates. Thus they reduced their own costs until it became almost impossible for a married labourer, even by working full time and exerting the greatest industry and economy, to support his family without aid.² Hence the rise in poor rates in such parishes was not caused by any lack of industry or effort on the part of the poor, but by the fact that they only received from the parish officers what they ought to have received in wages.

The Speenhamland scale was followed the next year by the Act of 36 George II. c. 23, which made it compulsory to give out-door relief to the able-bodied and prepared the way for the laxity of administration and indiscriminate relief which proved a veritable curse to the labourer. Earlier in the century in attempts to deal with winter unemployment parish officers had sent labourers on "the Rounds" to solicit work, and they had been paid partly by the employer and partly by the parish. In consequence of the new Act the practice became more common, until, when the agricultural depression started, large numbers of men, and even women and children, were sent on the rounds, auctioned to the highest bidder, or employed on parish work. The parish sometimes paid part, sometimes the entire wage.

The full consequences of these relaxations in Poor Law administration were not apparent until after 1813. During the war the enormous increase in arable farming provided more employment. Agricultural wages rose, and although they failed to keep pace with prices, the employment of women and children enabled the poorer classes with difficulty to meet the high cost of provisions.³ Only during winter

¹ Marshall, D., *English Poor in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 104.

² "I believe that the rate of payment of labourers has been reduced so low of late years that it is impossible for a labourer who is married and has a family (with the greatest energy, assiduity, and economy on the part of himself and his wife) to support his family without aid from the parish rates." *P.P. Report on Labourers' Wages* (1824), vi, p. 33. Evidence of Rev. P. Hunt.

³ *P.P. Lords' Commission on Poor Laws* (1831), viii, p. 114.

unemployment were the rounds and allowance systems used. From 1813-1834, however, the Poor Law was used to its fullest extent and the distressed farmer by employing only rate-aided labour was able to reduce his working costs to a minimum. The abuses revealed by the Commission of Inquiry in 1832 showed that the relaxed administration had resulted in the demoralization of labourers and employers alike.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND PARISH OCCUPATIONS FOR WOMEN

In the early days of the depression farmers attempted to meet the falling prices with a drastic cutting down of expenses. There were, therefore, reductions both in wages, which could be made up from the poor rates, and the number of labourers employed. Both economies affected the employment of women. At the peace many labourers' families were in fairly regular employment owing to the increased demand for labour of all kinds during the war, when farmers had been only too glad to employ women and children.¹ But the supply of labour now exceeded the demand, and moreover, the low cost of women's labour, its chief advantage in the past, was no longer so important a consideration. By means of Poor Law allowances, men's wages could be reduced until they were as cheap or cheaper than women's.² They were therefore employed in place of the latter on the lowest paid work, which had come to be regarded as women's work. In Sussex, in 1816, for example, "strong able men" were "employed in picking stones, etc., which would otherwise be done by women and children, for whom no employment can now be found."³ In Cumberland, as a result of the distress, wherever the supply of labour exceeded the demand, wages were reduced and consequently "much fewer women and children" were employed.⁴ The reduction in labour had the same effect. Farmers economised by employing men occasionally instead of all the year round, and avoided undertakings that required much labour. In addition to the land that fell out of cultivation altogether, many corn growers, in view of the low prices, laid down land in fallow instead of planting with green crops, which lessened considerably the amount of weeding and hoeing available for women. In Scotland, where the retrenchment of farmers was concerned more with the numbers they employed than with a reduction in wages, the result was the same; "the number of women and children usually employed in hoeing, weeding, and other light work, are much decreased."⁵ At the same time many women previously employed as servants on farms, now swelled the ranks of the unemployed. Since farmers engaged as few hands as possible, fewer women were hired at the Statute Fairs. Those who remained unemployed added to the distress of their families

¹ P.P. *Lords' Commission on Poor Laws* (1831), viii, pp. 60, 61, 65, 68. P.P. *Report on Agriculture* (1833), v, pp. 243, 531.

² At North Aston (Oxon.), for example, a man was working for a farmer at 9d. a week, while the parish made up his wage to 5s. 9d. *First Report Poor Law Commissioners* (1835), xxxv, p. 129.

³ *Agricultural State of the Kingdom* (1816), Part ii, p. 57.

⁴ P.P. *Report on Agricultural Distress* (1821), ix, p. 62.

⁵ *Agricultural State of the Kingdom* (1816), Part ii, p. 134.

at home ; in some districts, particularly in Lancashire and Yorkshire, they were able to get factory labour, while in Somerset, the extension of the glove trade round Yeovil provided industrial work at home for women who had previously been on the farms.¹

One of the worst features of the depression was the substitution of occasional for regular employment. When a farmer could obtain from the parish an unlimited supply of labour for which he had only to pay in part, it is not to be wondered at that regular labourers were discharged as superfluous, and as soon as they had been ordered to receive a parish allowance, were received back into employment.² This system gave the farmer all the hands he required during the summer months, without the necessity of retaining them during the winter. There was, therefore, widespread unemployment from the end of harvest until spring, and the parish had either to provide work, or leave men and women to subsist in idleness on relief. The most usual form of work provided by the parish was on the roads and in stone quarries where women as well as men were employed. Sometimes the parish contracted with a road surveyor for the employment of all the surplus labourers, in which case the whole family was usually employed. James McAdam, giving evidence before the Committee on Labourers' Wages in 1824 said : " I have a great number of instances of men with no less than ten children, and the wife, being wholly employed on the turnpike roads. . . . His sons and himself lift the road, the smaller boys pick the stones, and the wife and girls rake the road and keep it in order afterwards . . . and I have a great number of similar instances."³ Besides making the roads, a great number of women and children were employed in breaking stones and flints during the winter months.⁴ In some places women were sent with men to the stone quarries. In Somerset they were paid by the overseers at the rate of 8d. a day for this work, but the wage was supplemented according to the size of their families.⁵

CONTINUED EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

From accounts of the numbers of men unemployed, and the low wages of others, it might be supposed that women's labour in agriculture ceased altogether during the depression. But there is ample evidence to the contrary. Witnesses before various Parliamentary Inquiries both in connection with the distressed state of agriculture and the Poor Laws made fairly frequent reference to the employment of women,⁶ and weekly as well as daily wages were quoted, showing that in some places women were in regular employment. As time went on and farmers gradually grew accustomed to the new conditions and small men were replaced by others with greater capital, the amount of employment for women seems to have increased. In 1833, when returns were made from all parishes concerning the work of women

¹ *P.P. Report on Agriculture* (1833), v, p. 236.

² *P.P. Report on Labourers' Wages* (1824), vi, p. 42.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵ *P.P. Report on Agricultural Distress* (1821), ix, p. 186.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38 ; *Report . . . on Relief . . . from Poor Rates* (1828), iv, p. 21.

and children, it was shown that although women's labour had decreased in amount since the war years, they were still employed in some districts in almost every county, to an extent which varied from a little summer and harvest labour to periods of half the year and more.

There seems to have been little, if any, diminution in the number of women employed at harvest time during the depression. Nearly all the parish returns to the Poor Law Inquiry in 1833 state that women were engaged at harvest time, even in the Southern Counties where there was the greatest amount of unemployment and where the payment of wages out of the poor rate was carried to its greatest extent. A few rare instances of unemployment during harvest are to be found, but in Sussex, apparently one of the worst counties so far as "surplus" labourers were concerned, neither men nor women were unemployed in harvest,¹ and the average earnings of a woman in Sussex, "particularly at haytime and harvest," were in 1826, £5 4s.² In Kent, where unemployment during the winter months was equally bad, the demand for labour during the summer was greater than the supply and farmers were glad to have Irish labour as well as their own.³ There was, therefore, work for women, especially when their husbands were engaged on task work. The latter system sometimes explains why women were working when men, unable to find work, were supported by the parish. If a good labourer could obtain task work, he could employ his wife and children to assist him, and the family wage would be nearly double the usual daily rates. But where the scale system was in operation and labour was very cheap, farmers were not inclined to give task work; nor were labourers likely to take it, unless offered at extravagant wages. They knew that whatever their earnings the parish would make up the sum required for the support of their families, and there was therefore no incentive either for women and children to work, or for men to undertake the extra exertion entailed in task work.⁴

Besides harvest work, women in most districts did a little summer labour of some kind, which varied in amount from casual labour to more regular employment on light soils throughout the spring and summer. The usual rates of pay were from 8d. to 10d. per day; in Berkshire the earnings of women and children in 1830 were stated to be "considerable,"⁵ and the average amount earned in most counties seems to have been from 2s. to 4s. weekly, with more in harvest. Parish allowances in the case of single women were rarely sufficient to make idleness preferable to employment, as was sometimes the case with men where the income derived from the parish for nominal work actually exceeded that of the independent labourer. There was not, therefore, the same tendency to demoralization and women who received only 1s. 6d. or 2s. weekly from the parish found it to their advantages to get employment at 10d. a day when obtainable. In the case of widows, where earnings made an addition to their income and nothing was deducted in consequence by the overseers, there was the same

¹ *P.P. Report on Emigration* (1826), iv, p. 115.

² *P.P. Report on Emigration* (1826-7), v, p. 48.

³ *P.P. Poor Laws* (1834), xxviii, p. 875A.

⁴ *P.P. Lords' Commission on Poor Laws* (1818), v, p. 122.

⁵ *P.P. Lords' Commission on Poor Laws* (1831), viii, p. 186.

incentive to employment ;¹ when, however, earnings were subtracted from parish pay, the opposite was the case.

THE EFFECTS OF POOR LAW ADMINISTRATION ON WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

In spite of distress and unemployment, therefore, there was a certain amount of work available for women during this period of depression, particularly during the summer months. The amount varied greatly from district to district according to the state of agriculture and the relative distress of the occupiers. But this was not the only factor in determining whether or no they should be employed. While in some places women were in fairly regular employment, in adjacent parishes with apparently the same conditions and the same opportunities, few, if any women, were working at all. In others again where nearly the whole male population was out of employment and doing parish work on the roads, women had full time agricultural work. While the employment of women is easily understandable during the summer when there was work for all, it is more difficult to see why they should be employed in preference to men, who, in consequence of unemployment were receiving full time relief from the parish. Hitherto women's work had been chiefly extra occasional work and they had not replaced men to any extent. The only explanation of these different conditions appears to be in the administration of the poor law. The way in which the allowance system was applied in any particular parish, the laxity of officials, and the relative demoralization of the labouring classes, were all determining factors in women's employment, and unusual circumstances are sometimes explained by an inquiry into the Poor Law administration of the district.

A study of the information amassed by the Commissioners on the practical operation of the Poor Laws, reveals the most amazing variety of management which existed between different parishes, and often in adjacent districts which had apparently the same conditions and problems. In one parish the allowance system would be carried to extremes and wages in consequence be so low, that even a single man's earnings had to be made up to scale. In the next there might be no allowance at all except for children over a certain number. Thus unemployed labourers in one parish receiving allowances from the rates, would refuse to move into the next where there might be a demand for labour, because in so doing they would leave a "good" parish with allowances, for a "bad" one without.² Under such conditions employment for both men and women naturally varied from parish to parish. In a few areas the abolition of allowances was accompanied by improved management and better conditions of labour. But such improvements often had no effect beyond the parish boundaries. Surrounding parishes continued to be overwhelmed with enormous rates. The fact that overseers and members of vestries, either as farmers, tradesmen, or owners of cottages were sometimes benefitting

¹ P.P. Lords' Commission . . . on Poor Law Amendment Act (1837-8), xix p. 134.

² P.P. Poor Laws (1833), xxxii, p. 271.

by the enormous sums spent in subsidising wages, or in relief in kind, helps to explain the continuance of high rates in some places and to account for the total lack of organisation and principle in administering the Poor Law.

The scale system which placed the industrious labourer at a disadvantage with the indolent was the most demoralizing feature of the old Poor Law.¹ Where this was applied, the able-bodied poor in nearly all parishes received assistance to a varying extent in respect of their families. Often no inquiries were made into circumstances to discover whether relief were necessary or no; it was simply paid in accordance with the regular scale. In this way the payment of "head-money" as it was called, acted as a discouragement to industry,² and was not without its influence on the employment of women. Where wages were made up by the parish according to the size of the family the actual earnings became a matter of indifference. Thus a man in full work with a large family might be entitled to 15s. a week, of which he himself if fully employed might earn 10s. If his family worked therefore, it was rather for the benefit of the parish than for themselves, since the earnings of wife and children simply reduced the allowance from the overseers. Moreover, the worthless labourer out of employment, or working "nominally" for the parish, received the same income (provided he had the same family) as the man who worked hard all the week for a farmer and had his wages supplemented by the parish.³ It is little wonder that labourers became indifferent to employment. In the words of a Commissioner, "Under the operation of the scale system, idleness, improvidence, or extravagance

¹ Some idea of how the scales operated is obtained from the two following examples. The Berkshire scale is that originally drawn up at Speenhamland in 1795. Income was calculated according to the rise in the price of the loaf from 1s., 1s. 1d., etc., to 2s.

Income should be for	A man	A single woman	Man and wife	Man, wife & 1 child	Man, wife & 2 chn.
	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.
When the gallon loaf is 1s. . .	3 0	2 0	4 6	6 0	7 6
When the loaf is 2s.	5 0	3 0	7 6	10 0	12 0

For each additional child 1s. 6d. was added when the loaf was at 1s., and 2s. 6d. when it was 2s. Hasbach, *History of English Agricultural Labourer*, p. 182, quoting Eden.

The Huntingdon scale gives fuller details of the allowances to women. The following sums were ordered for September, 1832, and varied a little according to the price of flour.

	s.	d.
Single woman, working for the parish	2	6
Ditto, not working	2	0
Woman with one child, whether legitimate or illegitimate	3	6
Ditto with two children	4	6
Ditto with three children	5	6
Single man, under 20, working and finding his own lodging	4	6
Man and wife	6	6
Ditto with one child	7	0
Ditto with two children	7	6
Ditto with three children	7	11
Ditto with four children	9	6

P.P. Poor Laws (1834), xxviii, p. 680a.

² P.P. Poor Laws (1834), xxviii, p. 679a.

³ *Ibid.*

occasion no loss, and consequently diligence and economy can afford no gain."¹ Women no less than men shared the increasing reluctance to save the parish. Where the earnings of wife and children were taken into account as they frequently were, there was no inducement for them either to seek employment, or to accept it when offered. Thus at Wistow (Yorks), it was reported that several women "have refused work two or three days in a week, which they could have, unless they received the usual weekly pay besides."² Here this was not encouraged, but in many cases the deduction of wages from relief led to deception. Because so much agricultural work was occasional, overseers rarely knew whether women had been working or not, nor had they time to inquire from the different farmers by whom they might have been employed. Cases quoted by the Commissioners show that the receipt of full-time relief cannot be accepted as evidence of unemployment.³ In Lincolnshire, where the draining of the Fens caused a great demand for labour, women could earn 5s. and 6s. a week regularly for eight months in the year, but the facility with which relief was obtained from the magistrates brought some of them to the parish, and farmers in consequence were compelled to employ non-parishioners who had no claim on the rates.⁴

The obvious results of deducting women's earnings from allowances led to a difference of opinion among overseers and others responsible for relief as to the wisdom and justice of the practice, and in some areas as an inducement to industry, their earnings were not taken into account on principle. It was admitted that "if there be not some advantage gained thereby, neither wife nor children will ever go off the parish."⁵ One Commissioner was at first "hardly able to credit" that in Warwickshire no inquiries were ever made into the actual or possible earnings of women and children there, and that they might be fully employed while the husband was drawing an allowance for them just the same.⁶ In Oxfordshire all were relieved according to scale, the men's wages being 9s. a week and their wives 3s. with more in haytime.⁷ In some places overseers were merely indifferent; their task was a thankless one, to be got through with as little trouble as possible and they neither inquired into, nor deducted, family earnings.

The ease with which allowances were obtained and the laxity of administration led to the rapid demoralization of the labouring classes. Moreover, the system in itself definitely increased pauperism. In many places farmers refused to employ independent labourers until those on the parish were provided for; thus the more paupers, the less work there was for the independent labourer, until, in self defence and in order to obtain employment, he also had to resort to the parish. Except in a few places where efforts were made to remedy these conditions, the provision of either employment or relief by the parish led to a great increase in the numbers entirely dependent on the rates.

¹ *P.P. Report on Labourers' Wages* (1824), vi, p. 31.

² *P.P. Poor Laws* (1834), xxviii, p. 824A.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 597A, 598A.

⁴ *P.P. Poor Laws* (1834), xxix, p. 13A.

⁵ *P.P. Poor Laws* (1834), xxviii, p. 3A.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 436A.

A curious situation in Suffolk shows how the system lent itself to the complete demoralization of a district. The fact that almost the entire male population of a parish was being relieved for unemployment would at first suggest that agriculture was in too distressed a condition to provide any work, but an inquiry into an alarming increase in the rates in the incorporated hundreds of Bosmere and Claydon in 1832 revealed the fact that while the men were receiving relief, their wives were doing the agricultural work of the district. The great increase in relief in the spring, one of the busiest seasons of the year, was only to be accounted for, said the Commissioner, "by the growing practice of throwing the whole of the labouring population on the rates. It is not to be imagined that this has the effect of suspending all labour, it only throws part of that which should be performed by the men on the shoulders of the women, and it is not very apparent how the occupiers are benefitted by it; for I was informed last spring, when . . . there was an immense expenditure on the unemployed, one of the directors had the sagacity to inquire whether the wives had any work, when it appears that they were earning 9d. a day, and were generally well employed; this, added to the allowance of the husband, gave 9s. 6d. a week to a man without any children, being 6d. more than the nominal wages of the district."¹ The benefit to the labourers is obvious. While drawing the parish dole of 5s. a week for themselves and their wives, they were receiving also the women's weekly wage of 4s. 6d. In the meantime the men themselves were doing nothing, for the Report continues: "No work whatever was required in return for relief to able-bodied who are out-pensioners, the committee being unable to devise any means of employ, and the occupiers of the parish taking no pains to do so." Yet as many as 500 labourers were sometimes in receipt of relief at the same time.² In Mildenhall, in the same county, there was a similar situation. It was a common thing, says the Report, to have nearly a hundred men on the roads during the winter, "principally from the farmers employing women and girls hoeing their wheat, and cleaning and weeding their land, whilst their husbands and sons were sent upon the roads to be paid by the parish."³ At Burnham, in Buckinghamshire, the poor rates were stated to have been increased by employing women on threshing machines, as a result of which a great number of men were thrown out of employment.⁴ It is difficult to see what exactly was the advantage to employers in these and similar instances, especially in counties such as these where the payment of wages out of the rates was carried to the greatest extent.⁵ In paying both wages and rates to support unemployed the farmer was apparently paying twice over for his work. It may be that he got better value for his money than by employing men whom idleness and unsupervised labour in parish gangs had spoiled for steady, monotonous field labour. Farmers were

¹ P.P. *Poor Laws* (1834), xxviii, pp. 359-361A.

² *Ibid.*

³ P.P. *Poor Laws* (1834), xxxviii, p. 112B.

⁴ P.P. *Lords' Commission on Poor Laws* (1818), v, pp. 96-97.

⁵ Of Suffolk, the Report states the custom "is so general that it is impossible to discover at what or at whose expense the land is cultivated." *Poor Laws* (1834), xxviii, p. 344A.

constantly complaining that men had become "so unruly," and in districts where it paid better to be on the parish than in employment, it was often a difficulty to get men to accept work.¹ On the other hand, where women's earnings were an addition to allowances there was every inducement for them to work. Too often the greater part of the dole received by their husbands was spent in the village beer shops and wives and children of demoralized labourers were often in a state of semi-starvation.² Their own earnings might at least give them a better chance of subsistence. Women with families also found it easier to obtain employment than single men who represented the least charge on the rates.

In a few districts attempts were made to rescue the labouring classes from the state of pauperization into which the old Poor Law had allowed them to sink. By careful management the scale system was gradually got rid of, and in a few places all outdoor relief was discontinued. In such districts the conditions which became general after the Poor Law Amendment Act were anticipated, and were accompanied by the increased employment of women and children. The Committee of 1828³ had suggested the abolition of allowances to fully-employed labourers with the idea of raising wages, but few authorities felt themselves in a position to accept the recommendation. In the districts where this was done and scales were abolished, farmers had higher wages to pay but were rewarded by the superiority of the work of an independent labourer over that of a pauperized one at lower wages.⁴ Even so, earnings were still insufficient to maintain a family. There were, therefore, definite attempts to provide regular employment for wives and children and farmers made it a rule to employ the families of their labourers before taking on extra hands.⁵ At Glynde, in Sussex, in the centre of a pauperized district, work was found for women at 5s. and for children at 3s. a week throughout the year when the allowance system was abolished.⁶ At Bedford, wives and children were employed at similar wages instead of labourers being assisted from the rates,⁷ and at Uley, Gloucestershire, the application of the workhouse test had similar results.⁸ These examples and others quoted in the Report of 1834, were a sure indication of what might be expected after the Poor Law Amendment Act.

EXTENT OF WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT DURING THE DEPRESSION

Agricultural conditions varied too greatly during the depression to render possible any estimate of the proportion of women working during this period. A questionnaire circulated by the Poor Law Commissioners in 1832, to obtain information on parochial conditions, investigated the average amount of work available for labourers'

¹ P.P. *Poor Laws* (1834), xxxviii, p. 196D.

² P.P. *First Report of Poor Law Commissioners* (1835), xxxv, pp. 6, 156.

³ P.P. S.C. . . . *Relief of Able-Bodied Persons from the Poor Rates* (1828), iv.

⁴ P.P. *Report on Emigration* (1826-7), v, p. 440.

⁵ P.P. *Report on Agriculture* (1833), v, p. 265.

⁶ P.P. *Report on Poor Laws* (1834), xxviii, p. 608A.

⁷ P.P. *Lords' Commission on Poor Laws* (1831), viii, p. 83.

⁸ P.P. *Poor Laws* (1834), xxviii, p. 630A.

families and the average earnings of women and children. It seems probable that the Commissioners expected that the abolition of allowances would be followed by the more regular employment of women and children as well as a rise in wages, since that had been the result in the districts already brought under improved management, and that their aim was to discover what might be expected in the way of possible earnings.

Unfortunately the returns are defective. Some are incomplete, suggesting possibly that in those districts earnings of women were too occasional to be worth estimating; others are obviously biased, as shown by some of the contradictory opinions when more than one return was made from the same parish. Actual earnings are rarely given, and therefore, while the rates of pay are likely to be correct for their respective districts, the estimated averages of the amount of work available and yearly earnings can at best only give a general indication of the actual work being done. The usual tendency seems to have been to over-estimate yearly earnings.

The returns do show, however, that work was being done by women in many districts during the depression and that in some the majority were already employed before 1834. They show also how varied were the conditions from parish to parish. An examination of the returns from parishes in any one county shows how impossible it is to draw conclusions which have a general application. In Suffolk, for example, one of the worst counties for unemployment, women were employed half their time through the summer months at Barningham; at Debenham, there was only occasional work for very few women; at Euston, it was stated that there was plenty of employment for those who chose to seek it; at Southelmham, women had little work because farmers could not even employ their men; while at Worlingworth, women were employed in the summer instead of men, who were in consequence thrown out of employment.¹ With such varied conditions the most that can be done is to give some indication of the main features suggested by the facts.

Many parishes lamented the lack of work for women, both as a result of the decline of spinning and the smaller amount of agricultural work available. In Suffolk, Oxford, Essex and Kent, unemployment seems to have been worst and many men and women in those counties were stated to be living on allowances alone. In Shropshire also, men were so easily obtainable and so cheap that they were employed on women's work, although there were some women earning 4s. a week the year round.

Hay and harvest work was general almost everywhere, except in the counties of Buckingham and Bedford, where lace and straw plaiting had always been preferred to field work. The failure of the lace trade was, however, sending some of the lace-makers of Buckingham and Oxford into the fields. In Northampton, Nottingham, and Leicester also, only a proportion of the women did field work, the others being occupied with lace and hosiery.

In the Midland Counties there was on the whole little employment

¹ P.P. *Poor Laws* (1834), xxx, Returns from Suffolk.

beyond hay, harvest and occasional weeding; many women were unemployed for eight or nine months of the year, although in some districts of Stafford and Rutland women had work for six months, and in Huntingdon for eight. Lighter soils provided more employment. In parts of Surrey and Sussex women had work for three-quarters of the year, while the hop districts of the South and West provided a good deal of labour from early spring until harvest. In the Fens, newly drained land required a good deal of weeding which gave employment to women through the summer.

The greatest amount of work was provided in turnip and potato districts, and consequently in the North, where the population was thinner and the demand for labour greater, women had more regular employment than in the South. In Durham nearly all the labourers' wives were employed constantly from five to eight months in the year, and where single labourers were hired on farms, there was a difficulty in finding enough women for out-door work.¹ In addition more weeding was required in the North as a result of climatic conditions,² and there was also more winter work for women in the barns. The more regular employment of women, and the addition of their earnings which were really appreciable, not only permitted a better standard of living in the North, but it also prevented many families being pauperized.³ The allowance system, almost universal in Southern Counties, was not nearly so general in the North where it was more often used as an expedient in times of particular distress. The greater demoralisation of labourers in the South was due to various causes, but the more regular employment of women was not the least important factor in preserving the independence of the North.

THE POSITION OF SINGLE WOMEN UNDER THE OLD POOR LAW

While the demoralisation due to unemployment and the expedients adopted to meet it was shared by the labouring classes as a whole, on no class did the economic conditions of the depression bear more hardly than on single women.

As already shown, agrarian and industrial changes at the end of the eighteenth century had seriously curtailed the earning capacity of women in rural districts, and later the agricultural depression had lessened the chances of employment in field work to which some of them had turned. All women of the labouring classes were affected by these changes, but during this period married women in many districts at least shared the allowances of their husbands, and therefore the question of their employment was not so vital. Widows also were

¹ *P.P. Poor Laws* (1834), xxx, pp. 1472-1662; xxviii, p. 124A.

² In the South weeds could be harrowed to the surface and left to die in the sun, whereas in the North they had to be gathered by hand and carried off the soil. Among women of the North couch grass was commonly called "the farmer's curse and the poor body's blessing." *Poor Laws* (1834), xxxvii, p. 52c.

³ *Poor Laws* (1834), xxxvii, p. 52c.

sure of maintenance for themselves and their children. Single women, if unemployed, were theoretically entitled to relief from the parish, but their allowance was often a mere pittance. In Berkshire (1795) they had from 2s. to 3s. a week according to the price of the loaf; in Huntingdon (1832), 2s. a week, and in Warwickshire (1827), from 1s. to 2s. Unmarried women as a class were unpopular with parish officials, because in rural districts offering little employment, sooner or later they were most likely to become chargeable. Their chief occupation was some branch of domestic service, either on the farms or in adjacent towns, and the parish as a rule was only too ready to assist them to obtain situations in order to get rid of them, especially if in so doing they achieved a settlement elsewhere. In the counties of Cambridge, Hertford and Essex, it was the policy to give single able-bodied women no relief whatever. The practice invariably pursued by the parishes in those counties was "to consider them neither as members of families maintained by allowances, nor entitled to relief as distinct claimants on the ground of lost time."¹ This was evidently done with the intention of preventing their staying at home and to force them into service.

The anxiety shown in some districts to get single women employed, actually led to the pauperizing of domestic service. In their eagerness to get places for single women, overseers in Sussex undertook to pay to those employing them a weekly sum towards maintenance, until mistresses, taking a leaf from the farmers' book, refused to take any but pauper servants.² Parish officers erroneously believed they were saving parish funds by contributing to the maintenance of those whom they would otherwise have had to keep entirely and failed to see that their policy stopped all demand for independent labour and made pauperization a condition of employment.

Women who remained unemployed in the villages were submitted to the humiliation of being "on the rounds," and were sent from one occupier to another in search of employment. In the winter they were often unable to get anything and then received relief for "lost time," or were sometimes employed on the roads. The parish also expected women in receipt of relief to do any nursing that might be required. In the eighteenth century it had become customary for the parish to provide medical attendance and nursing (such as it was), for the poor when ill, and any one of the female paupers might be sent out at any time to nurse. Sometimes extra payment was given for such work, and during the period of the depression when there was no other form of employment, overseers seem to have regarded attendance upon relatives a justification for increased relief. Such items as the following were frequently entered in parish accounts:³

	s.	d.
To Elizabeth W., a present for her kindness to her father, .	5	0
Lucy A., for looking after her mother when ill, . . .	3	6
Mary B., for sitting up at nights with her father . . .	2	0

¹ *First Report Poor Law Commissioners* (1835), xxxv, p. 136

² *Ibid.*, p. 179.

³ *Parish Accounts of Yattendon, First Report Poor Law Commissioners* (1835), xxxv, p. 115.

The position of single, unemployed women was then, not an enviable one, and the only alternatives by which they could better their condition were marriage and motherhood. What, in a pauperized community, were the chances of marriage? A good deal depended on the Poor Law administration in the district. Few labourers were in a position to marry and parish officials deprecated any union which might bring further burdens on the rates. But with incredible blindness on the part of both farmers and overseers, their management in many districts acted as an inducement to early and reckless marriages. A single man received a starvation allowance by way of relief, and in districts where the scale system was applied, he knew that he had only to marry and his allowance would be increased; hence the threat of labourers when complaining of their small allowances: "We will marry, and you must maintain us."¹ Farmers acted upon a similar plan and with the idea of saving the rates, refused to employ single men; the result was "when they cannot live any longer as single men, they marry and go to the overseer for employment and a house."² The married man had a larger income, more chance of employment, and the parish often paid his rent; hence in some places marriages between minors became "extremely common."³

But while in these districts the increased pay after marriage tempted early and improvident unions, in others the evidence of the Report of 1824 is to the effect that "assistance in general is doled out in so limited a way, that very few labourers marry voluntarily";⁴ and early marriages were not the rule where the scale system was not applied. Economic conditions were such that many labourers would not have married except to avoid imprisonment under the bastardy laws.⁵ The evidence put before the Commissioners in 1832 in district after district, was to the effect that marriage, in the majority of cases did not take place until after pregnancy. Where the administration of the Poor Law had this result, pre-marital pregnancy was the single woman's only means of escape from the inadequate dole supplied by the parish. Following this, the parish either provided her with a husband or gave her an increased allowance for her child. In either case she was better off financially. The increase in illegitimacy was due, therefore, far more to economic necessity and the hope of obtaining better maintenance and a home than to a deliberate lowering of moral standards. Recent research has shown that the increase in illegitimacy during the Speenhamland age did not cause any real rise in the birth rate, which points to a proportionate decrease in the number of voluntary marriages.⁶ The result of parish administration, however, was that incontinency became the "certain passport" to marriage.

By the Act of 1733 (6 George II, c. 31) any man charged by a woman as the father of her illegitimate child, had either to contribute towards maintenance, marry the woman, or submit to imprisonment. The provisions of the Act led not only to systematized blackmail of reputed

¹ *P.P. Report on Labourers' Wages* (1824), vi, p. 4.

² *P.P. Report on Emigration* (1826-7), v, p. 144.

³ *P.P. Report on Emigration* (1826), iv, p. 141.

⁴ *P.P. Report on Labourers' Wages* (1824), vi, p. 34.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Clapham, *Economic History*, p. 35.

fathers by worthless women who made a trade of swearing their children to men who could best pay for their support, but also to innumerable forced marriages. Among the labourers there were few who could afford the weekly sum towards maintenance, and unless they chose the House of Correction the only alternative was to marry. When the putative father belonged to another parish, every effort was made by the overseers to compel him to marry the woman so that the parish might be relieved of her settlement and that of the child. Parish accounts abound in entries which show the expedients adopted to secure the removal of women likely to become chargeable, and show how lightly the parish regarded the welfare of such persons as compared to a saving of the rates. Among others, "fees towards necessary marriages" are common, and paupers were frequently married by licence at parish expense,¹ lest the prospective bridegroom should disappear before the marriage could take place. "I have repeatedly known instances of men being apprehended under a bastardy warrant, carried off immediately to a surrogate for a licence, and brought to the church, all in the same morning, to be married," said a clergyman giving evidence on compulsory marriages. "I have seen the handcuffs removed from the man at the church door as I approached; and then with the constable and overseer as witnesses to the marriage, I have been compelled in the discharge of my ministerial duty, to pronounce over such persons the words of a service, which breathes nothing but the spirit of a free and sanctified affection."² Reluctance on the part of the individuals most concerned was of little account. After the performance of such a marriage Parson Woodforde writes in his Diary: "Rode to Ringland this Morning and married one Robert Astick and Elizabeth Howlett by Licence . . . the Man being in Custody, the Woman being with Child by him. The Man was a long time before he could be prevailed on to marry her when in the Church Yard; and at the Altar behaved very unbecoming. It is a cruel thing that any Person should be compelled by Law to marry. . . . It is very disagreeable to me to marry such persons."³

Marriage portions or bribes were sometimes provided for men who would undertake to remove "troublesome females" (those with large families of children) to another parish, and all sorts of expenses were

¹ The expense of a pauper's marriage at Compton was as follows:

	£	s.	d.
Putting the horse and cart up at the public house, waiting for			
Mr. Bent, the clergyman, to come home	0	1	2
Mr. Bent, for a licence	3	3	0
W. Baker, for his horse and cart	0	2	6
Clergyman not at home; expenses at the Swan Inn, keeping Rumbold (the male pauper) in HOLT; paid for dinner the day that he was married	1	19	4½
J. Cox, constable	0	3	6
For gold ring for Wm. Rumbold to be married with	0	8	0
Parson's and clerks' expenses	0	15	0

First Report Poor Law Commissioners (1835), xxxv, p. 115.

² *Third Report Poor Law Commissioners* (1837), xxxi. Evidence Rev. Chas. Lacy.

³ *Op. cit.*, vol. ii, January 25, 1787.

incurred to get rid of what the parish considered a surplus population.¹ A case at Croyden, in which parish officers induced a man to sell his wife, shows the lengths to which a parish would go to secure a removal, and the way in which a woman might be bandied about from one parish to another. In 1814 Henry Cook of Effingham, Surrey, was forced under the bastardy laws to marry a woman of Slinfold, Sussex, and six months after the marriage she and her child were removed to the Effingham workhouse. The governor there, having contracted to maintain all the poor for the specific sum of £210, complained of the new arrivals, whereupon the parish officers of Effingham prevailed on Cook to sell his wife. The master of the workhouse, Chippen, was directed to take the woman to Croyden market, and there on June 17, 1815, she was sold to John Earl, for the sum of one shilling, which had been given to Earl for the purchase. To bind the bargain the following receipt was made out :

5s. stamp. June 17, 1815.
Received of John Earl, the sum of one shilling, in full for my lawful wife,
by me, Henry Cook.
Daniel Cook } Witnesses.
John Chippen }

In their satisfaction at having got rid of the chargeability of the woman, the parish officers of Effingham paid the expenses of the journey to Croyden, including refreshments there, and also allowed a leg of mutton for the wedding dinner which took place in Earl's parish of Dorking. The ruse, however, was not successful. After some years, Earl, having ascertained that the marriage was invalid, deserted his wife, and she with a large family of children was again removed to be maintained by the parish of Effingham. In despair the officials now applied to the magistrates to compel Cook, the original husband, to support the whole family! The appeal, naturally, was dismissed.²

That the expenses incurred by such transactions could be entered up in the parish accounts and regularly passed by a parish vestry, is sufficient evidence, not only of the futility of parish administration under the old Poor Laws, but also of the straits to which women were reduced by the weakness of their economic and social position.

¹ The attempts of one parish to reduce its own rates at the expense of another led to an enormous amount of inter-parochial litigation. E.g. "Indictment of William Tanner, Overseer, John Ealey, Churchwarden, and William Cowley, Constable of the Parish of Idlestree, for conspiring to procure a marriage between Adam Blackwell, a poor man, having a legal settlement in the parish of Enfield, co. Middlesex, unable to keep himself and a wife, and Sarah While, a poor woman, having a legal settlement in the parish of Idlestree, with the intent to relieve the parish of Idlestree and to burthen the parish of Enfield with the maintenance of the said Sarah, which marriage was solemnized." *Hertfordshire County Records* ii, p. 180.

² *Second Report of the Poor Law Commissioners* (1836), xxix, p. 311. For other instances of the sale of a wife in the early nineteenth century, see notes by H. W. V. Temperley, "The Sale of Wives in England in 1823," in *History Teachers' Miscellany*, for May, 1925, p. 66.

CHAPTER V

RURAL CONDITIONS IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

EFFECTS OF THE POOR LAW AMENDMENT ACT ON WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

THE POOR LAW of 1834 marked the beginning of a new era in the life of the agricultural labourer. For over thirty years his wage in many districts had been supplemented from the rates, and before that his wife and children had supported themselves on their earnings at home, and agricultural wages had been based on that assumption. As a correspondent in the *Gentleman's Magazine* pointed out in 1834, formerly "it was of no importance to the farmer whether he employed the single or married labour, inasmuch as the labourer's wife and family could provide for themselves. "The female poor" had "earned their bread at home, while their husbands were earning theirs abroad." In his opinion the allowance system was simply the natural outcome of the unemployment of women and their consequent dependence on the man's wages. "Abolish the allowance system," he continued, "without carrying other measures into effect, and you throw the married man out of work directly; find an employment for the families, and the system will die instantly away."¹ The Act of 1834 abolished allowances, but the problem of the married man's wage and the support of his family was left unsettled by the Legislature.

That the abolition of out-door relief would result in the increased labour of women and children was anticipated before the passing of the Act. A witness before the 1834 Commission suggested that when the parish refused to subsidise wages, farmers would find it worth their while to take their best labourers at wages proportioned to their skill, and "by providing work for their wives and children also, would contrive to make the earnings of the family adequate to their support without any allowance from the parish."² The labourer on his part was expected to make greater exertions to obtain employment, "not only for himself, but for his wife, and as many of his family as might be able to work . . . seeing that nothing but the united efforts of all the family could then keep them out of the work-house."³ These suppositions were correct. Allowances were not abolished suddenly—by 1836 the Commissioners had been able to apply the Act only to a very limited extent⁴—but relief was strictly regulated and was usually paid in kind. Even so the transition caused no little suffering

¹ *Letter to Lord Althorpe on the Poor Laws*, *op. cit.*, 1834, vol. i, p. 531.

² *P.P. Report on Poor Laws* (1834), xxix, p. 297a.

³ *Poor Laws* (1834), xxviii, p. 683a.

⁴ *P.P. Second Report of Poor Law Commissioners* (1836), xxix, p. 7.

especially in large families, and attempts to find more constant employment were immediately made.

Now there was only the workhouse to fall back upon, the greatest anxiety was shown in obtaining employment and in keeping it when found. But more regular employment was not only due to the "alteration in the habits of the labourers." Farmers feared that good men would leave the parish in search of work and lest they should be left without sufficient labourers were compelled to take men on permanently and employ more of them. With the prospect of lower rates they could afford to pay out more in wages, but the continued agricultural depression and the relatively overstocked labour market prevented the rise in wages which had been expected. Here and there wages rose slightly, especially in the Midlands and the North where railroads and industrial expansion increased the demand for labour. Elsewhere wages fluctuated with the price of agricultural produce,¹ but even where wages rose immediately after the passing of the Act on account of the increased price of the loaf, labourers were still considerably worse off than they had been under the allowance system.²

The married man's wage, therefore, remained at a minimum and had in some way or other to be supplemented for the support of the family. The farmer on his side was still compelled to economise and could not afford to pay a higher price for the same labour. But by providing extra work for women and children he could receive a further profit on his outlay and could also ease conditions for the labourer. This therefore was the solution adopted.

The annual reports of the Poor Law Commissioners after 1834 show that the labourer was just as anxious to get employment for his wife and children as the farmer was to profit by their labour. By 1836, in Wiltshire, a "very large proportion of women and girls" was employed, and the masters as well as the parents were said "to see the advantages it will be to both to give them occupation."³ In the Witham Union (Essex), the new system, while causing distress in some cases, was said to have animated the labourers "to unknown energy and searching for work. This is very striking by the great addition of females working abroad, and the taking of children from school to earn a few pence."⁴ In Sussex, the Report states, "the custom of the mother of a family carrying her infant with her in its cradle into the field, rather than lose the opportunity of adding her earnings to the general stock, though partially practised before, is becoming very much more general now."⁵ Such children were usually kept quiet by the administration of "Gregory's Cordial" or some other opiate. In the same county those unable to find agricultural work found employment on the roads: "It is by no means uncommon to see the father of a family, with his wife and some of his younger children (even the females), engaged in the (now well-paid) employment of stone-breaking."⁶

¹ P.P. *First Report of Poor Law Commissioners* (1835), xxxv, p. 4. P.P. *Second Report* (1836), xxix, p. 391.

² P.P. *Lords' Commission on Poor Law Amendment Act* (1837-8), xix, p. 26.

³ P.P. *Second Report Poor Law Commission* (1835), xxix, p. 299.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

Farmers were anxious to provide extra employment for women, since in addition to its cheapness it enabled them to retain their men at lower wages than they could otherwise live upon. The labourer as yet failed to realise what would be the ultimate effect upon his own wages. The idea that his wage should be sufficient to "keep" his family was new to him and women's day labour in agriculture was of too recent a date to cause serious fears of competition with his own. Single men suffered to a certain extent, since farmers were more anxious to provide work for families who would be a heavier charge on the rates. Task work on which the labourer could employ his wife and children himself was given wherever possible and in addition farmers made definite attempts to provide regular work for women and children.¹

While the evidence points to the fact that in some cases women and children were now working who had not previously been accustomed to agricultural labour but had been maintained by allowances, in others there was merely an increase in the amount of employment found for them. As the Third Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners put it, the alteration in the habits of labourers in their desire to obtain employment for themselves and their families was "in direct ratio to the degree in which the parishes had become pauperized."² Many farms, as a result of the continued depression, were in a shocking state of cultivation, and it was a comparatively easy matter to find extra work for women and children, especially in clearing the land where their work was an undoubted advantage. As a witness stated in 1837, farmers "find that they can keep their land much cleaner by employing Women and Children than they can by so much ploughing."³

THE GANG SYSTEM

The increase in women workers was specially noticeable in the Eastern Counties as a result of the particular organisation which developed there, known as the Gang System. Bands of workers of both sexes, working under the direction of an overseer, and moving from farm to farm, had appeared before 1834, but it was not until after the new Poor Law and the new economic situation that gang-work really developed, especially in connection with the work of women and children.⁴

The system rose to meet the demand for irregular labour on large

¹ *Report on Agriculture* (1836), viii, p. 193. Farmers endeavoured to make up for allowances in various ways. In one case quoted in Suffolk, a labourer was preparing to move with wife and six children into the workhouse, when his employer offered to take the boy of twelve years to work at 2s. a week, and his wife at 3s. 6d. With the addition of 5s. 6d. weekly the family could be maintained independently. *Report Poor Law Commissioners* (1836), xxix, p. 223.

² *Op. cit.* (1837), xxxi, p. 111.

³ *P.P. Lords' Commission on Poor Law Amendment Act* (1837-8), xix, Part 1, p. 467.

⁴ "One of the prime causes of the increase of the gang-system (I may almost say its origin) was the New Poor Law, for previous to that Act, if an able-bodied man could not maintain his family, the parish assisted him; that assistance being withdrawn, it became necessary that all who could work should support themselves, and the improved system of agriculture (particularly as regards the cultivation of turnips as adopted in this county) gave them an opportunity of so doing." *Report on Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, p. 280.

farms which had adopted a high state of cultivation. No labourers were available in the immediate neighbourhood because in old established enclosures as in Norfolk, cottages had been pulled down to avoid poor rates and where new farms had been formed by recent enclosures in Lincoln and Cambridge, the same desire on the part of landowners to avoid giving settlements prevented the building of an adequate number of cottages to accommodate the labourers required.¹ On the Wolds of Lincolnshire, which early in the nineteenth century had been "mostly a rabbit warren covered with gorse, thistles, and coarse grass," the landlord of a large farm was in many cases the sole proprietor of the parish, and his refusal to build labourers' cottages, beyond those actually on the farm, led to over-population in surrounding parishes from which farmers for many miles around drew their labour.² Such parishes were usually in the hands of a considerable number of small proprietors, many of whom provided cheaply built cottages at exorbitant rents. As they were open to all comers they were known as "open parishes" as distinct from the "closed parishes" in which settlements were not allowed. Thus on the Wolds, in Norfolk and in the recently drained southern Fen, where a great deal of weeding and light labour was required, almost all the work was done by the gangs which grew up naturally in the open villages.

The first appearance of the gang system seems to have been in the open parish of Castle Acre (Norfolk), about 1826, and from there it spread over the whole district. The village was surrounded by large farms of up to 1,200 acres, situated in closed parishes where there was, therefore, a deficiency of labourers, while in Castle Acre there were many anxious for employment. A farmer desiring to have a piece of work done, would apply to a gang-master at Castle Acre who would contract to complete the work and furnish the labour for a specific sum. He then selected from the people in his employment as many men, women and children as he thought necessary for the task, and sent them to the farm under an overseer whose business it was to accompany them on their journeys and supervise their work.³ One of the worst features of the system was the physical hardship and unnecessary fatigue imposed on both old and young on their journeys to and from work in all seasons and all weathers. In winter if the task was fairly near, a two-journey day was worked; the gang set out at 7 a.m., returned at mid-day, and went again from 1 p.m. to dark; but in summer the gang had sometimes to walk seven or eight miles each way, and work from 8.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., making a day of intolerable length and hardship even for adults.¹ For children of seven years of age—and some were still younger—such conditions must have caused indescribable suffering. On longer journeys the gang was driven to its destination and generally remained there while the work lasted, sleeping in barns, stables and any available shelter.

Although in 1843 the gang system had only been in existence a few years, the Commissioner who investigated its effects, found it almost

¹ P.P. *Sixth Report of Children's Employment Commission* (1867), xvi, p. xxi.

² *Ibid.*, p. vi.

³ P.P. *Children's Employment Commission* (1867), xvi, p. xxi.

universally condemned in consequence of its injurious influences, both physical and moral. In spite of this, however, gang-work continued and increased because from the economic standpoint it proved a workable and satisfactory system, and it was believed that "the work could not be done without it, especially in the Fen."¹

The advantages of the system were reaped by the farmer and the gang-master, the former benefitting to the greater extent. In addition to the saving effected in cottage rates and repairs, gang-work was profitable because it was in itself cheaper than any other form of labour. The farmer's contract with the gang-master was by the "piece," and therefore cheaper than the cost of the same work at day wages, while so many children were employed at 3d. and 4d. a day, that the wage bill was lessened considerably. Moreover, the gang leader being always with the same workers, knew exactly how much he could get out of each member, and by pressing the gang to the utmost could get much more work done in the day than could the farmer himself, or an inexperienced labourer.² Work therefore was done more quickly and at less cost. The necessary labour for any crop was obtainable the moment it was required, and, unlike regular labourers, could be dispensed with as soon as the work was completed. The gang-master was responsible for the work and behaviour of the gang, and the farmer was freed from all supervision.

The gang-master had usually been an agricultural labourer himself, and was of the same class as his gang. He benefitted by becoming an employer instead of a labourer, and was a little better off financially. Sometimes he received a small definite sum for each member of the gang; more often he trusted to making his profits by taking piece work from the farmer and paying day wages to the gang. Many of them also made extra profits by keeping and selling provisions and forcing all members of the gang to deal with them.³

For workers in the gang, on the other hand, the system was in most cases thoroughly bad, and was not without its effects on other labourers in the districts where it prevailed. As farmers realised the economic advantages, they employed the gangs more and more, not only for their extra work, but also for the tasks hitherto performed by regular labourers, "to do work for which men apply for and are refused."⁴ Unemployment among labourers therefore increased, since many could not get work independently on farms and in gangs women and children were preferred, because although employed in many cases on men's work, their wages were so much lower.

Women were usually paid 8d. or 9d. a day, children 3d. or 4d.,⁵ and for these rates were compelled to work as hard as though working for themselves at task work. By threats, and not infrequently by blows, women and children were urged beyond their strength, while the accounts of some gang-masters are sickening in their descriptions of brutality and licence. In bad weather long walks were frequently

¹ *Report on Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, p. 278.

² *Children's Employment Commission* (1867), xvi, pp. 3, 21.

³ *P.P. Report on Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, pp. 223, 275-6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 276, *Children's Employment Commission* (1867), xvi, pp. 37, 169.

⁵ *Report on Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, p. 276.

taken for nothing. If rain came on after five or six miles, the gang returned without earning anything. The day was divided into four quarters, at 2*d.* each period, and unless at least one had been worked the gang received nothing.

Worst of all were the effects on the lives of children, some of whom worked in gangs at four, five and six years of age.¹ Not only had they no opportunity of education, but they were physically injured by the long walks and the very laborious work to which they were constantly put. The father of a child of eleven who had been working in a gang for two years gave evidence before the 1843 Commission: "I'm forced to let my daughter go, else I'm very much against it. . . . She has complained of pain in her side very often; they drive them along—force them along—they make them work very hard. Gathering stones has hurt my girl's back at times. Pulling turnips is the hardest work; they get such a hold of the ground with their roots; when the land's strong it's as much as we can do sometimes to get 'em out, pull as hard as we can pull. It blisters their hands so that they can hardly touch anything. . . . My girl went 5 miles yesterday to her work, turniping; she set off between seven and eight; she walked; had a piece of bread before she went; she did not stop work in the middle of the day; ate nothing till she left off; she came home between 3 and 4 o'clock. Their walks are worse than their work; she is sometimes so tired, she can't eat no victuals when she comes home."²

Morally the results were still more injurious. The possibility of employment drew young men and women from all districts to the overcrowded open parishes under conditions which led almost inevitably to immorality. "All sorts of characters are employed in the gangs," said one of the overseers, "some of all sorts. This is the coop of all the scrapings of the county. If a man or woman do anything wrong they come here, and they think by getting among them here, they're safe."³ It increased the misfortune of the children that bad moral influences were added to physical hardships.

Although the gang system was condemned in the Report of 1843, it persisted and increased for another quarter of a century until public opinion, roused by its worst features, demanded an inquiry which resulted in the regulation of the gangs after 1868. As the Commissioner pointed out in 1843, the evils could not be remedied merely by putting an end to ganging. Such an expedient would only throw vast numbers out of work, and "immorality and crime would be increased by idleness and distress."⁴ The remedy lay in the hands of landowners, who, by providing cottages could enable labourers and their families to live in the parishes in which they were employed.⁵ After 1865, the alteration in the law of rating effected by the Union Chargeability Act (28 and 29 Vict. c. 79), induced landowners to supply more cottages, and this, together with the introduction of agricultural machinery, began to make it possible to do without gangs.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 276, 274.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 276-7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 225-6.

⁵ At Castle Acre in 1843, there were 103 labourers and their families employed in the gangs who belonged to other parishes as opposed to 49 who belonged to Castle Acre. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

Before that, however, many farmers had adapted the system to their own use, forming smaller gangs of from twelve to twenty persons, kept entirely in their own employment and known as private gangs.¹ These represented a further saving to the farmer since the profit of the gang-master was saved, and as time went on fewer adults and more children were employed. The farmer was often inclined to pay less than the public gang-master, and children were not only cheaper than women but as a rule they worked longer hours. Women with household duties to attend to could not leave home before 8 a.m., whereas children often worked from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.² The first check to their labour came with the Gangs Act of 1867 (30 and 31 Vict. c. 130), which allowed no child under eight years of age to be employed. The Act also provided that in future all gang masters should be licensed; that women should not work in the same gangs with men; that any woman working under a gang-master should be accompanied by a woman also licensed to act as a gang-master; and that Justices could regulate the distances which children were to be allowed to travel on foot. More effective for the latter was the Education Act of 1876 (39 and 40 Vict. c. 79) which, by making it illegal to employ any child under ten years of age in agricultural work, proved the death blow of the system. With improving conditions among agricultural labourers, women worked less and less in the fields, and when child labour could no longer be exploited the gang system gradually died out.

The organisation of women in gangs for agricultural work never developed outside the Eastern Counties, but existed almost exclusively in Lincolnshire, Huntingdon, Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk and Nottinghamshire, and in a few places in Northamptonshire, Bedford and Rutland.³ While therefore women and children were working at the same tasks and in as great numbers in other parts of the country, their work was generally under better conditions, since the worst features connected with, and produced by ganging, were absent.

GENERAL CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT IN 1843

When the Government Inquiry into the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture was made in 1843, the Commissioners found that women were working at the chief tasks in agriculture in all counties, although the kinds of work in which women were engaged in any one district depended upon the custom of that particular locality.

The general conditions under which they worked in the South-Western Counties were described by a Dorset farmer: "I employ six to eight women all the year round; in winter in threshing and hacking turnips for sheep, at other times in hoeing turnips and keeping land clean, in hay harvest and corn harvest. In winter they work whilst it is light, and in spring from eight till six, with an hour and a half for dinner: at daytime and harvest the hours are not so regular. Women reap; I have employed 40 women at a time in reaping. Generally they get

¹ For growth of private gangs, see Hasbach, *History of English Agricultural Labourer*, pp. 202-4.

² P.P. *Children's Employment Commission* (1867), xvi, p. 5.

³ P.P. *Children's Employment Commission* (1867), xvi, p. v.

8d. a day ; at harvest 1s. with two quarts of ale or cider ; sometimes, if they work at task work at harvest, they earn 1s. 6d. a day, besides drink ; they also get 1s. 6d. a day at turnip hoeing, which is task work, but with that there is no liquor. Working out of doors is a good thing for women," he added, "you may tell them at Church on Sunday by their size and ruddy looks."¹

In Wiltshire, Dorset and Somerset women were employed mainly in spring, summer and early autumn, whereas in Devon the majority of them worked through the winter months as regularly as in other periods of the year, doing work usually given to men elsewhere.² Married women were preferred as day labourers, and as younger women were often prevented by their families from constant work many of those engaged regularly were between the ages of forty and sixty ; some were still to be found working in the fields at seventy.³ In Kent, Surrey and Sussex, fruit and vegetable gardens and hop fields especially, provided an enormous amount of employment for women as well as the usual field work. More often in these counties women were engaged in assisting their husbands at task work for a family wage, than in working at daily rates for themselves. Especially was this so in the work connected with corn and hops. The labourer contracted with the farmer at so much an acre and employed his wife and children to assist him. The attempt to keep up with her husband in task work was often the severest trial of strength for a woman and it was at such times that they were most likely to over-strain. Anxiety to take full advantage of high rates urged them to keep up a rapid pace through long hours. At harvest time a man often worked from 5 a.m. or even 4 a.m. to 8 p.m. or 9 p.m., and in many cases a woman worked as long as her husband.⁴ Much of the work done on hop grounds was very laborious compared with ordinary agricultural work. Custom again determined which tasks should be undertaken by men and which by women, but as a general rule, men did the ground work while women tended and trained the plants. Task work, however, was responsible for women sharing the more laborious operations and when work was let out by the year the amount of labour performed by women and children was increased considerably.⁵

¹ *Report on Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, p. 89. Evidence of Mr. Burgess.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 96.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 98.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁵ The heaviest work in hop fields was "opening the hills" in the spring—"hard work for a woman"—and only done by her when her husband was working by the acre. Both women and children assisted in poling the hops, but as soon as the bine was up from the ground, its care was invariably committed to women. The competition for work was considerable, and usually a woman could not get more than two or three acres to attend to. "A woman will take generally two acres or two acres and a half. Her trouble depends on the weather: if it is boisterous weather she has to tie them over and over again, as the wind blows them from the pole, or in a wrong direction, away from the sun. She can tie about two acres and a half for the first time, in a week; she must visit them to rebind them every two or three days till they grow out of her reach; this takes place, on an average, in five or six weeks." Her earnings at tying were 9s. or 10s. an acre. The harvest was the one season when the woman's wages exceeded the man's. As a picker she was quicker and more expert than her husband, and her wage, paid according to measure, was correspondingly higher. The price varied with the crop, but a woman's wage usually averaged from 1s. 8d.

In Northumberland there was a good deal of barn work for women in winter and as a result of the bondage system which was still in existence, almost all the women were fairly constantly employed in agriculture. Some years earlier an attempt had been made to end the system by which each hind had to provide a woman labourer to work at stipulated wages whenever required. Cobbett had attacked it, and other writers had compared it to West Indian slavery, with the result that the labourers in 1837 combined to bring it to an end.¹ The hardships connected with the system fell upon the labourers rather than on the women bondagers who hired themselves voluntarily to "work the bondage" for one year. The difficulty sometimes experienced in obtaining bondagers and the high wages demanded by them compared with the payment received from the farmer for their labour, led to great dislike of the system. When a member of the labourer's family served as bondager there was no great grievance, except that her wages were lower than they would have been as an independent labourer; but when the family was young and the small money wage of the hind would barely cover the cost of clothing and educating the children, it was a very real hardship to be compelled to hire and maintain a bondager whose wages took nearly the whole of the small balance of cash allowed to the labourer, his main wages being paid in kind. Moreover, Northumberland cottages were small. Many of those supplied by the farmers consisted of one room in which the whole family lived and slept,² and the presence of a hired bondager must have added to the discomfort of the family. On the days when they were not employed in field work they were supposed to make themselves useful in the cottages, but the testimony of the labourers' wives—as might perhaps be expected—was to the contrary: "They look upon themselves as hired to work on the farm, and they neither are very willing to work in the house, nor very capable. They get out-of-door tastes and habits, they loathe the confinement of the house; they dislike its duties . . . they can hoe turnips and potatoes to a miracle, but know very little about the most approved method of cooking them."³

As soon as the labourers' children were considered old enough to work, however, this difficulty was surmounted. A farmer would often take two children of eleven and twelve years of age in place of a woman, and as soon as a daughter arrived at the age of sixteen, there was no necessity to hire a bondager.⁴ When the labourer had no longer to pay out money wages he was in a much more satisfactory position; his wages in kind ensured a certain food supply and the other advantages of his hiring "conditions," together with constant

to 2s. a day while the harvest lasted. Afterwards came the stripping and stocking of poles, task work again in which women helped. Thus in hop districts, women worked fairly constantly from the middle of March to the end of September, and in winter some of them worked in the woods shaving hop poles, and in their homes chopping rags for manure. *Ibid.*, pp. 166, 139, 167, 198-9, 206.

¹ *Journal of Statistical Society*, vol. i, p. 404.

² *P.P. Report on Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, pp. 298-9.

³ Howitt, *Rural Life of England*, pp. 180-181.

⁴ *Poor Laws*, (1834), xxxvii, p. 463c.

employment for his family rendered his situation far more comfortable than that of a similar family in the South.

The attempt to do away with the bondage system in 1837 failed in its main object, although the hinds obtained a slight advantage in the wages allowed by the farmer for the bondager's service.¹ The farmers feared that unless they had a certain number of women tied to the farms in this way on whom they could depend at all times, they could not be sure of the proper cultivation of their land. It is probable that, had the system been abolished, more girls would have entered domestic service in the towns, but many undoubtedly would have remained to work on the land. The main change would have been in the system of hiring. Instead of being hired by the labourers they would have lived at home and been employed directly by the farmers themselves at the customary daily rates.

THE PROPORTION OF RURAL WOMEN EMPLOYED IN AGRICULTURE IN 1843

The number of women employed in agriculture in the "forties" varied very much from one district to another and also according to the season of the year. Employment depended on a woman's health and strength, the age and number of her children and whether there were any other occupation available. If domestic employment at a remunerative wage could be obtained it was usually preferred by married women, since they saved the wear and tear of clothes in the fields and could attend to their own domestic duties. The higher wages usually obtainable in factory labour also drew younger women from field work where the former was available.²

In the South Western Counties the Commissioners found that there were "but few families" in 1843 where the wife or children were not engaged in farm labour, but in parts of Dorset and Devon where women could earn more at home in shirt-button making and lace-making, it was more common for women to remain at home and children to work in the fields.³ Often the older children were sent to regular out-door labour while the younger ones were kept at home to assist in the domestic industry. In these districts the demand for women's labour was greater than the supply; button-makers would only work for the highest wages at harvest time, and lace-makers would not do field work at all on account of their hands.⁴ Elsewhere at hay and harvest time, there were usually as many women and girls working as men and boys; at other times women equalled one-third or one-fourth the number of men.⁵

In Norfolk and Suffolk there was little in the way of domestic industry. Straw plaiting had been introduced to take the place of spinning but had not been very successful in these counties. In Suffolk, around Woodbridge, about half of the women were said to be employed in agriculture and in the district between Woodbridge and Ipswich the earnings of women and children varied on different

¹ *Journal of Statistical Society*, vol. i, p. 404.

² *Report 1843*, xii, pp. 83-4.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 105.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

farms from one-seventh to one-twelfth of the whole labour employed.¹ Allowing for the difference in wages, the numbers of women and children probably varied from about one-third to one-sixth of the men employed.

In Yorkshire women had a good deal of employment except in the dales where there were few opportunities of agricultural work. On the small grass farms all the work was done by occupiers and their families and the system of mowing, instead of reaping the corn, had diminished the number of women previously engaged at harvest time. Sometimes they could get a month's haymaking but the rest of their time was spent in knitting stockings, jackets and caps, at which their earnings for a day of from ten to twelve hours were never more than sixpence.² In other parts of Yorkshire the proportion of women employed was usually considerable: for example, at Beverley, "the females working on the land" were about a quarter of the whole parish; at Alcaster Malvis, one-third; at Dunnington, two-thirds; at Osbaldwick, four-fifths, and round Rotherham, all were employed who could conveniently leave their families. At West Rounton, in Cleveland, "out of 150 women in the parish perhaps 80" were employed in out-door work.³ In Northumberland on two farms referred to in 1843, there were on the first, eight bondagers employed throughout the year, and additional women in summer; and on the other, sixteen bondagers employed for five-sixths of the working days, six women "nearly regularly" employed in summer, and six girls between eight and sixteen years for light work in the summer months, making twenty-eight in all.⁴

EARNINGS OF WOMEN LABOURERS

To what extent did women find agricultural employment worth while financially? The amount of a woman's earnings depended upon her capacity for work, the extent to which she could free herself from domestic responsibilities and the amount and duration of the employment available. The latter varied from mile to mile, since it depended upon the quality of soil, the kind of crops grown and the extent to which women shared in task work; all of which produced a corresponding fluctuation in earnings. There were also some slight differences in the rates of pay in the same district. Strong active women were often paid a little more than slower and inferior workers in the employment of the same farmer, while in task work, strength and skill made a still greater difference in earnings. Regular workers also on whom the farmer could always depend were sometimes paid at higher rates than those whose family circumstances only permitted them to go out to work occasionally.⁵

From the irregularity of much of women's work it is difficult to obtain anything more than a general idea of their earnings. There were certainly some who were employed all the year round, or all through the summer at weekly wages and their earnings are easily estimated. But the majority were employed for the duration of a particular piece of work, and might have a period of inactivity before

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 228, 231.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 365, 348.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 307, 314, 315, 336, 346, 371.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 375, 376.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

they were required again. Few farmers were in the habit of keeping accounts from which wages might be obtained, and even where these are available they do not tell the whole story. It was a common thing for a woman to do one or two months' stone picking for one farmer, three weeks at bean setting for another, and a period of weeding for a third. Work had to be taken wherever it was obtainable. Similarly daily rates are not very helpful in forming an estimate, since they leave out of account how many days women might expect to work and the amount of work done by task for a family wage.

In the South Western Counties of Wiltshire, Dorset, Devon and Somerset, the average wage was 6*d.* to 8*d.* a day in winter; 7*d.* to 10*d.* in spring and summer; 8*d.* to 1*s.* in haytime and harvest, but usually more was earned by task work at harvest time.¹ Part of the wage was paid in cider of an inferior quality, and to the above money wage was added one or two pints of cider a day with double the quantity in harvest. The value was not so much as it might seem. A man's cider was reckoned to be worth from 1*s.* 3*d.* to 1*s.* 6*d.* a week,² and a woman usually had about half as much as a man. In task work of all kinds the wage was higher; 1*s.* to 1*s.* 4*d.* a day could be earned at bean planting; 1*s.* to 1*s.* 6*d.* in various kinds of turnip and harvest work.³ Exceptionally hard workers sometimes earned more. "I have earned as much as 2*s.* 6*d.* a day at digging," said one woman in 1843, "but I was always considered a very hard worker."⁴ Potato digging was hard work for a woman, as was recognised by the higher daily rate of 1*s.* and in addition, dinner and sometimes supper also were given, if the demand for labour was great and farmers were anxious for their crops on account of frost. Of two other women giving evidence on day wages in 1843, one had earned by task work in harvest as much as 4*s.* a day, and the other—"a good reaper, as good as many men"—had earned 2*s.* and sometimes 2*s.* 6*d.*, "but only for a short time."⁵ On the whole it was estimated that women earned about half of what men earned if at work every day of the week.⁶

In Kent, Surrey and Sussex, the spring and summer wage was 8*d.* to 10*d.* for ordinary field work; 10*d.* to 1*s.* at haytime; and at harvest, when hired by the day, 1*s.* 3*d.* to 1*s.* 6*d.*⁷ In the hop fields they had 10*d.* to 1*s.* for opening the hills and poling; at tying they earned about £1 10*s.* for the season; and at picking about 1*s.* 8*d.* a day on an average.⁸ In Norfolk and Suffolk the average daily rate was 8*d.*; in task work they could earn 1*s.* to 1*s.* 6*d.*, and in Lincolnshire 10*d.*, with 1*s.* to 2*s.* a day in harvest.⁹ In Yorkshire wages were on the whole higher; the spring and summer wage was 8*d.* to 10*d.*; turnip hoeing and hay 1*s.*; and harvest 1*s.* 6*d.* to 2*s.* 6*d.*¹⁰ The hinds in Northumberland received 10*d.* a day in summer and 1*s.* in harvest for the services of their bondagers, whom they had to keep and pay at the rate of £6 or £7 a year, while other women received 1*s.* a day in summer and 2*s.* 3*d.* in harvest.¹¹

With regard to average yearly earnings no very definite statements

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 206, 202, 194.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 166, 186, 139.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 216-7, 235, 251.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 282-3, 342.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

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can be made. Women's agricultural employment was too irregular and uncertain in its amount to allow of the daily rates being used as a basis for any calculation of average yearly earnings. In a few instances references are made to actual earnings or the length of time worked and these give some indication of what was possible. A Wiltshire woman, for instance, who had worked in the fields for sixteen years, "all the year through, except just the winter months" (January and December) had "always had 5s. a week in summer and 4s. 6d. in the other months." These were the regular wages. Another woman stated that she had generally worked for six months in the year.¹

Some account of the average earnings of labourers' wives in Norfolk and Suffolk is gained from the replies to a questionnaire circulated among farmers of capital in those counties. The results were as follows:²

Average earnings of wives :—		Annually	
		£	s. d.
In 34 cases in which there were no children . . .		3	8 9
71 cases in which all children were above 10 years . . .		2	9 0½
64 cases in which one child was above 10 years . . .		2	11 7½
49 cases in which two children were above 10 years . . .		2	5 7½
20 cases in which three children were above 10 years . . .		2	5 1
3 cases in which four children were above 10 years . . .		2	3 10
241			
Total earnings of all		£633	13 7
Average earnings of each		2	12 7

The man's average wage in these families worked out at £18 19s. 8d. or 7s. 3d. a week, but neither this nor the figure given above for the woman's wage included harvest earnings and gleanings. The average value of corn gleaned varied from 17s. 10½d. for the wife's work only, to £1 6s. 9½d. where there were four children, so that this and the wife's possible earnings in task work would bring her average considerably higher. It will be noticed that the earnings of a woman without children were one-third greater than those with children, but the actual number of children did not appear to affect earnings to any great extent. The full importance of the earnings of women and children was shown by the difference between the family income of the married man and that of the single man. The average wage of the latter including harvest and task work was £25 os. 0d.; the average income of a married man with no children was £30 12s. 10½d., and of a man with a wife and four children above ten years of age, £50 18s. 6d. In this last group of families only half the income was earned by the man.

An inquiry made about the same time in the Thirsk Union showed that women's average earnings there were about £5 4s. 0d., and the Commissioner who investigated agricultural conditions in Yorkshire in 1843 thought that £5 might be taken as the average yearly earnings for the whole country, except around Goole, where woman engaged

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

² *P.P. Report on Poor Law Amendment Act (1837-8)*, xviii. Appendix G. *Journal of Statistical Society*, vol. i, pp. 179-183.

in the potato crop earned £10 and more, and on the Wolds and in turnip districts in the north where more regular employment resulted in a wage higher than the average.¹

The bondagers of the North received a definite yearly wage of £7, or £5 for the summer, and £2 for the winter half year. The actual payment made by the farmer for their services varied from £5 to £9 and more, according to the number of days worked.²

THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S EARNINGS IN LABOURERS' FAMILIES

It has now to be considered whether these earnings of women and children were essential to the support of the family, and whether their earnings made sufficient difference to the standard of living to compensate for the disadvantages arising from their employment. It has to be remembered that in the majority of cases the wages of women formed part of the family wage, and that the standard of living therefore depended on the entire income and the number in the family. There were widows and some single women who were more or less dependent on their agricultural earnings, and if they were constantly employed they could just manage to exist on their wage. The weekly budget of Mary Hayes, a Wiltshire widow, shows how bare an existence it was. She had an allowance of 1s. 6d. a week for her child, making with her wage of 4s. 6d., a weekly income of 6s., on which to support two persons. Her expenses were :³

	s.	d.
Rent	1	6
1½ gallons of bread	1	6
½ lb. candles, ½ lb. soap	4	½
½ lb. butter	2	½
1 oz. tea	1	½
½ lb. sugar	2	
Rent of allotment	5	½ per week
	4	4

¹ *P.P. Report* 1843, xii, p. 282. The accounts of John Allen, a Yorkshire labourer, which include his wife's wages, show how women's employment fluctuated according to the season.

	£	s.	d.
March 8 - April 4 .. 5 days at 10d.		4	2
April 5 - May 2 .. 17 " " "		14	2
May 3 - May 30 .. 22½ " " "		18	9
May 31 - June 13 .. 11 " " "		9	2
June 14 - July 11 .. 21 " " "		17	6
July 12 - August 8 .. 23 " " "		19	2
August 9 - September 3 .. 23½ " " "		19	7
September 6 - October 3 .. 23 " " "		19	7
October 4 - October 31 .. 18½ " " "		15	5
November 1 - November 28 .. 20 " (13 at 10d., 8 at 8d.)		15	4
November 29 - December 26 .. 20 " at 8d.		13	4
December 27 - January 23 .. 4 " " "		2	8
January 24 - February 28 ..		-	-
	9	8	10

Report 1843, xii, p. 306.

² *Ibid.*, p. 297. *P.P. Poor Laws* (1834), xxxviii, p. 463c.

³ *Report* 1843, xii, pp. 69-70.

The balance of 1s. 8d. was used for firing, shoes, etc., while on her allotment, without which she could not have managed, she produced enough potatoes for herself and the child and about three bushels of wheat. She herself worked the allotment in addition to being fully employed in the fields. No meat of any kind could be purchased; the diet was simply one of bread and potatoes and totally inadequate for strenuous agricultural labour.

Many families were no better off. In a family of nine in Wiltshire, where the husband earned 10s. a week, the total income was insufficient for food alone. They had four gallons of bread a week, and could have eaten more but could not afford it; sixpenny-worth of meat was bought once a week, with a little butter, tea and sugar. The rest of the food was potatoes eaten with a little fat.¹ Such a family would be better off when the children were old enough to earn, but until they could support themselves, what could be done with the father's wage of 10s. to maintain nine persons? The only "indulgence" in many families was an ounce of tea a week; when that was used the common drink was "burnt crust tea." In Norfolk and Suffolk labourers had a good supply of vegetables from their gardens, but meat was rarely eaten. No independent labourer could afford the diet which was given in the workhouse, and fresh butcher's meat was never seen in the cottage of a labourer who had two or three children.² The hopeless inadequacy of the married man's wage is shown by the budget of a Sussex family, described as industrious and frugal, in which the man's wage was swallowed up in bread alone.³

FAMILY INCOME :			EXPENDITURE :	
	Age	Wage s. d.		s. d.
Robt. Crick	42	9 0	Bread	9 0
Wife	40	9 9	Rent	1 2
Boy	12	2 0	Potatoes	1 0
Boy	11	1 0	Tea	2
Boy	8	1 0	Sugar	3½
Girl	6	—	Soap	3
Boy	4	—	Blue	0½
			Thread, etc.	2
	13	9	Candles	3
			Salt	0½
			Coal and Wood	9
			Butter	4½
			Cheese	3
				13 9

Again there was no meat and no allowance for clothing or sickness. The wife's wage in this case was very small, but as may be seen from the expenditure, the lack of even so small a sum must have meant the omission of some essential article.

In Lincolnshire, where labourers were generally better off, meat was eaten more often, but in many cases only once a week. From all over the country came similar accounts of a diet in which bread and potatoes were the principal articles. Among agricultural

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

² *Ibid.*, p. 242.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

labourers as a class, beef and mutton, as articles of food, were said to be "almost unknown from the north of England to the south."¹

Something had already been done to improve the conditions of the agricultural labourer by allotments and without these small pieces of land many would have been in still greater distress. By 1843 there were few districts in which they had not been tried to some extent, but few in which they could be said to be general.² Especially were they valuable where they were sufficient to employ the woman at home, so that while adding to the family income, she could still attend to domestic affairs, which was impossible when her time was not her own. In most places where allotments were available women and children were employed on them, and in many instances the work was done principally by them. In Norfolk and Suffolk, allotments were the only thing the Commissioner could find "which at all supplied the place of spinning."³ Sometimes they consisted of pasture land and made possible the establishment of a small dairy.⁴

By allotments then, and by field labour, women and children contributed to the family income. Their earnings in most cases made an appreciable difference to the family wage and where there were no grown up children to assist, the earnings of the wife were a very important addition to those of her husband. Women's wages, however, were not all profit. Husband and children often suffered in other ways; children were sometimes neglected, or a girl had to be paid to look after the younger ones during the absence of the mother. There was the extra wear and tear on clothes to be considered, and then too, working in the fields made "people eat so much more."⁵ But while there were disadvantages to be taken into account, the fact remained that without the earnings of women and children, many families could not possibly have subsisted. As it was, the total family income scarcely provided the barest necessities. The importance of their contribution was pointed out by one of the Commissioners in concluding his report in 1843: "Their earnings are a benefit to their families which cannot be dispensed with without creating a great deal of suffering. And upon the fullest consideration, I believe that the earnings of a woman employed in the fields are an advantage which, in the present state of the agricultural population, outweighs any of the mischiefs arising from such employment. All direct interference in the employment of women in agriculture must be deprecated at present. The evils that attend it can only be relieved by generally bettering the condition of the agricultural labouring class."⁶

THE EFFECT OF WOMEN'S WORK ON MEN'S WAGES AND EMPLOYMENT

In connection with the employment of large numbers of women as day labourers, various questions arise. Was field work in general a suitable occupation for women? Had it injurious effects on their health, on their children, and therefore on the community? Was it really conducive to the general comfort and well-being of the agri-

¹ P.P. *Report on Handloom Weavers* (1840), xxiv, p. 28.

² P.P. *Report on Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, p. 143.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 220. ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143. ⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-8. ⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8

cultural classes? And lastly, how far did the exploitation of women's labour affect the employment of men and their wages; and, if they were employed in preference to men, were there any other reasons besides the comparative cheapness of their labour?

The employment of women as day labourers in agriculture was from the first connected with the married man's wage. When women and children were occupied at home either in husbandry or domestic industry, it had only been necessary to pay a man a wage sufficient for his own support. Afterwards when wife and children could no longer contribute to the family income, one of two things had to happen; either wages had to be increased for their maintenance, or some other remunerative employment had to be found for them. As early as 1794 Davis was stating this problem in Wiltshire. Farmers were complaining that the labourer's wage of 7s. a week was a heavy tax which hindered improvements; "and even these prices, high as they are, must be increased, if the employment which the women and children have hitherto held . . . should be lost . . . unless some mode can be found to employ them in any other kind of labour equally profitable."¹ It has already been shown that the second alternative was the one decided upon. Something was done to assist wages by allowances, but wherever new crops provided employment the number of women day-labourers steadily increased. The irregularity with which the new labour was required rendered the domestic supply a particularly suitable one for employers, and at the same time they had the double satisfaction of getting their work done cheaply and knowing that by giving employment to women they were preventing charges on the poor rates. As capitalistic farming developed and with it the desire to lower the cost of production, women's labour was increasingly in demand. Such advocates of new methods as Marshall and Arthur Young frequently pointed out the advantages to be gained from their employment. After detailing the cost of transplanting, for example, Arthur Young added naively: "This is doing it very cheap . . . from whence it is evident, that transplanting should always be done by women."² Those who were induced in the first instance to provide employment with the laudable object of keeping down poor rates soon discovered how profitable such labour could be, and although there was no shortage of men, women's labour was requisitioned on all sides.

The fact that women's labour was cheaper was not the only advantage to employers; some tasks women performed generally better than men, and for those therefore they were definitely preferred. Women were said, for instance, to bear monotonous repetition better than men, and such work as stone gathering, weeding, hoeing, raking, and attending threshing machines they did more satisfactorily. Again, where manipulative quickness was required, in singling and hop picking, they were more adept. Nor were they inclined to spare themselves in their labours. Gang-masters found women and children were more easily driven and managed than male labourers. As the Report of 1867 stated: "One reason why women and children are cheaper than men

¹ Davis, *Wiltshire*, p. 140.

² Young, *Eastern Tour* (1771 ed.), vol. ii, p. 145.

would seem to be that it is too much the propensity with agricultural labourers for the younger and weaker to put forth their strength to the utmost, and for the able-bodied to do much less than they can, so long at least as they are paid by day wages."¹

The competition of women's labour had in general a greater effect on men's wages than on their actual employment, except in gang districts. The women who worked all the year round as regular labourers were few compared with the numbers who took irregular work at busy periods. At harvest time, at the planting or gathering of a crop, the amount was out of all proportion to that needed at other times, and while the employment of women lessened the total amount of labour available for men, this occasional work alone would have been insufficient to keep men in regular employment. The earnings of women were mainly supplementary; a man's earnings had to be regular enough at least for his own maintenance.

In the South Western counties, where women were extensively employed, the Commissioner stated that with slight exceptions the work performed by women was not the kind it would answer to employ men on, and that so far as he could discover, women's labour had not superseded that of men in any degree. Although they had been employed in greater numbers during the French Wars, they had made way for men at the peace. "The strength required for the work performed by men," he declared, "effectually prevents women from being employed in it, and the lower rates of wages for which they work has not had any tendency therefore to make them more generally employed."² While this was in the main true, it has to be remembered that certain tasks which had originally been done by men, had by this time come to be considered as women's work. Turnip hoeing, for instance, was at first the work of regular labourers, but after it was found that women and boys could do it at half the wages, in many districts it came to be performed exclusively by them.

In Kent, Surrey and Sussex, where women's labour was directly hired by the employer, it was again most often light work, "not generally a substitute for the necessary labour of men," but supplementary to it.³ Task work, however, was responsible for the employment of women and children where men would otherwise have been employed. It was to the labourer's interest to get all the assistance he could without having to pay for it, and he naturally called in his wife and children first. As a result of this method of hiring labour, single men and old men whose children were grown up and independent found it difficult to obtain employment. Even here, however, the boy who worked steadily with his father was a more serious competitor than the woman in the labour market because he worked more regularly, and he at once brought down the price of labour and made it more difficult for the adult to obtain employment.⁴

The most serious effects of women's employment, so far as men were concerned, were seen in the gang districts. Here, where women and children were employed regularly and in large numbers the competition

¹ P.P. *Report on Children's Employment Commission* (1867), xvi, p. 14.

² P.P. *Report on Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, p. 27.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 131. ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

resulted in men of all ages being thrown out of regular employment. On some farms, especially where the cultivation was of a garden character, ten or a dozen women were employed throughout the year and did all the ordinary work of the farm, while men who required twice the wage for the same work had little chance of being employed.¹

By their employment as regular labourers, therefore, by task work, gang work, and by attendance on machines, women tended to supersede men in the agricultural labour market, but the numbers so engaged were few compared with the great army of occasional workers. A far more serious consequence was that the cheapness of women's work caused a general depression in wages over the whole country—a result which was observable from the earliest days of their employment as labourers. In 1788 Marshall had pointed out that the employment of women to hoe corn was "beneficial" to the farmer, since by it "the wages for Men are lowered."² As time went on and the employment of women increased the effects were more noticeable, and after 1834 the earnings of women and children allowed married men to be employed for wages on which they could not otherwise have lived, and made it difficult for single and old men to secure employment at all. By 1867 the exploitation of the labour of women and children had increased so alarmingly in gang districts that the exclusion of female labour altogether was suggested as the necessary remedy to bring back men's wages to a proper level: "It is averred that under the present system, by which the labour of women and children is so largely employed, the price of many kinds of work which is ordinarily done by adult male labourers is much reduced, and such labourers are kept out of employment for several weeks, or even months, while their wives and children are doing their work."³

Thus the necessity which first brought women's labour into the market to eke out the wage of the married man, not only prevented his wage from rising to an adequate standard, but resulted in a competition by means of which it was still further reduced. Moreover, had that competition been eliminated, the net family income would probably have been as high from the wages of the man alone as it was by the combined earnings, from which the extra wear on clothes and other costs incurred by his wife's absence from home had to be deducted. But the necessity to increase the family income by some means or other in the early days of women's agricultural employment was too urgent for such a contingency to have been avoided, even had it been foreseen.

THE SUITABILITY OF DAY LABOUR FOR WOMEN

When the exploitation of women's work was attacked in the 'forties, physiologists and moralists alike joined in the general condemnation and pronounced agricultural work unfit for women, as being injurious to health and invariably accompanied with moral degradation. When the question was examined apart from sentiment and prejudice, how-

¹ P.P. *Report on Children's, Young Persons', and Women's Employment in Agriculture* (1867-8), xvii, p. 76.

² Marshall, *Rural Economy of Gloucestershire*, vol. i, p. 100.

³ P.P. *Report of Children's Employment Commission* (1867), xvi, p. xx.

ever, it could not be proved that agricultural work in itself, apart from conditions in the gang districts, was unsuitable for women. Medical opinion could discover no permanently bad effects of their labour, although, judged by modern standards at any rate, some types of work were certainly less desirable than others. Women themselves considered haymaking, turnip pulling, potato digging and reaping their most laborious occupations; yet haymaking, the most fatiguing of all, owing to the long hours and the extent of ground walked over during the day, was the favourite employment. Tasks which were more likely to be injurious were stone picking, where women were liable to strain in carrying great weights of stones; gleaning, in which competition induced women and children to work almost night and day, and walk many miles with a heavy weight of corn,¹ and certain types of barn work. Bondagers in the North, "physically a splendid race," considered barn work the hardest part of all their labour. In addition to the constant strain of attending on threshing machines they had frequently to carry heavy sacks of corn up steps to the granary.² Work on threshing machines was rightly condemned as unsuitable, and was actually dangerous since a woman's dress was so liable to get caught in the machinery.³

While no disease or infirmity could be attributed to excess of work, there was among both children and adults a great deal of rheumatism, which contemporary medical opinion attributed to exposure and wet weather and working on wet ground. They did not suffer more in this respect, however, than other people of the same class, and on the whole were much healthier than the domestic workers of sedentary habits, among whom disease was common from confinement in insanitary and crowded cottages.⁴

Although objection was made to the severity of some out-door work in which women were engaged, it was never suggested that dairy work which was undoubtedly more severe, was too heavy and unsuitable for women. Dairymaids' contracts often expressly required them to work from 4 a.m. to 10 p.m., and during busy seasons even these hours were exceeded.⁵ Also they almost invariably worked on Sundays. More often than any other women engaged in agricultural work they were in need of medical aid as a result of over-work.⁶ On the other hand their position was very different from that of the women working in the fields. Their work was of such importance that their health was jealously guarded; they lived in the farm, and were well

¹ "In leasing (gleaning), and in bringing home the corn, I have hurt my head, and have been made deaf by it." Evidence of Mrs. Smart, Calne, Wilts., who during three weeks' gleaning got up at 2 a.m. and returned home at 7 p.m. With her three children she gleaned 6 bushels of corn, gathered in a radius of seven miles. *Report on Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, p. 65. See also Evidence of Rev. G. Osborne, p. 71.

² *P.P. Report on Children's, Young Persons' and Women's Employment in Agriculture* (1867-8), xvii, p. 53.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁴ *Report on Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, pp. 60, 71-3, 81-2, 187, 201.

⁵ *Report on Children's, Young Persons' and Women's Employment in Agriculture* (1868-9), xiii, p. 15.

⁶ *Report on Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, p. 5.

fed, and their wages were sufficient to provide them with proper clothing. Without such advantages their strenuous work would have been impossible.

The medical opinion that agricultural work was healthy apart from rheumatism—and this only indirectly produced by field work—and over-work among dairy women, was borne out by evidence of the women themselves, many of whom preferred it to being at home and declared that their health was better when they were working in the fields.¹ But while out-door work in itself was beneficial, the health of the agricultural classes was adversely affected by other circumstances, in particular an insufficiency of food, both as to quality and quantity; poor and inadequate clothing; damp, ill-ventilated and over-crowded cottages; the lack of fuel and opportunities for personal cleanliness, and by long walks to and from their employment—sometimes up to fifty or sixty miles a week—which caused unnecessary fatigue.² The evil of insufficient food resulting from low wages has already been described. Even where the quantity of food was sufficient, the slightest tendency to disease proved it to be defective in quality. The health of women varied according to the family income and the number to be fed out of it, but in any case the mother was the most likely to suffer by any shortage. The more a labourer's wife was able to increase the family earnings therefore, the better her physical condition was likely to be, since her own health stood a chance of improvement by the better food so obtained.

Cheap fuel in the North was partly responsible for the better health observed among the agricultural labourers there. It not only promoted cleanliness, but it made possible warm houses, hot food and dry clothing, which could also be more frequently and easily washed. In the South where scarcity of fuel often caused the fire to be extinguished between meals, and a change of clothes was out of the question, clothes had often to remain wet until they were put on again the next day.³ This great disadvantage and the inadequate dress worn by many women workers, did much to counteract the beneficial effects of an open-air life. Only in the North among the bondagers was any suitable and substantial clothing to be found.⁴

RURAL HOUSING CONDITIONS

Any tendency to disease caused by under-feeding and inadequate clothing was further aggravated by the bad housing conditions, which

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 68. "Not one of the many women accustomed to work in the fields with whom I conversed on the subject of their labour, considered it as generally too severe; they spoke of working out of doors, even of the more fatiguing occupations, when they had become accustomed to it, as desirable to their health and spirits." *Report of Mr. Austin. Ibid.*, p. 4.

² As a result of pulling down cottages, it was a common thing for agricultural labourers to have to walk from 50 to 60 miles a week in going daily to their employment. When wives and children were engaged on the same work, they had to make the same journeys. *Statistical Soc. Journal*, vol. lxvi, pp. 307-8, quoting Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850-1*, p. 516.

³ *Report on Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, pp. 22, 65.

⁴ *Report on Children's, Young Persons' and Women's Employment in Agriculture* (1867-8), xvii, pp. xiii, 84.

were responsible for rheumatism, consumption and contagious fevers among the rural population. Apart from improved cottages built by a few landowners on their estates, little had been done in providing adequate accommodation in the villages. Many labourers were still living in dilapidated stud and clay dwellings; the earthen and stone floors of more substantial cottages were frequently below ground level, and were perpetually damp and unwholesome; while in many cases little attempt was made to deal with drainage.¹ It was rare to find more than two bedrooms even in better cottages; the great majority had only one. In the North, where cottages were provided rent free by the employer, they consisted generally of one room in which the whole family lived and slept, while the small recess behind the beds often housed a cow, a pig and fowls.²

Bad as these conditions were, they were rendered immeasurably worse by the evils of over-crowding. The pulling down of cottages and refusal to build new ones to avoid settlements, resulted in several families crowding into the accommodation previously intended for one.³ At the same time young people who in earlier days would have lived in the farms as servants in husbandry or apprentices now remained in the cottages with their families. The Report of 1843 showed the extent to which the evil had grown. So many cottages had only one sleeping apartment that it was a common thing for a big family to share a tiny room; in one case at Studley there were twenty-nine people living under one roof; and in a few rare cases, neighbours were found sharing their cottages—the females of two families sleeping in one, the males in the other.⁴ As a concrete example of what over-crowding at this period really implied, one of the Commissioners quoted the case of a family at Stourpain, in Dorset. Here in a room ten feet square, roofed with open thatch and only seven feet high in the middle, with one window of about fifteen inches square, slept a family of eleven in three beds; in one the mother and father and two young children; in the second two grown-up daughters and a younger girl, and in the third, four sons. This, he pointed out, was no exceptional case, but the *ordinary accommodation* of a labouring family in that district. Practically every room in the village was similarly crowded as a result of the lack of cottages.⁵ Until such conditions could be remedied it was useless for critics to speak of the demoralising effects of field labour. The morality of women workers was very much the same as that of the agricultural classes generally, and if the standard was not very high, it was owing to poverty, the lack of education, and the housing conditions to which they were accustomed from

¹ Perry (G. W.), *Rural Peasantry of England*, 1846, pp. 74-5.

² *P.P. Poor Laws* (1834), xxxvii, p. 473c. Howitt, *Rural Life of England* (1838), p. 167.

³ Speaking of over-crowding in Sussex, a witness in 1826 said: "Many of them (labourers) have now got into one cottage; it was stated to me that forty years ago a cottage that only held a man and his wife and three children, now contained five families, consisting of nineteen persons." *P.P. Report on Emigration* (1826-7), v, p. 49.

⁴ *P.P. Report on Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, p. 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 20.

infancy.¹ A better standard was already observable in those districts where the cottages were large enough to make decency and delicacy more possible.²

THE STANDARD OF DOMESTIC COMFORT

Although it could not be proved that day labour in itself was an unsuitable occupation for women, yet in so far as the comfort of the family was concerned the employment of the married woman was accompanied by many disadvantages. Its worst feature was that a woman had little choice in the matter; the low wage of her husband almost compelled her to take employment whether suitable in her particular case or not. The actual field labour was not more severe than that which women had been accustomed to do for centuries, and was an improvement on much of the work they had done on small holdings, where women had ploughed and harrowed and shared the most strenuous tasks. But such work had generally been done at their own convenience, and had not interfered unduly with domestic comfort, whereas a woman who was working as a day labourer was compelled to leave her home and children for long hours day after day. The leaving of children either in charge of a hired child, or locked in the cottage alone was considered by many women the worst part of their employment,³ and it often entailed a serious deduction from their earnings. "I do not think a great deal is got by a mother of a family going out to work," said one who had been engaged in field work for twenty-five years, "perhaps she has to hire a girl to look after the children, and there is a great waste of victuals and spoiling of things; and then working in the fields makes people eat so much more. I know it was so with me always. I often say there is not fourpence got in the year by my working out . . . but generally I am in better health when I am out at work."⁴

When a woman arrived home in the evenings after a long day in the fields there was housework, cooking, mending and the children to look after. Sometimes the home was neglected, and if not, it often meant that the woman was over-worked. No hard and fast rule can be made about the neglect of the home. A married woman often did not start work until 8 a.m. and returned before her husband to get the evening meal. Sometimes she had one day a week at home to attend to family affairs.⁵ There was certainly little time for cooking, but the lack of fuel and the low wages which provided little more than bread and potatoes did not in any case allow much to be done. Those who blamed women's agricultural work for the lack of domestic comfort failed to realise the actual position; among the labouring classes generally there was the greatest ignorance of domestic economy, and management in the homes of domestic workers was not generally better

¹ "In Studley it is not at all uncommon for a whole family to sleep in the same room. The number of bastards in that place is very great . . . I don't think that this state of things is attributable to the women working in the fields, but more to the want of proper accommodation in the cottages." *Ibid.*, p. 62. Evidence of Mr. Henry Phelps.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 293-4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-8.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 101, 118, 119.

than that of those who were out all day. The lack of comfort was due, not so much to neglect—for many field workers were among the most industrious of their class—but to ignorance and long years of low wages and mean diet. Until the income of the labourer was raised there was little chance of improving the domestic comfort of the family. The disadvantages arising from women's labour made it most desirable that it should cease to be a necessity, but until an adequate income made that possible, there was no question that the disadvantages to the family were outweighed by earnings which just relieved it from the pressure of want.

EDUCATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL CLASSES

Educational facilities in country districts in the early nineteenth century, while leaving much to be desired, were not altogether lacking; but in many cases economic conditions were such as to prevent advantage being taken of the opportunities which existed. In many villages there were charitable bequests for the free instruction of a limited number of children; dame schools of very varying character were fairly common, and after the foundation of the Lancastrian Association in 1810, followed by the National Society in 1811, elementary schools of a better sort were provided in many districts.

The fact that education had in most cases to be paid for at once ruled out some of the poorest, although the fees of labourers' children were sometimes reduced and sometimes paid by others.¹ Under the old Poor Law the allowances paid for children often enabled parents to afford the small weekly sums required by dame schools and others, and according to a witness before a Lords' Committee in 1817, the lower classes in Somerset would "suffer great distress in order to send their children to school."² In Northumberland, where education among the agricultural classes was more general and of a better standard than in any other part of the country, parents made every effort to procure education for their children.³

As the nineteenth century advanced, improved schools became more numerous as a result of the activities of the two educational associations, but after 1834 many agricultural labourers could not afford to leave their children at school although greater advantages were offered. Children had to begin at the earliest possible moment to support themselves, and in the eyes of the poor, a small wage in the immediate future was of more importance than a prospective gain from education.⁴ As soon as a child was old enough to scare birds or watch cattle, education had to cease, apart from the instruction in reading and writing received at the Sunday School. An attempt was made to lessen the evil by admitting children at an earlier age. To some extent this was fairly successful, since a woman out in the fields all day was glad to use the school as a nursery and to send her children to school as soon as possible.

¹ P.P. 1843, xii, p. 312.

² Lords' Commission on Poor Laws (1818), v, p. 175.

³ Poor Laws (1834), xxxviii, p. 466c. *Women and Children in Agriculture*, 1843, xii, pp. 300-302.

⁴ *Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, pp. 219-220.

The age at which children left school depended entirely upon the opportunities of wage earning in the district. As a general rule in rural areas boys were earlier employed in the fields than girls, who remained longer at school. In towns and especially in factory districts the opposite was the case. It often happened, however, that far fewer girls than boys were sent to school in the first place, partly on account of their greater usefulness in domestic occupations and also from the general impression that education was not so necessary to girls as boys.¹ Again, although girls remained longer at school, their attendance was much more broken, especially where the mother was engaged in agricultural work away from home. After the age of eleven or twelve girls were kept at home entirely, either to take charge of the house in the absence of the mother or to become nurse girls in other families. At thirteen many girls became domestic servants.

The few years given to education were so broken that very little could really be done in the way of instruction. At Framlingham, for instance, of ninety girls in the school, one-third were absent in the winter, and two-thirds in the summer. The older girls were absent from six to eight months in the year—"it's teaching the same thing always over again"—said the mistress.² Local domestic industries caused as many breaks as field work. At Lavenham girls were kept plaiting straw all the summer,³ and in Dorset many children were only allowed to attend school on condition that more than half their time was spent in making buttons, at which they earned only from 1½d. to 4d. a week in 1843.⁴

The result of this desultory attendance was that few women in the agricultural classes could read fluently or write correctly.⁵ The knowledge gained by many was so imperfect that it was quickly forgotten, and even those who were able to read and write a little were generally in a state of ignorance with regard to needlework, cooking and domestic economy.⁶ Their homes for the most part were too poor to give any training in these matters, and the result was that only field work and the poorest kind of domestic service were open to them. Prevented by ignorance and lack of training from improving their position, the lives of too many children in the agricultural classes proved to be a mere repetition of those of their parents. More than anything else the lack of education was responsible for the continued exploitation of the labour of women and children.

Even the slight opportunities that did exist for rural education were by 1843 already causing a certain amount of dissatisfaction among farmers. It was becoming increasingly difficult to get indoor servants on farms, especially dairymaids, but this was due to a variety of causes and not in the main to education. Many girls preferred the greater freedom of field work and others were attracted to factory labour by

¹ *Annual Reports British and Foreign School Soc.* (1843), p. 81.

² *P.P. Report on Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, p. 239.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁵ Of 27,670 couples married in England and Wales in three months of the year 1838, 8,733 men and 13,624 women were unable to sign their names. *Annual Reports British and Foreign School Soc.* (1840), p. 22.

⁶ *P.P. Report*, 1843, xii, pp. 25-6.

the higher wages offered. Nevertheless, opinions were frequently expressed that "the least educated are the best servants"; that "in the National Schools they become habituated to needlework, which is labour of a much finer kind than they must perform in farmhouses, and which gives them a distaste for it." The schools also were blamed for the shortage of dairymaids: "They all want to be house-maids, or mantua makers, or something of that sort. They object to such work as the dairy; they are too delicate for that."¹

CHANGING CONDITIONS

Although educational opportunities for the agricultural classes themselves were still slight, some improvement is noticeable in the conditions connected with women's agricultural work from the second and third decades of the nineteenth century. As day labourers women were mainly engaged in the lighter forms of field work, and the heavier tasks which they had performed as servants in husbandry and as occupiers on small holdings were becoming almost entirely men's work. This was partly due to an awakening of public conscience and the consideration of what might be required of a woman's strength, partly to an objection on the part of women themselves to perform certain tasks, and in a few cases to a change in farming methods which dispensed with their labour. Leading horses at the plough, for instance, had at one time been a common occupation for women. It was one of the most unpleasant and wearisome of all farming tasks, especially in bad weather and on stiff soils, when the ten or twelve miles walked during the day often meant complete physical exhaustion. By the 'forties the system by which ploughmen drove their own horses had been very largely adopted, and women were only employed at this work in a few rare instances in Devon.²

At the same time compulsory apprenticeship was falling into disuse. The disadvantages by which it was often accompanied had caused many parishes to discontinue the system and where it still existed the Act of 56 Geo. III, c. 139, which regulated the binding of apprentices had remedied the more serious evils. The practice of sending young girls into the fields was almost given up except for occasional work in hay and harvest, and then only when they reached a suitable age.³ "I remember formerly," said a witness in 1843, "when girls turned out regularly with the boys to plough, etc., and were up to the knees in dirt, and in the middle of winter, in all kinds of employment. Now you never see a girl about in the fields."⁴

The greater demand for labour in the towns and the corresponding difficulty of obtaining farm servants made for better conditions in their employment. Much of the out-door work, which seems to have been viewed with increasing dislike, was given up and the duties of farm servants became more purely domestic. This was particularly noticeable in connection with milking and the rearing of young stock. In the eighteenth century milking, with few exceptions, was everywhere a

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 213, 216, 203, 253.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 43-4.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 102.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-6.

woman's job. Objections to it on the part of women seem first to have been made in the Home Counties at the end of the eighteenth century. In 1800 farmers complained that maids in Middlesex did not want to milk; by 1808 women were no longer employed in this work in Bedfordshire,¹ and by the 'forties the same objection had travelled to remote parts of Devon and Yorkshire.² As time went on women's work in this connection gradually diminished until it ceased altogether in many districts except where carried out by occupiers' families on small holdings. From the point of view of production this change has been a loss to agriculture. To many dairy farmers it has proved a serious difficulty, since men are not on the whole so successful either as milkers, or in their handling and rearing of live stock.³

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE WOMAN DAY LABOURER

By the end of the nineteenth century women had almost ceased to be employed as wage earners in agriculture. A considerable decline in the number of women day labourers was already noticeable when the inquiry of 1867 was made. Men's wages were at last slowly rising in some parts of the country, and in the next decade the formation of the Agricultural Labourers' Union resulted in a visible improvement in the material condition of the labourer. There was, therefore, not quite the same necessity for women's assistance, and many women who had been in the habit of working themselves had "made up their minds that it did not answer, and that they would not encourage their children to take to it."⁴ Except where wages were still so low as to compel women to work, there was a growing disinclination to take field labour,⁵ and in Dorset, it was stated, "the only way to get them" was for farmers to refuse to employ a man unless his wife would undertake to work when required.⁶

At the same time the more extensive use of machinery was making it possible for farmers to dispense with women's labour. Hay-tedding, mowing and reaping machines, together with horse hoes, did most of the work formerly done by women and children.⁷ Again, after 1870 less labour was required by the conversion of arable to pasture and the increase in small holdings and dairy farming, following on the competition of corn growers in the New World. With the improvement in the pecuniary position of the male labourer and these changes in agriculture, women day labourers as a class disappeared.

¹ Batchelor's *Bedfordshire*, p. 582.

² *P.P. Report on Women and Children in Agriculture* (1843), xii, p. 314.

³ Levy, *Large and Small Holdings*, p. 172.

⁴ *P.P. Report on Children's, Young Persons' and Women's Employment in Agriculture* (1868-9), xiii, p. 54.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

Ibid., pp. 14, 257.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

PART II

WOMEN IN INDUSTRY AND TRADE

CHAPTER VI

TEXTILE INDUSTRIES—THE DOMESTIC SYSTEM

FROM the earliest times the productive work of women has been of greater importance in the textile industries than in any other trade. In primitive society the provision of clothing for the family was entirely woman's responsibility; and in early times we find the "virtuous woman" poetically described as one who "seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands . . . [who] maketh herself coverings of tapestry," and, having supplied the needs of her household "maketh fine linen and selleth it." With the organisation of the textile industries for commercial production and distribution, women's control of the manufacture gradually lessened, but their work in different branches continued to be of enormous importance all through the days of hand industry, and without their activities, particularly in spinning and providing the yarn, the nation could not have been clothed, neither could England's staple, the woollen industry have developed.

By the eighteenth century, although some of the family clothing was still provided in some country farms, more particularly in the North and in Wales, and household linen was still produced at home in many places, the textile industries generally had long been organised on a capitalistic basis, and women, though still working in their homes, were engaged mainly as wage earners. As a result of the inventions beginning about the middle of the century, the textile industries were revolutionised and transferred from the cottage to the factory. The introduction of machinery not only produced great changes in domestic life, but it completely reorganised the work of women and enormously changed the conditions of their employment. Thus with the development of industry on modern lines the industrial and economic position of women was radically altered. Before the significance of the change can be estimated, however, it is necessary to get a true perspective of women's work in the textile industries before the Industrial Revolution, and a brief description of their organisation in the eighteenth century is therefore necessary.

THE COTTON INDUSTRY

While the woollen industry was England's greatest and oldest trade after agriculture, cotton was of very minor importance until the end of the eighteenth century when rapid developments in the processes of manufacture speedily made it the leading textile trade. The

Lancashire cotton workers of the seventeenth century produced only coarse fabrics of linen warp and cotton weft,¹ and the sudden popularity of cotton goods for fashionable wear at the end of the century was due to the importation of fine Indian muslins, chintzes and calicoes.

The new materials increased in favour in spite of an outcry from the woollen trade on whose behalf the "will of the ladies" and "their passion for their fashion" was denounced.² The eagerness with which the new fashion was adopted is described by Defoe at the beginning of the eighteenth century: "The *chints* and *painted calicoes*, which before were only made use of for carpets, quilts, etc., and to clothe children and ordinary people, became now the dress of our ladies; and such is the power of a mode as we saw our persons of quality dressed in Indian carpets, which but a few years before their chamber-maids would have thought too ordinary for them: the chints was advanced from lying upon the floors to their backs, from the foot-cloth to the petticoat; and even the queen herself at this time was pleased to appear in China and Japan, I mean China silks and calico. Nor was this all, but it crept into our homes, our closets, and bedchambers; curtains, cushions, chairs, and at last beds themselves, were nothing but calicoes or Indian stuffs."³

As long as English spinning failed to compete with the fine yarn produced by the Hindoos, fine goods could not be woven and the development of the manufacture proceeded slowly. In the first half of the eighteenth century the spinning of cotton yarn employed comparatively few women, since much of the yarn used was imported by the East India Company and a good deal of the raw cotton that was imported was spun into candle-wicks.⁴ With the rapid increase in the trade which began about the middle of the century women cotton spinners were soon in urgent demand. The eagerness with which cotton weft was sought and the high prices paid by the weavers soon created a large new class of spinners in Lancashire, many of whom turned from wool and flax to the more lucrative cotton. The increase in the imports of raw material give some idea of the expanding employment for women in this direction. After remaining almost stationary for half a century the imports in 1740 amounted only to 1½ million pounds; in 1750 they rose to about 3,000,000, and by 1764 the amount was nearly 4,000,000 pounds.⁵ The increase is slight when compared with importation figures for the later days of machine manufacture, but in the days of the hand wheel it betokened a great expansion of the market for women's labour.

THE TASKS OF WOMEN COTTON WORKERS IN THE HOME

At this time and until Arkwright's water frame (1773) made possible the manufacture of pure cotton goods and the organisation of the factory system, the cotton industry was carried on entirely on domestic

¹ Daniels, *Early English Cotton Industry*, p. 13.

² Defoe, *Plan of English Commerce*, 1728, p. 253; quoted Baines. *History of Cotton Manufacture*, p. 80.

³ Defoe, In *Weekly Review*, January 31, 1708, quoted Baines, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79.

⁴ Ure, *Cotton Manufacture of Great Britain*, vol. i, p. 189.

⁵ *Ibid.*

ines. "The workshop of the weaver was a rural cottage," says Ure, "from which when he tired of sedentary labour he could sally forth into his little garden, and with the spade or the hoe tend its culinary productions. The cotton wool which was to form his weft was picked clean by the fingers of his younger children, and was carded and spun by the older ones assisted by his wife, and the yarn was woven himself assisted by his sons. When he could not procure within his family a supply of yarn adequate to the demands of his loom, he had recourse to the spinsters of his neighbourhood. One good weaver could keep three active women at work upon the wheel spinning weft."¹

The cotton worker's cottage was indeed a miniature factory, in which the father superintended the weaving, and the mother was responsible for all the preparatory processes and the training and setting to work of the children. Speaking of his own early days, Radcliffe says: "My mother taught me (while too young to weave) to earn my bread by carding and spinning cotton, winding linen or cotton weft for my father and elder brothers at the loom, until I became of sufficient age and strength for my father to put me into a loom." By the time he arrived at manhood, his training and experience had given him a "practical knowledge of every process from the cotton bag to the piece of cloth," and he was ready to start business for himself.²

The first processes with which women and children were concerned in the home were picking and cleaning the cotton. The raw material was first separated from the bale, laid out on a wire riddle or tightly stretched cords, and beaten well with willow switches to free from dirt—a dirty and laborious task unsuitable for the home, which it was likely to fill with dust and flue. Cotton intended for fine spinning was then carefully washed, while in other cases it was simply drenched in order to make the fibres cling in spinning.³ The younger Crompton has described how his mother prepared the cotton for the inventor of the mule. "I recollect that soon after I was able to walk I was employed in the cotton manufacture. My mother used to bat the cotton wool on a wire riddle. It was then put into a deep brown mug with a strong ley of soap suds. My mother then tucked up my petticoats about my waist, and put me into the tub to tread upon the cotton at the bottom. When a second riddleful was batted I was lifted out, it was placed in the mug, and I again trod it down. This process was continued until the mug became so full that I could no longer safely stand in it, when a chair was placed besides it, and I held on by the back. When the mug was quite full, the soap suds were poured off, and each separate dollop [lump] of wool well squeezed to free it from moisture. They were then placed on the bread rack under the beams of the kitchen-loft to dry. My mother and my grand-mother carded the cotton wool by hand, taking one of the dolllops at a time, on the single hand cards. When carded they were put aside in separate parcels ready for spinning."⁴

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-2.

² Radcliffe, *History of Power Loom Weaving*, pp. 9-10.

³ Chapman, *Lancashire Cotton Industry*, p. 13.

⁴ French, *Life of Crompton*, 3rd ed., pp. 56-7.

Drying the cotton for spinning was not always an easy matter in the cottages and was sometimes attended with risk, as shown by the following entry in Rowbotham's Diary in 1788: "Fire at Isaac Hardy's, which burnt 6 lbs. of cotton, 5 pairs of stockings and set the cradle on fire, with a child in which was much burnt. It happened through the wife improvidently holding the candle under the cotton as it was drying." A similar entry shortly afterwards suggests that such accidents were perhaps of frequent occurrence: "The cotton in drying at Edmund Mellor's, Top-o' Th Moor, caught fire, and consumed about 7 pounds, together with the flake, a silk handkerchief. One vollom of the *Newgate Callinder* was materially damaged."¹

When dry the cotton was ready for carding. Hand cards were rectangular brushes fitted with wire bristles; the cotton was placed on one card and brushed with another until all the fibres were straightened out. The cardings could then be taken off in soft, fleecy rolls and converted into rovings by twisting on the spinning wheel. By a repetition of this last process the rovings were drawn out and twisted into yarn fine enough for the weaver.²

In many homes, especially if there were more than one weaver in the family, it was more than the wife and children could do to provide sufficient yarn, and in such cases it was customary for the cleaning and carding to be done at home and for some of the rovings to be sent out to be converted into weft by neighbouring spinsters, usually the wives and daughters of husbandmen and craftsmen. Some of these were undoubtedly full-time workers dependent upon their spinning wages for a livelihood; others took in spinning as a by-employment, like the wives of some of the leaseholders around Manchester, who, says Aiken, "consider themselves as better than the common small farmers," and whose industrial earnings enabled "their living and dressing better."³

Estimates vary as to the number of spinners required to keep one weaver fully supplied with weft. Ure says a "good weaver could keep three active women at work" at the wheel only, while Radcliffe estimated that for the preparation as well as the spinning of the yarn, six to eight hands were required. Children and old people were, however, evidently included in this number, since he says that this "inexhaustible source" of labour enabled "every person from the age of seven to eighty years (who retained their sight and could move their hands) to earn their bread, say one to three shillings per week without going to the parish."⁴ It has also to be considered that many of the rural weavers combined their work in the loom with some small interest in agriculture which rendered them still more dependent upon outside spinners, since, in addition to ordinary household duties, their wives were also partly engaged in dairying. According to French, the small farmer manufacturers who carried their fustians and dimities

¹ Rowbotham's *Diary*, January 14 and March 6, 1788. Published in weekly extracts in *Oldham Standard*, 1887.

² Guest, *Complete History of Cotton Manufacture*, p. 7.

³ Aiken, *Description of the Country round Manchester* (1795), p. 326.

⁴ Radcliffe, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.

to market in a wallet balanced over their shoulder, often carried on the other arm a basket of fresh butter and dairy produce prepared by their wives.¹ The Widow Crompton herself was a farmer manufacturer, occupying a small farm near Bolton, carrying her butter weekly to market and employing "every leisure hour in carding, spinning and weaving." The responsibilities of what must have been an extremely full and busy life were still further increased by her appointment as overseer of the poor for her township, and it is therefore little wonder that she instructed the young Crompton to weave "as soon as his legs were long enough to touch the treadles."²

The eagerness with which weavers sought their yarn from "spinners of every degree of skill"³ suggests that the greater number were unable to obtain sufficient supplies from their own families, and a developing trade revealed a real scarcity of cotton weft. The difficulty was aggravated by the adoption of Kay's flying shuttle, which came into general use among the cotton weavers about 1760, and by which the weaver could work up nearly twice as much weft as before.⁴ They were therefore often in great straits to keep their looms fully employed, especially in the summer months when the spinners were assisting with hay and harvest. "It was no uncommon thing," says Guest, "for a weaver to walk three or four miles in a morning, and call on five or six spinners, before he could collect weft to serve him for the remainder of the day; and when he wished to weave a piece in a shorter time than usual, a new ribbon, or gown was necessary to quicken the exertions of the spinner."⁵ The great demand for their labour enabled the spinners to name their own prices, and weavers were sometimes obliged to pay more for the spinning than the price allowed by the merchants, "but durst not complain, much less abate the spinner, less their looms should stand unemployed."⁶ According to Guest, the weaver whose yarn was not prepared by his family, paid out as much in 1760 as he himself received for weaving. Thus when he received 36s. for a piece of cloth which had occupied him fourteen days, 18s. had to be paid to the spinner, who in turn paid out 9s. for the picking, carding and roving.⁷ The prosperity of the spinners was, however, of short duration. The prospect of new markets for cotton goods in Germany, Italy and the North American colonies increased the impatience of merchants with the crude method of spinning by the hand wheel, which, with its tedious labour and inadequate supply of indifferent yarn, was the only obstacle to an expanding and lucrative trade. The attempts to devise a more efficient means of production led to inventions which were to revolutionise the industry completely.

THE NEW INVENTIONS

By 1760 the greatly increased demand for cotton goods both at home and abroad rendered improvements in spinning a matter of urgency, and "made profitable the exercise of inventive ingenuity

¹ *Life of Crompton*, 3rd ed., pp. 4-5.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

³ *Ure, op. cit.*, p. 190.

⁴ *Baines, op. cit.*, pp. 116, 117.

⁵ *Guest, op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁶ *Ogden, Description of Manchester (1783)*, p. 88.

⁷ *Guest, op. cit.*, p. 10.

which otherwise would have remained in a measure dormant."¹ The successful inventions which followed in the next two decades were not the isolated efforts of a few ingenious individuals, but the outcome of experiments extending over a period when invention was "consciously and publicly promoted."²

The three inventions of which it is necessary to give some account since they so materially affected the lives of the workers were "Hargreaves' spinning jenny, Arkwright's water frame and Crompton's mule. Hargreaves' jenny simply multiplied the number of spindles that could be worked by one spinner. His model of sixteen spindles patented in 1770 represented a great advance on the old one spindle wheel, but by 1784 the number had reached eighty and was still increasing. While the jenny thus increased production enormously, it did not in the early days change the organisation of the industry, since the small jennies were used by women and children in the cottages and rovings had still to be made on the old hand wheel. The thread produced by the jenny like that of the wheel was only suitable for weft.

The machine which introduced a new era in the cotton industry by producing a thread of sufficient fineness and strength for warps and making possible pure cotton goods, was Arkwright's frame. Worked by water power, the frame established the method of spinning by rollers—a process invented and tried unsuccessfully by Lewis Paul and Wyatt in 1738. Thus the jenny and frame for a time worked as "complementary machines,"³ the one producing weft in the cottages and the other warp in the factories. Later improvements patented by Arkwright in 1775 made it possible for machinery to perform the preliminary operations of carding and roving, and these processes also were soon transferred to the factory.

Finally, in 1779, Crompton combined features of both the jenny and the frame in his mule, which produced a finer and better thread than had hitherto been obtained and made possible the manufacture of fine muslins. Worked at first by hand, the mule of 1790 was driven by water power. The last twenty years of the eighteenth century was a period of transition. Factories driven by water power were built for Arkwright's frames, while small jennies and mules were worked at home and large ones assembled in small shops and factories. In the last decade the application of steam power led to more and larger factories.

While spinning methods were thus transformed, weaving remained for a much longer period a domestic occupation. The first improvement made for the loom was Kay's flying shuttle, invented in 1733, but not in general use among cotton weavers until 1760. At first the weavers benefitted by the increased supply of yarn and the improved

¹ Witt Bowden, *Industrial Society in England*, p. 65.

² *Ibid.*, p. 66. It has been well put by Witt Bowden: "In none of its aspects was this revolution the work of a few unappreciated individuals. It was rather the creation of social forces finding expression, to be sure in the work of individuals, far more significantly in governmental patronage and in organized, co-operative activities intended primarily to promote not the fortunes of individuals but the welfare of the nation." (p. 68).

³ Daniels, *Early English Cotton Industry*, p. 80.

thread spun by machines, and for a short time they enjoyed a period of prosperity afterwards looked back upon as "the golden age" of the weaver. The enormous production of yarn led to the invention of the power loom in 1787, but its working was unsatisfactory until 1806-7, and even thirty years later hand looms still outnumbered those worked by power.

At the beginning of our period, as we have seen, women were responsible for all the early processes in the cotton manufacture. By 1830, cleaning, carding, roving and spinning had been taken from the cottage into the factory, and spinning, for so many centuries a woman's industry, was now performed by a class of skilled workmen on complicated machinery. Weaving, on the other hand, so far as the power loom was concerned, was largely performed by women and girls although there was still a large class of men and women hand-loom weavers. A more detailed examination of the conditions under which women were employed in the separate branches of spinning and weaving under the domestic system is necessary before the effects of these vast changes upon their industrial, economic and social positions can be appreciated. Since many of the changes were analogous to those which occurred in the woollen industry, a brief account of its organization will be given first, before attempting to estimate the importance of the changes in both industries.

THE WOOLLEN INDUSTRY

Until the first third of the nineteenth century the woollen industry remained the staple manufacture of England, although the cotton trade became a formidable rival towards the end of the eighteenth century. The growing popularity of cotton goods and the way they were ousting woollens was graphically described in a pamphlet in 1782: "As for the ladies, they wear scarcely anything now but cotton, calicoes, muslins, or silks, and think no more of woollen stuffs than we think of an old almanac; besides our furniture now is nearly all cotton, subject to great danger of catching fire, as fatal experience has too lately proved. In short, we have scarcely any woollens now about our beds but blankets, and they would most likely be thrown aside, could we keep our bodies warm without them."¹

The importance of the woollen industry was due to the fact that it was carried on more or less in every part of the land, and the amount of employment it provided in the days of hand manufacture was enormous. It has been said that "there was probably not a town, village or hamlet throughout the length and breadth of the country which was not connected at some time or other with the manufacture of cloth."² By the eighteenth century the industry was concentrating in the three great manufacturing districts of East Anglia, the South West and Yorkshire, but while their production far exceeded that of all the rest of the country, smaller centres of the trade still flourished in many parts of the kingdom. Different districts specialised in certain

¹ *The Contrast or Comparison between our Woollen, Linen and Silk Manufacture* . . . (1782); quoted Bischoff, *History of Woollen and Worsted Man*, vol. 1, p. 233.

² Lipeon, *Wool and Worsted Industries*, p. 6.

branches of trade, and there was therefore an enormous exchange trade between different areas. London was the great receiving house of the trade, whence goods were dispatched and redistributed through the land by means of pack horses. In addition, great quantities of goods were sold at the weekly cloth markets in the clothing centres and at the great fairs of Stourbridge, Bristol, Exeter and the rest.¹

Yorkshire was the main source of supply for coarse cloths and kersies, "used for cloathing the poorer sorts of people"; fine medly cloths were produced in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire; serges in Devon, and crapes, camblets and worsted stuffs in Norwich, for "the wear of people of better condition." In addition to this exchange trade in finished goods there was also a great trade in wool, since the home supply was often unsuitable for the local manufacture. Thus the wool produced in Norfolk was sent to Yorkshire, and Norwich used the fine long stapled wool of Lincoln and Leicestershire. Similarly supplies of yarn were drawn from distant parts of the country, and wool was sent as far north as Westmorland to be spun and was brought back to London "to the amount at least of 100 horse-packs a week," to be woven into fine druggets and camblets in Spitalfields.² One has only to read the accounts of such travellers as Arthur Young and Eden, and the topographical descriptions of other eighteenth century writers to realise the enormous activity occasioned by the woollen trade, and the amount of industry required from men, women and children to clothe the nation and maintain the export trade in the days of hand labour.

ORGANISATION OF THE TRADE

The woollen industry was divided into two great branches; the cloth or woollen trade, and the worsted or stuff trade. The difference lay first in the type of wool used and in the preparatory processes before spinning. The cloth trade used short wool which was carded, and the worsted, long stapled wool which was combed before spinning.³ After weaving, the woollen cloth passed through various fulling and "finishing" processes which were unnecessary in the case of worsteds or stuffs, as they were commonly called.

The South West of England was the great centre of the cloth trade, and there, according to Defoe, almost the entire population in both towns and villages was "busy'd in the Broadcloth Manufacture."⁴ Although for the most part the workers were engaged in their own homes, the great majority of them were employed as wage earners by large capitalist clothiers in the towns, who provided the materials,

¹ Postlethwayt, *Dictionary*, art. Britain. "At Exeter," says Defoe, "the people assured me that at this market is generally sold from 60 to 70 to 80, and sometimes a Hundred Thousand Pounds value in Serges in a Week." *Tour*, (1927 ed.), vol. i, p. 222.

² Postlethwayt, *Dictionary*, art. Britain.

³ In carding, the short fibres were interlaced by being worked between the cards. In combing, the long fibres were drawn out until all lay in the same direction.

⁴ Defoe, *Tour*, (1927 ed.), vol. i, pp. 280-284.

directed all stages of the industry and marketed the finished cloth.¹ The skilled craftsmen engaged in the dyeing and finishing processes worked on the premises of the employers, and some of the clothiers had already gathered their journeymen and women weavers into workshops, which marked an intermediate stage in the transition from the domestic to the factory system proper. The growth of capitalism in the South West had, in fact, by the eighteenth century, resulted in large scale production, permitting a division of labour with as many distinct classes of workers as were afterwards to be found in the factories in the early days of the Industrial Revolution. To the skilled work of these different classes of workers, the excellence of the West of England cloth was due.²

In Yorkshire the great centres of the woollen trade were the districts round Leeds, Halifax and Wakefield, although the industry was carried on to some extent in the villages and scattered farms over the whole county. Yorkshire was increasing her trade rapidly all through the eighteenth century and big businesses were developing, especially in the worsted manufacture. But, while big clothiers similar to those in the West were to be found, by far the greater number of those engaged in the woollen trade were small men of little capital. The Woollen Report of 1806 describes the domestic system there as still "conducted by a multitude of Master Manufacturers, generally possessing very small, and scarcely ever any great extent of capital. They buy the Wool of the Dealer, and, in their own homes, assisted by their wives and children, and from two or three, to six or seven Journeymen, they dye it (when dyeing is necessary) and through all the different stages work it up into undressed Cloth."³ How numerous were these small clothiers, carrying on the manufacture in their homes, may be judged from Defoe's description of the country round Halifax: "Almost at every House there was a Tenter, and almost on every Tenter a Piece of Cloth, or Kersie, or Shalloon . . . yet look which way we would . . . it was all the same; innumerable Houses and Tenters, and a White Piece upon every Tenter."⁴ Some of these little manufacturers, producing only one, or at most, two pieces of cloth a week, were able to conduct all the necessary processes by means of family labour alone, but a greater number were small employers who had both men and women working for them, either in their own cottages near by, or on premises attached to the house of the manufacturer. Thus as in the West of England, the majority of the workers were wage earners, and the difference in the industrial organisation in Yorkshire was due almost entirely to a difference in the scale of operations, and not to the survival of another system as has often been suggested.⁵

The small manufacturing system of Yorkshire was everywhere

¹ "They told me at Bradford, Wilts., that it was no extraordinary thing to have Clothiers in the Country worth from Ten Thousand to Forty Thousand Pounds a Man, and many of the great Families, who now pass for Gentry in those Counties, have been originally raised from, and built up by this truly noble Manufacture." *Ibid.*, i, p. 280.

² *P.P. Woollen Report* (1803), iii, p. 8.

³ *P.P. Woollen Report* (1806), iii, p. 8.

⁴ Defoe, *Tour* (1927 ed.), vol. ii, p. 601.

⁵ Heaton, *op. cit.*, p. 92. Cole, Introduction to Defoe's *Tour*, 1927, pp. xiv, xv.

connected with a dependence upon agriculture as a by-industry. The profits of the little clothier were small, and the greater number occupied a little land, generally from three to fifteen acres according to the size of the family. On this they kept two or three cows and a horse for use in their business if they could afford it.¹ Thus while manufacture was regarded as their mainstay, the use of a small plot of land enabled their wives to supplement the family income with a home supply of butter, cheese, eggs and garden produce, and their dairying could be done in the intervals of carding, spinning and preparing the yarn for the loom. In spite of long hours and strenuous labour the joint profits of industry and this simple farming were only sufficient to provide a frugal livelihood and simple comforts which would be regarded as totally inadequate by workers to-day. A conversation quoted by Dr. Pococke in 1751 describes the simple manner of living among the clothiers. The son of one of them, "a pretty handy youth . . . told me that oatcake and butter-milk was their common food, that on a festival they had a piece of meat and a pye-pudding ; that his father paid six pounds a year, kept a horse, three cows, and forty sheep ; that his father and he wove woollen both for their clothing and to sell."²

By the mid-eighteenth century the worsted industry was carried on in every part of the kingdom, but Norwich, at her greatest prosperity from 1743-1763, had long been the most important seat of the manufacture.³ The trade was carried on by big merchant manufacturers who provided employment for all the surrounding population. According to Defoe, "there was not in all the Eastern and middle part of Norfolk, any Hand, unemploy'd, if they would Work ; and the very Children after four or five Years of Age, could every one earn their own Bread."⁴ His description of Norwich suggests that many of the employees were gathered into small workshops and factories : "If a Stranger was only to ride thro' and view the City of Norwich for a Day, he would have much more reason to think there was a Town without Inhabitants . . . but on the contrary, if he was to view the City, either on a Sabbath-day, or on any public Occasion, he would wonder where all the People could dwell, the Multitude is so great : But the case is this ; the Inhabitants being all busie at their Manufactures, dwell in their Garrets at their Looms, and in their Combing-shops, so they call them, Twisting Mills, and other Work-Houses ; almost all the Works they are employ'd in, being done within Doors."⁵ Here, as elsewhere, the preparation of the yarn found plenty of employment for women. "The vast manufactures carried on chiefly by the Norwich weavers," says Young, "employ all the country around in spinning yarn for them, besides many thousand packs of yarn which they receive from other countries, even so far as Yorkshire and Westmorland." In addition to spinning, women were employed in other branches of the trade. "The earnings of the manufacturers are various, but in general

¹ *P.P. Woollen Report*, 1806, iii, pp. 9, 447.

² Pococke, *Travels Through England*, vol. i, p. 203.

³ James, *History of Worsted Manufacture*, pp. 257-8.

⁴ Defoe, *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 62.

⁵ Defoe, *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 63.

high. Men, on an average, do not exceed five shillings a week ; but then many women earn as much, and boys and girls of fifteen or sixteen likewise the same."¹ The wages of the spinners were 2s. 6d. to 3s. 0d. weekly, and women doublers of yarn had 2s. ; the more highly paid workers were probably weavers.

We can now see more clearly the part played by women in this industrial organisation. It is understood that women and children did all the spinning and some of the weaving, but their other work will be considered first.

WOMEN WORKERS UNDER THE DOMESTIC SYSTEM

Women's work was most varied where the influence of capital in the trade was negligible, as among the small Yorkshire clothiers. When every process from the fleece to the woven piece of cloth was undertaken in the home, the women of the family commonly assisted in all operations. Big capitalistic production, on the other hand, meant a division of labour in which women were relegated to certain occupations, the number of which tended to be reduced as capitalistic organisation developed. In early days in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, women had been employed in every branch of the woollen industry, as wool sorters, wrappers, carders, spinners, dyers and weavers, and had been enrolled as apprentices and admitted to the membership of the crafts. As the industry became more highly organised their employment was attacked as competing with that of men, and on these grounds they were excluded from certain branches of the trade.² Later, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the tendency to employ an increasing number of journeymen on the premises of the employer still further limited women's work. Independent workers could and did work, both as journeywomen weavers and in some of the finishing processes in the workshops which were established, but the wives of journeymen who worked entirely away from home, either lost any share they had had in the industry, or were restricted to carding and spinning. They could no longer warp the yarn or take a turn in the loom as they so often did when the journeyman was employed at home. The growth of capital in Yorkshire had the same effect as in the West of England, and in the numerous cottages scattered among the manufacturers' houses, women and children were busy spinning while their husbands were employed on the premises of the clothier.³ Many of the journeymen, particularly among the weavers, objected strongly to the growth of a system which deprived them of the assistance of their wives and children,⁴ and it was afterwards one of the bitterest complaints against the factory system that by it women and children were deprived of employment which they could carry on in the home. This objection was based upon the connection between the actual manual assistance given by women and children, which had been so necessary in some forms of domestic

¹ Young, *Eastern Town*, 1771, ii, pp. 74 seq.

² Lipson, *Woollen Industry*, pp. 34-35.

³ Defoe, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 602.

⁴ *P.P. Woollen Report*, 1806, iii, pp. 51, 6.

labour, and its financial value in contributing to the family wage. When machine labour did away with any necessity for the former, even the increased wages earned by men did not reconcile them to the economic dependence of their women and children who remained unemployed at home. So accustomed were they to the idea of a family wage and the financial contribution of women and children, that the substitution of an individual wage and the responsibility of the father for the entire support of his family were changes which at first were neither welcomed nor understood.

The wife of a successful clothier who had his house "full of lusty Fellows, some at the Dye-Vat, some dressing the Cloths, some in the Loom, some one thing, some another,"¹ probably took little active interest in his business, unless women were employed to card and spin on the premises, when she would most probably take direction of their work. But among smaller clothiers who employed one or two servants hired by the year and a few apprentices, the help of the wife was often of great importance. She was not only able to give a hand in most of the processes when her help was required, but she was responsible for the direction of affairs during the absence of the clothier when buying wool, delivering it to, or bringing it back from, the spinners. In addition she set the younger children to work and trained them in their daily tasks. Defoe's references are sufficient witness to the early work of children in woollen districts. At Taunton, "there was not a Child in the Town, or in the Villages round it, of above five Years old, but, if it was not neglected by its Parents, and untaught, could earn its own Bread"; while in Yorkshire, he declared, there was "hardly anything above four Years old but its Hands are sufficient to itself."² The youngest children were put to winding the weavers' bobbins and at an incredibly early age were set to the spinning wheel. Those who were fortunate enough to be sent to school had still a task of spinning allotted them for nights and mornings. Afterwards came practice in the loom and for a year or two boys as well as girls were kept hard at work in carding, spinning and weaving. Later they learned to dye the wool, and had experience in some of the finishing processes, so that they became acquainted with all branches of the trade. In this way employment was found for all members of the family.³

When wool came home in the fleece it was first necessary to separate the locks and sort them into their different classes. This was a branch of the industry that in earlier days had been undertaken by women; a Statute of 1554 declared that "the experience thereof consisteth only in women, as clothiers' wives and their women servants."⁴ By the eighteenth century, however, wool sorting had become almost entirely a man's trade and only occasional references are found to women wool sorters. In 1802, for instance, "many women" were stated to be employed as wool sorters at Halifax, but it was "for want of men."⁵ After sorting, the wool was picked and beaten with

¹ Defoe, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 63.

² *Ibid.*, vol. i, pp. 266-7; vol. ii, p. 602.

³ *Woollen Report*, 1806, iii, p. 68.

⁴ Quoted Lipson, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁵ *P.P. Yorkshire Clothiers' Petition*, 1802-3, v, p. 2.

rods to cleanse from tar and dirt, and washed and scoured to free from grease. "Picking" was an unpleasant task, performed by "inferior people," usually women and children. Among the little clothiers, women of the household picked the wool at home; those who were employed as pickers worked either in their own cottages or on the premises of the employer. At Witney, in 1767, "old women of sixty and seventy earned 6d. a day in picking and sorting" the wool for the blanket manufacturers.¹ The next process was dyeing, unless the piece was to be woven white; this again was an occupation which women no longer shared except where they assisted their husbands in the primitive methods in use among the small clothiers. After being sprinkled with oil and well mixed, the wool was then ready to be carded by women and children for woollen cloth, or combed by men for worsted. Both processes were followed by spinning, and since even small clothiers had often to depend on outside assistance, what could not be done in the home was packed and taken or sent out to spinsters. A description quoted by Bonwick shows the dependence of a small clothier on distant spinners at the end of the eighteenth century. "I went to York, to buy wool, and at that time it averaged about 1s. per pound. I then came home, sorted it and combed it myself. . . . Then I took it to hand-spinners, 20 or 30 miles distant. The mother or head of the family plucked the tops into pieces the length of the wool, and gave it to the different branches of the family to spin, who could spin about 9 or 10 hanks per day; for the spinning I gave one halfpenny per hank, and sometimes $\frac{1}{4}$ d. for every 24 hanks over."²

The yarn was now ready to be worked into a web for weaving and wound on quills ready for the shuttle. Among the small manufacturers the warp was prepared at home:

"Now he strains the warp
Along the garden walk, or highway side,
Smoothing each thread; now fits it to the loom,
And sits before the work."³

If, on the other hand, the clothiers employed many journeymen weavers, they sent out the prepared web and engaged women to warp at a weekly wage. When the finished piece was taken from the loom, domestic work, strictly speaking, was at an end. It had still to be treated in various ways to free it from oil and dressing, and woollen cloth was sent to the fulling mill to be cleansed and thickened. When it came home again it was stretched upon tenters and then sold by the domestic clothier while still in its rough state at the nearest weekly cloth market.

Cloth finishing was a separate department of the woollen trade, and for the most part the processes were carried on in the employer's workshop. Sometimes a cloth dresser was allowed to do the work at home and employ his family to assist him,⁴ but the number of such domestic workers was few. Both men and women were employed in the finishing processes, and although women were restricted to the less

¹ Young, *Six Weeks' Tour* (1772 ed.), p. 144.

² Bonwick, *Romance of the Wool Trade*, p. 435.

³ Dyer, *The Fleeces*, iii, 131-4.

⁴ P.P. S.C. on *Manufactures*, 1833, vi, p. 639.

important occupations, the numbers employed appear to have been considerable.¹ In 1795, according to Eden, women dressing cloth at Frome earned 8d. a day, and at Trowbridge, 5s. a week.² "Burling" was the work at which women were most frequently employed, i.e. picking out the knots and imperfections which appeared in the cloth after it returned from the fulling mill. Others, who were employed as "fine drawers," repaired holes or weak places in the cloth after the nap had been raised and dressed by the shearmen. The employment of women in this occupation seems to have been resented by the men drawers, and evidence in the Report of 1806 suggests that some of them at Huddersfield were making an attempt to exclude women from this work.³ The opposition may have been due partly to the introduction of machinery, which at that time was causing unrest among some of the cloth workers and arousing a jealous care for their occupations. There was also a desire among all classes of the woollen workers to enforce the old apprenticeship regulations, and women drawers seem rarely to have served a regular apprenticeship, but to have entered the trade without.⁴

Cloth finally went through the hands of the pressers, after which it was ready for use. Apparently women ceased to be engaged in this occupation sometime in the seventeenth century, since as late as 1599 a certain Rachel Thierry applied for the monopoly of pressing all the serges made in Hampshire—an application that was strongly resisted by the Mayor and Aldermen of Southampton on behalf of the pressers of that town.⁵

The different branches of the clothing trade thus found employment for many thousands of men, women and children in all parts of the country. It is difficult to gain any accurate idea of the proportion of men and women engaged since conditions varied so much in different parts of the country and according to the requirements of the local trade. Pamphleteers, who never tired of praising the woollen manufactures and proving them to be the greatest occupation of the poor of the land, made frequent estimates from time to time of the different classes employed; but in the absence of definite statistical information their calculations can only be accepted as a rough indication of the proportion of workers. One fact, however, stands out clearly, that the number of spinners easily outnumbered all other workers, and since this was essentially the work of women and children, it is evident that they supplied the bulk of the labour for the woollen manufacture. One writer, in 1714, put his estimate as high as about eight women and children to every man employed,⁶ but it must be remembered that spinners were often part time workers. According to Chambers (1743), a pack of short wool manufactured into cloth, employed 63 persons for one week, 28 of whom were men and boys, and 35 women and girls,

¹ A witness in 1802 declared that "a great many women" were employed in the cloth finishing in Wilts. *P.P.* 1802-3, vii, p. 177. Evidence of Ann Edwards.

² Eden, *State of the Poor*, vol. ii, p. 643; vol. iii, p. 800.

³ *P.P. Woollen Report*, 1806, iii, pp. 261-3.

⁴ *P.P. Clothiers' Petition*, 1802-3, vii, pp. 177-8.

⁵ *Lansdowne MSS.*, 161 f. 127, and July, 1599; quoted Clark, *Working Life of Women in the 17th Century*, p. 101.

⁶ *Short Essay upon Trade*, p. 19.

for carding and spinning alone, although women were certainly employed in other branches as well. For the Spanish trade a pack of long combing wool made into stuffs and serges employed 150 spinners as opposed to 52 workers in all the other occupations. In the hosiery trade, out of a total of 184 persons to the pack of wool, 102 were spinners.¹

Although so large a proportion of women was connected with the woollen industry, the preceding sketch has shown that in the eighteenth century they were engaged mainly as wage earners and only in the minor and less remunerative occupations. There appear to have been no women clothiers who might be compared with Chaucer's "Wife of Bath"—

"Of cloth making sche hadde such an haunt,
Sche passeth hem of Ypres and of Gaunt."

or with Emma Earle, the principal clothier of Wakefield, and other women employers in Yorkshire in the fourteenth century.² A few references made in the woollen reports of the period show that the wives of small clothiers, master weavers and cloth dressers frequently continued in business after the death of their husbands as was customary in any other sphere at that time. But apart from widows, few if any women seem to have been conducting business on their own account. The reasons for the gradual exclusion of women from many of the occupations they had in the fifteenth century must be sought in developments in industrial and economic organisation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and are a separate study in themselves. It can only be suggested here that the apprenticeship system was, among many other influences, a factor in the weakening of women's industrial position. Although women appear to have been admitted to the crafts and allowed to carry on trade by virtue of their apprenticeship in the fourteenth century,³ the fact that many girls could be usefully employed in industry at home undoubtedly often prevented their being apprenticed.⁴ In the woollen trade in the eighteenth century, for example, though girls and boys alike were brought up to

¹ Chamber's Dictionary (1743). Art. Wool.

The writer of *The Weaver's True Case* (1714), stated that 1,200 lbs of wool employed 1,187 persons for one week, of whom 900 were spinners, p. 42.

Another estimate given in 1745 shows the distribution of labour:

"To make one piece of Spanish cloth will employ:—

	Men	Women	Boys	Days
Dyeing	1	—	—	1
Beating and Picking	—	2	—	4
Scribbling	2	—	—	5
Spinning the chain	—	8	—	7
Do. the wool	—	8	—	7
Winding chain	—	3	—	1
Warping, Winding and Weaving ..	2	—	1	24
Spinning list	—	2	—	2
Burling	—	2	—	4
Milling	1	—	—	1
Dressing	4	—	—	5

Scheme to Prevent Running of Irish Wools to France, 1745: quoted Bischoff, i., p. 132.

² Heaton, *Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries*, p. 38.

³ Lipeon, *op. cit.*, p. 34; Heaton, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 38.

⁴ Dunlop and Denham, *English Apprenticeship and Child Labour*, ch. ix.

assist in all branches of the trade, girls most often combined household duties with casual employment in industry, and if finally they were employed as weavers or fine drawers, they more often entered the trade by service than by indentured apprenticeship. Those who did serve a legal term of years were more often than not parish apprentices, in which capacity girls were indentured both as weavers and clothiers,¹ though it is very doubtful whether in the latter case they would learn all branches of the trade, as the name implies.

The result of this irregular training was not only that the industry fell naturally into the control of men while women were relegated to subordinate positions, but the fear of competition, inferior work and cheap labour led to a desire to prevent the employment of women wherever possible. Various crafts issued regulations to prevent the admission of women, but as a general rule no objection was made to the employment of wives and servants. The Fullers' Gild at Lincoln, for instance, forbade any man to work at the fulling mill with a woman, unless she were the wife of a master, or her servant.² Thus wives and daughters continued to work as assistants in many trades, and with the growth of industry and the development of capitalism, the workers found it impossible to prevent their employment as wage earners, especially as a form of cheap labour. They did, however, succeed in restricting their competition to a limited number of occupations.

The productive value of women's work in the woollen trade is easily discernible: it is a more difficult matter to estimate the financial value of much of it. Apart from the material relating to spinners and weavers, whose wages will be discussed later, the records are of the scantiest, and few wage statistics are obtainable beyond those given by Eden and Arthur Young for women employed in the minor branches of the industry. Moreover, as has been shown, the earnings of many women were still included in the family wage, and as such cannot be estimated independently. Of the value of their work to the family, however, there was no doubt, especially among the smaller clothiers, where the wife not only took an active part in industrial processes, but often shared the responsibility and general direction of affairs. We have also to remember, in estimating the value of their productive work, that industrial activity was in addition to the multifarious tasks included in housekeeping in the eighteenth century, and from the family point of view, their productive activity in brewing, baking and dairy work was of equal importance. How busy the lives of such women could be is amusingly shown in a colloquial poem describing the Yorkshire clothiers of the mid-eighteenth century.³ The rhymster first describes the early breakfast of the workers, of oaten cake, milk and porridge, after which "from five at morn to eight at neet" all are occupied at their various tasks. At the end of the day the housewife

¹ Sarah Brown, a clothier apprentice in 1718, appealed at the Leeds General Sessions, that her master was "teaching her nothing by way of a trade," and that she had been "very much crushed and abused by beating and otherwise in her master's service." *Leeds General Sessions Records*, iii, p. 77: quoted Heaton, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

² Salzman, *English Industries of the Middle Ages*, p. 222.

³ MSS. in Leeds Reference Library: quoted Heaton, *op. cit.*, pp. 344-6.

calls the family, including servants and apprentices, to supper, and during the meal the clothier informs them of his departure to buy wool :

" Lads, work hard I pray,
Cloth mun be peaked¹ next Market day.
And Tom mun go to-morn to t' spinners,
And Will mun seek about for t' swingers,
And Jack, to-morn by time be rising,
And go to t' sizing mill for sizing.
And get your web and warping done
That ye may get it into t' loom.
Joe, go give my horse some corn,
For I design for t' Wolds to-morn.
So mind and clean my boots and shoon,
For I'll be up i' t' morn right soon.
Mary—there's wool—tak thee and dye it."

The pressure of domestic tasks, essential in so large a family, urges Mary to protest against additional labours at the moment :

MISTRESS :—

" So thou's setting me my wark.
I think I'd more need mend thy sark.²
Prithee, who mun sit at bobbin wheel,
And ne'er a cake at top o' th' creel,³
And me to bake and swing and blend,
And milk, and barns to school to send,
And dumplings for the lads to mak,
And yeast to seek, and syk as that;
And washing up, morn, noon, and neet,
And bowls to scald and milk to fleet,
And barns to fetch again at neet."

MASTER :—

" When thou begin thou's never done !
Bessie and thee mun get up soon,
And stir about and get all done;
For all things mun aside be laid,
When we want help about our trade."

This reminder that their industry is after all the prime importance, reconciles Mary to her extra responsibility :

" Why Bairn, we'll see what we can do,
But we have both to wesh and brew,
And shall want Malt, Hops, Soap, and Blue,
And thou'll be most a week away,
And I's hev t'wark folk to pay."

MASTER :—

" Let paying for their wark alone.
I'll pay 'em all when I come home.
Keep t'lads at wark, and take this purse,
And set down what thou dost disburse."

Not the least difficult part of Mary's work would probably be to "keep t'lads at wark" in the absence of their master !

¹ i.e. "must be perched," or examined to see there are no holes or faults in the piece.

² Shirt.

³ The wooden frame hung near the roof on which oatcakes were laid to dry.

Although the inclination on the part of the big clothiers to gather their workers into miniature factories and workshops increased in the eighteenth century, the domestic system lasted well into the nineteenth century, and after the advent of mechanical power, continued side by side with the factories. As a result of the adaptation of the new machines to wool, the earlier processes in the industry left the cottages between 1790 and 1825, and passed into joint stock mills, which in Yorkshire were established by the domestic clothiers themselves.¹ The small master still bought his own wool, but it was sent to the mill to be picked, carded and slubbed—an inestimable benefit to the housewife when these processes, with all their dirt, grease and offensive smells were removed from the cottage and farm. In some cases the spinning also was done at the mill, in others at home on the jenny. In either case the yarn was then woven into cloth at home and the finishing processes as before were performed at the mill. Thus it was not until after the mid-nineteenth century, that domestic work in the woollen industry came to an end.

¹ Baines, *Yorkshire, Past and Present*, p. 656.

CHAPTER VII

TEXTILE INDUSTRIES—THE SPINNERS

THE WHEEL AND THE DISTAFF

HAND spinning, the foundation of all the textile industries, was from the earliest times to the period now under review, entirely the work of women and children. In the eighteenth century three instruments were in use for spinning; the rock, or distaff and spindle; the big wool wheel and the small Saxony wheel. For hundreds of years the distaff alone was used and was still preferred by some in the mid-eighteenth century, since by it a practised hand could produce a finer thread:

"Many yet adhere
To th' ancient distaff, at the bosom fix'd,
Casting the whirling spindle as they walk,
At home, or in the sheepfold, or the mart
Alike the work proceeds."¹

The greater number of spinners used one of the two wheels, which enabled the work to be done more expeditiously. The "big wheel," which was the one ordinarily used for spinning wool till the end of the eighteenth century, was really a loose spindle set in a frame. The spinner turned the wheel with her right hand, and stepping backwards and forwards drew out the wool and span with her left. A writer in the *Annals of Agriculture*, in 1788, estimated that in this way a woman walked 33 miles in about a week's spinning, for which the wage at that time was 2s. 8d.² Only one thread could be spun at a time, and spinning and winding had to be done intermittently. The small Saxony wheel was a great improvement on this since by the addition of a bobbin and flyer the yarn was wound automatically as the spinning proceeded and a double quantity of yarn was thus produced. The addition later of a foot treadle to turn the wheel left both hands free for the thread, and when, about the middle of the eighteenth century, a second spindle was added, two threads could be spun at once:

"There are to speed their labours who prefer
Wheels double spol'd, which yield to either hand
A sev'ral line."³

¹ Dyer, *The Fleeco*, iii, 67-71. (1757).

The distaff was a cleft stick about a yard long, on the top of which the wool or tow was loosely wound. Holding it under the left arm, or stuck in the girdle, the spinner drew a continuous strand from the fleecy wool with the left hand and twisted it between the forefinger and thumb of the right hand. At the same time the revolutions of the weighted spindle suspended at the other end of the thread, gave a finer twist and helped to draw out the thread. As soon as the spindle reached the ground, the length spun was wound on to it, and the spinner began on a fresh length.

² *Annals*, x. p. 546.

³ Dyer, *The Fleeco*, iii, 65-68.

This small wheel was the one so often used as a pastime in the eighteenth century by ladies and housewives who prided themselves on their domestic supply of linen. Except in particular instances, it was only suitable for spinning flax, and both wool and cotton, in which expedition was especially desired, had to be spun on the tedious "big wheel."¹

Hand spinning was by no means satisfactory from the manufacturer's point of view.² In an occupation which was considered suitable for all classes, and for the young and aged alike, it is evident that the degree of skill must have varied very considerably. Moreover, the yarn produced by a single household was often the work of six or eight different spinners, including servants and children, some of whom would spin "hard" and some "soft," with the result that when the thread was all put together and woven inequalities in the cloth were only too apparent. The coarseness of much of the yarn spun was another disadvantage, although skilled spinners, some of whom still preferred to use the distaff, could produce an astonishingly fine thread by hand labour. The best spinners on the big wool wheel produced counts as high as fifties, that is, 50 hanks of 560 yards in length to the pound of yarn;³ 70 hanks was considered "superfine" spinning, but individual spinners occasionally surpassed this standard. In 1754 Mary Powley, of East Dereham, produced 150 hanks to the pound—a performance that was considered "so extraordinary" as to be entered by the Royal Society. At the end of the century, however, Miss Ives, of Spalding, astonished the woollen world by producing 300 hanks to the pound. This "singularly fine woollen yarn . . . drawn to such a fineness that a pound of yarn measures . . . 95 miles," was exhibited in different parts of the country, and it was stated that "though this young lady has carried the art of spinning combed wool to so great a degree of perfection, she does not despair of improving still further."⁴

¹ James, *History Worsted Manufacture*, pp. 334-5. Ure, *Cotton Manufacture*, vol. i, p. 205. Warden, *The Linen Trade*, p. 685.

Dyer describes the two wheels:

"Come, village nymphs, ye matrons and ye maids,
Receive the soft material: with light step
Whether ye turn around the spacious wheel,
Or, patient sitting, that revolve, which forms
A narrower circle."

The Fleece, iii, 51-55.

² "The yarn was spun by two processes called roving and spinning. In the first, the spinner took the short fleecy rolls in which the cotton was stripped off the hand cards, applied them successively to the spindle, and, whilst with one hand she turned the wheel and thus made the spindle to revolve, with the other she drew out the cardings, which, receiving a slight twist from the spindle, were made into thick threads called rovings, and wound upon the spindle so as to form cops. In the second process, the roving was spun into yarn; the operation was similar, but the thread was drawn out finer, and received much more twist. It will be seen that this instrument only admitted of one thread being spun at a time by one pair of hands; and the slowness of the operation, and consequent expensiveness of the yarn, formed a great obstacle to the establishment of a new manufacture." Baines, *History of Cotton Manufacture*, p. 118.

³ James, *History Worsted Manufacture*, p. 335.

⁴ Young, *Survey of Lincolnshire*, 1799, p. 408.

COTTON, FLAX AND WOOL SPINNERS

While wool spinners were found all over the country, cotton and flax spinners, far less numerous, were to some extent localised. Lancashire early became the home of the cotton industry, and when the imports of cotton wool increased in the mid-eighteenth century the number of spinners was correspondingly augmented in the Lancashire districts. Of Manchester, Arthur Young wrote in 1768, "The number of spinners in and out of Manchester is immense; they reckon 30,000 souls in that town, and 50,000 manufacturers employed out of it."¹ Bolton and Blackburn were also centres of the trade, and cotton spinning rapidly spread to the bordering villages of Cheshire and Derbyshire. Elsewhere cotton spinners were comparatively few, working mainly for the hosiers who put out their spinning in the villages. London hosiers apparently sent spinning to Berkshire, since Dr. Pococke wrote in 1757: "About Auburn, and other part of this country, they spin cotton for candles, for cotton clothes and stockings; and the carriers go with cotton backward and forward through this place to and from London."²

Much of the linen produced in the eighteenth century was still made by private families for their own use, and therefore only the surplus of this home spun linen ever came into the market. The chief centres of the linen trade, apart from this domestic supply, were Yorkshire, Lancashire and Northumberland, although towns all over the kingdom had some small manufacture for local needs.³ Of the linen yarn used for this commercial production only a part was the work of English spinners; the greater part was purchased from Ireland, Scotland and continental towns in Germany and Prussia. Foreign yarn was not only cheaper, but linen manufacturers appear to have had some difficulty in procuring a sufficient quantity of yarn in England.⁴ For those who had to depend on spinning for a livelihood, wool was almost always obtainable, and being easier to spin than flax, was probably preferred by most wage earners. Thus apart from those producing yarn for domestic use, flax spinners were comparatively few, and those only in the districts where the linen manufacture was established. Their number grew steadily less as the century advanced. In the first place less and less flax was cultivated by farmers and cottagers, so that the domestic manufacture was declining; and secondly, the increase in the cotton trade induced many flax spinners in and near the cotton areas, "to engage in this more lucrative employment."⁵

Wool spinners on the other hand were to be found almost everywhere, and although the woollen industry had begun to decline in many districts at the beginning of the eighteenth century and to concentrate

¹ *Northern Tour* (and ed.), iii, p. 192.

² *Travels through England*, vol. ii, p. 248.

³ Horner, *The Linen Trade of Europe*, p. 225.

⁴ At the weekly linen market at Warrington as many pieces of "a sort of Table Linnen, called Huk-a-back, or Huc-a-buk," were sold "every Market day as to amount to £500 value, sometimes much more, and all made in the neighbourhood of the place." Defoe, *Tour* (1927 ed.), vol. ii, pp. 668-9.

⁵ T., *Letters on the Utility and Policy of employing Machines to shorten Labour*, 1779.

in the three great manufacturing areas, wool spinning was still the staple industry of the whole countryside. As might be expected, the clothiers of the West found full employment for the spinners of Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, and those of Yorkshire and East Anglia for all in the country round them for a radius of many miles. Although most of the women and children in the populous counties of Norfolk and Suffolk were spinners, the yarn they produced was insufficient for the great trade of the Norwich weavers, who in addition used "many thousand packs from other countries, even as far as Yorkshire and Westmorland."¹ Spitalfields weavers also drew supplies from the north, and at the same time employed "a great part of the poor of the whole counties of Cambridge, Bedford and Hertford."² Even small centres of the trade made heavy demands on the spinners. At Colchester, Defoe wrote, "the whole County, large as it is, may be said to be employ'd, and in part maintain'd, by the Spinning of Wool for the Bay trade of Colchester, and its adjacent Towns."³

Enormous as was the amount of yarn required for the wool and worsted industries, hosiers and knitters had also to be supplied. In the Midland Counties of Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Northamptonshire, and some parts of Yorkshire, the main business of the spinners was to provide worsted or "jersey" for the stocking manufacture and knitting industry. Thus spinning was by no means confined to the clothing counties; Cornwall, for instance, having little manufacture of its own, provided much of the worsted yarn required by Devon weavers.⁴ The absence of spinning in a district was in fact so unusual as to cause comment. "It is remarkable," wrote Young in 1767, of a small district near Oxford, "that very few women and children are employed in this country in manufactures, most of them work with the farmers, but some few of them spin."⁵ In other parts of Oxfordshire there was spinning both for the clothiers and the important blanket manufacture at Witney.⁶ Northumberland was perhaps the county where the least spinning was done for commercial purposes. Many of the women there were employed in agriculture, but as the men's wages—paid in kind—always included a certain amount of wool, spinning for domestic use was a feature in most homes.

THE PROPORTION OF SPINNERS

Evidence of the universality of spinning as an occupation for women is not lacking, but when we try to discover what proportion of women was so engaged, and how many might be assumed to be in receipt of wages and contributing to the support of their families, the material becomes tantalisingly vague. Contemporary writers are too often content to state that spinning occupies "all the poor" of a district, leaving it to the imagination to determine the exact connotation of the term; even when numerical estimates are given, we have little

¹ Postlethwayt, *Dictionary*. Art. Norfolk.

² *Ibid.*, Art. Middlesex.

³ *Tour*, vol. i, p. 17.

⁴ Polwhele, *History of Devon*, pp. 315-6.

⁵ Young, *Six Weeks' Tour*, 1768, p. 91.

⁶ Postlethwayt, Art. Oxfordshire.

or no statistical information with which to compare them, and from which we might draw reliable conclusions. At the most therefore, contemporary illustrations, which may be typical, do not give more than a rough guide to the proportion of women in any district who may have been engaged in spinning.

It is almost certain that in the eighteenth century every farm house and most of the cottages had a wheel or a distaff as part of the ordinary household furniture.¹ The frequency of entries in parish account books relating to the purchase of spinning wheels for the poor is indicative of the ease with which they could be obtained, at a price within the reach of all but the poorest. The big wool wheel was a very simple affair and could be purchased for as little as half-a-crown. The variation in the following entries, taken from among others in the parish account books at Rugeley (Staffs), and Duffield (Derbyshire), suggest that the overseers probably made their purchases at second hand:²

		s.	d.
Rugeley.			
Nov. 12, 1777.	Mary Taylor for a wheel	2	6
Feb. 1784	A small Wheel for Widw. Atkin	7	0
May 25, 1785	Mary Atkins for repairing her wheel		6

Sometimes the parish also provided the material for spinning.

May 21, 1779	4lb. of Flax for Creswell Lichfield to spin at 7d.	2	4

At Duffield the prices ranged from 2s. 6d. and were never higher than 5s.

Apl. 23, 1774	Sarah Annable a wheel	5	0
	A Beadcord for Do.	1	4
May 23, 1775	Ann Berkin a wheel	2	6
Apl. 19, 1783	Mill. Jackson tow'd a wheel	2	6

A pair of wool cards purchased for Anne Siddons in 1777 cost 1s. 0d. The above prices are sufficient to show that no cottage need have been without its wheel, and the resolution of the Rutland magistrates as late as 1793 to refuse poor relief to the family of any agricultural labourer whose children did not show proficiency in spinning in proportion to their age, suggests that few actually were without.³

Eden's estimate of the spinners at South Tawton is probably typical of villages in the clothing counties. There in 1796 he declared that nine-tenths of the women in the parish, "all of the poorest class," numbering 600 or 700 were in the "constant employment" of the Devon serge makers.⁴ Earlier, in 1768, Arthur Young estimated that the manufacture of "Kendal cottons" gave employment to 1,000 to

¹ In 1835, a witness before the Hand Loom Weavers' Commission, who had been engaged in statistical enquiries, went so far as to state that in the eighteenth century "every farm-house, every agricultural labourer's cottage, and the habitation of almost every smith, carpenter, mason and wheelwright in the rural districts was more or less a manufacturing establishment." *P.P.*, 1835, xiii, p. 56. Evidence of Mr. J. Marshall.

² MS. Rugeley Overseers' Account Book. MS. Duffield Overseers' Account Book.

³ Quoted Gilbert Slater, *Making of Modern England*, p. 44.

⁴ Eden, *State of the Poor*, ii, p. 139.

1,300 spinners in and about the small town of Kendal—an estimate which, if correct, suggests a big proportion of the population.¹ At Lavenham 150 woolcombers at the end of the century were said to have provided work for 4,500 spinners in the neighbouring villages;² while Professor Unwin's "very moderate estimate" for the whole county of Suffolk in the middle of the century was 36,000.³ The same number was given by a contemporary writer as an estimate of the spinners in Norfolk in 1788.⁴ The earnings of many spinners were notoriously small and the large sums therefore, which are stated to have been paid out among spinners in certain areas, go to support these figures. In Suffolk, for example, £120,000 a year were said to have been paid out among the spinners at the end of the eighteenth century;⁵ the Devon serge makers in 1789 paid out £20,000 in the more thinly populated villages of Cornwall,⁶ and the single parish of Dunmow in Essex, was said to have received no less than £5,000 a year for spinning in the middle of the century.⁷ Although these sums were divided among so many, spinning districts underwent a period of serious economic pressure when the payments were discontinued after the introduction of machinery, and in many parts the deficiency had to be made up from the poor rates.

INDEPENDENT PRODUCERS

From the point of view of economic organisation the spinners were divided into three classes. There were first the independent producers—those who grew their own flax and wool and spun mainly for domestic use, selling only their surplus yarn. In the second class were those who bought the raw material, converted it into yarn, often as a by-occupation, and sold it again at their own profit. Thirdly there were the wage earners, who worked up material owned by the employer, and whose only profit was the wage received for their labour.

Domestic production for use was far greater in the case of linen than in wool—due to the earlier capitalising of the woollen trade. Many farms and cottages in the mid-eighteenth century had still their little patches of flax and hemp,⁸ and others could purchase tow prepared for spinning from the shopkeepers in both towns and villages.⁹ When spun their yarn was in some cases woven at home, but more often sent to a "custom weaver," who, like Silas Marner, depended on farmers' and cottagers' wives for employment. In this way the linen

¹ *Northern Tour* (1771 ed.), iii, p. 135.

² *P.P. Report on Women and Children in Agriculture*, 1843, xii, p. 228.

³ V. C. H., *Suffolk*, ii, p. 253.

⁴ *Annals*, ix, pp. 333-5.

⁵ *Agricultural State of the Kingdom in 1816*. Part ii, p. 46.

⁶ Polwhele, *History of Devon*, i, pp. 315-6.

⁷ *Vancouver, Essex*, 1795, p. 210.

⁸ A "good deal of hurden, hempen, and flaxen cloth [is] got up in private families; a great many people in the country being now, and having long been, in the habit of growing a patch of hemp and flax." Pitt, *Staffordshire*, 1796, pp. 171-2.

Arthur Young in *Suffolk*, in 1771, writes: "I observed little patches of hemp in the gardens of most of the cottages." *Eastern Tour*, ii, p. 166. See also *Annals*, xxix, pp. 128-9.

⁹ *Hand Loom Weavers' Commission*, 1835, xiii, p. 29.

cupboard was kept well stocked, to the pride and satisfaction of the housewife, and any surplus was sold to defray the weaver's charges. In families of gentlefolk, especially in the North, spinning on the small flax wheel remained a pastime for the ladies of the household long after the necessity for it had ceased, and in other homes, at the end of the century—such was the preference for hand spun linen—old women of the neighbourhood were hired to spin by the day, at a rate of 4d. to 6d. a day and their food.¹

The domestic production of woollen yarn for sale, except in the clothing counties, was gradually declining. In the seventeenth century a great deal of yarn was brought into the market by small independent producers, who "would not spin to the clothiers for small wages, but have stock enough to set themselves on work . . . and make good profit, having the benefit both of their labour and of their merchandize and live exceeding well."² But as the capitalist clothiers increased and industry became more highly organised, more and more wool was bought in the fleece by big dealers and sorters and was afterwards given out to be spun by wage earners. Sufficient wool was kept back by the farmers for domestic use, and in a few districts lying outside the organised areas, mainly in the North, in Scotland and Wales, domestic spinning both for clothing and the sale of yarn continued till the end of the century. In many parts of Scotland there was no "public manufacture" of woollen cloth and domestic production there was still the rule: "All over Scotland, every housewife and family spin; has the yarn wove, dyed, etc., etc., at her own expence; having clothed her family, she sells the surplus."³ In Westmorland farmers and labourers still brought the yarn spun by their wives to market every week: "Every family spun from its own flock the wool with which it was clothed, a weaver was here and there found among them: and the rest of their wants was supplied by the produce of the yarn, which they carded in their own houses, and carried to market, either under their arms, or more frequently on pack horses, a small train taking their way weekly down the valley or over the mountains to the most commodious town."⁴ Independent spinners who could thus enjoy the profits "both of their labours and of their merchandize" were very much in the minority towards the end of the eighteenth century, although it was still possible for some of them to purchase small supplies of wool to spin for their own clothing, and in this way to have the benefit of their labour. In Durham, says Eden, "the women spin jersey and . . . many of them manufacture their own woollen and linen apparel";⁵ and Arthur Young on tour in Wales in 1776 writes, "all manage to buy some wool, which they spin and send to weavers who can earn 1s. or 1s. 3d. a day."⁶

¹ *Memoirs of Susan Siddals*, 1926, pp. 148, 158, 160.

² S.P.D., lxxx, 13 January, 1615, General Condition of Wool and Cloth Trade: quoted Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 108.

³ *Annals*, x, p. 559. Many women did their own dyeing: "The women extract the dyes from trees, shrubs, and herbs of their own culling or rearing. The buds and tender twigs of the alder, heath, in different states of verdure, and woad are very much used." Eden, *op. cit.*, i, p. 359.

⁴ Wordsworth, *Description of the Lakes* (1833 ed.), p. 47.

⁵ Eden, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 169.

⁶ *Annals*, viii, p. 38.

The class of spinners who bought raw material, spun it and sold the yarn themselves, thus gaining the middleman's profit, was comparatively small by the eighteenth century. All through the seventeenth century the ever-widening organisation of clothiers and "market spinners" who put out wool, tended to crowd them out of the market.¹ Such spinners were, however, still to be found in the South West clothing counties in 1741: "Day Labourers, who whilst they are employed abroad themselves, get 40 or 50 Pounds of Wool at a Time, to employ their Wives and Children at home in Carding and Spinning, of which when they have 10 or 20 Pounds ready for the Clothier, they go to Market with it and there sell it, and so return home as fast as they can: the common way the poor Women in Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorsetshire, and I believe in other Counties, have of getting to Market (especially in the Winter-time) is, by the Help of some Farmers' Waggon, which carry them and their Yarn. . . . During the Time the Waggon stop, the poor Women carry their Yarn to the Clothiers for whom they work; then get the few things they want, and return to the Inn to be carried home again. . . . As to those who may live in or near the Market Town, there will be in Market time 3 or 400 poor People (chiefly Women) who will sell their Goods in about an Hour."²

In the same way flax and cotton spinners could sometimes buy the raw material and sell direct to the weavers. A writer in the *Annals* in 1787, describes how "some of the poor purchase the tow of the hickler, and carry it to market themselves when they have spun it. By this means they add the hickler's profit to their own, and so, you see they ought: it is the interest of the little capital they lay out in the purchase of tow."³ Most fortunate among those who were able to choose their market and obtain the best prices for their labour were the cotton spinners. The competition among weavers to obtain sufficient weft gave the spinners an ever-open market, and when two or three buyers appeared in a rural district together the news spread rapidly from house to house and prices of yarn were said to go up by leaps and bounds.⁴

WAGE EARNERS

By far the greatest number of spinners were wage earners, employed by the clothiers, or by middlemen—the "market spinners," the master woolcombers, and hicklers, who gave out material and marketed the thread in the woollen, worsted and linen trades respectively. This class of spinners included labourers' wives in agricultural districts, who with their children span as a by-employment, and women in the clothing counties who regarded spinning as a full-time occupation. In some districts raw wool was given out to the weaver, who was thus made responsible for his own yarn. In these circumstances it was not unusual for the weaver, especially if his wife were also at the loom, to

¹ Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

² Remarks upon Mr. Webber's Scheme and the Drapers' Pamphlet, 1741, pp. 21-2.

³ *Annals*, ix, p. 327.

⁴ W. Cooke Taylor, *Notes of Tour in Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire* (ed. 1842), p. 145.

take an apprentice and employ her as a full-time spinner; such a one was Ruth Nitten, a poor child of the parish of Darlaston, who was apprenticed to John Giles and his wife to learn "the mystery or trade or occupation of Spinning."¹

Materials were distributed to the spinners in different ways, but almost all involved an enormous waste of time. From villages near the clothing centres, women had often to walk weary miles to take in their yarn and obtain fresh supplies at the clothier's warehouse.² In some districts small employers themselves delivered wool to the spinners and collected the yarn. The big clothiers, some of whom in the South West employed "upwards of 2,000 spinners"³ scattered over a wide area, engaged "putters out" who conveyed the wool on pack horses, or in "tilted carts" to certain "pack houses" in the villages, at which the isolated spinners met fortnightly to hand over their yarn, and receive their wages and fresh material. The *Discarded Spinster* describes how a load of wool⁴

"Went every week along this very road:

Which, always stopping at the Poarch House Door,
Supply'd with plenteous Spinning all the Poor."

Sometimes country shopkeepers acted as "putting out agents"—a system often accompanied with the worst abuses. In addition to being charged a commission, the spinner was often obliged to take payment in inferior goods at a high price, and work was refused except on these terms. Credit was readily offered, and once in debt, the spinner was powerless to resist whatever deductions and conditions the shopkeeper liked to impose.⁵

Among all the improvements brought about by machine industry, not the least was the enormous saving in time and labour when this cumbersome organisation was superseded. It is difficult to realise in these days how much time actually was spent in sending material from one set of workers to another, and the "prodigious number of people, horses, carts and wagons" engaged in the distribution. Some idea of the distances and time involved may be gained from the facts relating to a serge maker near Otley, in Yorkshire. His wool had first to be brought from a distance by strings of pack horses along the worst roads, to be combed on his premises. It was then reloaded and conveyed in the same way by "putters out" to be spun in villages in Cheshire and the Derbyshire Dales. After an interval the yarn was collected and taken back to Otley to be woven, and finally the cloth had to be dispatched to a distant market at Colne.⁶

In spite of sending the wool so far afield and seeking spinners over such wide areas, the supply of yarn remained inadequate and large quantities had to be brought over from Ireland.⁷ The establishment

¹ Darlaston Parish MSS., 1712.

² Polwhele, *History of Devon*, ii, p. 259. Some of the Lancashire cotton spinners also obtained their material in this way. Unwin, *Samuel Oldknow*, p. 50.

³ Davis, *Hints to Philanthropists*, etc., p. 84.

⁴ *Discarded Spinster*, p. 20. 1791.

⁵ *Report of the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor*, vol. i, pp. 24, 199-200.

⁶ James, *History of Worsteds Manufacture*, p. 292.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

of industrial spinning schools and attempts to train children as fine spinners from their earliest years, failed to produce either sufficient spinners or regularity of thread. From the employers' point of view, therefore, the domestic system of spinning was wasteful and unsatisfactory, and it was not by chance that spinning was the first process to pass into the factory, or that once established, machine spinning developed so rapidly.

SPINNING WAGES

It remains to consider how far hand spinning was worth while to the enormous number of women and children engaged in it. The constantly recurring cry that weavers' looms were standing idle for want of yarn would suggest that spinners were in such demand as to make their occupation a well-paid one. Complaints on their part of the lowness of wages are, however, frequent; and a pamphleteer in 1743 expressed the opinion that spinning was "of all labour on wools the most sparingly paid for."¹ More recently it has been argued from some of the low wages earned by spinners in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that "England's greatest industry rested on a basis of sweated labour."² It is not easy to reconcile these statements with those relating to the shortage of yarn, but a closer examination of wage rates collected from different parts of the country throughout the eighteenth century, shows that no categorical statement in relation to wages can be made for the industry as a whole. Conditions varied in different parts of the country, according to the type of work, the condition of the local trade and the status of the spinner. High rates, which would give spinners what might be considered as really good wages for those days are quoted from time to time during the eighteenth century, but it cannot be assumed that these were at any time general, nor do contemporary statements of average wages suggest that the majority of spinners earned them. Labour at the hand wheel was often a by-employment, and the time given to it varied according to the housewife's preoccupation with other duties. The small amounts earned by labourers' wives and others who span to supplement the family income cannot, therefore, fairly be described as spinners' wages, and must not be confused with the earnings—for the most part adequate—of those who regarded it as a full time occupation.

The woollen trade was, moreover, subject to constant fluctuations, and many of the complaints of lowness of wages are to be accounted for by periods of depression following on over-production in some particular branch. At such times the clothiers often ceased to give out work altogether, causing great distress and unemployment among spinners and weavers alike, while the "market spinners," realising their greater dependence on the "goodwill of the spinners" when trade improved, more often tried to keep their people employed, though at reduced rates. Thus irregularity was characteristic of spinning wages, and distress inevitably accompanied deductions from

¹ *Scheme to Prevent the Running of Irish Wool to France*, p. 19.

² Lipson, *Wool and Worsted Industries*, pp. 65-66.

earnings. "The distresses among the poor," wrote Arthur Young on the reduced wages of spinners in Norfolk and Suffolk in 1788, "are very much in proportion to the irregularity of their earnings; accustomed in good times to earn sixpence, eightpence, and ninepence a day, they are not at all prepared, and it would be the same with ourselves, to meet the adversity of half the income: their refuge is the parish."¹

Unfortunately for the spinners, the very fact that they were scattered, unorganised and often without other means of employment, made them powerless to resist reductions of wages at any time, and since the employer was the sole judge of the market—"himself judge and jury of his conduct"—spinning wages were liable to arbitrary deductions under the pretence as well as the fact, of dullness of trade. "Let the demand for the Manufacture be ever so great," wrote a pamphleteer on behalf of the spinners, "or the trade be in ever so flourishing a condition—*Dull* is the word of the Woolcomber."² But while conditions might be bad in one area, it was quite possible that in another at the same time, spinners had plenty of work and were receiving a fair remuneration as may be seen from some of the contemporary accounts of wages.

At the time our period opens, the cotton spinners, owing to the impetus in that trade, were in the most fortunate position. The shortage of yarn was so acute that "weavers were obliged to pay more for their spinning than the price allowed by their masters,"³ and complaints of the "tyranny" of the spinners and their demands, certainly suggest that their wages were considered good for that time. At Mellor, where according to Radcliffe, cotton spinning was "the great sheet anchor of all the cottages and small farms," women and children from seven years of age earned from 1s. to 3s. a week before 1770,⁴ and another writer gives 2s. 6d. and 3s. as the average weekly wage of women spinners before machinery.⁵ It will be remembered that most of the cotton workers at Mellor were also little agriculturalists, and these wages therefore apparently represent what could be earned when spinning was a by-employment. At Manchester where more women were likely to be full time spinners, the average wage when Young was there in 1768 was from 2s. to 5s. a week.⁶ His figures are supported by others given in the *Cotton Spinners' Petition* to Parliament in 1780, wherein the petitioners declared "that about Sixteen Years ago a Woman could earn from Tenpence to Fifteen Pence a Day by the Single Spindle."⁷ As the spinners were drawing attention to their distress in 1780 by contrasting conditions then with the prosperity of former years, these rates probably represent the highest that were obtainable in the days of hand industry. Judged by women's wages in other

¹ *Annals*, ix, p. 267.

² *Ibid.*, p. 347.

³ [Kirby, J.], *Letter to a Member of Parliament . . . Wages of Spinners*, 1787.

p. 22.

⁴ Guest, *Compendious History*, p. 12.

⁵ *Origin of Power Loom Weaving*, p. 60.

⁶ T. *Letters on the Utility and Policy of employing Machines to shorten Labour*,

1779, p. 31.

⁷ *Northern Tour*, iii, p. 192.

⁸ *P.P. Reports Miscellaneous*, 1778-82 (32), v, p. 4.

occupations, and the fact that parish pay for a single woman varied from 1s. to 2s. 6d. a week—the latter sum in many places being given only to widows—5s. a week was a good wage for a woman at that time,¹ and many could and did maintain themselves on considerably less. While, therefore, the average wage of the married woman was probably most often in the region of 2s. 6d. to 3s. 6d. a week, full-time cotton spinners might earn up to 7s. 6d. a week according to their industry and skill, and were, by the standard of that time, well paid for their labour. These good conditions, however, were not of long duration. The great demand for cotton yarn only began in the second quarter of the century, and soon after 1770 the hand spinners were superseded by inventions which changed the whole character of the industry.

Woollen spinners in the seventeenth century appear for the most part to have been very badly paid;² but in the eighteenth century the rates are much more variable, and high and low wages bear witness to the fluctuations of the woollen and worsted trades. Some of the highest rates occur early in the century. In 1724 Defoe writes: "The rate for spinning, weaving and all other Manufactory-work, I mean in Wool, is so risen, that the Poor all over England can now earn or gain near twice as much in a Day, and in some Places more than twice as much as they could get for the same Work two or three Years ago; Particularly in Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk, Eastward; and in Wiltshire, Somerset, and Devon, West; the Poor Women now get 12d. to 15d. a Day for Spinning, the Men more in proportion, and are full of Work; whereas before, they could not get half so much, and very often not find employment neither . . . The Farmers' Wives can get no Dairy-Maids. . . truly the Wenches answer, they won't go to Service at 12d. or 18d. a week, while they can get 7s. to 8s. a Week at Spinning."³

We do not know how long the spinners were fortunate enough to secure these wages, but by 1740 at any rate, wages had fallen again very considerably. About that time it was proposed to remit the duty on Irish spun yarn in the hope of preventing the extensive smuggling of Irish wool to France. English worsted spinners strongly opposed the measure on the ground that the free importation of Irish yarn would still further reduce their wages, already too low. Broad-sides were widely circulated wherein it was declared that owing to the cheapness of provisions in Ireland, the poor there could "work fourpence in the shilling lower than those of England; that the wages of English spinners were then so low, that they could scarcely get bread, twopence out of every shilling being abated in their wages; that Irish yarn then sold in England from sixteen-pence to eighteen-pence per pound, whereas one pound of English yarn of the same fineness would cost two shillings."⁴ In spite of the protests the duties were removed, and since the weavers of Norwich favoured Irish

¹ Arthur Young at Norwich in 1771 states: "The earnings of manufacturers are various, but in general high. Men on an average do not exceed 5s. a week, but then, many women earn as much." *Eastern Tour*, vol. ii, p. 75.

² Clark, *op cit.*, p. 95.

³ *Behaviour of Servants in England, 1724*, pp. 83-4.

⁴ James, *History of Worsted Manufacture*, p. 243.

yarn for the making of calimancoes,¹ the wages of the unfortunate worsted spinners of Norfolk and Suffolk were still further reduced. Even before this, worsted spinners, probably on account of Irish competition, appear to have been the worst paid of all, for in 1736, while the wages of woollen spinners were given as 4s. a week, and stocking wool spinners about 3s. 5d., worsted spinners had only 2s. 3d. a week.²

Later in the century the figures quoted by Arthur Young on his tours again illustrate the different wages earned by spinners. At Witney, in 1767, "a good stout woman" could earn from 10d. to 1s. a day by spinning for the blanket manufacturers (in 1787 this sum was reduced by slack trade to 6d.);³ at Sudbury at the same time spinning was but "a poor business, a stout girl of fifteen or sixteen not being able to earn above 6d. a day," while at Bocking and Braintree the daily wage was only 4d. and 5d. At Norwich and Leeds, the average weekly wage was 2s. 6d. to 3s.; at Warrington, spinners in the sacking branch earned 6s. a week and were never short of work, while spinners for sail cloth could only earn about 2d. a day.⁴ Still later, about 1780, fine spinners for West of England broadcloth were stated to earn 7s. a week for spinning warp and 6s. 1d. for weft;⁵ and these high rates are supported by Eden, who in 1796 says that until recently in Wiltshire, "a woman in a good state of health, and not encumbered with a family," could spin a pound of wool a day, at 1s. and 1s. 2d. a pound. With a family, he says, a woman could not on an average spin more than two and a half pounds of wool a week, which reduced her wages to about 2s. 6d.⁶ In the light of these figures, it may be that Young's average wages for Leeds and Norwich also referred to women with families, and not to women who depended solely on spinning for their support, but the whole question of spinning wages is attended with difficulty, as these contemporary statements show, and it is impossible to make decisive statements about the earnings of spinners generally. There is evidence to show that when trade was good, really high wages could be earned by individual spinners; but trade was irregular, and wages were frequently "raised or lowered according to the goodness or badness of the times."⁷ The effect of the fluctuations of the woollen trade on the earnings of spinners was a recognised and accepted fact in the eighteenth century. "When our Woollen Manufactory flourishes," wrote Moore in 1773, "the wives and children of small Farmers, Cottagers, and Labouring Men, can earn nearly as much money by spinning at the wheel, as the man can get by his industry in the field; . . . but when our woollen manufactory declines, the man alone must wield the labouring oar."⁸

¹ "We do not buy their Irish Spinning for its Fineness, (our own People spin much finer) but on account of its Nature and Quality. It is very useful to our Weavers in mixing with their own Spinning, and in making several sorts of Goods for foreign Markets." *Scheme to Prevent Running of Irish Wools to France*, p. 27.

² Mun, *Golden Fleece*, 1736: quoting "Short Essay on Trade in General," p. 8.

³ *Six Weeks' Tour*, p. 144. *Annals*, ix, p. 536-7.

⁴ *Six Weeks' Tour*, p. 70. *Ibid.*, p. 65. *Eastern Tour*, ii, p. 75. *Northern Tour*, i, p. 138. *Ibid.*, iii, pp. 163-4.

⁵ Figures given in a reliable table in *Hand Loom Weavers' Commission*, P.P., 1840, xxiii, p. 439.

⁶ Eden, iii, p. 796.

⁷ *Annals*, ix, p. 285.

⁸ Francis Moore, *On the Exorbitant Price of Provisions*, p. 58, 1773.

In 1787, Arthur Young, roused by the very real distress among the spinners of Norfolk and Suffolk and the controversy waging between the wool growers and manufacturers over the Woollen Bill then in the Commons, conducted an enquiry into the conditions and earnings of the spinners all over the country. The replies received by him, which have been summarised in the following table, are valuable in showing the varied prices and conditions in the industry at the same date, and that at a time when the competition of machine industry was just beginning.

AVERAGE EARNINGS OF SPINNERS PER DAY, 1787-8¹

County.	Wages and Remarks.	Reference.
Yorkshire : Scorton	1s. for good industrious woman spinning superfine wool 9d. for seconds and thirds 6d. for flax, for best work.	<i>Annals of Agriculture.</i> ix. pp. 280-1
Melberley	6d. average for wool and flax	ix. pp. 285-6
Sussex	8d.-10d. for 10-12 hours' spinning	ix. p. 319
Lancs.	8d.-10d. wool. 8d.-9d. hemp and flax.	ix. pp. 287-8
Essex	10d. in "good times," 6d. in "bad."	ix. pp. 316-8
Kent	6d. -10d. for a good spinner. 6d. flax	x. p. 554 x. p. 555
Lincs.	10d. for best spinners ; a child of 9 years earns 4d. or 5d. flax, few can earn 6d. "even if they keep very constantly to it."	ix. pp. 289-290
Northants.	spinners paid by the pound, 7d.-1s. for coarse, 1s. 2d.-2s. for fine.	ix. pp. 291-3
Berks.	6d. for very diligent woman, average 4d. 3d.-4d. flax and hemp, obliged to take half earnings in goods from chandlers.	ix. pp. 523-4
Worcester	4d.-11d. per pound ; now obliged to spin finer than formerly for the same prices, earnings therefore reduced.	xi. p. 26
Hants.	6d. for "tolerable hand," 3d. in shilling deducted from earnings ; "of this abatement the women complain very much, and work very scarce."	ix. p. 301
Staffs.	6d. for wool, hemp and flax. 8d. for hurds, for sacking.	ix. p. 320 x. p. 556
Oxfordshire	6d. "must work hard to earn this as the price of spinning is reduced."	ix. pp. 295-6
Cornwall	4d.-6d. average earnings.	ix. pp. 322-3
Devonshire	6d. for industrious woman, deductions made in bad times.	ix. pp. 304-5
Hereford	4d., flax, 4d.-6d.	ix. p. 306
Somerset	4½d.	ix. p. 308
Suffolk	3d.-4d. for "women who work close all day" ; deductions 2d.-5d. in shilling from rates.	ix. pp. 337-8 ix. p. 352
Norfolk	3½d.-4d. at most, deductions ½ of wages. 5d.-8½d. for flax.	ix. pp. 336-7 ix. pp. 327-330

¹ Wages refer to wool except where stated otherwise.

It is difficult to judge whether machine spinning had as yet had any real influence on the prices for hand industry. In only two of all the replies received by Arthur Young was it mentioned; in Westmorland, where the spinning of combed wool was stated to have fallen 1d. or 1½d. per pound within six months "occasioned as it is said, by the invention of spinning worsted by water";¹ and in Suffolk, where along with other explanations the manufacturers asserted that the low rates were caused by "their goods at market being beyond competition outrivalled by the spinning machines."² That machine spinning was not, however, altogether responsible for the wretched wages in Norfolk and Suffolk is shown by the fact that in Yorkshire, Lancashire and elsewhere the old rates were still in force, and no abatements were made from the spinners' wages. Moreover, it was pointed out that arbitrary and unjust deductions had occurred before in these counties, although never to the "mischievous height" then experienced, when for a shilling's worth of spinning, the worker received only 7d. The current belief of "many very respectable persons" that the yarn-makers had combined in order to impose these low rates, which they were able to enforce on account of the large imports of Irish yarn, seems justified in view of the fact that the spinners were all employed and that yarn was selling at good prices.³ The wage of the spinner in ten or fifteen years had gradually been reduced by one half, until finally, after a tedious and hard day's labour, it only equalled "the allowance from the county for bread and water, if she were committed for a fault to the House of Correction."⁴ Convinced that these rates were an imposition on the poor, Arthur Young fiercely denounced the attitude of the masters and painted a vivid picture of the distress caused by their oppression. He spoke of "the sufferings of thousands of wretched individuals, willing to work, but starving from their ill-requited labour: of whole families of honest, industrious children offering their little hands to the wheel, and asking bread of the helpless mother, unable through this *well-regulated* manufacture, to give it to them."⁵ In Gloucestershire also, wages had been reduced by degrees towards the end of the century, and the clothiers refused to make any advance, "notwithstanding the trade is in as flourishing a condition as the most zealous advocate for monopoly can wish."⁶ In Worcestershire the same effect had been achieved by demanding finer spinning at the old rates, which amounted to a deduction of one-third from the original prices.⁷ While the distress of spinners was nowhere so great as in Norfolk and Suffolk, these accounts from other parts of the country show how completely the spinners were at the mercy of their employers. Unable in any way to resist oppression and unfair deductions, they could be forced by unprincipled employers to accept starvation rates, and in such circumstances the only alternative for many was to enter the parish workhouse and to perform there the same labour in return for maintenance by the parish officials.

In estimating the economic importance of spinning wages, a distinction must be made between those whose earnings supplemented the

¹ *Annals*, x, pp. 587-8.

² *Ibid.*, ix, pp. 325-6.

³ *Ibid.*, ix, pp. 73-4, 274, 276.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ix, p. 449.

⁵ *Ibid.*, ix, pp. 297-8.

⁶ *Annals*, ix, pp. 297-8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, xi, p. 26.

family income, and others who had to support themselves and sometimes their children, on their wages.¹ There is little doubt that the independent spinners as a class suffered from the fact that so many women and children were engaged in spinning as a by-industry. Manufacturers were inclined to base wages on the assumption that the spinners were already maintained by their husbands, and at the same time in rural areas, farmers defended the low wage of their labourers on the grounds that women and children supported themselves by spinning. This interdependence of agricultural and spinning wages was a constant source of strife between agriculturalists and woollen manufacturers, and reached its culminating point at the end of the century when the decline of hand spinning made a rise in the labourer's wage imperative.

The importance of spinning earnings to the families in which it was carried on as a by-industry, is shown in some of the budgets quoted by Davies and Eden, although these were collected after the rise in food prices at the end of the century, and when the rates for spinning were so reduced by the competition of machines that the poor scarcely had "the heart to earn the little" that was to be obtained by it.² In a labourer's family where the weekly wage of the man only averaged from six to eight shillings, the smallest additional sum was of real importance. Even the sixpence a week, which any woman could earn, "be her family what it will" was, according to Davies, of consequence in the family income.³ When therefore the combined wage of wife and children equalled or exceeded that of the man, the difference in the standard of comfort was considerable.⁴ In one instance used by Davies to contrast the economy of spinning and non-spinning families, the total yearly income of a family of seven persons was £39 17s. 4d., of which £5 17s. represented the spinning earnings. With the greatest frugality the yearly expenses amounted to £39 14s. 4d.; hence although the woman could only earn 4½d. a day, without her total contribution the family must have gone short of actual necessities. According to her account, "the earnings of her husband and the boys maintained the family in food; and that what she herself and the girls [aged respectively seven and five years]

¹ The writer of *The Female Manufacturers' Complaints* (1720) divides the spinners into two main classes: "the good farmers and husbandmens daughters," who were supported at home and used their earnings as pin money, and "industrious poor women [who] have, by the help of the spinning of worsted yarn as aforesaid, maintained their said families, and kept themselves and their said children from misery, and from being chargeable to the parish, though with very hard work and the utmost industry and application." *B. M. Tracts*, 95, c. 7.

² Eden, vol. iii, p. 796.

³ Davies, *Case of Labourers in Husbandry*, p. 162.

⁴ Speaking of domestic spinning, a witness before the Hand Loom Weavers' Commission in 1835, declared: "My own knowledge of the fact embraces an extensive district in the midland counties, in which I can look back on the habitations of fifty families, whom I knew as agricultural labourers thirty or forty years ago, living in great comfort, the mother and children of the family exchanging the produce of their labour at the wheel to the extent of 2s., 3s., 4s., or 5s. a week." *P.P.*, 1835, xiii, p. 30.

According to a yarn inspector in Suffolk, a woman with four or five children could earn from 4s. to 7s. a week, as late as the first decade of the nineteenth century. *P.P. Poor Laws*, 1834, xxviii, pp. 342A-343A.

earned by spinning, and in harvest, found them in clothes, linen and other necessities."¹ In another budget quoted by Eden in 1796 at Seend, Wiltshire, the man's wage as an agricultural labourer was 8s. a week, while the expenditure for bread alone was 11s. ; 1s. 6d. was received from the parish, and the balance was made up by the wife and oldest child, who earned 4s. 6d. a week by spinning. The income from this source had previously been much higher, but at Seend, the introduction of machinery had already caused great distress and many families were in great straits as a result of the diminution of earnings. In consequence, Eden points out, "their maintenance must chiefly depend on the exertions of the man (whose wages have not increased in proportion to the defalcation of the woman's earnings) and therefore the present dear times are very severely felt by all families, and even by single women who depend solely upon spinning for their support."²

It was extraordinary on how little the individual spinster could exist even in these dear times. In the same parish of Seend were two sisters, one of whom was an invalid and dependent on the 1s. 6d. a week allowed her by the parish. The other, being obliged to devote much time to her sister, could only earn 2s. a week by her spinning. Sixpence a week was paid for their lodging, and on the other three shillings the two of them somehow managed to live.³ A detailed and interesting budget, which illustrates the extreme simplicity and frugality of an independent spinner in Cumberland in 1796, is also given by Eden. The woman, aged 61, went out spinning wool for her neighbours about fifteen weeks in the year, and earned 4d. a day and her victuals. For the rest of the year, she spun lint at home for a manufacturer and earned 13½d. a week. Her spinning earnings in actual cash, therefore, amounted to £3 11s. 7½d. She had a small capital of £10 received on her father's death, and the interest on this sum, lent to her landlord, paid her rent. Her total yearly income therefore was £4 1s. 7½d. Her expenses were as follows:

EXPENSES:

	s.	d.
House rent	10	0
Fuel, peat and turf	7	0
Barley, 2½ bushels at 5s.	12	6
Oatmeal, 6 stone at 2s. 4d.	14	0
Butter, 8lb. at 8d.	5	4
Milk, 220 qts.	5	6½
Gets 3 pecks of potatoes planted for her; her turf ashes produce about 9 bushels—balance of expence about	2	0
Tea not used; sugar and treacle	4	0
Salt, candle, soap, etc.	4	0
Clogs (one pair in 2 years) 1s. 6d.; shoes (one pair in 7 years) 6d.	2	0
Butcher's meat, 1s. 6d.; wheaten bread 1s.	2	6
Shifts	2	9
Other clothes, etc.	10	0
	£4	1 7½

¹ Davies, *op cit.*, p. 84.² Eden, iii, pp. 796-7.³ *Ibid.*, p. 798.

When she was able to reap in harvest she could sometimes earn a little more money, but "notwithstanding her present scanty income," says Eden, "she has no thought of applying to the parish." She received no assistance from friends, her common diet was hasty pudding (oatmeal porridge), milk, butter and potatoes, and, he adds significantly, she "never had a tea pot in her house at any period of her life."¹

The account of another spinner of seventy years of age in the same parish, who with an allowance of 10s. a year from the overseers, managed to maintain herself on similar low earnings,² suggests that the standard of life for single women when wages were at their lowest, was of the same extreme frugality. To Eden, the wretched wages paid by the flax manufacturers in Cumberland at the end of the century, seemed definitely connected with the pauperization of the spinners; "A woman must labour hard at her wheel, 10 or 12 hours a day, to earn 4d. Whether the poverty of women engaged in this manufacture is ascribable to low wages, I shall not, here, attempt to investigate; but the fact certainly is, that in the north of England, where spinning is much attended to, many more women than men are necessitated to solicit parochial assistance."³ The parish accounts of other districts, with their expenditure on shoes and clothing for single women, some of whom were apparently engaged in spinning, also suggest that in bad times the manufacturers sometimes took advantage of parish funds to reduce their wages below subsistence level.

The temptation to spinners to embezzle material was always greater when wages were low. "There is great reason to believe that were the poor to receive the full wages for their work, most of those complaints [against embezzlement and false reeling] would be effectually done away", wrote one pamphleteer on behalf of the spinners.⁴ Not only was material sometimes held back by the spinners for their own use, but travelling pedlars and hucksters were frequently willing and anxious to give goods in exchange for "bowl-weft", so designated because payment was often made in the form of a bowl or some other useful piece of earthenware.⁵ The laws against embezzlement were difficult to enforce and frauds were frequently committed, although accounts in contemporary newspapers show that women sometimes suffered the full penalties. In 1767, for instance, "Eliz. Walker, of Snowden, was sent to the House of Correction at Wakefield for fourteen days, and ordered to be publicly whipped for embezzling 3 lb. of comb'd wool."⁶ In 1777, the Worsted Act laid down stricter regulations and authorised committees of masters who might employ yarn inspectors to discover and convict offenders. New penalties were fixed for both embezzlers and receivers of stolen goods, and agents and putters-out were made responsible for false-reeled and short-weight yarn. In Yorkshire, the Midland Counties and East Anglia, masters took advantage of the Act, which seems ultimately to have succeeded. Under the new regulations material given out to the

¹ Eden, vol. ii, p. 75.

² *Ibid.*, ii, p. 72.

³ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 84.

⁴ [Kirby], *A Letter to a Member of Parliament . . . Wages of Spinners*, 1787, p. 21.

⁵ W. Cooke Taylor, *Handbook of Silk, Cotton and Woollen Manufactures*, p. 150.

⁶ *Newcastle Journal*, August 1, 1767.

spinners had to be worked up within eight days, or they were liable to be committed to the House of Correction for one month for neglect of duty. The convictions obtained suggest that many women suffered this penalty, as well as those who were indicted for receiving stolen yarn.¹

THE TRANSITION FROM HAND TO MACHINE SPINNING

By the last decade of the eighteenth century, cotton spinning by hand had practically ceased, while wool spinning continued in some districts well into the nineteenth century. The wages given in the *Agricultural Surveys*, by Eden, and in the *Annals*, show that although the rates still varied in different parts of the country, they were getting steadily lower, rarely rising above 4d.-6d. a day. After 1790, we begin to hear of the effects of the introduction of machinery in the woollen industry, and signs of distress among the spinners are noted, especially in remote country districts. In view of the acute economic distress which the rural population suffered at this time, it is important to remember that the introduction of machinery was not the fundamental cause. The wars of the second half of the eighteenth century had already brought about a rise in food prices and dislocation of trade; agrarian changes had been pushed on rapidly throughout the same period, and in many places the effects of the enclosure movement coincided with the loss of domestic industries. The great straits to which the poor were reduced resulted from the cumulative effects of these changes, and were further accentuated by the outbreak of the French Revolutionary Wars which accompanied the transition in industry. In Yorkshire, for example, the increase in trade was so great in 1791, and spinners in such demand—some having left the woollen for the cotton trade—that "instead of taking 3d. or 4d. out of a shilling, they were glad to get spinners at the expence of adding as much to the shilling."² Four years later, the effects of the war were noted by Eden at Halifax; "The present war," he says, "has affected the manufactures of this place, and reduced the price of labour; especially of weaving and spinning; many poor women, who earned a bare subsistence by spinning, are now in a very wretched condition."³ Some reduction was probably due to machines for spinning which had already been set up in some parts of Yorkshire, but the inclusion of weaving in his statement shows that the war also had affected both wages and employment.

The transition from domestic to machine industry in the textile trades is a very difficult one to trace. Changes were introduced at different times in different parts of the country. When Eden was visiting the South West in 1796, he found six or seven hundred women in the parish of South Tawton in "constant employment," spinning for the Devon serge makers, while the same year at Scend in Wiltshire he found hand spinning had "fallen into disuse." "Fifty persons with machines, will do as much as five hundred without them," he

¹ For legislation against embezzlement, see Heaton, *Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries*, pp. 419-422, 427-431.

² A. Young, *Annals*, xvi, pp. 422-3.

³ Eden, iii, p. 826.

writes, "and the Poor, from the great reduction in the price of spinning, scarcely have the heart to earn the little that is obtained by it."¹ Many similar contrasts are to be found for other parts of the country, and in many districts the domestic and factory systems persisted side by side. It is therefore only possible to indicate the general progress of the change.

THE INTRODUCTION OF MACHINERY IN THE COTTON INDUSTRY

The cotton spinners were the first to be affected by the changes which followed the introduction of Hargreaves' spinning jenny. Invented in 1764, the machine spread rapidly through the Lancashire towns, and in many weavers' cottages, women and children were soon spinning on the jenny as much as twenty or thirty persons had been able to accomplish on the single thread wheel.² At first the machine was small, easily imitated and inexpensive, and many of the spinners were able to purchase and install them in the upper rooms of their cottages.³ A few years later, when the number of spindles was considerably increased, the jennies were gathered into small workshops and worked by men, and after the appearance of the mule in 1779, women spinners were soon superseded. By 1788, jenny spinning in the cottages was over. Heavier machines required the strength of men, and spinning on the mule quickly became highly skilled work monopolised by a new class of men spinners. Thus, within the space of one generation, what had been women's hereditary occupation was radically changed, and the only class of women spinners left were the unskilled workers in the new factories built to house Arkwright's frames. By 1790, carding and roving machines were drawing the preparatory processes also into the factory. The swiftness of the change stands out in strong contrast to the slowness of events in the woollen industry, in which some hand spinning went on for another twenty years. By 1788, one of Young's correspondents could write from Lancashire: "A total revolution in spinning has happened in these parts, the water engines make such fine level threads; spinning by hand engines is entirely abolished."⁴ Radcliffe vividly describes the change which took place at Mellor between 1770-1788: "Cotton, cotton, cotton, was become the almost universal material for employment, the hand wheels, with the exception of one establishment, were all thrown into lumber rooms."⁵

His account of this exception is both interesting and amusing and illustrates the attitude of the more conservative spinners towards the innovations. This particular establishment was conducted by four or five sisters, living on one of the small farms in Mellor. "They had a complete spinners, consisting of two pairs of cards, and five hand wheels, by which they earned more than paid the rent of the farm, on which they kept three cows, one horse, and always ploughed a field,

¹ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 139; iii, p. 796.

² *Ure, Cotton Manufacture*, i, p. 203.

³ *Butterworth, Historical Sketches of Oldham*, p. 104.

⁴ *Annals*, x, pp. 579-580.

⁵ *Radcliffe, Origin of Power Loom Weaving*, p. 61.

this farm was also celebrated for its cheese, poultry, eggs, etc. These spinsters entered their solemn protest against any innovations upon their trade, and the property they had embarked in it, either by Sir Richard Arkwright or any other person, and declared they would never surrender a right that had descended to them thro' their predecessors from the earliest period of time and till now had never been disputed." While strongly disapproving of the riotous proceedings which had already taken place, they made the resolution that "until these machines were ordered by Government to cease working, to the ruin of all His Majesty's loyal and dutiful *spinsters* in his dominions, they would oppose them with all their wealth, power and industry, with the aid of their legitimate cards and hand-wheels." Apparently they did so, for in 1822, Radcliffe was able to write, "I saw some of the yarns just brought from this celebrated spinnery on the same farm by a respectable manufacturer in our town, only a few weeks ago."¹ It is probable that these sisters were not the only ones who persisted in the use of their hand wheels, and in remote districts elsewhere a few jennies and hand wheels survived long after spinning had become a factory industry.

How did these changes react on the disinherited spinsters? At the outset it may be said that there was less distress among the cotton spinners as a class than was later suffered by many of the woollen spinners. The lot of the former was mitigated by the fact that cotton was a localised industry, and the rapidly increasing trade absorbed many women in other branches of work. Moreover, the higher wages earned by male cotton workers in the early days made it less necessary for married women to contribute to the family income. Woollen spinners, on the other hand, were to be found in almost every part of the kingdom and particularly in agricultural districts. The establishment of factories for woollen spinning meant the concentration of industry in certain areas, and when hand spinning was withdrawn from the villages, there was nothing, in the majority of cases, to take its place; hence the distress which in many places followed the reduction of the family income.

On the whole the attitude of the cotton spinners towards the jenny was not so hostile as might have been supposed from so great an innovation. There was some rioting and destruction at the time of the invention, and an outcry that the jennies would take "bread from the Poor," but the opposition soon died away.² It has to be remembered that many of the spinners were wives and daughters of weavers who stood to gain tremendously by the increased output of yarn. Their true interest was to encourage the jennies, and so to free themselves from the "bondage" and high prices of the outside spinners.³ Thus many of the cotton workers were only too glad to adopt the machines. Such hardship as occurred was suffered by old people and those who could not easily acquire the jennies; their wages were reduced by the new competition. Until the carding and roving machines were in use, however, the increased output from the jenny and mule provided a

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2.

² *Thoughts on the Use of Machines in the Cotton Manufacture*, 1780, p. 8.

³ Ogden, *Description of Manchester*, 1783, pp. 87-8.

greater amount of employment than before in carding and preparing wool, and many who, according to Ogden, had been "insolent" spinners before, "were glad to be employed in carding and slubbing for these engines."¹ Again, the fact that jennies were easily obtainable was a further argument for their speedy adoption, since the women who secured them could earn much higher wages than before, while still remaining in their homes. "What a prodigious difference have our machines made in the gains of the *females in a family*?" wrote an enthusiastic contemporary. "Formerly the chief support of a poor family arose from the loom. A wife could get comparatively little on her single spindle. But, for some years, a good spinner has been able to get as much, or more than a weaver. . . . If it were true that the weaver gets less, yet, as his wife gets more, his family does not suffer. But the fact is that the gains of an industrious family have been, upon an average, much greater, than they were before these inventions."²

The wages quoted by contemporaries certainly suggest that women jenny spinners shared in the greater prosperity which machines brought in the first instance. In 1779 a writer states that a woman who earned from 2s. 6d. to 3s. a week on the old hand wheel would earn from 7s. 6d. to 12s. a week when she transferred her labour to the jenny.³ Samuel Oldknow's ledger for 1786-7 contains among its smaller entries the account of a woman earning 10s. a week by spinning low counts on a jenny,⁴ and a little later Aikin states that at Oldham "women will sometimes earn 16s. and 17s. per week by spinning with a jenny."⁵ His statement probably refers only to those who were spinning high counts or working the larger machines, and the average wage of women jenny spinners was more likely to be in the region of 9s. or 10s. a week. This was, however, sufficiently high to attract many women to machine spinning, including some who had not been spinners before. Crompton's wife, for instance, was the daughter of a ruined West India merchant, and had gone to reside with friends at Turton, "where ample and profitable employment could be obtained by spinning on Hargreaves' jenny."⁶

These high wages, however, were not maintained, especially in the case of women. Large profits attracted many newcomers to the industry and many weavers became spinners. Jennies were rapidly improved and workers on the early models could not keep pace with the increased number of spindles. Their profits grew less as competition increased, both from factories and larger machines, and as soon as the supply of labour exceeded the demand rates were reduced.⁷

¹ *Ibid.* ² *Thoughts on the Use of Machines*, p. 14.

³ T. *Letters on the Utility and Policy of employing Machines to shorten Labour*, 1779, p. 31.

⁴ Unwin, *Samuel Oldknow and the Arkwrights*, p. 70.

⁵ *Description of Country round Manchester*, 1795, p. 239.

⁶ French, *Life of Crompton* (3rd ed.), pp. 43-4.

⁷ As a result of improvements in spinning machines, wages went up by leaps and bounds, but the fall in prices was equally rapid, especially after the introduction of fine spinning on the mule. In 1786, for instance, 10s. a pound was paid for spinning counts of 100, and by 1790 the price paid for the same thing was only 4s. Mc. Connel and Co., *Century of Fine Cotton Spinning*, p. 23.

The effects were noticeable as early as 1780, when the cotton workers complained to Parliament that women who had been earning from 8s. to 9s. a week on jennies of twenty-four spindles, "can now only earn from Four to Six Shillings a Week."¹

At the same time that women jenny spinners began to be superseded by machines of eighty and more spindles, the effects of the new series of machines for carding and roving began to be felt. Unfortunately the new developments coincided with the American War and the loss of custom in American, French and Spanish markets. Women spinners and those who until now had been engaged in the preparatory processes in their cottages, believed that the new machines were responsible for their distress and unemployment; consequently opposition, more widespread than in the early days of the inventions, broke out again. In September and October, 1779, several thousand cotton workers and their sympathisers destroyed hundreds of carding, doubling and twisting engines, and as many large jennies as they could find at Chorley, Manchester, Wigan, Blackburn and Bolton.² Small jennies of twenty-four spindles and less were spared, as the rioters considered these were "fair machines," inexpensive enough to be within the reach of every spinner and able to be worked in the ordinary cottage.³ A good deal of sympathy seems to have been felt for the rioters, and their case, together with a petition from the men and women sent to Lancaster gaol, was put forward in a pamphlet. Therein it was stated that machines at first had not been detrimental, but now that one person could manage a hundred spindles, manufacturers were making immense profits and the rates for hand labour were seriously affected; "thousands of women, when they can get work, must make a long day to card, spin, and reel 5040 yards of cotton, and for this they have *four-pence or five-pence and no more*." The increase in machines had reduced numerous families to "want and wretchedness, insomuch, that strange and disturbing as it may appear, some families have been driven to that extremity that they have gone to the Brewer to beg his grains with which he fed his hogs, to preserve them from famine." Finally, "being no longer able to endure the remediless cries of our husbands, wives, and children, and not having it in our power to put food into the mouths of those to whom, under God, we gave existence; in an unhappy hour of depression, prompted by want and poverty, we pulled down and demolished several of these Machines, the causes of our calamitous situation."⁴

The grievance of the cotton workers was obviously not against the smaller machines, but against those they could not afford to buy and with which they could not compete. Their complaint was summed up in a petition to Parliament: "That the Jenneys are in the Hands of the Poor, and the Patent Machines are generally in the Hands of the Rich; and that the work is better manufactured by small Jenneys than by large ones."⁵ A good deal of sympathy was expressed with

¹ *Reports Miscellaneous, 1778-1782* (38), vol. v, p. 4.

² *Annual Register*, October 9, 1779.

³ [R. Mather], *Case of the Poor Cotton Spinners, 1780*, p. 5. Chapman, *Lancashire Cotton Industry*, p. 76.

⁴ *Case of the Poor Cotton Spinners*, pp. 2, 3, 5, 15.

⁵ *Commons' Journals*, June 27, 1780.

the rioters and their cause. At Wigan, the Magistrates agreed to lay their grievance before Parliament and to suspend the use of "all Machines and Engines worked by Water or Horses for carding, roving, or spinning Cotton" until the decision of Parliament on the subject should be made known.¹ Another ingenious suggestion was made on behalf of the spinners, that machine-spun cotton should be taxed to enable hand workers to survive the competition and that machines themselves should be taxed also, according to the number of spindles.² In the inquiry, the cotton masters gave evidence of the enormous expansion of trade due to the introduction of machinery during the last ten years and maintained that "the Manufacturers in general are not distressed for want of Employment," and "that if the Spinning Machines were prevented from working, it would not be possible to supply the Weaver with Warp equal to the present Demand." The Parliamentary Committee to whom the inquiry was entrusted decided that there was "no want of Employment for the industrious Poor," and reported in favour of machinery.³

It is significant that after these riots no further outbreak occurred. The resumption of peace was followed by a revival of trade and further expansion which seems to have absorbed any labour actually displaced by machines. Although women were to a great extent displaced by skilled men spinners on the new machines, the enormous output of yarn led to a corresponding demand for weavers—"either lads or asses," according to Radcliffe—and it is certain that many women and children formerly engaged in carding, roving and spinning, took to the loom.⁴ Thus machines brought about an occupational interchange; spinning became a skilled occupation for men and weaving absorbed an increasing number of women.

During the last decade of the eighteenth century when the transition to the factory system was proceeding apace, a good many women deprived of spinning were still able to obtain employment in their homes, although their numbers steadily grew less. In 1795 Eden found women at Manchester engaged in winding, reeling and picking cotton in their cottages earning as much as 3s. 6d. a week.⁵ Many of the early factories began with machines for the actual spinning processes only and large numbers of outworkers were employed. Oldknow's mill at Mellor which in 1790 employed over 400 workers for spinning, provided work for 150 women picking and cleaning cotton, chiefly in their homes.⁶ But work in the factory was liable to be held up by the irregularity of outside workers and their discontent with the low rates of pay offered. In 1793 Oldknow's manager writes to him: "The women here are still obstinate and say they will not pick it for 1s. 6d. per Dozen, that is 1½d. per pound. H. Furnace has brought

¹ *Ibid.*, April 27, 1780.

² *Case of the Poor Cotton Spinners*, p. 7.

³ *Reports Miscellaneous, 1778-1782*, vol. v, pp. 5-6.

⁴ Radcliffe, *Origin of Power Loom Weaving*, pp. 55-6. Guest, *Compendious History of the Cotton Manufacture*, p. 31.

⁵ Eden, *op. cit.*, vol. ii, pp. 357, 358.

⁶ Unwin, *Samuel Oldknow and the Arkwrights*, p. 128. A good many women in Derbyshire villages obtained similar employment for Arkwright's mills. Aikin, *Description of the Country round Manchester*, 1795, p. 496.

in the Cotton she took out on Thursday and says 1½d. per lb. is too little—however she has taken more out. . . . The reason why rovings have been so scarce is the want of Cotton being picked but I expect that to-morrow we shall have a better supply." In a postscript he adds: "The Cotton Pickers are all come and are taking out the Cotton at 1½d.—tho' very reluctantly."¹ The difficulty of controlling these outside workers and the need for quicker and more efficient service led ultimately to the provision of room in the factory where some of this work might be carried on more regularly by full-time workers. In the next decade the superiority of steam power began to be recognised and in the new factories all the processes connected with spinning were gathered in to the factory and worked by the same power. The better wages earned by some of the male operatives freed their wives from the necessity of making up the earnings lost by spinning, and these were able to retire from industrial work and devote their time to the care of their homes and children. In the early nineteenth century the skilled spinner, assisted by his children, was able, writes Baines, to "live more generously, clothe himself and his family better than many of the lower class of tradesmen, and though improvidence and misconduct too often ruin the happiness of these families, yet there are thousands of spinners in the cotton districts who eat meat every day, wear broadcloth on the Sunday, dress their wives and children well, furnish their houses with mahogany and carpets, subscribe to publications, and pass through life with much of humble respectability."² For the women cotton workers who had still to earn their livings, however, the only alternatives were the factory, or, if they desired to remain in their homes, the hand loom. The fortunes of each of these classes of workers will be considered later.

THE INTRODUCTION OF MACHINERY IN THE WOOLLEN INDUSTRY

Spinning machines, as has already been seen, were invented in the first instance for the cotton manufacture and afterwards applied to the woollen and worsted industries. But while the cotton trade was localised and inventions spread rapidly throughout the area engaged in the manufacture, the transition to machine spinning in the woollen trade was a much more haphazard affair. The introduction of machines in a spinning district did not necessarily mean that they were adopted over the whole of that particular area and in some places hand spinning continued into the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, especially in the case of worsted, for which the wheel was used for some time after the jenny was in use for wool.

The later adoption of machine spinning in the woollen trade was due in the first place to the fact that wool was not so suitable a material as cotton to take the strain of the machine, and in the second to a certain lack of enterprise among the woollen manufacturers. Although the jenny was brought out in 1764, the earliest attempt to introduce it in the woollen trade appears to have been in 1776 at Shepton Mallet in the South West clothing district. At once it caused apprehension

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

² *History of the Cotton Manufacture*, p. 446.

and rioting among the spinners. In a petition which was immediately drawn up, all classes of woollen workers combined to support the spinners in an unsuccessful plea for its prohibition :

" A Petition of the Wire-drawers, Card-board-makers, Card-makers, Scribblers, Spinners, Twisters, Weavers, and others, employed in the Woollen Manufactory, in Fromeselwood, Shepton Mallett, and other Cloth-working Towns in the County of Somerset ; setting forth, That a machine called *The Spinning Jenny*, for carding and spinning of Wool into Yarn, had been lately introduced and put in practice in the Town of Shepton Mallett, in the said County ; and that the Petitioners were apprehensive that the same would be established in every Cloth-working Town throughout the Counties of Somerset, Gloucester, and Wilts, and would thereby tend greatly to the Damage and Ruin of many thousands of the industrious Poor employed in that Manufacture : And therefore praying the House to take the Premises into Consideration, and abolish the Use of the said Spinning Machine in the said County, being offered to be presented to the House ;

" And a Motion being made, and the Question being put, That the said Petition be brought up :

" It passed in the Negative."¹

The apprehension of the spinners that jennies would immediately be established in every cloth town in the South West was not justified by events. For some years longer their use was strictly limited. They were only being introduced at Exeter in 1791,² and in 1795 Eden says of Trowbridge in Wiltshire : " The machines have been introduced chiefly within the last six or seven years, and as the people are much averse to them, they are brought into use by degrees."³ Their progress over the whole district is difficult to estimate, but the evidence obtainable from Eden, the writers of the *Surveys* for the Board of Agriculture and correspondents to the *Annals*, suggests that the last decade of the eighteenth century saw the establishment of the jenny in most districts of the South West. Contrasts from village to village, however, show that it was not universal until after the end of the century. In Gloucester, for example, jennies were first introduced at Stapleton in 1796, whereas in the previous year, Turner had written of the Stroud district that carding and spinning engines had entirely deprived women and children there of employment.⁴ Some parishes were reduced to acute distress from the decline of hand spinning while in others there was still constant employment at the hand wheel.

In Yorkshire and the North generally, after the introduction of the jenny in 1780, the transition was more rapid owing to the great increase in the Yorkshire trade which provided more and more employment and to some extent counteracted the hostility towards machinery. Small master clothiers purchased jennies on which they or their wives and children could spin all the yarn they required, instead of putting out yarn to neighbouring spinsters, and after the adaptation of machines for the preliminary processes, many of them combined to set up joint stock mills to which such work could be transferred from the home.

¹ *Commons' Journals*, November 1, 1776: quoted Hammond, *Skilled Labourer*, p. 146.

² *Annals*, xv, p. 494.

³ Eden, *State of the Poor*, vol. iii, p. 802.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 209. Turner's *Gloucester*, p. 31.

The methods of the Yorkshire manufacturers stand out in contrast to those of masters in the South West, for while the latter were slowly adopting jennies worked by hand and water power, the enterprise of the former was leading them to proceed to steam power.

On the whole women in the North suffered less than those in the South by the transition to machine spinning. Among the small clothiers women stood to benefit by the increased prosperity that machines brought to many in this class, but there is evidence of distress among poorer women who were dependent on spinning alone.¹ Their numbers were not so numerous, however, as in the South, and the expansion of trade in Yorkshire provided other work for many of them. In addition, many women and children previously engaged in wool spinning were able to get employment well into the nineteenth century in spinning worsted for which the jenny was little used.² Owing to the flourishing state of trade, manufacturers in 1791 were even complaining of a scarcity of hands for worsted spinning.³ Towards the end of the century increasing demands for yarn led to the building of worsted mills for spinning by Arkwright's frames, but for some years longer hand spinning continued along with the factory. Since Arkwright's frame was worked chiefly by young women and girls, spinning mills here did not displace women to the same extent as in cotton and woollen spinning, and distress from unemployment was consequently less. Such suffering as did occur was chiefly among older women who were unable to leave their homes, and who, after long years at the wheel, could only regard the factory system with bitterness and antipathy.⁴

In all the districts in which an increasing trade induced manufacturers to adopt machinery, women who were dispossessed of hand spinning stood a chance of being absorbed into more regular and better paid employment. There is evidence of much prosperity in some of the villages where mills were set up for the sake of water power, and here there was generally much more work for women than before. Servants became scarce and farmers complained that women could no longer be obtained to work in harvest since they preferred employment in the mills. A clothier from Somerset giving evidence in 1803 declared: "All the Work People in his Neighbourhood, from the Age of Seven Years to Seventy, both Male and Female, are employed, and he employs as many Women as Men";⁵ and a Gloucestershire clothier at the same time stated "since the Introduction of Machinery there is much more work for the Women and Children in the Villages than formerly."⁶

¹ Eden, *op. cit.*, vol. iii, p. 847.

² James, *History of the Worsted Manufacture*, pp. 335, 338.

³ "A neighbour of mine, who lately spent time in Halifax, in Yorkshire, says manufacturers there told him hands for spinning were so scarce, owing to rapid progress of the cotton trade, that instead of taking 3d. or 4d. out of a shilling, they were glad to get spinners at the expense of adding as much to the shilling." *Annals*, vol. xvi, p. 423.

⁴ See *The Humble Petition of the Poor Spinners*, 1787.

⁵ *Woollen Report*, 1802-3, v, p. 8. Evidence of Mr. T. Joyce, of Freshford.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11. Hy. Dyer, Wootton-under-Edge. In 1806 the same witness declared that poor rates in his parish had decreased, "for we have not a Man, Woman, or Child, willing and capable of working, who is not employed." *Woollen Report*, 1806, iii, p. 365.

In some places there was a definite shortage of hands. A Yorkshire manufacturer in 1791 said that he was "in such want of hands as to be driven to the expedient of procuring from the workhouses in London, 500 poor children to be employed in his workshops";¹ and at Frome (1803) a manufacturer declared: "That he is so necessitated from the Want of Workwomen, as to have applied to the Overseers of his Parish, for some Months past, to send him such as apply for Relief to be employed in the Woollen Manufacture; and that he also sends wool into different Parishes to be picked, from the want of Hands."²

But the concentration of industry, which brought more employment and higher wages for women in districts where machinery was introduced, meant that many thousands of spinners in scattered, outlying rural parishes must ultimately lose all chance of employment. The expense and delay in sending wool far afield caused women in distant parishes to suffer first, and in such, the supply of wool was often stopped without warning. At Pewsey, in Wiltshire, the sudden cessation of work caused the poor rates to rise to 15s. in the pound, and on behalf of the spinners the Rector appealed to the manufacturer, offering to take work for the same rates as wool was spun by machinery at the mills, or even less. The reply stated "that work was supplied with more ease and certainty from the mills, and therefore they could not employ the poor on any terms."³ Elsewhere women were reduced to tramping weary miles to fetch out work for themselves as long as it was available, but all over the country dwindling wages threw an increasing burden on the poor rates. The greatest distress occurred in the South Eastern Counties, where, as a result of the general decline in the worsted trade, there were no developments to absorb any of the hands previously engaged in spinning, which had been the mainstay of thousands of women and children in the villages of Norfolk and Suffolk.

The returns made to the Poor Law Commissioners in 1833 bore eloquent testimony to the distress caused in agricultural districts by the loss of spinning. In a great number of cases this was put forward as one of the principal causes of the alarming increases in poor rates. From parish after parish came evidence to the effect that "formerly all the Women and Children had spinning to do, and they brought in as much as the Man did"; now "there is no employment except field work."⁴ The earnings of many women had been small, but the loss of even a few pence was of importance when the man's wage was only six or seven shillings a week. In the suffering which followed on the reduction of income, women were apt to look back on their spinning days as a veritable golden age. The tedium of long hours at the wheel, the hard necessity of children's work almost from infancy, the abatements in wages were all forgotten, and it was only remembered that "the loss of wool-spinning has been a mortal blow to the comforts of the Poor."⁴

¹ *Annals*, xvi, p. 422-3.

² *Woollen Report*, 1802-3, v, p. 22. Evidence of William Sheppard.

³ *P.P. Poor Laws*, 1834, xxx. Returns from Parishes.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 456a.

CHAPTER VIII

TEXTILE INDUSTRIES: THE HANDLOOM WEAVERS

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE WEAVING TRADE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

THE casual nature of the references to women weavers make it impossible to determine what actually was their position in the trade prior to the eighteenth century. When our period opens in the middle of that century we find that women were weaving in the cloth trade both in the West and in Yorkshire. In the dispute over weaving wages in Gloucestershire in 1756, the clothiers declared that weaving was the work of old men, women and children,¹ and although this was obviously a contemptuous exaggeration intended to discredit the weavers' claims, there is no doubt that it contained an element of truth. Many women were accustomed to assist their husbands and fathers at the broad loom which required two workers before the use of the flying shuttle.² In this way they took the place of a journeyman or apprentice and all the profits of the loom, then quoted at 13s. to 21s. a week, were retained in the family. Where a journeyman was employed the profits were divided in the proportion of 7:5; hence when his place was taken by a woman, her contribution to the family wage was equivalent.³ In the cloth trade at Leeds, according to Arthur Young in 1768, some women could earn by weaving as much as men, among whom the good hands earned on an average 8s. a week. In the "stuff" trade women earned 3s. 6d. to 4s. a week and were never out of employment. It is interesting to compare these wages with those of the spinners at Leeds, who were then earning about 2s. 6d. or 3s. a week.⁴

Lancashire also seems to have had a fair proportion of women weavers. The *Worsted Smallware Weavers' Apology*, issued at Manchester in 1756, shows that women were employed there on the same terms as men, and were subject to the same rules in the organisa-

¹ *State of the Case and Narrative of the Facts relating to the . . . Risings of the Weavers in the County of Gloucester, 1757.*

² Dyer gives an idyllic picture of the broad loom workers:

"Or, if the broader mantle be the task,
He chooses some companion to his toil,
From side to side, with amicable aim,
Each to the other darts the nimble bolt,
While friendly converse, prompted by the work,
Kindles improvement in the op'ning mind."
The Fleece, lili, 147-152.

³ *State of the Case*, etc.

⁴ Young, *Northern Tour*, ed. 1771, vol. i, pp. 137, 138.

tion of the trade.¹ Twelve years later Arthur Young found women weaving in both the check and fustian branches. While the maximum wage was found in those branches worked exclusively by men, in all others women's earnings were stated to be the same as men's. In fustians, out of thirteen varieties of material, six were woven by men at wages varying from 3s. to 12s. a week, and in other branches, women's earnings varied from 1s. 6d. to 10s. In checks, women wove five of the nine varieties, and the highest wage was 7s. as opposed to 10s. for men.²

These accounts and the occasional references to women weavers in other parts of the country show that although in the eighteenth century weaving was primarily a man's trade, yet it was not at all uncommon for women to earn their living in that way. And since it was admitted that a strong industrious woman could often earn as much as a man, the wages of good workers in a well paid branch compared very favourably with those of any other class of women workers at that time. Its suitability as an occupation for women was no longer questioned; there were even some, particularly among the agricultural enthusiasts, who considered it more suited to women than to men. "To see a young, well-made fellow, or rather one who might have been well made," wrote William Lamport, "in a loom where a woman will generally earn as much, what a sight, what a perversion of masculine strength! Women can bear confinement and a domestic life much better than men."³

Although a good deal of yarn was still spun for domestic purposes, by the eighteenth century little weaving was done in private houses. In some of the farms in Wales and the North, a loom was kept for weaving the household linen and flannel, and some of the family clothing, but usually the yarn that was spun for domestic use was sent out to local "custom weavers," a numerous class in the eighteenth century. They had their own looms and were not in the employ of any master, but maintained themselves by weaving the domestic yarn of thrifty housewives, as did Silas Marner in the village of Raveloe. From the few references available it is impossible to determine whether women formed any proportion of this class of custom weavers. The Freeman's Roll of York for the year 1748 includes the name of Elizabeth Dunn, "linnen weaver," who was evidently working on her own account,⁴ but information is too scanty to allow of any opinion concerning the number and position of women who may have been thus in business for themselves.

The great majority of weavers were settled in the clothing areas and were in the employment of capitalist clothiers who supplied them with materials. For the most part they owned their looms and worked at home for wages, though by the end of the eighteenth century there was a growing class of journeymen and women weavers working on hired looms in the shops of the clothiers and small master weavers.

¹ *Worsted Smallware Weavers' Apology*. Manchester Reference Library, No. 28266; quoted Daniels, *Lancashire Cotton Industry*, pp. 41-2.

² Young, *op. cit.*, iii, pp. 187-8, 190.

³ *Cursory Remarks on the Importance of Agriculture*, 1784, p. 40.

⁴ *Surtees Society Publications*, vol. 102, 1899, II., List of Freeman for 1748.

There was also a class of small farmer weavers, some of whom in Lancashire and Yorkshire were independent producers; but the greater number, like the farmers in the West, worked for the clothiers.¹ The women weavers in these classes worked either at the broad loom with their men folk for a family wage, or, as journeywomen, became independent wage earners. The evidence in the Woollen Reports of the early nineteenth century suggests that the latter class was fairly numerous. Many of them were single women hired to assist other weavers at the broad loom; some, weaving on their own, were in the direct employ of the clothier, while others, brought up as weavers and married to craftsmen in other trades, continued their own work at the loom. Moreover, since a loom was easily constructed at a cost of from £2 to £4, it was not uncommon to find two or more looms in a family, and as weavers were most often engaged by the piece, it sometimes happened that the husband and wife were employed by different clothiers, in which case the wife earned and received an individual wage.²

Where weaving was carried on by agriculturalists, women of the family sometimes shared and sometimes took complete responsibility for the weaving. Much depended on the size of the farm and the demands made by cultivation. According to Bamford the farming was generally "of the kind which was soonest and most easily performed," and while men were in the fields, the wife, daughters and servants "attended to the churning, cheese-making, and carding, slubbing and spinning of cotton or wool, as well as forming it into warps for the loom." As soon as the opportunity occurred, the husband and sons would "size the warp, dry it, and beam it in the loom, and either they or the females, whichever happened to be the least otherwise employed, would weave the warp down. A farmer would generally have three or four looms in his house, and then, what with the farming, easily and leisurely tho' it was performed, what with the housework, and what with the carding, spinning and weaving, there was ample employment for the family."³ As outdoor work often spoiled men's hands for the loom, it was not unusual for the women to do the greater part of the weaving. The Bishop of Chester, describing the same class in 1826, stated that it was usual for the men to cultivate the land, while the wife and daughters had "two, three, or four hand-looms in the house, from the profits of which they have been accustomed to pay their rents."⁴

APPRENTICESHIP AND ENTRANCE TO THE TRADE

Since weavers were an important class of workers it is of interest to inquire how women obtained their training and entered the trade. The sixteenth century "Act Touching Weavers" (2 and 3 Philip and Mary c. 11)⁵ had specifically stated that no-one might become a weaver

¹ P.P. *Handloom Weaving Commission*, 1840, xxiv, p. 370.

² P.P. *Woollen Reports*, 1802-3, vii, pp. 22, 297, 268; 1806, iii, p. 147.

³ Bamford, *Dialect of South Lancashire*. Introduction, p. iv.

⁴ P.P. *Emigration Report*, 1826-7, v, p. 203.

⁵ *Statutes at Large*. The Act was repealed in 1809 by 49 Geo. III., c. 109.

without being apprenticed, and theoretically this and the Apprenticeship Act of 1563 were still in force. In the early eighteenth century, however, these regulations were increasingly disregarded and the latter half of the century saw an almost complete breakdown of the old system of apprenticeship. In the North, where the custom was maintained longer than in the West, the Rules of the Worst Small-ware Weavers show that at Manchester attempts were being made in the middle of the century to enforce apprenticeship for women as well as men,¹ and it is possible that women were indentured there and in the North generally, later than elsewhere. Witnesses in 1802 were agreed that apart from parish apprenticeship for a long term of years (to twenty-one or marriage), which was frequently practised in the clothing counties, women were rarely legally indentured in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Some, indeed, served seven years with their parents or others on an informal agreement which was considered as equivalent to apprenticeship, but many after a short training and experience in the loom at home became journeywomen wage earners at an early age.² This is easily understandable since there was, apparently, little difficulty in obtaining employment without apprenticeship, and no distinction was made between apprenticed and unapprenticed workers.³ On the other hand, instead of serving a long period without wages, children were put to the loom at an earlier age, and the money they earned after a short training was not inconsiderable. At Sudbury in 1767, Arthur Young found women, and girls of seven and eight years of age weaving ship flags at which the girls earned "about 2s. 6d. or 3s. a week,"⁴ and at Manchester the wages of children in different branches varied from 1s. 6d. to 5s. a week.⁵ This system was, moreover, preferred by the employer; "I should be very sorry to be compelled to it (i.e. apprenticeship)," said one of them in 1806, "because I can have it done at a less expense by children coming in the morning and going home again at night, than by keeping them in my house as apprentices."⁶

There is little doubt that the breakdown of apprenticeship regulations enabled a far greater number of women and girls to enter the trade. In Wiltshire, a clothier in 1802 estimated that there were "about Two Parts Female Weavers out of Five," most of whom would be thrown out of employment if the weavers were successful in their attempt to get the regulations re-enforced.⁷ It was a vexed question how far such workers might be considered as skilled. Weavers and domestic clothiers, actuated by the fear of new machines and industrial changes, persisted that a seven year training was necessary to become a skilled worker, the actual weaving being "a very small part of the business," while the opposing manufacturers brought a

¹ *Worsted Smallware Weavers' Apology*: quoted Daniels, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

² P.P. 1802-3, viii, p. 344. A Wiltshire clothier giving evidence in 1802 said there were many weavers who had neither been indentured nor served seven years. "They are Women in a great Measure, Women who have come to it, but have not served Seven Years." *Ibid.*, p. 343.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

⁴ *Six Weeks' Tour*, p. 58.

⁵ *Northern Tour*, ed. 1771, iii, pp. 187-8, 190.

⁶ P.P. Woollem Report, 1806, iii, p. 196.

⁷ P.P. Woollem Report, 1802-3, v, p. 6.

good deal of evidence to the contrary. A Halifax manufacturer in 1806 declared that he had "a great many women and boys and girls that are now good Weavers, at the age of from 12 to 14, very decent good Weavers." In five or six months girls could become good weavers of kersymere and flannels, and both girls and boys of twelve and thirteen could, he declared, earn 20s. to 22s. a week.¹ It is doubtful whether this can be regarded as an average wage. Employers were often apt to over-estimate the earnings of their workers, and this was, moreover, an unusually prosperous period for some classes of weavers. Another Yorkshire employer stated that girls who began at twelve years of age could become proficient in weaving worsted in from three to six months, and afterwards weave flannel "fine as any superfine cloth in two or three months."² Such workers, however, could not be described as skilled in the real sense, since their work was often prepared for them and many of them worked under supervision. The evidence available on the position of women in the trade suggests that only a small proportion of them could be described as skilled workers with a knowledge of all processes of the trade. There is ample evidence that some women in all branches of weaving were as proficient in matters relating to the loom as any of the men, but in many cases the master weaver performed the beaming and fixing of the work for his journeywomen, and married women often had the assistance of their husbands. In the same way, the decline of apprenticeship had its effect on the standard of skill of male workers, an increasing number of whom became weavers of no greater knowledge or ability than the majority of women weavers, and who were equally dependent on the superintendence and assistance of a skilled worker.³

The attempt to revive the apprenticeship system among the woollen weavers ended in failure, and the Act which regulated it was suspended and finally repealed in 1813. Among some of the silk weavers, however, apprenticeship for both boys and girls prevailed for a longer period. In 1818 there were stated to be in Spitalfields "a great many women, single and married," working as broad silk weavers, many of whom had been apprenticed. Some served for five years, but the majority for seven, during which period they were boarded by their employers, and the "master or mistress" received the full amount of their earnings.⁴ It was probably due to the fact that the majority had a regular training as well as to the special conditions maintained by the Spitalfields Acts,⁵ that women silk weavers in London were on a more

¹ *P.P. Woollen Report*, 1806, iii, p. 400.

² *Ibid.*, p. 409.

³ The number of weavers who were unable to set up new patterns in the loom themselves is shown by the class of workmen who followed "the habit of Getting for Weavers." Masters often kept their own "gaiters" to set up patterns for their employees, and in other cases weavers themselves often employed and paid gaiters. *P.P. Committee on Weavers' Petitions*, 1802-3, viii, pp. 8, 63.

⁴ Skilled weavers, women as well as men, did this work for themselves. "My wife is as competent a weaver as I am myself," said a silk weaver giving evidence in 1818; "and as competent to gate, or put in any figure, as I am myself." *P.P. Report on Ribbon Weavers' Petitions*, 1818, ix, p. 88.

⁵ *P.P. Report on Ribbon Weavers' Petitions*, 1818, ix, p. 44.

⁶ The Spitalfields Act of 1773 not only arranged for the fixing of wages by Quarter Sessions, but also limited the weavers to two apprentices each. While regular apprenticeship was not actually enforced, the Act seems to have had beneficial results in restricting the numbers in the trade until its repeal in 1824. *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 48.

equal footing in the trade than the women in the clothing districts of the West and North. They were to be found working in the skilled branches; their right to take and train apprentices was recognised and they frequently did so; and by the last of the Spitalfields Acts (51 Geo. III. c. 7) the same wages and prices as were fixed for journeymen were assured to women weavers.

Elsewhere the silk weavers were unable to prevent the decline of apprenticeship and an influx of unskilled workers into the trade, although various attempts were made by the weavers to enforce the regulations established at Spitalfields. At Macclesfield for a short period the workers were successful, and in 1807 rules were adopted "to put a stop to the alarming multiplicity of fugitive boys and girls" entering the trade without indenture. The number of apprentices in future was to be limited; existing apprentices without indenture were to be dismissed, and both boys and girls were to be bound for seven years. These regulations were only kept, however, until 1815, when, against the will of the weavers, who attributed the breakdown to the desire of the masters to "break us up entirely," a system similar to the half pay apprenticeship of Coventry was resorted to.¹

By 1840 apprenticeship among all classes of weavers had practically died out. The Commissioners who conducted the inquiry into the condition of handloom weavers did not find a single instance of apprenticeship by indenture in the West of England; and in Spitalfields, its last stronghold, there were very few, only 61 boys and 12 girls serving an apprenticeship in 1838. Parish apprenticeship still persisted but it was often abused by unscrupulous individuals who took children merely for the sake of the premium and afterwards got rid of them as speedily as possible.²

THE INCREASING PROPORTION OF WOMEN WEAVERS AT THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Towards the end of the eighteenth century there is evidence to suggest that the number of women employed in weaving was rapidly increasing. Witnesses before the Woollen Committee in 1802 stated that more women had lately been employed in both the West and the North, and similar evidence was forthcoming from Scotland in 1810.³ There were various causes contributing to bring about this result, of which the most important was the invention of power spinning. Whereas in the past weavers had been held up by a shortage of yarn, the inevitable result of the new machinery was to create a shortage of handloom weavers. The enormously increased output of yarn led to innumerable attempts to devise a satisfactory power loom, but in the long interval which elapsed before the machine was perfected,⁴ there was employment for all who came to the hand loom. Both men

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-92, 98.

² *P.P. Hand Loom Weavers' Commission*, 1840, xxiii, pp. 459, 391-2.

³ *P.P. Woollen Reports*, 1802-3, v, pp. 3, 55; vii, p. 343. *S.C. on Weavers' Petitions*, 1810-11, ii, p. 5.

⁴ Though the power loom was invented in 1787, it was not much used till 1818, nor in general use till after 1824. Butterworth, *Historical Sketches of Oldham*, pp. 140-141.

and women were attracted by the high wages which ruled for a few brief years. "It was at that time impossible to get more weavers than were then employed," says Radcliffe of the period about 1800, and although the Manchester manufacturers employed "every person in cotton weaving who could be induced to learn the trade . . . want of *population*, want of *hands*, and want of *looms*, set us fast . . ."¹ He gives a graphic description of what happened in Mellor after 1788, where "the old loom-shops being insufficient, every lumber room, even old barns, cart-houses, and out buildings of every description were repaired, windows broke through the old blank walls, and all fitted up for loom-shops. This source of making room being at length exhausted, new weavers' cottages with loom-shops rose up in every direction."²

The great increase in the demand for labour at the handloom occurred at a time when many women, deprived of occupation by spinning machinery, were looking for a new field of employment, and there is no doubt that in districts where there was a demand for weavers, many of those who had been spinsters were thus absorbed. "The hands, turned adrift from hand cards and the spinning wheel," says Radcliffe, "soon found full employ in the loom on machine yarns, with three to four-fold more wages than they had been able to earn in their own trade."³ Although the actual increase in wages appears to have been exaggerated by Radcliffe,⁴ his account of the new prosperity among weavers is borne out by contemporaries, and there is little doubt that this was due to extended employment and increased family earnings brought about by the better wages of women. The whole family now went "well clad,—the men with each a watch in his pocket, and the women dressed to their own fancy,—*the church crowded to excess every Sunday*,—every house well furnished with a clock in elegant mahogany or fancy case,—handsome tea services in Staffordshire ware, with silver or plated sugar tongs, and spoons—Birmingham, Potteries, and Sheffield wares for necessary use and ornament, wherever a corner cupboard or shelf could be placed *to show them off*."⁵

While the great demand for labour occurred first in the cotton trade, the higher wages offered attracted weavers of linen and woollen goods and so helped to bring about a shortage in those trades. Complaints of "a scarcity of weavers" were forthcoming from Lancashire,⁶ the West, and Yorkshire, where "many women" were definitely stated to be weaving for "want of men," and girls of sixteen and seventeen were constantly employed in weaving broad cloth.⁷

That women found an apparently easy entry into what had hitherto been primarily a man's trade was probably due, not only to the expan-

¹ Radcliffe, *Origin of Power Loom Weaving*, p. 12.

² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

⁴ See Unwin's criticism of his figures: *Samuel Oldknow and the Arkwrights*, pp. 112-113.

⁵ Radcliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

⁶ "The cotton business has come so much into Saddleworth that there is a scarcity of weavers in the cloth line." *P.P.*, 1802-3, vii, p. 293.

⁷ Huddersfield clothiers stated: "We have wanted more weavers than we could get the last twelve months." *P.P.*, 1802-3, vii, p. 372; 1802-3, v, p. 2.

sion of trade, but also to the coincidence of the French Revolutionary Wars. Radcliffe dates the increase in the number of handlooms from 1788; by 1793 England was at war and in many cases women appear to have replaced the weavers who enlisted. According to one estimate upwards of 20,000 handloom weavers volunteered from Lancashire alone.¹ A correspondent of the Home Office wrote from Wigan in 1799: "If a Man enlists, his Wife turns Weaver, for here the women are weavers as well as the Men, and instructs her children in the art of weaving—and I have heard many declare that they lived better since their husbands enlisted than before."² In Bolton, before the war, the number of girls engaged in muslin weaving was stated to have been "remarkably few," but "the Journeymen in such numbers enlisted and went off, that the householders took the girls and learnt them, rather than let their looms stand."³

Another factor which opened the trade to a greater number of women at this time was that machine-spun yarn made weaving an easier and simpler task. Improvements in both warp and shuttle enabled the yarn to be worked in less time and with less strength, so that women and even children could now work in branches which had been closed to them before. This was especially noticeable in the Irish linen trade, where hand-spun yarn had been "too hard" to be woven by women.⁴ In the cotton trade also, finer thread made possible the manufacture of fine calicoes, muslins, cambrics, nankeens, etc., hitherto imported from India. These materials could easily be worked by women, and ultimately were almost entirely given up to them.⁴

The great demand for labour following the expansion of trade, the loss of spinning as an occupation for women, improved machine-spun yarns, and the situation created by the war, all, therefore, helped to increase the opportunities for women in the weaving trade at the end of the eighteenth century. It has also to be remembered that the earlier part of the century had witnessed the breakdown of apprenticeship regulations, and such organisations as existed among the weavers were not strong enough to fight this combination of circumstances and prevent the overstocking of the trade by the large numbers of men and women now attracted to it. That the weavers were aware of the dangers of the new competition and feared its ultimate effects on their wages, is shown by the demands of the woollen weavers for the enforcement of the old laws relating to the trade, and the societies

¹ P.P. S.C. on *Hand-loom Weavers*, 1834, x, p. 436.

² H.O., 42, 47: quoted Hammond, *Skilled Labourer*, p. 60.

³ P.P. *Cotton Weavers' Petitions*, 1808, ii, p. 27.

⁴ "Has not the facilities and ease attending weaving been such that the employ now is not confined to men, and that women and children compose half of the weavers?" "Certainly." S.C. on *Cotton Weavers' Petitions*, 1808, ii, p. 13. Evidence of Mr. Ainsworth, cotton manufacturer.

"Females are now generally employed in hand-loom weaving; a new feature in the history of Irish weaving; and except in the heavier and coarser fabrics, they are equal to any, if not the best workers." P.P. *Handloom Weavers' Commission*, 1840, xxiii, pp. 596-7.

"Mill spun yarn which may be worked in half the time, and with half the strength, has now been extensively introduced and females are taking to weaving." *Ibid.*, 1841, x, pp. 10-11.

they formed for the prosecution of unapprenticed workers.¹ Their attempts were bound to end in failure, but the later history of the trade shows that their concern was not unjustified. The number of handloom weavers increased out of all proportion to the expansion of trade and wages fell rapidly in consequence. Children were put to the loom at an earlier age to counterbalance the decline in family wages, and with expanding numbers the position went from bad to worse,² and finally reached its nadir when the power loom entered into relentless competition in a trade already overstocked.

To what extent the proportion of women weavers was increased by the changes described above, we have no means of judging. Contemporary accounts are all in agreement that more women were being employed than formerly, and with that and the rather vague statements of employers we have to be content. A Wiltshire clothier in 1802 believed that at Trowbridge and Bradford two-fifths of the weavers were women;³ at Halifax "many women" were employed,⁴ and in Lancashire at the same time there were stated to be "as many Females as Males in some Parts."⁵ Later in the century the few statistics available for the trade give more definite information. Returns from the ribbon weavers in Coventry and Warwickshire in 1818, though possibly not complete, give some idea of proportion since they showed 4,385 women and 5,056 men to be employed;⁶ in 1838 the numbers for the city of Coventry alone were 1,233 women and 2,384 men, while in the country districts for which no numbers were given, the trade was almost entirely in the hands of women.⁷ At Norwich in 1838, women weavers numbered 1,648 as opposed to 2,211 men, while among silk weavers in the Spitalfields district there were 3,395 women and 5,089 men.⁸ In the West Riding, Lancashire,⁹ and the West of England also there were large numbers of women among the weavers, although the returns did not give their numbers separately. The figures already given however, show the extent

¹ The following announcement taken from a Wiltshire newspaper for December, 1802, was attached to *The Rules and Articles of a Friendly Society or Club called the Woollen-Cloth Weavers' Society*, Gloucester, 1802: "The Woollen-Cloth Weavers in the several towns of Bradford, Trowbridge, and places adjacent, having formed themselves into a Society solely for the Protection of their Trade, hereby give Notice, that any person or persons, who shall, after one month from the date hereof, carry on or follow the trade of a Woollen-Cloth Weaver, without having legally served an apprenticeship for the space of seven years; or who shall unlawfully follow it under the pretence of marriage, or otherwise contrary to the statuta, will be prosecuted as the law directs, at the expence of the said Society."

"J. FRAMPTON, Solicitor."

B.M., 906, k. 14/1.

² S.C. on *Cotton Weavers' Petitions*, 1810-1811, ii, p. 7.

³ P.P. *Woollen Report*, 1802-3, vii, p. 336.

⁴ P.P. *Woollen Report*, 1802-3, v, p. 2.

⁵ P.P. *Cotton Weavers' Petitions*, 1802-3, viii, p. 13.

⁶ P.P. *Ribbon Weavers' Report*, 1818, ix, p. 7.

⁷ P.P. *Handloom Weaving Commission*, 1840, xxiv, p. 40.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1840, xxiii, pp. 309, 319 seq.

⁹ The returns from the West Riding showed that there were over 10,000 worsted and woollen looms in the district in 1838, while in Manchester and the neighbourhood alone, the number of weavers was variously estimated at from 8,000 to 10,000 at the same time. *Ibid.*, 1840, xxiii, p. 529; xxiv, p. 578.

to which handloom weaving had become a mixed trade and give some idea of the large numbers of women who depended upon it for a living.

WOMEN'S WORK IN DIFFERENT BRANCHES OF THE TRADE

Weavers were divided into four main classes, silk, cotton, linen and woollen weavers, and each class was again subdivided into numerous branches in which the requisite degree of strength and skill varied. While therefore women were debarred from certain branches by lack of physical strength, in others, including some of the skilled branches, their competence was equal to that of men, and their wages appear to have been the same. A Manchester muslin manufacturer in 1808, for instance, declared: "The women's talent is equal to the men's when the work is not too heavy; we have some women whose talent is equal to any man's in the middle kind of work."¹

In the woollen trade the width of the loom and the corresponding strength required excluded all but a few muscular women from such branches as broad cloths, blankets and carpets. Axminster carpets were indeed an exception. In that town while men were engaged in the clothing trade, the carpet manufacture was carried on almost entirely by women from its early days to at least the end of the eighteenth century. Arthur Young visiting there in 1796, writes: "Women do the whole of the weaving, and are paid by the piece, earning 6d. to 9d. a day in general; price of the carpets 25s. the square yard; has made to 31s. 6d."²

On narrow looms women worked in many branches of the woollen trade, particularly in the lighter materials such as worsted stuffs and serges. At Salisbury in 1767 girls of sixteen or eighteen earned 1s. a day by weaving shalloons, and women weaving serges in Devon had 8d. to 1s. a day in 1796.³ It is interesting to find that the single women among the serge weavers of Tavistock and the neighbourhood had by 1796 combined to form "one or more" Box Clubs, or Provident Societies.⁴ The serge trade of Devon seems indeed to have been largely in the hands of women by the end of the eighteenth century. The narrow loom was easily housed in an ordinary cottage, and throughout the South Western Counties generally, especially in agricultural districts, many women were engaged in weaving as an auxiliary means of support. The earnings of married women in the shopkeeping and artisan classes were often small, but among agricultural labourers

¹ *Cotton Weavers' Petitions*, 1808, ii, p. 27.

² Young, *Eastern Tour*, 2nd ed., 1771, vol. iii, p. 391. *Annals*, xxviii, pp. 628-9.

³ In 1799 Lipscomb visited a carpet manufactory at Axminster and was much impressed by the "great perfection" of the carpets which he declared to be "equally durable and elegant as the Turkey carpets imported." "The persons employed," he says, "are Women and Children, and it is really astonishing to see with how much facility the latter are brought to the knowledge of this kind of work, by which so many are enabled to earn their bread." *Journey into Cornwall*, 1799, p. 144.

⁴ At Kidderminster, in 1838, women were employed as winders and warpers for the carpet weavers, and some who assisted as drawgirls afterwards became weavers. *H.L.W.C.*, 1840, xxiv, p. 532.

⁵ Marshall, *Rural Economy of West of England*, i, p. 29.

a wife's earnings or wages were of greater importance, especially in times of depression or unemployment. The Poor Law Commissioner in Wiltshire in 1836 stated that when the cloth trade was good "instances frequently occur of families being maintained solely by the wife and some of the children, where the husband has not any work, and cannot contribute at all, and the family must otherwise be maintained by the parish."¹ As well as in the West, women were largely employed in light woollens in Yorkshire and the fancy worsteds of Norfolk.²

The domestic production of flannel and coarse woollen cloth persisted in Wales long after it had died out elsewhere. As late as 1840, farmers and cottagers in some parts were still producing on the old method—spinning and weaving in the winter evenings and bringing the produce of their own wool to market about once a year.³ Some idea of the amount of work which might be produced under this system, together with its economic value, may be obtained from the awards of the Cardigan Agricultural Society. In 1798, for instance, the Society awarded 30s. to Margaret James for "having manufactured 66 yards of flannel and cloth, sold for £11 11s."; £1 was given to Elinor Evans, and her daughter, "for 217 yards of coarse ditto, sold for £17 17s. 6d."; and 15s. to Mary Johns, who "with occasional assistance" had produced 78½ yards, sold for £9 6s. 6d."⁴ Such work was, of course, in addition to their ordinary work as housewives and must have made a welcome addition to the family income.

Where the flannel industry was organised on a capitalistic basis, particularly in North Wales, and in a few scattered loom-shops in the South, women were also employed as weavers. They were seldom engaged in coarse flannels, but in fine work manufacturers stated that they could weave "as well as men." At Newtown in 1840, women numbered 33 per cent. of the weavers.⁵

In the cotton trade there was perhaps a greater proportion of light and unskilled work than in any other branch, and it was here that the competition of women and children became most serious in overstocking the trade. Disastrous effects were especially noticeable after the power loom was employed for the heavier work in which up to that time men had had the monopoly. Girls as well as boys were put to the trade at an early age, and constant reductions of wages in the nineteenth century made it essential for most women to continue at work after marriage. Hence the wife of a cotton weaver was nearly always employed. "I have seen cases in which the wife was more expert at the loom than her husband," wrote Hickson in his report on the cotton weavers in 1840, "and although this is not a general rule, the wife and children of a weaver in most cases contribute very materially to their own support."⁶

¹ P.P. *Second Report of Commission under Poor Law Amendment Act, 1836*, xxix, pp. 301-2.

² P.P. *Handloom Weavers' Commission, 1840*, xxxii, p. 309.

³ *Ibid.*, 1840, xxiv, p. 555. In some districts the middleman who bought up the domestic production of farmers, had appeared by the end of the eighteenth century. Davies, *Agricultural Survey of North Wales, 1799*, p. 394.

⁴ *Annals*, xxxii, pp. 485-6.

⁵ *Handloom Weavers' Report, 1840*, xxiv, p. 556.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1840, xxiv, p. 11.

The linen trade on the contrary employed but few women. For the most part linen weaving required a great deal of strength and was too laborious for women to undertake. Such work as they did was in the badly paid canvas and sacking branches, and in Dorset they were sometimes employed in weaving sail cloth.¹

Among the Spitalfields silk weavers, women seem to have been employed from the establishment of the industry there at the end of the seventeenth century,² but the proportion of women was increased at the end of the eighteenth century as in other branches. So many women were then said to have taken to weaving that there was a shortage of women to wind the silk for other weavers.³ Silk weaving was essentially a family industry. Children were set to wind and quill while still in their infancy, and in early childhood were apprenticed to the loom,⁴ with the result that most women continued their work after marriage. This absorption of the entire family in periods of brisk trade led to the curious expedient of a Children's Market at Bethnal Green, where in an open space, from 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. every Monday and Tuesday, from 50 to 300 children from seven years of age presented themselves to be hired by the weavers. Boys were hired for the winding or helping at the loom, and little girls of seven to ten nursed and cooked and ran the house under the direction of the woman at the loom. Older girls were too expensive and a child under ten would work all the week for 1s. 8d. to 2s.⁵

While the majority of both men and women were engaged in weaving plain goods—the staple of the silk trade—it is interesting to find that early in the nineteenth century some women in Spitalfields were employed on highly skilled work, and earned what were then considered very good wages for women. In 1769, during one of the periodic depressions in the trade, there had been an attempt to exclude women from the better paid classes of work, and the following conditions were inserted in the Book of Prices agreed to:

"No woman or girl to be employed in making any kind of work except such works as are herein fixed and settled at 5^½d. per ell or . . . per yard or under for the making and those not to excell half an ell in width. . . . And no woman or girl is to be employed in making any sort of handkerchief of above the usual or settled price of 4s. 6d. per dozen for the making thereof PROVIDED always . . . that in case it shall hereafter happen that the Kingdom of Great Britain shall engage in war . . . that then every manu-

¹ *Ibid.*, xxiii, pp. 352, 494. Stevenson's *Dorset*, 1812, p. 447.

² In 1719 women, as well as boys and girls, were among the weavers who attacked the wearers of calico gowns, which they believed threatened the prosperity of the silk trade. *Weavers' Truce Case*, p. 41.

³ George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 182, 185.

⁴ On his visit to Spitalfields in 1836, Faucher was struck by the early age of the children working at the loom, and the long hours they were expected to work. He writes: "Des leur bas âge, ils sont courbés sur un métier, lançant la navette trizée à quatorze heures par jour; c'est là le seul exercice que prennent ces malheureux, qui respirent rarement un air libre, et qui ne voient jamais le soleil qu'à travers les fenêtres de leurs tristes réduits. Dans une visite que je fis à Spitalfields en 1836, apercevant une petite fille de onze ans, pale et mélancolique, qui tissant avec une activité fébrile, je demandai au père: 'Combien d'heures, travaille cette enfant par jour?' 'Douze heures,' me répondit-il. 'Et vous n'avez pas peur d'excéder ses forces?' 'Je la nourris bien.'" *Etudes sur l'Angleterre*, vol. i, p. 14-15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

facturer shall be at liberty to employ women or girls in the making of any sort of works as they shall think most fit and convenient without any restraint whatsoever. . . ."¹

How long these conditions were imposed is not clear. The expansion of trade which took place about 1798 may have resulted in their abolition since women were certainly working in the skilled branches early in the nineteenth century. In 1838, the Census taken by the Commissioners showed 526 women to be weaving silk velvets which were said to require "peculiar skill"; one woman was working on jacquard velvets, the most artistic and highly skilled branch of all; 78 on other jacquard and figured goods, and 2,790 on plain silks. The numbers of men in the same branches were respectively 1,871, 15, 392 and 2,820.² By this time the prosperity the silk weavers had enjoyed in the first quarter of the century was over, and competition and underselling had brought down wages as in all other branches of the trade. Nevertheless, in the higher paid branches it was still possible for a skilled woman to earn good wages. A skilled velvet weaver and loom broker who gave evidence in 1838, said his son-in-law earned about 18s. a week, and continued, "This would be a poor sum for his family to live upon; but then his wife, my daughter, is very quick at the loom, and earns as much, or rather more, than he does himself." He added that in view of the decline of the trade, he had educated his children with the idea of bringing them up to other occupations, but "as they grew up, I never could discover any means of bettering their condition by getting them into other trades. In fact, although we are not so well off as we could wish, there are very few trades in which a woman is able to earn as much as my daughter gets by working at the loom; though I must say it is a sort of slavery for a woman which I have never liked to see."³ Elsewhere the position of women in the silk trade was not so good. At Macclesfield and Manchester they seem to have been restricted to the lowest classes of work and paid at rates for which men refused to work.⁴

Ribbon weaving, a separate branch of the silk trade, was, in its early days, entirely in the hands of women.⁵ The extension of the trade brought men into it, but it remained one in which women were very largely employed. The simple handloom took up very little space in the cottage, and it was light, clean work particularly suitable for women who could only spare a few hours a day from domestic duties.

¹ George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 182, quoting "A List of Prices in . . . Branches of the Weaving Manufactory called the Black Branch, and the Fancy Branch, etc.," 1769. (Goldsmith's Library).

² *Handloom Weavers' Report*, 1840, xxiii, pp. 219-227.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. xxiv, p. 77. Evidence of William Bresson.

⁴ *Ribbon Weavers' Report*, 1818, ix, p. 117.

⁵ Women and children were connected with the silk industry from the earliest days of the trade in England. In the Middle Ages they prepared the gold and silver threads for the use of embroiderers, and were employed in "the twining of ribbon, cords, purses, girdles and trimmings of all sorts." Warner, *Silk Industry of the United Kingdom*, p. 20.

Various Acts were passed for the encouragement and protection of the Silk Women of London. By 33 Henry VI. c. 5, it was ordered "No wrought silk belonging to the Mystery of Silk Women shall be brought into this Realm by Way of Merchandise, during five Years"; and by 19 Henry VII., c. 21, Ribbands, Laces, Girdles, etc., were not to be brought into the country. *Statutes at Large*.

After the establishment of the trade in Coventry large numbers of women both in the town and country districts around were fully employed, in addition to those who took it up as a by-industry. When Arthur Young was at Coventry in 1776, men earned 7s. or 8s. a week by weaving, and women 5s., and he adds, "I saw more women at the work than men."¹ In 1818, women weavers in the district numbered 4385, and men 5056, but the addition of 3905 warpers and winders, who were chiefly women and children, meant that women still outnumbered men in the trade.²

At first only single hand looms were used, making one breadth at a time. About 1770 the Dutch engine loom, making several breadths at once, was introduced, but in spite of the large number of women employed and the fact that almost all of them served a five-year apprenticeship to the trade,³ women were not allowed to work the new looms. An attempt to employ a journeywoman on one of them led to a strike among the weavers, as a result of which women were forbidden to weave on any but the old single hand looms.⁴ That this was due to no incapacity on their part was proved later during the great boom in the ribbon trade, known as the "big purl" time.⁵ During this period (1812-15), when many weavers had enlisted and the demand for labour was such that wages went up by leaps and bounds, the employers broke through the apprenticeship regulations, embarked on the system of half-pay apprenticeship and put women into the engine looms. Once there, they remained, and by 1838, 1,233 women were working engine looms in the city of Coventry itself, and of these 214 owned their own looms and worked directly for the manufacturers.⁶ Single hand looms were relegated to rural districts where three-fourths of the weavers were women, many of them half-pay apprentices,⁷ and the rest wives of agricultural labourers and handicraftsmen who took up weaving as a subsidiary occupation. Materials

¹ *Annals*, vol. iv, p. 154.

² *Handloom Weavers' Report*, 1840, xxiv, p. 5. *Ribbon Weavers' Report*, 1818, ix, p. 7.

³ Boys only served for seven years in order to qualify for the Parliamentary franchise for the city.

⁴ This strike is mentioned in several places without reference to authority; e.g. *Handloom Weavers' Report*, 1840, xxiv, p. 33; V. C. H., *Warwickshire*, II, p. 260; Timmins, *Birmingham and Midland Hardware District*, p. 182, but I have been unable to trace the original account, or to obtain the date of the strike.

⁵ So called from the sudden fashion and extraordinary demand for ribbon with large purl edges. Local tradition describes how the weavers on one occasion, during this period of great prosperity, advertised for fifty distressed watch-makers "to come and shell peas for them" I. Timmins, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

⁶ *Handloom Weavers' Report*, 1840, xxiv, pp. 41, 44. For details of the re-organisation of the trade after the slump of 1815, see Timmins, *op. cit.*, p. 184 *seq.* *Handloom Weavers' Report*, 1840, xxiv, pp. 34-5.

⁷ The half-pay apprenticeship system appears to have existed in rural districts before the great boom of 1812, when it was first adopted in Coventry. *Report on Ribbon Weavers*, 1818, ix, p. 33.

In the great demand for labour which then occurred, young people, chiefly girls from the age of eleven years onwards, were employed for a varying period of years at half wages. The system was thoroughly disliked by the regular workers and others for various reasons. It not only led to the overstocking of the trade, but in slack periods, the master was not bound to support his apprentices as by regular indenture, and the half-pay apprentices in most cases then came on to the

for one to four looms; the average wage, including slack periods, was usually from 2s. to 3s. a week.¹ Around Coventry, women winding silk for the ribbon weavers in 1838 earned 3s. to 5s. a week, according to the quality of silk, and some of them employed children to wind for thirteen hours a day at a wage of 6d. to 1s. 6d. a week.² Warpers employed by the manufacturers earned on an average 4s. 6d. a week in 1818.³ Besides warping and winding there was still a certain amount of domestic jenny spinning for women in remote villages in Wales and Yorkshire. It was not unusual as late as 1840 for a woollen weaver's wife to spin the wool he required for the loom, and weavers whose wives were fully employed in this way estimated that their wives earned a third of the combined earnings, which on an average worked out at about 7s. a week, or something over £15 a year.⁴

WAGES OF WOMEN WEAVERS

Occasional reference has already been made to the wages of women handloom weavers in connection with the different classes of work on which they were employed. The highest paid weavers were those whose work demanded both strength and artistic skill, but from such work and any of the better paid work requiring physical strength, women were by nature debarred. It was partly due to the fact that such weavers were protected from the competition of women and children that their condition never sank to the lowest depths in the worst days of the trade. The majority of women, therefore, were either employed on work requiring skill alone, or on purely mechanical work in which their wages in turn were affected by the competition of children.

In the period under review, there was an extraordinary movement in the rise and fall of weavers' wages. The trade was not a highly paid one in the eighteenth century before the textile inventions, and fluctuations, periods of distress and unemployment were by no means introduced with the industrial revolution and the power loom. They had always been characteristic of the trade, especially among weavers of silk and luxury materials dependent on fashion. As a result of a combination of forces, however, there was a general and progressive decline in the wages of all classes of weavers after 1815.⁵ It is impossible here to follow in any detail the movement of women's wages and their various fluctuations throughout the period, only a few examples which are typical at different times can be given.

¹ *S.C. on Handloom Weavers*, 1835, xiii, p. 172; *Poor Laws*, 1834, xxx, p. 606a. The invention of the winding machine was already depriving many women of this employment. *S.C. Handloom Weavers*, 1834, x, p. 37.

² *Handloom Weavers' Report*, 1840, xxiv, p. 37.

³ *Ribbon Weavers' Report*, 1818, ix, p. 7.

⁴ *Handloom Weavers' Report*, 1840, xxiii, pp. 549-50.

⁵ The Committee on Handloom Weavers in 1835 reported that "the wages of handloom weavers have been reduced generally since 1815 to one-half or one-third of the wages paid at that period, and that the sums reduced were largest in 1816, 1817, 1826, and 1829." *P.P.*, 1835, xiii, p. xii. The fall in cotton weavers' wages began in 1795, and was already considerable by 1815, but in Yorkshire worsted weavers' wages were rising till 1814. *Handloom Weavers' Report*, 1840, xxiii, pp. 419 *seq.*

Records of women's weaving wages in the eighteenth century are rare as compared with the innumerable examples quoted in the Parliamentary Reports of the nineteenth century. In the absence of Blue Books we have only the statements of Arthur Young and Eden to fall back on. Reference has already been made to women's earnings at Manchester in 1768,¹ and on the same tour Young states that at Leeds women weaving "stuffs" earned 3s. 6d. to 4s. a week; at Kendal, on coarse woollens they earned 4s. 3d.; at Warrington, 5s. for sail cloth, and in 1776 the same amount for ribbon weaving at Coventry.² Young never states whether these are gross or net wages, and deductions for quilling, sizing, candles, wear and tear, etc., were appreciable. In so far as he sometimes compares these earnings with spinners' wages, however, from which no deductions were made, he is presumably referring to the net wage.

Nearly thirty years later in 1796 Young gives the average wage for both men and women woollen weavers in Devon as 6s. a week,³ and about the same time Eden gives 6s. to 8s. for "industrious women" at Worcester; 5s. to 6s. at Norwich; 5s. to 5s. 6d. at Colchester, and about 4s. at Kendal.⁴

With the great increase in the output of cotton yarn after 1788 there began a period of unprecedented prosperity for the cotton weavers which lasted with some fluctuations just into the new century.⁵ Contemporary accounts of women's wages show the extraordinary rise that had taken place. At Bolton, in 1802, journeymen cotton weavers were stated to have earned 28s. for weaving a piece which occupied them eight days,⁶ and some skilled weavers earned considerably more. Speaking of a twilled nankeen weaver in his employ in 1803, a manufacturer stated: "I paid in December last to one Woman Fifty Shillings and Three Pence, which she had got in Five Days; about Two Guineas of it would be clear Money, and she had wove it with her own Hands. . . . She worked from Five in the Morning till Eleven at Night; she had gaited it in the mean Time, and I include Candle-light and Bobbin-winding."⁷ Henry Horrocks, also giving evidence before the same committee, said, "I have also a young Girl, about Nineteen or Twenty, who earnt £113 9s. 7½d. in Two Years, taking a Quarter off for Brushes, Sewing, Candles, Rent, and Winding."⁸ The interest of manufacturers, however, was usually confined to the best paid workers on their books, and these statements therefore, cannot be taken as evidence of the earnings of an average weaver. As in all piece-work the wage earned varied according to the industry and skill of the worker, and while there were doubtless some women

¹ See p. 138 ante.

² *Northern Tour*, ed. 1771, vol. i, p. 138; iii, pp. 134-5, 163-4. *Annals*, iv, p. 154.

³ *Annals*, xxviii, p. 629; xxx, p. 301.

⁴ Eden, *State of the Poor*, vol. iii, p. 805; ii, p. 479; ii, p. 177; iii, p. 752.

⁵ Prices began to fall first after the depression of 1793; after 1796 they fell steadily until 1802, when there was a temporary rise, only to be followed by a great depression in the next year when wages dropped about 50 per cent. After another advance in 1805, the decline was steady and permanent. *Report on Weavers' Petitions*, 1808, ii pp. 26, 3.

⁶ *Report on Cotton Weavers' Petitions*, 1802-3, viii, p. 73.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

like the nankeen weaver quoted above, whose acquisitive instincts prompted them to take advantage of high rates and put in fifteen and sixteen hours a day at the loom, the average weaver more often worked twelve hours a day, and earned considerably less. The majority of women at this time probably earned something between 10s. and 15s. a week.¹

In the woollen trade also higher earnings were possible as a result of the improved machine spun yarn, although the rate of increase was not nearly so great as in the cotton trade. A Gloucestershire clothier in 1803 stated that a married woman in his employment who had children and a house to attend to, regularly wove a piece in three weeks, for which she earned 44s. Of this, 9s. 4d. had to be deducted for expenses.² In Norwich, however, where the worsted trade was badly hit by the war, there was much unemployment, and women were only earning 4s. a week in 1804, although according to Young, "in flourishing fabrics no such wages are heard of."³ Hemp weavers in Norfolk at the same time, for instance, were earning 10s. or 12s. a week.⁴

THE DECLINE OF HANDLOOM WEAVING

Unfortunately for the weavers, the period of high wages did not last long. By 1815 reductions had been made in all branches of the trade. There was no longer any difficulty in getting sufficient weavers to work up the increased supplies of yarn, and the number of people attracted to the trade during its prosperity had already overstocked the market. Light branches of the trade were flooded with child labour, with disastrous consequences to the employment and wages of adults. Perhaps nowhere were the effects of this worse, or more immediately noticeable than at Coventry, where the great prosperity in the ribbon trade had led to its overcrowding with half-pay apprentices. The exploitation of girl labour resulted in so great a reduction of wages that it was impossible even for weavers in full employment to earn sufficient to maintain themselves. A manufacturer who gave evidence before the Committee in 1818 stated that his weavers were among the most industrious persons, and that the rates he paid were "as high as any in the trade," and yet, he continued, "many of them are receiving parochial relief; they bring in their week's work (men and women too) and ask for a note to the directors of the poor, saying what their earnings are, that they may get relief; the directors require a note always, to see what they are earning."⁵

While the fall in wages was more sudden and startling in the ribbon trade than elsewhere, all branches of the trade experienced steady and repeated reductions and the earnings of all classes of handloom weavers diminished with extraordinary rapidity. In 1827 the net wages of cotton weavers in Lancashire were stated to be from 4s. to 5s. 6d. weekly, for twelve to sixteen hours a day. Women on an average earned about 3s. a week, and too often those wages were illegally paid

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

² *Woollen Report*, 1802-3, vii, pp. 301-2.

³ Young, *Survey of Norfolk*, 1804, p. 144.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

⁵ *Ribbon Weavers' Report*, 1818, ix, p. 37.

by small masters in "shop-stuff." As at Coventry, many of the weavers were supported by the poor rates or by the public funds which had been contributed to relieve their distress.¹

In the next decade the continued and increasing distress of the weavers called forth two inquiries into their condition and the causes of their distress. In the Reports subsequently published the story of the decline in wages and the increasing misery of all classes of weavers is told in detail. In the most pitiable state of all were the cotton weavers, whose rates had fallen by 60 to 80 per cent.² Thus, according to a statement handed in by a Lancashire manufacturer in 1833, the combined wage of a family of three weavers, which in 1814 amounted to £2 12s. 0d., had by 1833 dropped to 11s. 9d., which after deductions left a net wage of only 7s. 6d.³ The weavers themselves produced returns of wages and family budgets to show that in many of their households the sum left for individual maintenance for food and clothing varied from 1d. to 5d. a day, according to the number of looms and members of a family.⁴

In the woollen trade the cloth weavers were considerably better off. Their work was heavier and more skilled and consequently they had not suffered from the competition of women and children, while the power loom, though its use was extending, was much less employed than in other branches.⁵ Women's wages, however, in the lighter classes of work, were on the same low level as elsewhere. At Leeds in 1834, women were earning 4s. to 5s. a week, and that only when they were fully employed, "in rare instances of very brisk trade,"⁶ and the same wage was typical of the West of England.⁷

Worst of weavers as a class were in almost as distressed a condition as the cotton workers. At Leeds in 1834, the net earnings of women varied from 5s. to 5s. 9d. a week, but many of them were unemployed from two to six months during the year, which brought down the

¹ *Emigration Report*, 1826-7, v, pp. 280, 184, 211, 216.

² For details of the decline in wages see Wood, *History of Wages in Cotton Trade*, pp. 112-113; Bowley, *Wages in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 110-111.

³ *S.C. on Manufactures*, 1833, vi, p. 603.

⁴ The fall in wages was accompanied by a fall in food prices, though not in the same proportion. The wage of 20s. for example, which in 1804-11 would purchase 238 lbs. of provisions (flour, oatmeal, potatoes and butcher's meat) was by 1825-1832 diminished to 6s. 4d., which only purchased 83 lbs. of the same food. *Report on Handloom Weavers*, 1835, xiii, p. xiii.

⁵ *Report on Handloom Weavers*, 1840, xxiv, pp. 578-584.

⁶ The following is a typical budget of a Lancashire family in 1834:

The husband earned 5s. 6d., the wife 4s. 4d., and two children 4s. each per week in muslin weaving, making the total family wage 18s. per week. Expenses which had to be deducted were: Rent, 2s. 8½d. Poor Rate, 3½d. Sizing warp, 10d. Looming, 10d. Candles, 6d. Paste, 6d. Fire, 1s. 3d. Gating loom, 3d. Shuttles, cording, brushes, 3d. totalling 7s. 2d. A sum of 10s. 10d. was left to purchase food, clothing, etc. for seven persons. The rates paid to this family were the highest prices paid by any manufacturer for this type of weaving. *Report on Handloom Weavers*, 1834, x, p. 441.

⁷ In 1835 there were 108,632 power looms in the cotton trade, 3,082 worsted looms, 2,045 woollen looms. *Report of Factory Inspector*, October, 1850. *P.P.*, 1851, xxiii, p. 117.

⁸ *Report on Handloom Weavers*, 1834, x, p. 31.

⁹ *Report on Handloom Weavers*, 1840, xxiii, pp. 443, 409-410.

average rate of earnings to a level much below subsistence.¹ In rural districts wages were slightly lower still. Oastler described to the Committee of 1834 how men and women from the villages on the moors tramped eight and nine miles into Huddersfield, carrying their heavy burdens of cloth on their backs to fetch their wages and new work. They worked twelve and fourteen hours a day and were making from 4s. 6d. to 5s. 2d. clear wages. "There are scores and hundreds of families in that district that I am now alluding to," he said, "to whom a piece of flesh meat is a luxury; it does not form a daily article in their consumption; they live generally upon porridge and potatoes, and they do not know what it is, very many of them, to taste flesh meat from the year's end to the year's end, excepting somebody gives them some . . . as to their clothing, they are clothed in rags; and their furniture is such, as I am sure I cannot describe, but such as a convict ought not to have."²

At Norwich in 1838 the rate of pay for women weaving "fancy stuffs" was comparatively good. The Weavers' Union had been successful in maintaining a scale of prices until 1829, and subsequent reductions had only brought down wages to pre-war level. Hence with full employment the weavers there would have been comfortably off, but their average earnings were reduced by "the great amount of play" or unemployment. Manufacturers' books, however, showed that women weaving bombazines could still earn an average weekly wage of 8s. throughout the year, and on other goods the wage varied from 5s. to 8s. 10d., from which probably about 2s. had to be deducted for expenses.³

Wages in the silk trade had always been very unequal. "There never was a time in my recollection," said one of the weavers in 1838, "when some in the weaving could not earn very large sums and others next to nothing."⁴ From 1773 to 1824, rates in London had been regulated by means of the Spitalfields Acts.⁵ Although distress and unemployment had been by no means unknown during that period, the maintenance of prices and limitation of apprentices had protected the weavers to some extent from the effects of competition and price cutting; while from 1800-1826, when the trade was expanding, the silk weavers had been really prosperous. The repeal of the Acts was followed by a return to the old system, and the subsequent fall in wages immeasurably increased the poverty and distress among all but the skilled workers.⁶

¹ *Report on Handloom Weavers*, 1835, xiii, p. 229.

² *Report on Handloom Weavers*, 1834, x, pp. 279-80.

³ *Report on Handloom Weavers*, 1840, xxiii, pp. 311-315.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xxiv, p. 716.

⁵ The Spitalfields Acts were three in number. By the first, (13 Geo. III, c. 68), the Mayor, Recorder and Aldermen of the City, and Justices of Middlesex and Westminster, were authorised to "settle, regulate, and declare the wages of silk weavers in their respective areas; and no weaver was to have in his service at any one time more than two apprentices, upon pain of forfeiting for every offence the sum of £20." The second Act (32 Geo. III, c. 44), extended the provisions to persons working up silk mixed with other goods, and by the third (51 Geo. III, p. 7), they were extended to journeywomen employed in the trade.

⁶ The state to which the whole district was reduced in times of depression is illustrated by the Poor Law Commissioner's account of Bethnal Green in 1834.

The high degree of skill required for the better paid classes of silk weaving protected the workers from undue competition, and the women among them who were adequately employed earned higher wages than any other class of women weavers. An examination of manufacturers' books in 1838 showed that some women velvet weavers over the whole of the preceding year had earned an average weekly wage of 15s. 3d. to 17s. 9d., from which 3s. would be paid out in expenses. The proportion of women earning such wages regularly, however, was probably small. Much time was lost by skilled weavers in waiting for materials and setting up new patterns in the loom, and time so lost considerably reduced the average rate of earnings. More than two-thirds of the weavers in Spitalfields, moreover, were working on plain goods at the lowest prices, for gross wages which averaged only from 4s. to 8s. a week.¹ In country towns at the same time women silk weavers earned from 4s. to 6s. 6d. a week.² Among the ribbon weavers women engaged on engine looms at Coventry earned from 6s. to 8s.;³ while in country districts the single hand weavers, though well employed and working long hours, had only a miserable pittance of from 2s. to 3s. 9d. a week.⁴ The state of the single hand weavers was so bad, declared a contemporary, that they might be said "to get nothing, not even hope."

THE EFFECTS OF WOMEN'S COMPETITION

Since the Commissioners in 1840 constantly reiterated that the competition of women and children was largely responsible for the decline in wages in the branches in which they were employed, it is of interest to examine the attitude of employers towards women's wages, and to discover how far the principle of equal pay for equal work was adopted. Piece rates operated throughout the trade and in most cases it was naturally assumed that women should receive the same rates as men. This was so in the cotton trade generally, in the worsted trade except in the West of England, and in the Coventry ribbon trade. In Spitalfields women had apparently been paid the rates established by the Spitalfields Acts without question until 1811. In that year, according to Sholl, "a master refused to pay a journeywoman her price." In the subsequent trial, doubts were expressed whether the term "journeymen" included women, and application for a separate Act was therefore made. The resulting amendment (51 Geo. III. c. 7) definitely extended the previous Acts to journeywomen who were now

There were then, he states, nearly 900 men, women and children in the work-house—"chiefly operatives in the silk business"; while between 6,000 to 7,000 weavers were receiving out-door relief. Speaking of wages, he says: "What, for example used to be paid 10d. a yard for is now 4d. and 3d. Thus families come to the poor book for the deficiency to subsist upon . . . A very few years ago operative weavers and those concerned with the silk trade could maintain their families, and put by for sickness. Now that is wholly out of the question, wages being so dreadfully reduced." *Poor Law Report, 1834, Appendix B.3, xxiv, p. 838.*

¹ *Report on Handloom Weavers, 1840, xxiii, pp. 229-232.*

² *Ibid.*, pp. 287, 288-291, 293, 444.

³ *Report on Handloom Weavers, 1835, xiii, pp. 233, 241.*

⁴ *Report on Handloom Weavers, 1840, xxiv, pp. 284-5.*

legally "enabled to obtain their price under the same pains and penalties as the men."¹ The Act seems to have been extended as a matter of course, which suggests that the principle was already accepted in the trade.

Only in the West of England does a different policy appear to have been pursued. After investigating conditions among the weavers there in 1838, the Commissioner wrote, "When it becomes needful to lower wages, women are employed who will readily undertake it, at a lower price than men receive . . . indeed, it appears to be a custom in every trade to pay women at a lower rate than men receive for the same article. I have found it in the broad-cloth trade, in the blanket trade, and in the silk-velvet trade."² In Gloucestershire, where women received 3s. less for weaving a white piece and 4s. less for a coloured, the manufacturers explained that women generally were not able to perform the work in the same time as men. "The longer a piece is in the loom, the heavier is the loss on the capital sunk under it," they argued, and a reduction was therefore made in women's wages to compensate for the delay.³

The natural result of this policy was that the light branches in the West of England came more and more into the hands of women. It is interesting to note, however, that wages remained sufficiently high for men to continue in the trade until the East India Company, the chief customer, threw open contracts to public competition. Then, as a result of undercutting among employers, prices were so reduced that women only would take on the work.⁴ Low wages, therefore, were both the cause and effect of women's work in the West. Cullompton was the only place in Devon where the serge trade was not monopolized by them. There, as the result of a combination among the weavers, no women had been allowed to learn to weave for nearly a century, and it was not until about 1825, "when the necessity of having the assistance of wife and daughters in the loom became imperative" that the prohibition was removed. Prices continued higher there than elsewhere, and men were still in the trade in 1840.⁵ Over the rest of Devon and in Somerset serge weaving had become the subsidiary occupation of "wives and daughters of agricultural labourers, mechanics and others." Married women earned on an average about 3s. a week, and only by incessant labour could a single woman earn about 5s. on which she might just manage to maintain herself.

In other parts of the country where men and women worked for the same rates, the tendency was for women to predominate in the lower paid branches, and it was among them that wages were most easily reduced. But there appear to have been no harmful effects from women's labour in Lancashire in the earlier period when the supply of labour only equalled the demand. It was only when the trade became overstocked that women's wages were taken as a basis to regulate the rest. Low wages in this case resulted not so much from

¹ Sholl, *Short History of the Silk Manufacture*, 1811, p. 34.

² *Report on Handloom Weavers*, 1840, xxiii, p. 442.

³ *Ibid.*, 1840, xxiv, p. 401.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1840, xxiii, p. 410.

⁵ *Ibid.*

the cheap labour of women¹ as from the overcrowding of the trade, and the fact that the power loom was available and to some extent fixed the standard of wages.² There seems little doubt that the absence of cheap labour here would merely have resulted in the earlier and more general adoption of the power loom.

Apart from the actual effect on the rate of wages, the great increase in the number of women weavers was held to be injurious in other ways. Weavers themselves complained that women brought up to the loom married into other trades and afterwards not only undercut the regular weaver but also brought up their children to the trade.³ The most serious effect of women's work, however, was its cumulative effect in overstocking the trade. Women's earnings set a premium on early marriage, while the employment available for children encouraged large families and increased the supply of labour out of all proportion to the demand of the trade. "A weaver," it was said, "would scorn to marry a servant girl . . . but chooses a weaver, who earns as much, or half as much as himself."⁴ At first the pecuniary position of both was improved by their joint earnings, hence the majority of weavers tended to marry before their twentieth year. But the improvement was of short duration; the wife's earnings ceased just when an increasing family added to expenses, and the consequences to the children were disastrous. "As each child becomes successively capable of profitable employment, it is so employed—in many branches of hand-loom weaving at the age of six years, or even younger. Of course this precocious employment is injurious to the intellectual and moral education of the child; in many cases altogether prevents it, and the family grows up a set of human machines, with no futurity but that of treading in their parents' steps, marrying before they are adult, and giving birth to an equally degraded progeny."⁵ Thus, early marriage, resulting as it did in the earlier work of children, both prolonged and increased the distress among the handloom weavers⁶ since it enormously increased the numbers in the trade at the same time as the power loom was reducing its requirements.

How far the decline in weaving wages was attributable to the

¹ The fact that so many weavers' wives and children were practically self-supporting, did, of course, react indirectly on men's wages as Francis Place contended: "It will be found universally . . . where men have opposed the employment of women and children by not permitting their own family to work, or where work is such that women and children cannot perform it, their own wages are kept up to a point equal to the maintenance of a family. Tailors of London have not only *kept up*, but *forced up* their wages in this way, though theirs is an occupation better adapted to women than weaving." Handloom Weaving and Factory Workers. A Letter to Jas. Turner, Cotton Spinner, by F. Place: quoted *H.L.W. Report*, 1840, xxiii, pp. 583-4.

² *Handloom Weavers' Report*, 1840, xxiv, pp. 402-3.

³ *Ibid.*, xxiv, p. 418.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1841, x, p. 44.

⁶ The fact that a wife and children could be almost self-supporting was one reason the weaver clung to his trade "longer than prudence would appear to dictate. His own earnings may be but 7s., but, with the assistance of his wife and children, that 7s. may be made 21s. To give up his loom, and to take to day-labour, would be to place himself in an inferior position, unless other employment for his wife and children could be obtained." *Ibid.*, 1840, xxiv, p. 11.

competition of the power loom was a matter of controversy among contemporaries. It is sufficient here to note that the fall in wages was considerable before the advent of the power loom, and was undoubtedly caused in the first instance by the overcrowding of the trade.¹ Weaving was easily learned; high wages during the expansion of the trade attracted great numbers to it, among whom, agricultural labourers, Irish immigrants, women and children, were accustomed to, and content with, a low wage. Then into this labour market already overstocked came the power loom to intensify competition and accentuate existing evils. The expansion of the trade saw the rise of many small master manufacturers among whom competition led to ruinous undercutting,² and the weavers, scattered and unorganised, were powerless to resist continued reductions in wages. Their only remedy was to work longer hours and put children earlier to work, thereby narrowing the vicious circle in which they were enclosed.

By the 'thirties the position of the handloom weavers was hopeless. Government inquiries succeeded in analysing the causes of distress, but the Commissioners were helpless when it came to suggesting adequate remedies. Even had the weavers succeeded in restricting new entrants to the trade, they could only have ameliorated the position for a time, since the success of the power loom was inevitable and the supersession of the hand worker was only a matter of time.

The introduction of the power loom meant that weaving became to a much greater extent than before, a woman's trade. The domestic tradition and hatred of restraint held men back from the factory in the early days, and although they entered later, the occupation has remained very largely in the hands of women. Any comparison of women's working conditions before and after the transition must, therefore, take into account the conditions under which handloom weaving was done.

WORKING CONDITIONS OF HANDLOOM WEAVERS

Although ordinary weaving was soon learned it required considerable practice before the weaver became skilful, and was by no means easy labour. "The position in which the weaver sits," wrote Gaskell, "is not the best for muscular exertion, having no firm support for his feet, which are alternately raised and depressed in working the treddles. He has thus to depend for a fulcrum, chiefly on the muscles of his back, which are kept in constant and vigorous action—while one order of muscles is employed with little power of variation, in moving the shuttle and beam. These processes when carried on for many successive hours are very wearying, and the exertion required becomes after a while laborious. The weaver who worked hard, therefore, actually toiled—a condition widely different from that of the steam-loom weaver."³ The handloom weaver often suffered injurious effects from his position; consumption and diseases of the stomach frequently resulted from the constant pressure against the beam of the loom.⁴

¹ Mantoux, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 434.

² *S.C. on Handloom Weavers*, 1834, I, p. iii. *Report on Handloom Weavers*, 1840, XXIV, p. 529; XXIII, pp. 456, 581.

³ *Manufacturing Population*, 1833, p. 35.

⁴ *Report on Handloom Weavers*, 1840, XXIII, p. 240.

The hours of work and domestic circumstances of weavers varied in the period under review. In the eighteenth century they appear to have worked long though irregular hours; the standard of living was simple and diet extremely frugal. Meat was no part of the regular fare until the prosperous days at the end of the century, and then only for a brief period. Close confinement in the loom must always have rendered the trade an unhealthy one, although among country weavers the effects were probably mitigated by outdoor exercise. But housing conditions were such that a family of six to eight persons often inhabited a two or three roomed cottage which had to serve as a workshop as well as a home. A weaver's cottage in the West Riding described in 1842 consisted of two rooms and a pantry for a family of man, wife and nine children. The lower room was clean and comfortable with a painted press bedstead, a chest of drawers, tables and chairs, a "good mahogany case clock," pictures and shelves for plates and dishes. In the room above where the weaving was carried on in a space about 12 feet square were three looms, three old oak stump bedsteads, three chests, "one oak chest used as a child's bedstead," and a quantity of lumber. Five of the children worked as weavers in this restricted space and yet this was not the home of a weaver in poor circumstances.¹ As for weavers in the towns, many of them lived and worked in a single room amidst horribly insanitary surroundings. In some parts of Spitalfields inhabited by weavers, "every house ought long ago to have been condemned and razed to the ground," said Hickson, in 1840. "Ruinous buildings, streets without sewers, overflowing privies and cesspools and open ditches filled with a black putrifying mass of corruption infecting the air for miles round render the district the abode of disease and death. There are streets and alleys from which typhus fever is never absent the year round."² Weavers were afraid to open their windows lest the air should affect the delicate colours of their work or diminish the weight of silk; even the cracks were carefully pasted over with paper. In this atmosphere children ate and slept and spent long hours at the loom. "I have often been tied to the loom all day and ate my meals as I sat there," said an old weaver looking back on her childhood.³ It was no wonder that feebleness was described as the chief characteristic of the weavers' constitution and that they lacked all ability to resist disease.

In Lancashire towns, says the Commissioner, "the great majority of hand-loom cotton weavers work in cellars, sufficiently lighted to enable them to throw the shuttle, but cheerless because seldom visited by the sun. The reason cellars are chosen is that cotton requires to be woven damp. . . . Unhappily the medium which might be preserved without injury to the constitution and which is preserved in the best power loom factories, the impoverished hand loom weavers are obliged often to disregard. I have seen them working in cellars dug out of an undrained swamp; the streets formed by their houses without sewers and flooded with rain; and water therefore running down the bare walls of the cellars and rendering them unfit for the abode of dogs

¹ *Report on Mines*, Appendix II, 1842, xvii, p. 92.

² *Report on Handloom Weavers*, 1840, xxiv, p. 681.

³ Warner, *Silk Industry*, p. 88.

or cats. The descent to these cellars is usually by a broken step ladder. The floor is but seldom boarded or paved. . . .” In some instances, he added, in modern built houses, the cellars were “light and convenient apartments,” and some better off weavers had un-boarded rooms on the ground floor.¹ Though domestic circumstances may have deteriorated somewhat with the increasing population in the early nineteenth century towns, yet the deplorable state of housing and the almost complete lack of sanitation must have prevented the conditions of domestic work from ever having been really good.

The great attraction of domestic work for the weavers was that in the home all members of the family could be employed together. Factory conditions, they feared, would deprive them of the earnings of women and children. Moreover, although the hours they worked were often long, they were at least independent and could work when, and as they liked, although this was scarcely a privilege towards the end of the period when the hours were almost always excessive. Sarah Jackson, a girl of fifteen, for instance, giving evidence in 1842, says, “I have been weaving about four years. I work from six in the morning till ten at night. I weave huckaback; it tires me very much indeed.”² The father of Jane Ormerod in 1833, said his daughter, aged fourteen, who wove with “extraordinary energy,” could complete a web of 177 yards in two weeks by working from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. with an hour each for breakfast and dinner. She was “apt to fall asleep at her work,” and her wages were about half of what they would have been as a power loom weaver, and yet, he added, he would “rather see his daughters hanged up than in a mill.”³

Factory work was opposed to all the instincts and traditions of the weavers. The reorganisation which entailed the loss of independence and the disintegration of the family, appeared to them a disastrous upheaval which brought no compensations in its train. Subsequent history, however, has proved the change to be one of real progress in many and varied directions, and has justified the opinion of Hickson in the Report of 1840: “With regard to health, having seen the domestic weaver in his miserable apartment and the power loom weaver in the factory, I do not hesitate to say that the advantages are all on the side of the latter. The one, if a steady workman, confines himself to a single room in which he eats, drinks and sleeps and breathes throughout the day an impure air. The other has not only the exercise of walking to and from the factory but when there lives and breathes in a large, roomy apartment in which the air is constantly changed. Some of the factories I have visited are models of neatness, cleanliness and perfect ventilation, and there is no reason all should not be the same.”⁴

¹ *Report on Handloom Weavers*, 1840, xxiv, p. 7, Hickson's Report.

² *Report on Mines*, Appendix, Part I, 1842, xvi, p. 265.

³ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xxi, p. A3, 8.

⁴ *Report of Handloom Weavers*, 1840, xxiv, p. 681.

CHAPTER IX

TEXTILE INDUSTRIES: FACTORY WORKERS

SIMULTANEOUSLY with the decline of domestic industry in the textile trades came the development of the factory system. The last quarter of the eighteenth century saw the establishment of numerous mills to house the new machinery, now too large to be worked in the ordinary cottage, or requiring the use of power. At first many of the factories were small, some of them starting with as few as eight or ten hands; but with the newer types of spinning machinery and especially after the application of steam power, came a rapid increase in the number of larger and better factories, comparatively well-built and ventilated and equipped for a large number of workers.¹

The early factories—"frequently dirty; low roofed; ill ventilated; ill drained;"²—the conditions of labour within them, the "evils" and abuses connected with them, have been so often described that it is unnecessary to detail them again. Moreover, the number of adult women employed in the beginning was small. It is well known that child and apprentice labour were employed excessively in the early days;³ and although girls were often in a majority among the apprentices, they were in many cases turned away when they became adults. "Except in a few instances," writes Farey, "I could not learn that more than a few of these [girls] were retained on wages at particular Mills, after the expiration of their Apprenticeship; but too often, such truly unfortunate young Women, disperse themselves over the Country, and for want of friends or employ, prematurely and inconsiderately get married to, or more improperly associate themselves with Soldiers, or other loose and unstationary men, and at no distant periods, are passed home to Parishes they were apprenticed in, . . .

¹ In the district around Oldham many of the mills started with from eight to forty hands, and the "principal concerns" in that part of the country started with fewer than one hundred hands each. Arkwright's mills were larger; at Cromford (1771), he employed about 300, and at Wirksworth about 200. Butterworth, *Historical Sketches of Oldham*, p. 118.

Steam was first used in a cotton mill in 1789, but the rapid development of the large factory came in the first decade of the new century, when wealthy spinning manufacturers began to extend their businesses to include power weaving. Gaskell, *Manufacturing Population of England*, pp. 180-181. Unwin, *Samuel Oldknow and the Arkwrights*, p. 119.

² *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. 16.

³ A witness in 1816 stated that thirty years previously they "were almost all children" employed in manufactories, and that there were then at least five times as many under ten years of age as in 1816. *Report on State of Children in Manufactories*, 1816, iii, p. 343.

with several Children, to remain a burden thereon."¹ Then too, spinning, the chief of women's occupations in the past, with more advanced machinery became highly skilled work on which chiefly men were employed.

With the development of steam power, resulting in larger and more complicated machinery, came a greater demand for the employment of adults, and the proportion of women employed increased with the early years of the nineteenth century. The evidence of a number of women who appeared as witnesses before the Factory Commissioners in 1833, showed that they had started as children of five and six years of age, just before the end of the century, and had continued until then in the factory, passing from one employment to another as new processes and machines were introduced.² The Factory Act of 1833, by limiting child labour again increased the number of adults, and finally, with the greatly extended use of the power loom in the third decade, the field of employment for women was enormously increased. Gaskell writing in 1833 states, "Since steam weaving became so general as to supersede the hand loom, the number of adults engaged in the mills has been progressively advancing: inasmuch that very young children are not competent to take charge of a steam loom. The individuals employed at them are chiefly girls and young women from 16 to 22 or 23 years of age; indeed the weavers in many mills are exclusively females. . . ."³ A witness in 1832 estimated that in Stockport alone power looms had increased from 1,970 in 1822 to 11,003 in 1832. Since each weaver commonly attended two looms, the amount of employment for women in this branch was therefore more than quintupled during the ten years.⁴

SOURCES OF THE NEW FACTORY POPULATION

The women of the new factory population were recruited from various sources. The antipathy of domestic workers towards machinery prevented their entering the factories in the early days, and the workers came, therefore, not from those previously engaged in the textile trades, but largely from agriculturalists unsettled by the agrarian revolution, from domestic servants, the unskilled of all trades and parish paupers. "Families had to come in from different places and learn to spin," said a witness before the Factory Commission in 1834, "and whole families together were sent for by the masters. . . . People left other occupations and came to spinning for the sake of the high wages. I recollect shoemakers leaving their employ and learning to spin; I recollect tailors; I recollect colliers; but a great many more husband-

¹ Farey, *Review of Derbyshire*, vol. iii, p. 502.

² *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, pp. C 2, 22; C 3, 4; D 2, 74-75.

³ *Manufacturing Population*, p. 182.

⁴ *S.C. on Factories Bill*, 1831-2, xv, p. 433. Baines, *History of Cotton Manufacture*, pp. 235, 236-7.

men left their employ to learn to spin."¹ From the children of such workers, who generally accompanied their fathers in the mill, came many of the factory women of the next generation. Manufacturers also frequently advertised in the newspapers of the period for "healthy strong girls" and "families chiefly consisting of girls,"² and later, in the Government scheme for the migration of labourers after the new Poor Law, many of the families removed from the southern counties to the textile districts consisted chiefly of "children and women."³

With the steam loom women textile workers began to enter the factory. Manufacturers preferred to choose their power loom weavers from those who had already had some experience of handloom weaving, since they were accustomed to the care and minute attention that the work required. Hence the majority of the girls who attended the power looms in the 'thirties and 'forties were the daughters of distressed handloom weavers who entered the factory to better their prospects; and the married women, more often than not, were wives of weavers, forced by bitter necessity to leave their homes. In either case, it was very largely their earnings that preserved the handloom weavers' families from utter starvation. Humiliating as they felt their position to be and detesting the factory as they did, this connection between the hand and power loom weavers did at any rate prevent antipathy or jealousy on the part of the domestic workers towards women factory weavers as a class.⁴

OCCUPATIONS OF WOMEN IN THE FACTORY

It is unnecessary here to trace the different occupations of women in the factory through all the processes which were constantly changing and increasing as new machines were introduced.⁵ It is sufficient for our purpose to notice that the majority of women were engaged on the subsidiary processes, and except for the weavers, they were for the

¹ *Factory Commission: Supplementary Report*, Part I, 1834, xix, p. 169. *S.C. on Factory Bill*, 1831-2, xv, p. 119. In Staffordshire at the end of the eighteenth century, the scarcity of female servants—"hardly to be hired at any price"—was attributed to "the number of women employed in the cotton mills lately erected." Pitt's *Staffordshire*, p. 137.

² *Times*, December 1, 1813. *Derby Reporter*, April 4, 1826. During the earlier water power stage, manufacturers drew cheap labour from the surrounding agricultural population. A notice in 1787 advertising a corn mill suitable for cotton spinning runs: "The manufacturer may be supplied with plenty of hands at low wages as there are a great number of grown women, boys, and girls in the town of Ruthin that are out of employ, no manufactory whatever being carried on there at present, and the wages paid to women at hay harvest does not exceed eightpence a day upon their own meat." Unwin, *Samuel Oldknow and the Arkwrights*, p. 118: quoting *Manchester Mercury*, February 6, 1787.

³ *First Report Commissioners under Poor Law Amendment Act*, 1835, xxxv, pp. 55, 157, 190. The returns showed 4,684 persons were assisted to migrate by the parish authorities between 1835-7. More than four-fifths of these went to textile areas. Redford, *Labour Migration in England*, p. 93.

⁴ *S.C. on Handloom Weavers*, 1834, x, pp. 80-81, 175, 225, 467, 152.

⁵ The shifting of processes has, of course, continued to the present day. According to Wood, in a modern cotton factory, from bale breaking to warehouse work there are between 50 to 80 separate and distinct occupations, each with its own method of payment. *History of Wages in the Cotton Trade*, p. 8.

most part "tenters" of machines and frames connected with preliminary work in the carding room and in the spinning and weaving departments.¹ Apart from the process of "batting" in the early days—laborious work to which domestic cotton workers had always been accustomed in their homes—there was no real manual labour, a fact which caused Cooke Taylor to overlook some of the more disadvantageous aspects of factory labour and to exclaim enthusiastically, "Except in 'batting,' which is a rare occupation, and totally independent of machinery, no woman in a cotton mill has to perform any work more laborious than that of shopkeeper; and certainly there are few females in a mill whose labour is one-half so laborious or one-tenth so vexatious as that of an attendant in a haberdasher's shop during the busy season. It is notorious that females prefer employment in the mill to domestic servitude."²

The strength and skill required for mule spinning in the cotton trade excluded the majority of women from that occupation, although some of them were employed on smaller mules and throstle spinners were mainly women and girls.³ Much of the harshness and cruelty associated with early factory labour resulted from the fact that the spinners' work and remuneration depended largely on the activity and attention of their piecers, hence the treatment which many of them doled out to their assistants. In view of the fact that women spinners could not be expected to keep their boys at work by the frequent "lickings" considered necessary "six and eight times a day," the Factory Commissioners, in 1833, were curious to know how the women kept up their output. It is interesting to know that they got their work done "as well as men" by pleasanter and more ingenious methods. In the words of one who had worked for them, "they used to coax the piecers up. . . . They used to ask them if they'd mind their work,

¹ Returns from 151 Lancashire cotton mills in 1834 showed the following distribution of labour: (*Factory Commissioners' Supplementary Report, Part 1, 1834, xix, p. 125*).

Carding	Carders or overlookers	Male adults	376
	Jack frame tenters	Female adults principally	696
	Bobbin frame tenters	" " "	945
	Drawing tenters	" " "	1931
Mule Spinning	Overlookers	Male adults	145
	Spinners	M. & F. adults, principally former	3,797
	Piecers	M. & F. non-adult and adults, principally former	7,157
	Scavengers	M. & F. non-adults	1,247
Throstle Spinning	Overlookers	Male adults	82
	Spinners	Female adults and non-adults	1,123
Weaving	Overlookers	Male adults	400
	Warpers	M. & F. adults	332
	Weavers	M. & F. adults and non-adults (chiefly females)	10,171
	Dressers	Male adults	836

² *Factories and the Factory System*, p. 38.

³ *S.C. on Factories Bill, 1831-2, xv, v. 323. Factory Commissioners' Supplementary Report, Part 1, 1834, xix, p. 119aa.*

and then they'd give 'em a halfpenny or a penny; and then the piecers was pleased, and worked; and if the piecers hadn't meat, they used to give 'em meat, and marbles, and tops; and at any pastime here gives 'em money; 6d. or 1s."¹ For the piecers it must have been a matter of regret that such women spinners were not more numerous!

In worsted mills, on the contrary, the spinners were chiefly women and girls, and in flax mills, entirely so.² Spinning in the latter was one of the most unhealthy of women's occupations, due to the method of "wet spinning" which was employed. The workers, exposed to a constant spray of water from the frames, were compelled to spend the greater part of the day in wet clothing, and the introduction of hot water spinning merely increased the heat and dampness of the air. "It is difficult," said Drinkwater, one of the Commissioners, "to exaggerate the abominable nature of the atmosphere which is inhaled."³ The effects were more liable to be injurious in view of the youth of many of the workers. Flax spinning was highly skilled work and manufacturers were unanimous in the assertion that girls could never become "expert artists" if they began to learn after the age of eleven. The greater degree of ill-health which was stated to exist in flax mills was, therefore, probably due to the fact that so many of the workers had spent their adolescent years working under conditions so likely to be prejudicial to health.⁴

The great majority of power loom weavers in the first half of the nineteenth century were in cotton mills. The steam loom, though used in the worsted and woollen trades in the second and third decades respectively, was not so well adapted to them as to the cotton trade; its progress in both branches therefore was relatively slow, and the employment provided for women in those trades correspondingly less.⁵ Cloth weaving, moreover, demanded greater skill than either cotton or worsted weaving, and manufacturers who introduced cloth power looms had at first considerable difficulty in inducing women capable of such skilled work to enter a factory.⁶ The ultimate victory of the power loom in the cloth trade, however, meant that here also weaving became in the main a woman's occupation.

There were various reasons for the predominance of women in power loom weaving. The reluctance of male handloom weavers to enter the factory in the first instance has already been mentioned, while their financial needs often compelled their womenfolk to take advantage of the better wages offered. At the same time, manufacturers seem to have been anxious to employ women wherever possible. According to Gaskell, men were more "difficult to manage," and more likely to cause trouble by their combinations. These disadvantages were not compensated for by extra production, since the steam loom placed all workers on the same level. Hence in Gaskell's opinion women's work was accounted for by the fact that the master,

¹ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. D 1, 79.

² James, *History Worsted Manufacture*, p. 549. *Factory Commission*, 1833, xxi, *Second Report*, p. A 3, 5.

³ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. C 1, 165-8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, and *Second Report*, xxi, p. A 3, 5. *Medical Report of Sir D. Barry*.

⁵ *McCulloch's Essays*, p. 451.

⁶ Collet, "Women's Work in Leeds," in *Economic Journal*, vol. i, 1891, p. 460.

"finding that the child or woman was a more obedient servant to himself, and an equally efficient slave to his machinery—was disposed to displace the malt adult labourer. . . ."¹ Finally there was the question of wages. In spite of the doubled and trebled output of the power loom, the rates paid for handloom weaving were so low as to create serious competition and prevent a large margin of profit in steam weaving, where heavy overhead charges had also to be met. Hence the level of wages originally was such that women's labour was more easily obtained than that of men.²

THE REGULATION OF HOURS

The story of the long struggle for the regulation of factory hours has already been told;³ it is only necessary here to make a passing reference to the hours of factory labour in order to complete the comparison with the conditions of domestic workers previously described. In early factories at the end of the eighteenth century hours "were not infrequently eighty in the week,"⁴ and although a few years later a twelve hour day seems to have been more general, the evidence given before Peel's Committee in 1815 showed that a thirteen and fourteen hour day was not unusual either for children or adults. In 1833 the Factory Commissioners found that while in a few factories the hours did not exceed eleven, in the majority the regular hours were twelve, and in times of pressure these were liable to be extended to fifteen and even sixteen hours a day.⁵ In Nottingham, for instance, the Sub-Commissioner found that although the day's work was considered to be twelve hours, the actual practice was to extend that period to sixteen and sometimes eighteen hours when the demand was pressing.⁶ There was, however, a good deal of evidence given by the workers themselves showing that some of them at least considered overtime a privilege, and that there was no limit to the time they would work for extra wages. After discussing the Ten Hours question with a number of operatives, Drinkwater, who was himself "decidedly hostile" to such long hours wrote in his report: "I have the firmest conviction that if every girl above sixteen who works in a factory in

¹ *Manufacturing Population*, pp. 184-5.

² Low wages, once adopted, continued in the weaving department; hence men's wages ultimately were regulated by the women's standard. "The small amount of wages paid to women, acts as a strong inducement to employ them instead of men, and in power-loom shops this has been the case to a great extent." *Factory Inspectors' Reports*, 1843, xxvii, p. 19 (Saunders' Report).

³ Hutchins and Harrison, *History of Factory Legislation*; also the essay by Miss V. Jeans, *Factory Act Legislation*. Earlier books include "Alfred," [Kydd], *History of the Factory Movement*, 1857. P. Grant, *The Ten Hours Bill, The History of Factory Legislation*, 1866.

⁴ *A Century of Fine Cotton Spinning*, Centenary Report of McConnel and Co., p. 55.

⁵ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. 7. Irregularity of hours was worst in water mills, where time lost through "great" or "slack waters," or other accident was made up by working overtime or in the night. The Act of 60 Geo. III, c. 5, allowed children under sixteen, otherwise "protected," to make up time in this way. *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xx, p. C 2, 16.

Nottingham were polled whether she would rather work long or short hours, even if the long hours were extended to the extreme limit of sixteen hours, that the majority would be greatly in favour of the sixteen hours. If the choice were given between twelve and fourteen hours, the voices would be ten to one for the longer period; if between ten and twelve, I doubt whether a single vote could be obtained for the shorter one."¹ His statement was supported by the evidence of the workers themselves. One witness, a girl of twenty, stated "she would sooner work long hours for most wages than short hours with less; and that she was accustomed to long work now, and did not mind it." Another, a girl of sixteen, said, "We never work over hours now; we did a good while ago. I liked that best. We used to get more money."² Among women who were entirely dependent on their own earnings the opposition to shorter hours was actuated by the fear of lower wages and in some cases they already barely earned enough for subsistence. One such, a widow earning 6s. a week, declared, "It will be of no use to me to work short, and to be stopped for it; it will make it worse for me."³ Whether the workers acquiesced or not, however, the long hours were compulsory for all who were employed, and that the effects were injurious for all workers cannot be doubted.

The Act of 1833,⁴ by limiting the hours of young persons under eighteen, had practical effects on the labour of adults. Night work became the exception, and a twelve hour day much more general.⁵ Conditions in lace and silk mills, however, not included in the Act of 1833, and some cases of excessive overwork elsewhere,⁶ persuaded factory inspectors of the necessity of legislative protection for women generally. In 1843, Mr. Baker, one of the superintendents, reported having seen several women who "could only just have completed their eighteenth year," who had been compelled to work from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., with only one and a half hours for rest and meals; in other cases women were obliged to work all night in a temperature of from 70° to 80°. "My weekly lists," he continued, "refer you to some instances which I consider cruelty, though it may be voluntary, for God help them, the hands dare not refuse."⁷ Similar and even worse

¹ *Ibid.*, 1833, xx, p. C 1, 39.

² *Ibid.*, pp. D 1, 35; C 1, 61, 57, 58.

³ *Ibid.*, p. C 1, 23.

⁴ 3 and 4 William IV, c. 103. The Act excluded children under nine except in silk mills; limited the hours of young persons (under eighteen) to twelve per day, or 69 per week, and prohibited night work to all under eighteen except in lace mills. The importance of the Act was that four government inspectors were appointed to see that its provisions were carried out.

⁵ *Factory Inspectors' Reports*, 1836, xiv, p. 13; 1840, xxiii, p. 11 (Horner's Reports).

⁶ In 1839 Saunders reported, "There is scarcely any lace mill in which young persons are not employed the full number of hours the mill is at work, viz., 15 to 16." As a result of this competition, occupiers of mills for doubling lace thread, which came under the Act, obtained as many persons as possible above the age of eighteen who would consent to work more than twelve hours, and thus, he says, "I am assured a considerable number of young women, from eighteen to twenty-one years of age, are now employed for 15 or 16 hours with only one interval for meals." *Factory Inspectors' Reports*, 1839, xix, pp. 8-9.

⁷ *Factory Inspectors' Reports*, 1843, xxvii, p. 19 (Saunders' Report).

cases¹ were quoted by the inspectors to reinforce their recommendations for legislative interference which seemed more necessary in the case of women than men. "A vast majority of the persons employed at night, and for long hours during the day, are females," wrote Saunders, in 1844. "Their labour is cheaper, and they are more easily induced to undergo severe bodily fatigue than men, either from the praiseworthy motive of gaining additional support for their families, or from the folly of satisfying a love of dress."²

At first the inspectors hesitated to suggest interference with adult labour, and only proposed to extend to women of twenty-one the protection already granted to "young persons." But in response to the pressure of public and medical opinion and the repeated requests of "considerate and humane mill owners," both Saunders and Horner, in 1843, proposed that women of all ages should be excluded from night work and that their hours should be limited to twelve per day.³ In the following year these proposals were embodied in the Act of 1844, and the principle of protection for women was definitely adopted. Three years later the Ten Hours Bill became law, although its advantages were not fully secured until the Acts of 1850 and 1853 established a normal day for women and children. With the passing of those Acts the ten hour day was really achieved.⁴

WOMEN'S FACTORY WAGES

The question of women's factory wages is a subject in itself, and that one of extreme difficulty. Statements of wages show that different rates were paid in different places for the same kinds of work; in the constant development of processes, one machine replaced another, bringing with it a new class of workers, while in the shifting of processes women took over work that had previously been done either by men or children. It is therefore impossible in the brief survey which is all there is space for here, to attempt more than to give a few representative figures which illustrate the earnings of different groups of workers through the period.⁵

The earliest figures relating to factory labour in the eighteenth century are those given by Arthur Young for the workers in silk mills. At Sheffield in 1768 in a "silk mill copied from the famous one at Derby," women earned 5s. to 6s. a week, and at Knutsford at the same time 4s. to 5s.⁶ After the general rise of wages at the end of the

¹ In 1844, Saunders reported that in one mill he found several women just eighteen who had been employed for some weeks, working for five days a week from 6 a.m. to midnight, less two hours for meals, "this giving them for five nights in the week only six hours out of twenty-four to go to and from their homes and obtain rest in bed. Some of these were employed in high temperatures.—*Inspectors' Reports*, 1844, xxviii, p. 8.

² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³ *Factory Inspectors' Reports*, 1844, xxviii, pp. 8, 4.

⁴ By the Act of 1850, the hours of work for protected persons were fixed within a twelve hours' limit, i.e. from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., or from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. allowing 1½ hours for meals. Hutchins and Harrison, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-7.

⁵ For detailed wages in the cotton trade, see Wood, *History of Wages in the Cotton Trade*, and *The Course of Women's Wages in the Nineteenth Century*; also Bowley, *Wages in the Nineteenth Century*.

⁶ *Northern Tour* (2nd ed.), vol. i, p. 124; vol. iii, p. 248.

century, women in silk mills in Berkshire earned 8s. to 10s. a week in 1808,¹ and from 4s. 6d. to 9s. at Congleton in 1816.² After the war wages appear to have declined, for in 1832 women working ten and a half to eleven hours a day in mills in Dorset and Essex earned on an average only 5s. a week.³ The greater proportion of child labour in silk mills, however, always kept the level of women's wages lower than in woollen and cotton mills, and it is scarcely surprising to find a large silk manufacturer of Norfolk protesting against the restriction of children's hours in 1833 on the ground that the wages paid in certain silk mills were "so very low that no adult labour could be got for the money."⁴ Later, when power looms were introduced into the silk manufacture, 260 weavers, "nearly all females," working at the Courtauld factory in Essex in 1838, had only an average wage of 5s. to 6s. a week.⁵

In the early cotton mills also wages were low, again partly due to the large proportion of children. In those quoted by Eden in 1795, at Nottingham, Newark and in Yorkshire, wages varied from 10d. and 1s. for children to a maximum of 5s. for women.⁶ Early in the new century wage statements become more definite and it is possible to differentiate between the separate classes of workers. Cotton pickers, women engaged in unskilled preparatory work, earned on an average from 7s. to 11s. a week at Manchester in the period 1809 to 1819.⁷ In the card room the range of wages between 1806 and 1842 was from 7s. to 12s., with a general average of 9s. The better paid workers as a rule attended two frames.⁸ Among women cotton spinners wages varied considerably and there was a wide difference between the wages of mule and throstle spinners. The books of McConnel and Kennedy, at Manchester, showed the average weekly wage of women mule spinners from 1812 to 1819 to be from 16s. to 18s.,⁹ while a statement prepared from the books of another Manchester cotton spinner for the period 1803-1833 showed average wages of women throstle spinners to have been 10s. 1½d. for a 78 hour week in 1803; 10s. 5d. for a 77 hour week in 1818; and 8s. 5½d. for a 69 hour week in 1833.¹⁰ Facts collected by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce in 1832, produced an average of 5s. to 9s. 6d. a week for throstle spinners and 10s. to 15s. for mule spinners.¹¹ The next year Gaskell, presumably referring to mule spinners, said women spinning coarse yarn could earn 18s. to 21s. a week, while Mr. Greg stated that

¹ Mavor's *Berkshire*, p. 463.

² S.C. on *State of Children in Manufactories*, 1816, iii, p. 76.

³ S.C. on *Silk Trade*, 1831-2, xix, pp. 279, 377.

⁴ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. E 12.

⁵ *Report on Handloom Weavers*, 1840, xxiii, p. 293.

⁶ Eden, *State of the Poor*, vol. II, pp. 565, 576; III, p. 574.

⁷ *Century of Fine Cotton Spinning*, p. 52. Wood, *History of Wages in the Cotton Trade*, p. 14.

⁸ S.C. on *Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping*, 1833, vi, p. 320. Table of Wages from wage books of Thos. Houldsworth, Manchester. *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. D 1, 84. Evidence of Mary Barratt. *Inspectors' Reports*, 1842, xxii, p. 85 (Horner's Report).

⁹ *Century of Fine Cotton Spinning*, p. 52.

¹⁰ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. D 2, 98.

¹¹ *First Report Commissioners under Poor Law Amendment Act*, 1835, xxxv, p. 202.

in his mill at Bury some women who worked the smaller mules earned from 21s. to 24s. a week.¹ In 1842 Inspectors' Reports showed that throstle spinners at Wigan were earning an average weekly wage of 7s. 6d., while at Manchester for the same work the average was 9s. to 11s.²

In the case of power-loom weavers, earnings varied according to the kind of cloth woven, the skill and output of the weaver, and the number of looms over which she had charge. In the 'twenties and 'thirties the majority of women attended two looms, but some had three and a few skilled workers four, in which case they were assisted by a young tenter, whose wages they had to deduct from their own. Women and children weaving coarse cloths at Blackburn in 1827 were stated to be earning 7s. or 8s. a week, while at Manchester at the same time for wider and finer fabrics—"more arduous work"—their wages were from 10s. to 20s. a week.³ In 1832 average wages in Manchester were stated to be from 8s. to 12s. a week, while Gaskell in 1833 gives 10s. to 16s.⁴ The evidence of workers themselves before the Factory Commission in 1833 again illustrates the great variation of earnings. At Stockport one weaver aged twenty, was earning from 13s. to 15s. a week; another aged twentyfive, had 8s. to 9s. for the care of two looms; while at Manchester, a girl of eighteen, attending four looms, earned 16s. a week, from which she paid her "little helper" 3s.⁵ In 1841, during a period of trade depression, weavers at Wigan were earning an average of 7s. 1d. for two looms and 10s. 10d. for four, while at Manchester for a pair of looms the average wage was 7s. 6d.⁶ Three years later trade had recovered and earnings were correspondingly better. In one factory visited by Horner, the average wage of 618 weavers in charge of two looms, was 12s. 8d. a week, and 172 others, one half of whom were women, earned on an average 19s. 10d. for four looms. This was probably the gross wage, for the figures given for another factory for the same class of workers show 180 women to be earning a clear average wage of 16s. 8d. a week, after paying their helpers.⁷

In woollen and worsted mills, though wages in general were slightly lower, the earnings of corresponding classes of workers were so similar as to make their enumeration a matter of mere repetition. More detailed tables of the rates paid through the period outlined above suggest that after the war, nominal wages of factory workers generally tended to decline.⁸ The fall in the cost of living at the same time, however, appears to have prevented any depreciation of real wages

¹ *Manufacturing Population*, p. 241. *S.C. on Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping*, 1833, vi, p. 675.

² *Factory Inspectors' Reports*, 1842, xxii, pp. 85, 87 (Horner's Report).

³ *Emigration Report*, 1826-7, v, p. 179. Evidence of Fielden.

⁴ Figures collected by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, *First Report of Commissioners under Poor Law Amendment Act*, 1835, xxxv, p. 202. Gaskell, *Manufacturing Population*, p. 241.

⁵ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, pp. D 1, 84: 34-35.

⁶ *Factory Inspectors' Reports*, 1842, xxii, pp. 87, 85.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1845, xxv, p. 18.

⁸ See tables in Baines' *History of the Cotton Manufacture*, pp. 446-7; also Bowley, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

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before 1835.¹ From the figures quoted above no safe generalisation can be made as to the average earnings of factory women. In view of the wide range of women's earnings in different classes of work, only the most detailed tables can give any accurate idea of the general level of earnings of factory women as a class. Fortunately a sufficiently large number of reliable returns from employers' wage books was obtained by the Factory Commissioners in 1833 for tables to be compiled, which give a good idea of the average earnings of factory workers at different stages of their career. The returns and the evidence of workers contained in the report showed that the rate of wages increased with age and that the majority of workers reached their maximum at about the age of twenty-five, although the higher wages of overlookers and a few skilled workers brought the maximum average wage to a later age group. The following table shows the returns from some of the Lancashire cotton mills :²

Age.	No. women employed.	Average weekly wage.		Men's wage for corresp. age group.	
		s.	d.	s.	d.
Below 11	155	2	4½	2	3½
11-16	1123	4	3	4	1½
16-21	1240	7	3½	10	2½
21-26	780	8	5	17	2½
26-31	295	8	7½	20	4½
31-36	100	8	9½	22	8½
36-41	81	9	8½	21	7½
41-46	38	9	3½	20	3½
46-51	23	8	10	16	7½
51-56	4	8	4½	16	4
56-61	3	6	4	13	6½
61-66	1	6	0	13	7
66-71	1	6	0	10	10

Similar tables for other textile workers showed that cotton operatives earned the highest wages of all. Without entering into detail the following tables of maximum average wages gives some idea of the general level of wages in other trades :³

Trade.	District.	Maximum Average Wage.		Age group.
		s.	d.	
Cotton	Lancashire	9	8	36-41
Wool	North	7	7	36-41
"	Gloucester	5	7	41-46
"	Somerset	8	1	31-36
"	Wiltshire	6	11	31-36
Flax	Leeds	6	4	21-26
Silk	Derby	7	7	26-31
"	Norfolk, Suffolk			
"	Essex	5	0	21-26
"	Somerset	6	0	36-41
Lace	Derby	8	1	21-26
"	Devon	5	8	36-41

¹ Baines, *ibid.*

² *Factory Commission*, 1834, xix, p. 33.

³ *Ibid.* Compiled from tables, pp. 33-36.

It will be noticed that the rate of women's wages was slightly higher in childhood and then considerably lower than that of men. For the most part they were employed in different kinds of work, but considerations of economy undoubtedly led to a preference for women's employment wherever possible. "The small amount of wages paid to women," says Inspector Sanders in 1843, "acts as a strong inducement to the mill occupier to employ them instead of men, and in power-loom shops this has been the case to a great extent."¹

A lower standard for women had been the accepted rule for so long that it called forth little comment from contemporaries; nevertheless, it is somewhat amazing to find Dr. Mitchell, one of the Sub-Commissioners in 1833, attempting to justify the lower wages of women as part of the far-sighted policy of Nature. "Some persons," he wrote, "feel much regret at seeing the wages of females so low, in some cases full grown women averaging under 6s.; but perhaps such persons are wrong; and nature effects her own purposes more wisely and more effectually than could be done by the wisest of men. The low price of female labour makes it the most profitable as well as the most agreeable occupation for a female to superintend her own domestic establishment, and her low wages do not tempt her to abandon the care of her own children. Nature therefore thereby provided that her design shall not be disappointed."² That this so-called policy of Nature obviously favoured the manufacturer and at the same time completely disregarded the fate of the single woman who had to be independent and the widow who had to provide for children, were facts overlooked by the Commissioner. The exploitation of women's labour which was the natural outcome of this policy was set forth in plain words in a letter quoted by Lord Ashley in a speech on the Ten Hours Bill: "Mr. E. a manufacturer," (says the writer), "informed me that he employs females exclusively at his power looms; . . . gives a decided preference to married females, especially those who have families at home dependent on them for support; they are attentive, docile, more so than unmarried females, and are compelled to use their utmost exertions to procure the necessities of life."³

CONFLICTING CRITICISMS OF THE FACTORY SYSTEM

Opinion as to the suitability of factory labour for women was sharply divided in the early days of their employment. Much has been written on the "evils" of the early factory system—of cruel treatment, deformity, moral degradation, and the break up of home life, which last was particularly connected with women's work—and the evidence given before Sadler's Committee has often been used to describe pictures of unrelieved gloom. But there is good reason to believe that in some cases the factory system has been blamed for effects for which it was in no way responsible, and that in others, the tendency has been to exaggerate the extent of evils which did exist and attribute them to the system in general.

¹ *Factory Inspectors' Reports*, 1843, xxvii, p. 19.

² *Factory Commissioners' Supplementary Report*, Part 1, 1834, xix, p. 39.

³ *Hansard*, Third Series, March 15, 1844, col. 1091.

The appalling conditions in the new manufacturing towns in the early nineteenth century have too often been ascribed to the new industrial regime. Cooke Taylor in 1844 drew attention to the healthiness of factory employees in rural districts, and declared that there alone could the factory system "fairly be tested by its own merits." Visitors to Manchester, he added, "make the double blunder of believing that all its working classes belong to the factory population, and that all the ill-health and misconduct they witness among females of the lower ranks in that town may be ascribed to the factory system."¹ Much of the ill-health and "moral degradation" of the factory population was, on the contrary, due to domestic conditions. Aiken writing in 1795, states that there were then in Manchester "nearly whole streets of houses built of wood, clay and plaister," and that the town "unfortunately vies with, or exceeds, the Metropolis, in the closeness with which the poor are crowded in offensive, dark, damp and incommodious habitations, a too fertile source of disease."² With a rapidly increasing population, including a large Irish element accustomed to a low standard of life, overcrowding and the lack of sanitation became still more glaring evils, affecting vitally the moral and physical condition of the population.

Again, in considering the charge of cruelty, it has to be remembered that it was the operatives themselves who were chiefly responsible for such ill-treatment of women and children as did occur, and that they were bringing into the factory the brutality which the standards of the time permitted the lower classes to practise on their wives and children at home. "Much cruelty," states the Report of the Factory Commission, "is daily practised in many a cottage, which is not unfit to rank even with the strap and billy roller."³

The conflicting evidence relating to the effects of factory labour arose very largely from the great diversity of conditions.⁴ While it has to be admitted that factory labour at its worst was indescribably bad, and that some of the masters were completely indifferent to the comfort and health of their employees, regarding them "in no other light than as tools let out to hire," yet in the opinion of Factory Commissioners and Inspectors alike, such accusations were far from being applicable to factories or masters generally.⁵ Horner in 1836 emphati-

¹ *Factories and the Factory System*, p. 39.

² *Description of the Country round Manchester*, p. 192.

³ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. C 1, 170 (Drinkwater's Report).

⁴ "I can conceive no one general system that can admit of greater diversity of situation for the operator of every age. There are not wanting abundant proofs that it is in the power of the occupier of every mill and factory to adopt regulations which will ensure to all employed under him a degree of comfort and advantage greater, in my opinion, than is ordinarily enjoyed by any other of the same class in society. From this state and condition various are the gradations of which factory labour is susceptible, and I doubt not that without some legislative interference and strong responsible controlling power, the same system is equally capable of producing the greatest individual misery and suffering." *Factory Inspectors' Reports*, 1836, xlv, p. 12 (Saunders' Report).

⁵ Criticism of the factory system has been based largely on the evidence given before the Sadler Committee. Many of the witnesses, however, were concerned with the worst conditions of earlier days, and little attempt was made to bring the evidence up to date and include improvements that were already taking place in the larger and better factories. Moreover, a careful comparison of the state-

cally denied "the truth of those general accusations against the masters so frequently indulged in . . . and of those pictures of oppression, debilitated health, and suffering, represented to be characteristic of factory employment." "That instances of cruelty and oppression are common," he wrote, "or that there is among them [employers] a smaller proportion of benevolent good men, may be most confidently denied. Indeed I know of no description of persons of whom so many instances may be brought forward of active and benevolent exertions and large pecuniary sacrifices to promote the welfare of the people they employ. To this I bear the most willing testimony from very ample opportunities of observation."¹

CONTEMPORARY OBJECTIONS TO WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Opponents of the factory system waxed eloquent on two topics particularly connected with women's labour. In the first place they were alarmed at the increasing employment of women, which, they claimed, was displacing male workers; and secondly, they deplored the extent of married women's employment which, they asserted, was causing the complete break up of home life among the working classes.

The progress of the factory system did, of course, increase tremendously the amount of employment available for women.² But critics who opposed their employment overlooked the fact that the textile trades had always employed by far the greatest number of women and children. It was no new thing for women to be engaged in industrial employment, and the different branches of these trades, together with domestic service, had been their mainstay from time

ments made by the same witnesses before the Sadler Committee in 1832 and the Factory Commissioners in 1833, shows some of the evidence of the former year to be unreliable, owing to the manner in which the examination was conducted. After re-examining several of the principal witnesses at Leeds, Mr. Sub-Commissioner Power wrote in 1833: "I am bound to say that all whom I examined, with only one exception, appeared to be disposed to reveal the whole truth and nothing else; and they have sometimes appeared astonished at the statements reported to have been made by them before the Committee. I attribute this in a great measure to the extraordinary manner in which the questions have frequently been put to the witnesses on approaching any critical and important topic, so as to leave in fact little or no discretion respecting the answer. . . Many instances of detriment to the truth, by way of suppression as well as by perversion of evidence, will be found to have resulted from such a mode of examination." *Factory Commission, 1833, xx, p. C 2, 72.*

The same opinion was expressed by Mr. Sub-Commissioner Drinkwater, *Ibid.*, pp. C 1, 157-8, and their statements were borne out by the evidence of witnesses themselves. Alonzo Hargreaves, for example, says in 1833: "I never meant to say what you have read to me, of my being so young when I worked at night, or of my working eight weeks together. I was going sixteen, and I never worked so more than a month." His evidence is typical of others who contradicted or corrected the statements read over to them from the previous year. For detailed criticism of the Sadler Report, see Hutt, *The Factory System of the Early Nineteenth Century*, in *Economica*, 1926, pp. 79 seq.

¹ *Factory Inspectors' Reports, 1837, xxxi, pp. 40, 41.*

² In 1818 the total number of both sexes employed in cotton mills was 57,323; in 1839, females alone had increased to 146,331. Ashley, Speech on the Ten Hours Bill, *Hansard*, Third Series, March 15, 1844, col. 1089.

immemorial. Women and children were simply doing in the factory, under different conditions, the work they had always done in their homes. Changes in machinery from time to time temporarily displaced both male and female workers, but as compared with the days of hand labour, when spinners so largely outnumbered all other classes of workers, the proportion of men was noticeably higher in the days of machine industry.¹ Moreover, the occupations open to men, always more numerous than those available for women, were increasing in number and extent throughout the whole period of the industrial revolution, as a result of developments in industry and transport. Finally, those who objected to women's factory employment, completely neglected the truth that many women were forced to earn their own livings, and that the great majority of those so employed were single women and girls who could not be supported at home.

The second argument, that the factory system was having disastrous consequences on the home life of the working classes, appears to have rested on an exaggerated idea of the extent of married women's employment. Contemporary statements predicting the speedy end of domestic life frequently give the impression that every woman in a factory above the age of eighteen was a wife or mother.² The Report of the Factory Commission throws interesting light on this question. The returns sent in to the Commissioners showed that in the cotton factories of Lancashire, the woollen mills of the North and West, and in flax, silk and lace mills generally, the greatest number of female operatives were aged from sixteen to twenty-one, and that there was a "prodigious diminution immediately after," during the period when most factory women married. In the woollen mills of the North and Gloucester more than 50 per cent. of the women left at that age, and in cotton factories the number was nearly as great.³ Among those who remained the proportion of married women was relatively small. To quote Dr. Mitchell: "It is known by the returns, as well as from the evidence given to the District Commissioners, that very few women

¹ In 1844 Ashley quoted the following percentages for female operatives: 56½ per cent. in cotton mills, 69½ per cent. in woollen mills, 70½ per cent. in silk, and 70½ per cent. in flax spinning mills. *Hansard*, House of Commons, March 15th 1844. For the proportion of women employed in days of hand labour, see pp. 124, 125 ante.

² Lord Ashley and Gaskell, in particular, were propounders of these views. Ashley, for example, in his *Answer to the Address of the Central Short-Time Committee*, says: "Nor must we omit to press upon the attention of the public the gradual displacement of male by the substitution of female labour in a large proportion of the industrial occupation of the country. . . This evil . . . is spreading rapidly and extensively . . . desolating like a torrent, the peace, the economy, and the virtue of the mighty masses of the manufacturing districts. Domestic life and domestic discipline must soon be at an end: society will consist of individuals no longer grouped into families; so early is the separation of husband and wife, of parents and children." Quoted Hodder, *Life of Shaftesbury* (Pop. ed.), p. 234. See also "Speech on Ten Hours Bill," March 15, 1844, *Hansard*, Third Series, cols. 1092, 1096.

³ Returns from certain Lancashire mills showed 1,240 women employed from 16–21 years, but in the next group 21–26 years, numbers dropped to 780; from 26–31 years, they were 295, and from 31–36 only 100. In Glasgow cotton mills, numbers in the same age groups, dropped from 2,452 to 1,252, 674 and 255 respectively. *Factory Commissioners' Supplementary Report*, Part 1, xix, pp. 33–39.

work in the factories after marriage."¹ His statement was supported by evidence given in the Report. Mr. Ashworth, a Lancashire cotton manufacturer employing 532 persons said, "I am happy to say that there is no married female employed by us, nor has any one been discharged or refused work on that ground; nor do I know that we have any married workman who finds it necessary or is desirous that his wife should follow any employ but that of her domestic duties."² In a Leicester factory Dr. Loudon found one-tenth of the women were married, and at Nottingham he wrote, "It is rare to find a mother who has at home a couple of children alive, working in a mill. The duties of domestic life compel her to stay at home."³ At Greenock girls left the mill immediately on marriage, and it was stated to be "the general rule in factories that married women living with their husbands are neither employed nor retained."⁴ One of the objections, in fact, to the limitation of children's labour in 1833, was the belief that it would cause a regrettable increase in the employment of married women, which again suggests that they were not as yet extensively employed.⁵

The advance of steam power in the next decade, together with the Factory Act of 1833, certainly increased the number of adult women employed, but it is doubtful whether the number of married women was more than relatively increased. Lord Ashley's references to the subject in a speech in the House on the Ten Hours Bill provoked the following contradictory reply from John Bright: "It has been stated that a large proportion of the females employed in mills are married, but the returns to which I will ask your attention will show that this is not the case. If all the noble Lord said on this point were true, if the cases he stated, but for which he gave no authority, were the rule, instead of being, as I am sure they are the exception, such a state of things would go far to justify interference of an extraordinary description on the part of the Legislature." The figures he quoted for three separate mills showed a withdrawal of women above twenty-one years, similar to that shown by Dr. Mitchell from the returns of 1834, thus "proving beyond dispute," said Bright, "that after that period, which might be termed a marriageable age, the women are to a very large extent withdrawn from factory employment, and remain at home engaged in their domestic duties."⁶ Inquiries conducted at the same time by Leonard Horner in nine Lancashire cotton factories, showed that of the comparatively few women who remained employed above marriageable age, 27½ per cent. were married.⁷ Statistical evidence is inadequate for any precise statements on this question, but careful investigation of the available evidence certainly suggests that detrac-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

² *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. E 5.

³ *Ibid.*, xxi, pp. C 3, 2, C 3, 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xxi, p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xx, pp. E 5; C 2, 75; D 2, 33; xxi, D 2, 34.

⁶ *Hansard*, Third Series, March 15, 1844, cols. 1144-1146.

⁷ *Ibid.* Speech of Sir Jas. Graham, May 3rd, 1844. Figures given by Engels in 1844 showed 10,721 married women to be distributed among 412 factories, which gives a rough average of 26 to a factory. *Condition of the Working Class*, p. 147, n.

tors of the factory system over estimated and exaggerated its effects on home life.¹ No attempt was made, moreover, to compare it in this respect with other occupations in which married women had always been employed, nor with agriculture, where the proportion of women who left their homes every day for long hours in the fields, was infinitely higher. With greater justice an outcry might have been raised that women's agricultural work was ruining the home life of the country side.

Among the operatives themselves women's factory labour seems to have been accepted as perfectly natural until the Ten Hours agitation in the 'forties, and external criticism was at first centred upon children's employment. It was during the discussion preceding the Factory Bill of 1833, that the desirability of limiting women's employment appears to have cropped up first, although the *laissez faire* attitude of the time precluded any chance of their being considered in that Bill. *The Examiner*, however, took advantage of the opportunity to bring forward the daring suggestion that all children under fourteen, and "females of any age" should gradually be excluded from manufactories.² The article called forth an amusing reply on behalf of "The Female Operatives of Todmorden" which puts so clearly the position and attitude of women compelled to earn their own living that it is worth quoting at some length:

"SIR,

"Living as we do, in the densely populated manufacturing districts of Lancashire, and most of us belonging to that class of females who earn their bread either directly or indirectly by manufactories, we have looked with no little anxiety for your opinion on the Factory Bill. . . . You are for doing away with our services in manufactories altogether. So much the better, if you had pointed out any other more eligible and practical employment for the surplus female labour, that will want other channels for a subsistence. If our competition were withdrawn, and short hours substituted, we have no doubt but the effects would be as you have stated, 'not to lower wages, as the male branch of the family would be enabled to earn as much as the whole had done,' but for the thousands of females who are employed in manufactories, who have no legitimate claim on any male relative for employment or support, and who have, through a variety of circumstances, been early thrown on their own resources for a livelihood, what is to become of them?"

"In this neighbourhood, hand-loom has been almost totally superseded by power-loom weaving, and no inconsiderable number of females, who must depend on their own exertions, or their parishes for support, have been forced, of necessity, into the manufactories, from their total inability to earn a livelihood at home.

"It is a lamentable fact, that, in these parts of the country, there is scarcely any other mode of employment for female industry, if we except servitude and dressmaking. Of the former of these, there is no

¹ Similarly the view that the factory system displaced adult men and imposed on women "the duty and burthen of supporting their husbands and families," (See Ashley, *Hansard*, March 15, 1844, col 1096; and Gaskell, *Manufacturing Population*, pp. 184-5) proves on examination to have no statistical foundation. Figures quoted by Engels in 1844, show that of the husbands of 10,721 married women employed in 412 factories, 5,314 were also employed in factories, 3,927 were otherwise employed, information was not forthcoming for 659, and only 821 were unemployed and presumably supported by their wives. *Condition of Working Class*, p. 147, f. 2.

² *Examiner*, January 29, 1832.

chance of employment for one-twentieth of the candidates that would rush into the field, to say nothing of lowering the wages of our sisters of the same craft; and of the latter, galling as some of the hardships of manufactories are (of which the indelicacy of mixing with the men is not the least), yet there are few women who have been so employed, that would change conditions with the ill-used genteel little slaves, who have to lose sleep and health, in catering to the whims and frivolities of the butter-flies of fashion.

"We see no way of escape from starvation, but to accept the very tempting offers of the newspapers, held out as baits to us, fairly to ship ourselves off to Van Dieman's Land, on the very delicate errand of husband hunting; and, having safely arrived at the 'Land of Goshen,' jump ashore, with a 'Who wants me?' Now, then, as we are a class of society who will be materially affected by any alteration of the present laws, we put it seriously to you, whether, as you have deprived us of our means of earning our bread, you are not bound to point out a more eligible and suitable employment for us?"

"Waiting with all humility, for your answer to our request, we have the honour to subscribe ourselves, the constant readers of the *Examiner*,

"THE FEMALE OPERATIVES OF TADMORDEN."¹

In reply the editor of the *Examiner* admitted the cogency of these arguments and as a compromise naively suggested that "the interdiction might be confined to *married* females, and those whose parents are alive, and not in receipt of parish relief." But at the same time, in all seriousness, he advocated emigration as offering the greatest advantages for that large class of young women whose "parents or other near relatives" were unable "to support and protect them."²

After the Bill of 1833 was passed, nothing more was heard of the restriction of women's labour until 1841, when some of the Short Time Committees representing the male operatives included in their demands "the gradual withdrawal of all females from the factories." The arguments brought forward in support of this plea suggest that it was based on the fear of women's competition. They contended that the "home, its cares and its employments, is woman's true sphere"; that women brought up in factories could not "make a shirt, darn a stocking, cook a dinner or clean a house"; and that their work was "an inversion of the order of nature and of Providence—a return to a state of barbarism, in which the woman does the work, while the man looks idly on."³ How far this was an exaggerated view has already been shown. The *Manchester Guardian* took up the case for the women, stressing the point that no alternative employment was to be had, and that their exclusion from mills could only result in still

¹ *Ibid.*, February 26, 1832.

² *Ibid.*

³ Deputation from the Short-Time Committee of the West Riding to Peel and Gladstone, reprinted in *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, January 8, 15, 1842. Peel as a manufacturer disapproved of the proposals, but Gladstone thought the object might be achieved by the following regulations: "First by fixing a higher age for the commencement of infant female labour, than for the commencement of infant male labour in factories. Secondly, by limiting the number of females in proportion to the number of males in any one factory. Thirdly, by forbidding a female to work in a factory after her marriage, and during the life-time of her husband." *Ibid.*, January 15, 1842.

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fiercer competition among the already sweated shirtmakers and seamstresses.¹

Nothing came of this attempt to restrict women's labour, and shortly afterwards their position in factories was definitely accepted by the Legislature in the Act of 1844, which for the first time included them among protected persons. By that measure the position of women in industry was not only definitely recognised, but the first step was taken towards the regulation of industry in the interests of the woman worker.

¹ *Manchester Guardian*, January 15, 1842.

CHAPTER X

THE SMALLER DOMESTIC INDUSTRIES

COMMERCIAL and industrial changes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries resulted in the decline of numerous home industries which for varying periods had provided employment for women and children all over the country. In addition to the widely distributed textile industries there were in many districts small local industries which occupied the cottagers for miles around. Dorset, for example, was long noted for its trade in string, pack-thread, netting, ropes, sailcloth and sacking, and later became famous for button-making and gloving; Buckingham, Northampton and Bedford, with other midland counties, were for centuries associated with lacemaking, and with the newer industry of straw plaiting; Nottingham, Derby and Leicester were the most important provincial centres for frame-work knitting and afterwards for the domestic occupations connected with the machine lace trade; Essex and the Thames valley were noted for basket making; and Stafford and Worcester for nail and chain making. In addition to these, which were mainly concentrated in special districts, there were others, such as hand knitting, staymaking, hatmaking and trimming, capmaking, shoemaking, smock-frock making, embroidery, slop work and needlework of all kinds, in urban centres all over the country. In all these industries women were employed; in some of them they worked with men, but others were conducted entirely by women and children.

The women engaged in these domestic industries were for the most part the wives and daughters of labouring men—the class invariably described in seventeenth and eighteenth century parlance as “the poor.” The wages of such men, the greater number of whom were agricultural labourers, were generally low, and based on the assumption that wives and children by some means or other, earned their own keep. Hence the great desire of philanthropists, landowners and parish officers to introduce and encourage domestic industries wherever possible, and especially in rural areas. To quote Thomas Firmin in 1678:

“The only way to provide for our poor, and to bring them to labour, is to provide such work for them as they may do in their own homes, which tho’ never so mean and homely is more desired than at any other place; and the way which several persons have proposed, of bringing them to a public work-house, will never effect the end intended; for, suppose a woman hath a sick husband or child, or some infirmity upon herself, in all such cases she may do something at home, but cannot leave her own home. And supposing that none of these should happen, which is yet very frequent, not one person of twenty will endure the thoughts of working at a public work-house.”¹

¹ *Some Proposals for the Employing of the Poor*, p. 2.

The more important domestic industries, so far as women were concerned, were lacemaking, straw plaiting, glovemaking, knitting, and needlework of different kinds. Besides these, thousands of women worked in their homes at the sewing connected with framework knitting, shoe and staymaking and other industries of that kind. In the following pages some description will be given in turn of the more important of women's home industries, in order to bring out more clearly the general conditions underlying domestic work.

LACEMAKING

"The Lace Manufacture in England is the greatest, next to the Woollen"—so runs a petition of lace manufacturers to Parliament in 1698, which throws interesting light on the extent of this domestic industry at the end of the seventeenth century. "There are now," it states, "above one hundred thousand in England who get their living by it, and earn by mere labour £500,000 a year, according to the lowest computation that can be made; and the Persons employed in it are, for the most part, Women and Children who have no other means of subsistence. The English are now arrived to make as good lace in Fineness and all other respects as any that is wrought in Flanders . . . so great an improvement is made that way in Buckinghamshire, the highest prized lace they used to make was about eight shillings per yard, and now they make lace there of above thirty shillings per yard, and in Dorsetshire and Devonshire they now make lace worth six pound per yard. . . ."¹

In the early eighteenth century this industry—whose introduction was variously attributed by tradition to Katherine of Arragon or to the Flemings who fled from Alva's persecutions—was established as the staple employment of women and children in the counties of Bedford, Buckingham and Northampton, and was also followed in parts of Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Derby and Yorkshire. As the century proceeded, lacemaking declined in many of the outlying districts and became concentrated in the three former counties and on the borders of Huntingdon, Hertford and Oxford.²

In this central district the industry flourished throughout the eighteenth century, and more and more women were attracted to the employment. Defoe, writing in 1724, says the lacemakers of Bedfordshire are "wonderfully encreas'd and improv'd within these few Years past,"³ and at the end of the century lace was being made in every part of the county except in the few villages in the south where it had been superseded by straw plait.⁴ In Buckinghamshire also by that time lacemaking was general in most parts of the county, the chief centres being Newport Pagnell and Olney. A lace manufacturer giving evidence in 1780 stated that there were then "140,000 Persons and upwards employed in the Three Counties of Buckingham, North-

¹ Quoted, Palliser, *History of Lace*, pp. 402-3.

² Palliser, *op. cit.*, pp. 371, 395-8.

³ *Four* (1927 ed.), vol. ii, p. 513.

⁴ Lysons, *Magna Britannia*, 1813, i, p. 23. Batchelor's *Bedfordshire*, 1808, p. 603.

ampton and Bedford in the Lace Manufactory; that from a few Towns that have been numbered lately it is supposed the People employed throughout the Kingdom in the Article of Bone Lace would amount to near 400,000.¹ In the little town of Olney alone the lacemakers numbered 1192,² and Pennant, who passed through Buckinghamshire about that time, described the whole county as flourishing from the profits of the manufacture: "There is scarcely a door to be seen, during summer, in most of the towns," he wrote, "but what is occupied by some industrious pale faced lass; their sedentary trade forbidding the rose to bloom in their sickly cheeks."³ Returns from the village of Hanslope in 1802 show how large was the proportion of workers in a lacemaking village. There, where boys as well as girls were brought up to the pillow, 800 out of a population of 1,275 were lacemakers, and the profits to the parish were calculated at £8,000 to £10,000 per annum.⁴ Lace made at Hanslope was valued at from 6d. to £2 2s. a yard,⁵ but the West of England was famous for the finest and most expensive lace. From Honiton in Devon, "very large quantities" of lace were "disposed of in the metropolis, from one shilling a yard to five guineas and upwards";⁶ and of Blandford, in Dorset, Defoe writes, in 1724: "This City is chiefly famous for making the finest bonelace in England, and where they shew'd me some so exquisitely fine; as I think I never saw better in Flanders, France or Italy, and which they said, they rated at above £30 Sterling a Yard; but I suppose there was not much of this to be had, but 'tis most certain, that they make exceeding rich Lace in that Country, such as no Part of England can equal."⁷ It was possibly due to the fact that the time spent on such fine lace proved unremunerative, having to compete with that produced in convents abroad, that the trade in the West gradually declined.

Throughout the eighteenth century, lace was an article much in demand for gentlemen's ruffles, ladies' lappets and trimmings of all kinds, as shown by the enormous lace bills of "people of fashion." Foreign lace was, however, considered superior to that produced in England, and many efforts were therefore made during the century both to protect the English manufacture and to improve the quality of English work. In spite of prohibitions against the importation of certain laces and duties payable on others,⁸ foreign lace continued in favour, and a considerable and profitable smuggling trade was carried on. In vain did political economists point out that England was expending two millions yearly on foreign lace and linen, and that British ladies might "as well endow monasteries as wear Flanders lace, for these Popish nuns are maintained by Protestant contribu-

¹ *Lords' Journals*, June 28, 1780. Evidence of Mr. Jas. Pilgrim.

² *Ibid.*

³ Pennant, *Journey from Chester to London*, 1781, p. 342.

⁴ Lipscomb, *History of Buckingham*, iv, p. 164.

⁵ Lysons, *Magna Britannia*, i, iii, p. 483.

⁶ Cooke, G. A., *Topography of Devon*, p. 105.

⁷ *Tour*, (1927 ed.), i, p. 217.

⁸ Importation of Bone Lace was prohibited by 13 and 14 Car. II, c. 13, and 10 Wm. III, c. 9. By 11 and 12 Wm. III, c. 11 Flemish lace was allowed to be imported, but the points of France, Spain and Venice were still excluded.

tions."¹ In the second half of the century sterner measures were adopted. Frequent raids by Customs officers on the premises of court milliners and tailors and the confiscation and public burning of foreign lace, encouraged the aristocracy to appear at Court functions in lace of English making, and after the accession of George III., additional acts were passed for the benefit of lacemakers in this country.² At the same time the Society of Arts and the Anti-Gallican Society (founded in 1750) did much to encourage finer work among English lace makers by the award of "well-judged premiums," which were successful in producing lace manufactured "to an extraordinary pitch of delicacy."³ The Anti-Gallican Society also made an interesting attempt to revive the working of point lace among "gentlewomen of middling-rank" and small fortune, but the work was not sufficiently remunerative to encourage its production.⁴

The middleman seems to have appeared in the lace industry in its earliest days,⁵ and most of the lacemakers were employed by local dealers or "lace manufacturers" as they called themselves. Many of them in the eighteenth century were employers on a large scale. James Pilgrim, a lace manufacturer who gave evidence before the Lords in 1780, stated that he then employed 800 hands, and that some years previously he had employed "upwards of 1000, and those mostly Women and Children from the Age of Four or Five Years to Eighty."⁶ The dealers generally collected their lace from the makers at the village inn, and themselves travelled weekly to London to the lace markets held at the George Inn, Aldersgate St., and the Bull and Mouth in St Martin's by Aldersgate. There they sold their goods to the London milliners, received orders and purchased fresh stocks of materials from London thread merchants. Great quantities of lace were also sold at the weekly lace market at Newport Pagnell and some of the London houses sent buyers or travelling agents to buy up the lace locally from the villagers.⁷

The business seems to have been a lucrative one for the dealer, at any rate during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when "great fortunes" were said "to be acquired by the factors."⁸ Not only did they derive considerable profits from their transactions in lace, but they seem often to have compelled the lacemakers to purchase

¹ Postlethwayt, *Dictionary*, 1766. Art., Lace.

² Palliser, *op. cit.*, pp. 358-9, 363. In 1779, lace manufacturers petitioned Parliament against the smuggling of French lace, "fraudulently introduced into this country as cheap German bone lace," and 19 Geo. III, c. 69 §24 was passed to check smuggling. *Commons Journals*, February 26, 1779. Later Acts increased duties payable on foreign lace.

³ Postlethwayt, *Dictionary*, 1755. Art., Lace. *Museum Rusticum*, ii, p. 375.

⁴ Dossie, *Memoirs of Agriculture*, vol. i, p. 137.

⁵ In Bucks, as early as 1611, the Bishop found it necessary in his visitation to deal with Newport men who "continually travelled to sell bone lace on ye Sabbath day." F. W. Bull, *History of Newport Pagnell*, p. 195.

⁶ *Lords' Journals*, June 30, 1780.

⁷ V. C. H., Bucks., ii, p. 107. Wright, *Romance of the Lace Pillow*, pp. 203-4.

⁸ Lysons, *Magna Britannia*, I, iii, p. 482. Lipscomb quotes the case of John West who, "born and brought up in very humble life" became a dealer in lace, "by which he acquired considerable property." One of his bequests was a sum of £4,000 to £5,000 for a church consecrated in 1807. *History of Buckinghamshire*, ii, p. 591.

their thread at exorbitant prices which took no account of fluctuations in the price of lace. In 1843, for instance, we find the lacemakers complaining bitterly that "though lace does not, by a third at least, fetch near what it formerly did, they are compelled to take their thread from the dealers at the same enhanced price as formerly; and if they did not buy their thread of them they would not take their lace."¹ The lacemakers were, therefore, in the position of outworkers, completely dependent on the commercial entrepreneur. They purchased from him their materials, worked according to his pattern and order, and received such wages as he was inclined to give them. Wages in the eighteenth century were moreover so frequently illegally paid in truck, that in 1779, a Bill was passed specially forbidding such abuses in the lace industry.² Subsequent complaints from time to time, however, show that the Act was evaded, and lacemakers were still being defrauded of their earnings in this way in the mid-nineteenth century.³

When trade prospered, lacemakers' earnings were good, and wives of agricultural labourers frequently earned more than their husbands. But although on the whole the English lace trade prospered and increased throughout the eighteenth century and during the first part of the nineteenth, the period was by no means one of unchequered prosperity for the lacemakers. There were frequent fluctuations and wages rose and fell according to the vagaries of fashion. Moreover, the very high wages sometimes quoted for lacemakers apply chiefly to fine work, whereas the bulk of the English trade consisted of low priced laces from 1½d. to 5s. a yard, for which earnings were considerably less. "Where there is One Yard made above Five Shillings, there are 1000 made under," said a lace manufacturer in 1780.⁴ The poet Cowper, who lived in the centre of the lacemaking district at Olney, certainly gives no impression of a well paid industry:

"Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,
Pillow and bobbins all her little store;
Content though mean, and cheerful if not gay,
Shuffling her thread about the livelong day—
Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night
Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light."

Again, any falling off in demand was immediately followed, not only by reductions in wages, but also by the dismissal of numbers of workers. The lace dealer, having no invested capital at stake, had no incentive to retain his workers. A petition of lace manufacturers during the depression of 1779, attributed to the smuggling of cheap foreign lace, speaks of "the Miseries and Anxiety under which Thousands of the reduced Artificers now labour," and one of the dealers stated that he personally had discharged 500 out of 1000 hands.⁵

¹ P.P. *Report of Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, p. 1, 12.

² 19, Geo. III, c. 49, *Statutes at Large*.

³ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, p. D 6. "The custom of exchanging lace for goods instead of money prevails throughout the pillow lace districts."

⁴ *Sub-Commissioner's Report for West of England*.

⁵ *Lords' Journals*, June 30, 1780.

⁶ *Commons Journals*, February 26, 1779. *Lords' Journals*, June 28, 1780.

At the same time those retained in employment were scarcely better off. "I am an eye witness of their poverty," writes Cowper in 1780, "and do know that hundreds in this little town [Olney] are upon the point of starving, and that the most unremitting industry is but barely sufficient to keep them from it."¹ Fluctuations in prices and periods of distress and unemployment must, therefore, be taken into account when considering statements of wages for lacemakers.

In 1768, when Arthur Young was at Bedford, where lace of various sorts up to 25s. a yard was being made, women that were "very good hands" earned 1s. a day, "but in common only 8d., 9d. and 10d."² In 1782, prices for the cheapest lace had "fallen almost to nothing,"³ but after the recovery Young wrote at Northampton (1791), "the trade is now very brisk, and the dealers have made much money for four or five years past." Women's wages in this prosperous period were on an average 8d. a day, and some "even to 10d. and 1s." Men's wages at the same time were 10d. to 1s. a day, and beer—a totally inadequate wage without assistance from wives and children—but, says Young, the "state of the poor in general is advantageous, owing very much to lacemaking."⁴ During the last decade of the century, average wages remained around 8d. to 10d. a day, and 1s. to 1s. 6d. for the best workers,⁵ from which about one-seventh had to be deducted for thread. But earnings of women and children, however small, were perhaps never of more vital importance than during the closing years of the century, when the poor generally were in great distress from high prices and shortage of food. The value of women's work in lacemaking is illustrated by the fact that while poor rates were rising almost everywhere, they were very little altered in lace districts,⁶ and Eden notes that lacemakers can "maintain themselves even in the present dear times."⁷

The war period was one of continued prosperity for the trade, and lacemakers were perhaps better paid than at any other time. Foreign lace ceased to be imported and at the same time the English manufacture probably benefitted from the French refugees who settled here.⁸ From 1800 onwards good hands were earning from 9s. to 10s. a week,⁹ and at Aylesbury before the end of the war, good workers were said to be able to earn as much as 25s. and married women *fr.*¹⁰ For these wages lacemakers worked all day and every day, and household duties were rarely allowed to interrupt the business of the pillow.

¹ *Correspondence of Wm. Cowper*, Ed. Wright, i, p. 210: Letter to J. Hill.

² *Northern Tour* (2nd ed.), i, p. 49.

³ *Correspondence Wm. Cowper*, Ed. Wright, ii, p. 26.

⁴ *Annals*, xvi, p. 449.

⁵ Donaldson's *Northamptonshire*, p. 10. James and Malcolm, *Buckinghamshire*, p. 46. Eden, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 8, 24, 28, 554, 584.

⁶ *Annals*, xxxv, p. 171. Batchelor's *Bedfordshire*, p. 596.

⁷ Eden, *op. cit.*, i, p. 566.

⁸ "A number of ingenious French emigrants have found employment in Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, and the adjacent counties, in the manufacturing of lace, and it is expected, through the means of these artificers, considerable improvements will be introduced into the method of making English lace."

Fallick, *op. cit.*, p. 383, quoting *Annual Register* for 1794.

⁹ *Annals*, xxxii, p. 449.

¹⁰ Gibbs, *History of Aylesbury*, p. 621.

Writing in 1808, Batchelor says, "The lacemakers begin their work in summer at 6 or 7 in the morning, and finish at sun set, or the dusk of the evening. In the winter, little is done till 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning, or after breakfast, when they continue their work till 10 or 11 at night and sometimes later."¹

The period of high wages did not last long; prices dropped with the peace in 1815, and from then onwards until the complete decline of the trade in the 'eighties, lacemakers dwindled in number as their condition went from bad to worse. Changes in fashion after the war caused a serious decline in demand; foreign laces were again admitted to the country and before the trade could recover, the effects of machine lace began to be felt.

Almost immediately after the war, women and children began to suffer from low wages and unemployment. In 1817, a "good lace-maker" in Buckinghamshire could only earn 8d. a day and wages had almost invariably to be taken in truck;² at Honiton about 1820, only 300 lacemakers were employed out of the 2,400 who had had work previously;³ and the same year at the Aylesbury elections, the distressed Buckinghamshire workers paraded the town in anti-machine processions, bearing lace-trimmed banners with the mottoes, "Support Bobbin Lace," "Down with the Machine Stuff."⁴ For many years the lacemakers suffered greatly. The diminution of women's and children's earnings coincided with the agricultural depression, and from comparative comfort, many families were reduced to poverty and dependence on poor relief. The inquiries of Poor Law Commissioners in the 'thirties revealed deplorable conditions among the lace workers. In some districts the industry had ceased altogether, or was "not worth notice," and where possible women and children had turned to straw plaiting, and in some instances to stone picking and field work, to which they were completely unaccustomed in lace districts. In other places where lace work was still available, women were compelled to work longer hours for smaller wages. Women who during the war earned 10s. to 20s. a week could now with difficulty earn half-a-crown. "A woman must work very hard to get a halfpenny an hour, sixpence a day." From parish after parish came the same tale of unemployment, low wages paid in shop goods and the general poverty and distress which had fallen on the lace-making counties since the war.⁵

The lace schools, the only schools in many lace districts, by which some of the older lacemakers managed to make a living, were largely responsible for the continuance of the trade, since by them a fresh supply of workers was continually being produced. The Report of the Children's Employment Commission in 1843 states that although the hand workers were reduced to a state of "miserable depression" by machine competition, "the manufacture of pillow lace still finds occupation for many thousands of women and children in the dispersed

¹ *Bedfordshire*, p. 596.

² *Lords' Committee on the Poor Laws*, 1818, v, pp. 72, 98.

³ *Palliser, op. cit.*, p. 408, quoting Lyson's *Magna Briannia*.

⁴ *Wright, Romance of the Lace Pillow*, p. 214.

⁵ *Poor Laws*, 1834, xxx. See returns from parishes in lacemaking counties: Bedford, Buckingham, Northampton, Huntingdon, Oxford.

population of Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, and likewise in Devonshire; many of the children being assembled in schools, which are more properly workshops."¹ The evidence collected by the Commissioners from the lacemakers themselves suggests long days of monotonous drudgery and ceaseless work. "Children and grown-up people also are kept much closer to work from the badness of trade than when I began," said Ann Freeman, a lacemaker of fifty-two who had worked at the pillow since she was five. "A young woman must work very hard to earn 6d. a day, and pay for her thread and gymp; must work fully eleven hours for that; you see we pay as much now for the thread as we did when trade was better and better prices given."² In the West of England the Commissioner found that although wages had been reduced by half, the custom of paying in goods instead of money prevailed "throughout the pillow lace districts," and workers lost both time and value in bartering the goods they were compelled to accept in lieu of money.³

Under such conditions the complete decline of the lace industry was only a matter of time. Moreover, village life itself was changing; the railway era brought about a more rapid migration from the countryside, and younger women found better wages and more scope for employment in expanding industrial centres. The lace schools shrank to a diminutive size before the Education Act of 1870 gave them their death blow, and by the 'eighties lacemaking as a domestic industry had disappeared almost everywhere.

MACHINE LACEWORKERS

While the invention of machinery for lacemaking was one of the chief causes which deprived thousands of women of employment in the old lacemaking counties, it created at the same time an entirely new field of employment for an enormous number of women and children in the north midland counties of Nottingham, Derby and Leicester. Women and girls were not only required in factories for the production of lace thread, but many thousands more were employed on lace work of different kinds in their homes.

The new manufacture was really an offshoot of the hosiery trade—hence its establishment in the old frame-work knitting centres. From the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, attempts were being made to adapt the knitting frame to lacework, but all efforts to produce a satisfactory substitute for the net ground of pillow lace were unsuccessful until Heathcote patented his improved machine for "bobbin net" in 1809.⁴ From then on the new manufacture spread rapidly, especially after the expiration of the patent in 1823. Eight years later, Felkin estimated that the industry employed 180,000 women and children in their homes as regular workers, in addition to many others employed at intervals—an estimate which one of the Factory

¹ *PP. Children's Employment Commission, 1843, xiv, p. a 52.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, pp. D 6; d 31, 32.

⁴ V. C. H., *Nottingham, ii*, pp. 358-9. *Palliser, History of Lace*, pp. 447-449.

Commissioners, from other information, believed to be "by no means overstated."¹

Of these workers, many of whom were children, 150,000 were engaged in embroidery, and the rest in mending, drawing and pearlying the fabric produced by machines. Scarcely any age was considered too young for a child to begin to work. A witness in 1843 said she had seen some at work "who could scarcely sit on a stool," and the same year the Commissioner investigating children's employment in the Midlands reported that "almost all the children of the labouring classes in Nottingham are engaged at a very early age in one or other of the several branches of the lace manufacture and hosiery trade, as soon as they can tie a knot or use a needle."²

The youngest children, from five years onwards, were employed at "drawing", a simple process of drawing out with a needle the threads which joined together the single widths of lace when it came from the machine. At nine and ten years they usually became either "menders", tying the short broken threads in lace net, or "runners", embroidering with fine thread patterns stamped on the net.

Children engaged in mending and drawing were commonly employed by women who, themselves often in a state bordering on poverty, turned their small cottages into crowded workshops. Their object was to gain as much as they could from children's labour, and from half a dozen to forty children of varying ages might be crowded into the confined space of a cottage. Some worked at home, but most parents, it was asserted, preferred to send their children out because a mistress could exact a greater amount of work from them.³

In 1831, Felkin estimated the average weekly wages of menders and drawers at 4s. for children and 8s. for women, working from nine to fourteen hours a day.⁴ Twelve years later the evidence taken by the Children's Employment Commissioners showed that conditions both as to wages and hours had gradually got worse and worse, and by many the change was attributed to the great number of children "being employed to do women's work."⁵ "The masters," declared one witness, "prefer giving out the work to those women who keep young children, because it can be done at the lowest price. At some warehouses where witness has gone to seek for work she has been asked, 'Do you keep hands?' and on answering in the negative, has been told that she would not be employed. Children of very tender age, six, seven, and eight, can in a short time draw lace almost or quite as well as grown people; these children do not earn more than 6d., 9d.,

¹ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, pp. C 1, 187, C 2, 24 (Power's Report).

² *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, pp. 136, F 9.

³ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. C 1, 44.

⁴ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. C 1, 188.

⁵ Young children seem to have been employed in the machine lace trade from its earliest days. Suggestions were made in 1843 that reductions in men's wages had compelled parents to send their children to work earlier in order "to get bread for their families," but the Commissioner noted particularly that the early work of children was not the result of distress or want of employment on the part of their parents. Equally young children had been employed in 1825 when work for adults was abundant, and moreover, many of the parents of those working in 1843, were in receipt of good and regular wages. *Report*, 1843, xiv, p. F 10.

1s. or 1s. 3d. a week." Women engaged on the better kinds of work had to work "very hard" in 1843 to earn 3s. 6d. or 4s. a week, and many who worked "early and late" could not earn more than 2s. 6d.¹ The regular hours worked in most cottages were 6 a.m. to 8 p.m., but there was much irregularity. The warehouses often sent out little or nothing at the beginning of the week, and a rush of orders at the end meant that children were sometimes kept sixteen and eighteen hours a day, and not infrequently through the whole of Friday night.²

The much larger class of embroiderers or runners, while including some children, consisted mainly of young and married women. It was a curious anomaly of the lace trade, pointed out by Power, the Factory Commissioner, that the lace runner, although the most skilful, was the hardest worked and the worst paid of all the operatives connected with the lace trade. In 1831, Felkin states that he has under his eye while writing "some splendid specimens of silk bobbin net shawls, embroidered with the greatest care and beauty, by young women, who have worked upon them during six weeks, six days a week and fourteen hours a day, and have earned 1s. a day by such unremitted and anxious labour."³ Two years later, giving evidence before the Factory Commission, he expressed the belief that embroiderers' wages had fallen by one half since 1831, as a result of the increased exportation of British net, and the competition of Belgian and Saxon embroiderers.⁴ Power, at the same time, estimated that average wages were 2s. 6d. in slack times and 3s. 6d. to 4s. in busy periods.⁵ Although many of the younger women left the trade in despair and turned to the stocking frame, the number of children put to it rapidly overstocked the labour market and in 1843, runners who were working fifteen, sixteen and seventeen hours a day, and sometimes all night on Friday, were in a wretched condition and in receipt of wages that were totally inadequate for any decent standard of living. The following evidence of Elizabeth Sweeting, gives some idea of their working conditions:

"Has worked at the trade twenty-one years; when she first began it was a very good business; begins at 7 a.m., and leaves off about 10 p.m. but oftener later than earlier; often works till between 11 and 12, has done so all the winter round; in the summer generally begins between 5 and 6, and works as long as it is light, often till 9 p.m.; often does not go to the bottom of the yard for a week; can earn by working hard 7d. a day; . . . she has now a little girl helping, and together they can earn a shilling. Finds her sight very much affected, so much so that she cannot see what o'clock it is across her room; the work affects the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

² *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, pp. 136-7, 147. More humane mistresses were almost obliged by competition to work equally long hours. The evidence of a witness in 1843 runs: "Has been told at some warehouses that if witness could not execute the orders quickly by working long hours, that there were other mistresses who would do so." *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³ *Pamphlet on State of Bobbin Net Trade*, quoted, *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. C1, 190.

⁴ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, C 1, pp. 50-51.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. Ca, 17, 25. A typical statement of earnings is that of E. Dickinson: "If I were to work free at it I could earn 5s. now, from half-past six in the morning to nine or ten at night. I have worked this winter at 1s. 9d. a week and had candles to pay for, and worked as many hours in all." *Ibid.*, p. C 1, 54.

stomach and causes a pain in the side ; often makes her light-headed ; generally the lace runners are crooked, so that the right shoulder is higher than the other. . . . Her candles cost her about 8d. a week."¹

Eliza Hexton, working from 4 or 5 a.m. to 11 p.m., earned on an average 3s. a week.² When trade was at its best it was sometimes possible to earn about 5s., and the highest wage for a small minority of the most skilful workers was 7s.³ The only people who apparently earned an adequate wage were the pattern setters or designers. These were described as "females of great importance in the trade, highly prized by the masters," and "taking good wages in general."⁴

Such low wages could only be disastrous in their social and moral consequences. Single women, dependent on their own earnings, were reduced almost to starvation, while the very character of their work and the injurious effects of long hours on health and sight totally unfitted them after a few years for any other employment.⁵ Speaking of the moral consequences, Dr. Watts stated in 1843, "It is impossible for young women to procure the necessaries of life, exclusive of dress, by the present wages they can earn as lace runners. The consequence is that almost all become prostitutes, though not common street walkers. This is a usual and, witness believes, a true cause assigned by young women for losing their virtue."⁶ While this was almost certainly an exaggerated view of the extent of the demoralisation, there is little doubt, from additional evidence given in the Report, that prostitution was too often the outcome of these low wages.

Concerning married women working as embroiderers, the Report states :

"One of the most appalling features connected with the extreme reduction that has taken place in the wages of lace runners, and the consequent long hours of labour, is, that married women, having no time to attend to their families, or even to suckle their offspring, freely administer opium in some form or other to their infants, in order to prevent their cries interfering with the protracted labour by which they strive to obtain a miserable subsistence.

"The practice, which is most common, usually is begun when the child is three or four weeks old ; but Mr. Brown, the coroner of Nottingham, states that he knows Godfrey's cordial is given on the day of birth, and that even it is prepared in readiness for the event. The extent to which the system is carried may be judged of by the fact, expressly ascertained by this gentleman, that one druggist made up in one year 13 cwt. of treacle into Godfrey's cordial—a preparation of opium exclusively consumed by infants. The result of this terrible practice is that a great number of infants perish, either suddenly from an overdose, or, as more commonly happens, slowly, painfully and insidiously. Those who escape with life become pale and sickly children, often half idiotic, and always with a ruined constitution."

¹ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, p. f 5.

² *Ibid.*, p. f 39.

³ *Ibid.*, p. F 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. f 55. Their wages are not given.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. F 11. This opinion was frequently expressed to the Commissioners in 1843. Some of the runners had tried factories and service but had been obliged to return to the embroidery frame for want of strength for other work. *Ibid.*, p. f 45.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. f 58.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. F 10-11.

The organisation of the trade, and particularly the method of distributing lace to the runners, was in some instances responsible for lessening their wages. Lace was given out at the warehouses to mistresses or agents, who not only employed the younger women at their own homes, but also gave out work to others in the neighbouring villages. In some cases lace was thus passed on through the hands of two or three mistresses before it reached the embroideress, and not only did each exact a percentage of profit, but frauds were frequently committed by mistresses who took advantage of the workers' ignorance. Only when the price paid at the warehouse was ticketed on the lace, a method adopted by some of the manufacturers, could the worker be sure of obtaining her real earnings.¹

In 1840 the lace runners at Nottingham formed an association and organised a "turn-out," in the hope of putting an end to these abuses. The circular drawn up by the committee is interesting, not only from the point of view of trade organisation, but also as an example of women's early trade union activity:

"TO THE LACE-RUNNERS OF NOTTINGHAM AND ITS VICINITY."

"SISTERS,

"On Monday last, a meeting was held, in the Democratic Chapel, Rice's-place, Nottingham, to consider the best means of putting an end to the present injustice practised towards you, by those who call themselves mistresses; you are well aware, that they are in the constant habit of going round to the warehouses taking out nearly all the work, and dealing it out to you, at what price they think proper to give; that you are not only obliged to take work from what are called 'second-handed mistresses', but also from 'third-handed ones'; that in consequence of this method of giving out work, the lace-runners in many cases receive for their work not more than one-half the original price, the mistresses reserving to themselves the remainder for that most useful of all purposes, walking with your work to the ware house! Are you thus to be robbed of your hard-earned pittance to maintain these cormorants in idleness, and many of their husbands in drunkenness and profligacy;—no wonder that misery enters our dwellings—that we are in the depth of poverty, that our children are crying for bread, while there is a swarm of locusts hovering between us and the manufacturers, ready to devour one half of our hire, it is not enough that we have to compete with machines which, in many cases, supersedes needle-work; but are also robbed in the manner described above; is this state of things to exist? remember the Scripture saith, 'they that won't work, neither shall they eat.' Lace-runners of Nottingham, be determined, that this passage of scripture shall be verified, as far as you are concerned. The Committee whom you appointed to manage your affairs, have agreed that there shall be a turn out on Monday next, against this most unjust of all practices, and we trust that the lace-runners will be at their post and show their oppressors, 'that their occupation is gone.'

"We respectfully request, that the manufacturers will condescend to assist us in this just undertaking; we also trust that the male portion of society will assist us, as it is the cause of the poor working man as much as the females."

Committee

Mary Smith
Hannah Weatherbed
Mary Chapman
Ann Davis
SARAH HARGREAVE,
Secretary.

¹ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, pp. f 36, f 40-44.

At the same time a letter addressed with "due deference" to the manufacturers described the distress existing among the runners, and made some suggestions for its amelioration by better organisation: "We cannot ascertain to the fullest extent the price the mistresses receive from the warehouse, but we have ascertained that in many cases they (the mistresses) do not give to their hands more than half the original price. . . . We do not wish to dictate to you as to the manner you may think proper to give out work, but we most respectfully state as our opinion that the present has a most injurious tendency. We beg to submit to you as our opinion that if the manufacturers were to cause to be stamped on each lace-piece, the price to be given for running; or append to each piece a ticket stating the price, it would effectually put an end to the system of which we complain. The average earnings of the single women employed in the embroidery of lace, does not amount to more than 2s. 6d. per week! Comment is useless; we appeal to your humanity; we most respectfully solicit you to assist us in putting an end to this state of things. We are willing (and we think it reasonable) to allow the mistresses a penny in the shilling from our earnings, for the trouble they may take in going with our work to the warehouses."¹

Unfortunately for the runners, the turn-out was unsuccessful. Some of the younger women, threatened by the mistresses in whose employ they were, were afraid to take part in the strike; the majority of the agents opposed the plan, and opinion among the manufacturers was divided. The result was that the proposals were abandoned, and the old system continued.²

Closely connected with lace running was tambour work—embroidery on Brussels or Nottingham net with the tambour needle. This, an older domestic industry than lace running, was not practised so much in the north midlands as in London and other parts of the country. From its introduction in the eighteenth century, it was carried on largely by small masters and mistresses employing apprentice labour in domestic workshops. Generally bound by the parish for a long period of years, tambour workers frequently worked under incredibly bad conditions. Not only did unprincipled masters and mistresses compel them to work almost without interruption, but they were often half starved and miserably clothed and housed. In an appalling case which came into the Courts in 1801, a London tambour master, Jouvaux, was found "guilty of assaulting and very cruelly beating Susannah Archer, a child of fifteen years of age, his apprentice; of employing her to work in his business, and employing her beyond her strength, at unseasonable hours and times; of neglecting to provide for her proper clothing and necessities, whereby she was stated to be

¹ Papers relating to the Turn Out, quoted in *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, pp. 143-44. This apparently was not the first attempt at combination on the part of the laceworkers. In 1811, a parson magistrate at Loughborough was alarmed at the action of some women laceworkers who had shown "a Spirit of Combination to dictate to their Employers and to raise the price of their Wages." They had held meetings and sent emissaries to neighbouring towns to extend their organisation and collect funds. Hammond, *Town Labourer*, p. 262: quoting, H.O., 42, 118.

² *Report*, 1843, xiv, pp. 140, 143.

emaciated, and her health impaired."¹ Seventeen wretched apprentices were employed by this man and five, as a result of overwork and cruel treatment, had previously died "in a decline." A letter read by Mr. Justice Grose at the trial, stated that the "horrid state" of tambour apprentices generally it was impossible to describe, and "that their treatment was disgraceful to any civilized state."² In Lancashire, justices had already made recommendations for the checking of abuses in this trade and had circularised clerks of the peace and those responsible for the apprenticeship of parish children in other counties where tambour work was carried on. In parishes where justices were really concerned for the happiness and welfare of apprentices much could be, and doubtless was done, by investigation, to secure only suitable masters and mistresses for parish children. Nevertheless in 1843, the Children's Employment Commissioners found young tambour apprentices were still required in busy times to work fifteen and sixteen consecutive hours and cases of gross cruelty still occurred. In Essex the commissioner was called upon to investigate the sudden death of an apprentice who was found to have died "a natural death, accelerated by the cruelty of Thomas Bateman," her master. His report, indeed, suggests that many of the old evils, associated with parish apprenticeship were even at this date by no means eradicated. "Unfortunately," he writes, "such oppression is not confined to the trade of tambour workers. The power of unprincipled masters and mistresses to overwork and inflict misery on their unhappy apprentices, more particularly pauper and orphan apprentices, is fearful. Evidence to any extent, could be obtained, both in the metropolis and in the provinces, that the worst of masters and mistresses are constantly going to distant unions to select apprentices, and the opposition to the binding made by the officers of the parishes into which it is intended to bring them is but seldom successful."³

STRAW PLAITING.

Straw plaiting, like pillow lace, was a domestic industry which employed women and children chiefly in agricultural districts. The trade was not of importance till the end of the eighteenth century, when it spread rapidly and the number of workers greatly increased. The art of plaiting had, however, been practised by country people for a considerable period, and both plaiting and hat making were well established in the counties of Bedford, Buckingham and Hertfordshire at the beginning of the eighteenth century. An interesting petition of "The Poor Straw Hat Makers" in 1719, against the importation of foreign hats and straws, throws light on the industry at that date:

"The Making of Straw Hats, Bonnets, Baskets, and divers other things out of Wheat-Straw, hath been an Employment time out of

¹ *Lancaster Gazette*, July 4, 1801.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Report*, 1843, xiv, p. 1258.

mind, for the poor People both Men, Women and Children from Four to Fourscore Years of Age in the aforesaid Counties [Hertford, Bedford, Buckingham, etc.] and other Places, by which many thousands have gained a comfortable Subsistence and kept themselves and their Families from being Chargeable to the Parishes.

"The Farmers Wives, Children and Servants, do at their spare Hours Earn, some 10, some 20, and some 30^s per Annum by Manufacturing there own Straw, which is a good Article towards paying their Rent.

"That by Six Penny-worth of Straw, bought of the Farmers, the Poor People can make by their Industry and Work, Eight, Nine, and often times Ten Shillings.

"That when so wrought up and Manufactured, they carry every Week to Market, for which they have ready Money, without any Deduction, Stoppage, or Obligation to take part in Goods, or even so much as to Deal with those that Buy their Hats, etc. . . ."¹

A few years later Defoe noted that "straw work" was increasing in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire,² and in the middle of the century the people around Hempstead were said to earn "some thousand pounds every year in the mean manufacture of straw hats."³ At Dunstable women were engaged in making "hats, boxes, baskets," and all sorts of fancy articles in coloured straw which they sold to the travellers who passed through the town,⁴ and when Eden was there in 1797, women could earn 6s. to 12s. a week at straw work which by then had become the "staple manufacture." "This business," he writes, "has given employment, for the last 20 years, to every woman who wished to work; and for ten years back, straw work has sold well, particularly in the spring. Earnings in the last four years have been exceedingly great, which in some measure accounts for Poor Rates not rising."⁵

During the last few years of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth, the industry appears to have increased out of all proportion to its former extent. Hitherto the fine straws imported from Italy had been much preferred to the heavy clumsy hats produced from English wheat straw, but with the war and cessation of foreign imports came the opportunity for the English trade to expand. Attempts were made to improve the quality of English straw grown for the purpose,⁶ and the invention (about 1801) of a simple tool for

¹ *The Case of the Poor Straw Hat Makers . . . Printed as a Broad Sheet, B.M., 357, b 3 (117).* Petitions calling attention to the decline of the trade were sent to the Commons in 1719 from numerous villages in Bedford, Buckingham, Hertford, and the Committee appointed to consider them reported that the importation of foreign chips and straws "is very prejudicial to the Manufacturers of Straws in this kingdom, and has been, and is, the Occasion of a very great Decay in that Trade." *Commons' Journals*, February 2, 3, 4, 6, 1719.

² *Tour*, (1927 ed.), vol. ii, pp. 513-4.

³ Postlethwayt, *Dictionary*, 1751. Art., Hertfordshire.

⁴ Young, *Northern Tour*, i, p. 16.

⁵ Eden, *State of the Poor*, ii, p. 2.

⁶ Much was done by the Society of Arts to encourage experiments. In 1805 the Gold Medal of the Society was awarded to Mr. Wm. Corston, for an imitation of Leghorn plait in rye straw, grown by him in Norfolk. "I have been three years in bringing it to its present state of perfection, and I now trust it will not only prove of public advantage to this country, by preventing many thousand pounds

splitting the straws, made possible all kinds of fine and fancy plaits, and enormously increased the demand.¹ The wages of plaiters went up by leaps and bounds, and in their eagerness to obtain the new patterns, dealers were content to collect it from the cottagers five yards at a time, and to meet the plaiters on their way to market at three and four in the morning.² "By the mere invention of the *splitting of a straw*," wrote an enthusiastic dealer in 1810, "a source of employment has been discovered which has increased the returns in that branch not less than 3 to £400,000 annually . . . since the introduction of spinning by hand, no source of employment has been discovered which promises to afford occupation to so many thousands."³

It was just at this time that the decline of wool spinning left a great number of women in the southern counties eagerly seeking some new occupation. Parish officers with an eye on the poor rates and philanthropists genuinely concerned for the loss of income among the poor, were quick to take an interest in any activity that promised to replace spinning among women and children, and their enterprise in introducing straw plaiting was responsible for the growth of the industry in many new districts. Arthur Young gives an amusing account of the public-spirited efforts of the Marchioness of Buckingham to introduce the straw industry at Gosfield about 1790. At first no one would wear the "miserably coarse bungled hats" which the inexperienced plaiters produced. Lady Buckingham therefore "decorated one with ribbons, and wore it in the sight of the whole village; the Marquis went to church in another, and laid it during service in full sight of the congregation; but it was not easy matter to introduce the fashion amongst the farmers' daughters and others; gradually however, by extraordinary efforts, and bringing an instructor from Dunstable, and everything necessary, the fabric was improved, and the business well established. It spread over all the vicinity: girls were brought from Nethersfield and Halstead for instruction, but not without difficulty: all such, however, have been long at an end; and last year [1806] Mr. Thurlow took some pains to ascertain the earnings by straw plait in the parish of Gosfield, containing no more than 453 souls: and found it to amount to about £1,700. As in Hertfordshire so here also, a cry has been raised against it, the young women earning

a year being sent abroad, but will also be the means of diffusing private happiness to some hundreds of poor families, by the healthy and productive employment it will afford their children." *Transactions, Society of Arts*, vol. xxiii, pp. 223-4. In 1810 he writes: This country is now beginning to reap those advantages which I foretold to the Society six years ago, and that many hundreds of women and children are at present employed in the various parts of the kingdom in the manufacture of this article. I sold to two persons, in less than two months, upwards of 5,000 scores, and had an order from a third for 2,000. But this bears but a small proportion to the demand." *Ibid.*, vol. xxviii, p. 131.

The invention was variously attributed to an English "inferior mechanic" and to French prisoners in this country in 1803-6. The tool was first made in bone. It was "about two inches long, brought to a point, behind which a set of cutters was arranged in a circle. The point entered the straw pipe, separating it into so many equal sized splints." Later, cutters were made in iron, and improved so that four or five different sized splitters could be used in one frame. *Annals*, xli, p. 491. Austin, *The Straw Trade*, pp. 16-17.

¹ Tansley, Paper read before Society of Arts in 1860, *Journal of Arts*, ix, p. 70.

² *Transactions, Society of Arts*, vol. xxviii, p. 132.

so much, that maids for domestic purposes are not easily to be had; but the poor are in a situation which nothing else could have effected."¹ From Gosfield the industry spread and became well established in other parts of Essex.²

Similar efforts were equally successful elsewhere. At Avebury, in Wiltshire, women who had previously been spinning were, in 1800, in great distress and reduced to picking stones and repairing roads for a parish allowance of 1s. 6d. to 3s. weekly, according to the price of the loaf. The next year the parish officers hired an instructress from London and "all the females were invited" to learn to plait. A market was found with a dealer in Bath, and within a few months nearly a hundred women and children, of whom the majority had been supported by the parish, were earning from 3s. to 10s. weekly.³ Such examples were not without effect elsewhere. Articles and pamphlets encouraged farmers and landowners to provide employment in this way, until Arthur Young, concerned to find that spinning in a certain agricultural district had not been replaced by any other industry, could exclaim, "This is the fault of the higher classes."⁴

During the early nineteenth century the straw manufacture spread rapidly in Essex, and in the southern districts of Bedfordshire, Hertford and Buckingham.⁵ It was largely because these counties produced the most suitable straw for the English manufacture that the industry became of greater importance here, but it was also carried on in other districts, particularly in Wiltshire, Hampshire, Dorset, Norfolk and Suffolk.

Ultimately, the straw industry supported many different classes of workers, as well as the factors or middlemen, but in the early days the organisation was very simple. At first the women or their husbands went to the barns and bought the straw from the farmers. "They give 2d., 3d. and 4d. a pound for it, and sort it themselves," says Young in 1801.⁶ The great bundles of straw were then carried home, cut into lengths, split and steeped ready for plaiting. Sometimes where there were several workers in a family, one member, usually the mother, spent her time in preparing straws for the rest. The plait made, it was either taken direct to market, or bleached first in the cottage by means of a simple sulphur box. As the trade increased a class of factors made their appearance, who bought the straw from the farmers, sorted it, and sold it again to women in smaller quantities.⁷

¹ *Essex*, ii, p. 395.

² In 1807 large earnings from straw plait were being made at Coggeshall and at Bocking and Braintree, where some of the shops purchased plait from the women to the value of £60 to £70 weekly. At Headingham one dealer paid out £1500 during the year. *Ibid.*, p. 392.

³ *Twentieth Report of the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor*, 1804, p. 90.

⁴ Young, *Hertfordshire*, p. 222. *Hints for those desirous of Introducing the Manufacture of Split Straw*, was published by the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor. A little later Cobbett became an ardent advocate of the industry, both in articles and in his *Cottage Economy*.

⁵ Batchelor's *Bedfordshire*, pp. 594-5. Young's *Hertfordshire*, p. 222. St. J. Priest's *Buckinghamshire*, p. 346.

⁶ *Hertfordshire*, pp. 223-4.

⁷ "The buyer usually draws the straw from the sheaf and pays five shillings for a bundle which weighs about sixty pounds," (1813), *Hertfordshire County Sessions Records*, ii, p. 238: quoted, V. C. H., *Hertfordshire*, iv, p. 252.

Later, straw cutting, bleaching and dyeing became separate occupations employing different classes of workers, and the plaiters purchased their straw split and ready for working in local markets.¹ Women who bought their own material in this way were free to sell their work in the best market, but as the trade developed, some dealers gave out straw as out-work, in which case the plaiters did no bargaining, but merely received wages for their labour.² Dyed and imported straws seem always to have been given out by the factors in this way.³

The actual plaiting was done in the cottages, in plaiting schools for young children, or as the villagers walked through the lanes. The fact that the work was light and could be done standing or walking made the occupation a much healthier one than many other domestic industries which were purely sedentary. "As you walked about the lanes," says a writer in the *Essex Review* of the period about 1840, "you scarcely met a woman, or child over five years old, whose fingers were not busily plaiting—the bristling roll of finished plait under one arm: the bunch of split straws under the other; and frequently a selection from these [was] carried in the mouth, where most of them were moistened before they found their way into the piece."⁴ Although the plaiters were chiefly women and girls, boys generally worked at the trade "till big enough to go to harvest work," and during the winter in intervals of bad weather and unemployment, agricultural labourers could earn nearly as much as their wages by coarse plaiting at home.⁵ When finished the plait was made up into scores ready for sale.

It was to the advantage of the plaiters to take their work to the local market and sell it themselves, although it often meant a walk of six to ten miles in the early morning. When the prosperous days of the early nineteenth century were over, many of the workers seem to have lived from hand to mouth, and either could not or would not wait for the weekly market. Frequently they sold two or three days' work at a time to travelling dealers, or the factors who were to be found in every district. Sometimes it was exchanged for goods at the village shop: "We get a bit of plait, and we take it and get a pottle loaf, or two pottle loaves, for our plait."⁶ Necessity compelled such workers to sell at any price; consequently their earnings were

¹ Gibbs, *History of Aylesbury*, p. 668.

² Deposition of Wm. Price regarding Lydia Badricks, charged with having made away with certain plait. Accused had been in the habit of making plait for deponent and was paid as she bought it. On Wed. morning last she was given two score and a half of plait which was worth at least 2s. 6d., *Hertfordshire Sessions Records*, ii, p. 410.

³ Plaiters of "common straw" "sell the plait to anybody they choose: but, with respect to the coloured straw, they are answerable to the person who lets out the coloured work, and, with respect to the bents [i.e. Tuscan straw], they are obliged to fetch the bents out, and to take the work back plaited to the person from whom they fetched the bents." 26th and 27th Reports from S.C. on Poor Law Amendment Act, 1838, xviii, Part ii, p. 9.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 224-5: quoted V. C. H., *Essex*, ii, p. 376.

⁵ 26th Report on Poor Law Amendment Act, 1838, xviii, Part ii, p. 8.

⁶ 26th and 27th Report on Poor Law Amendment Act, 1838, xviii, Part ii, pp. 9, 10.

considerably lower than those who could choose their market and save the factor's profits.¹

Descriptions of the straw markets are reminiscent of Defoe's account of the woollen market at Leeds. Piles of "golden plait" were set out on stalls all down the long street, and loaded carts brought in the supplies collected in distant villages. The street was crowded with straw dealers and buyers—agents for big houses and small bonnet makers "who chaffer with the plaiters for a score or two of plait"—and women and girls who stood on the pavement, "each with their scores of plait looped on their arms." When a bell rang, at 7 a.m. or 9 a.m., according to the time of year, the business began, and within an hour or two was ended and the street empty.² Women and dealers retired to the inn where accounts were usually settled,³ and having purchased fresh supplies of straw, the plaiters set out on what was frequently a long tramp home.

Although plait markets were held all the year round, trade was seasonal and earnings generally fell considerably during the winter. At the beginning of spring, says Young at Berkhamstead in 1801, "a good hand could earn from 14s. to 18s. a week, which was the price of thirty yards of twist: but now it sells only at 4s. per score."⁴ Plaiters were rarely without work, but it should be noted that many of the high wages quoted were only obtainable in the spring months, and fluctuations of from 50 per cent. to 100 per cent. brought average wages to a much lower level.⁵ Those who could afford it kept back the plait made in the autumn and winter months until a more favourable market came in the spring, but it is doubtful whether any number of plaiters were in a position to do this.⁶

The highest wages undoubtedly, were earned in the early days of the nineteenth century, immediately after the introduction of split plait, the early patterns of which fetched as much as 12s. a score.⁷ In Hertfordshire in 1801, women who had given up spinning for straw plait were earning "three or four times" as much as they had previously earned by the wheel, and wages of £1 1s. and £2 2s. were quoted. "After six weeks learning," says Young, "a girl has earned 8s. a week; and some clever little girls even 15s. The farmers complain of it as doing mischief, for it makes the poor saucy, and no servants can be

¹ *Ibid.*, "There are always persons who buy the plait from persons in needy circumstances, and in small portions, two or three days' work at once, and those persons do not get so good a price as if they take it to the market at Luton."

² Austin, *The Straw Trade*, pp. 19, 35, 36: quoting Knight, *British Almanac and Companion*.

³ Information of Mary Hawkins, of Cadington: "That having sold some straw plait to Mr. James Butterfield, she went to a public house at Luton to receive her money, and whilst she was in the parlour where Mr. Butterfield was paying for several parcels of plait which he had purchased . . . etc." *Bedfordshire County Sessions Records*, i, p. 94.

⁴ *Hertfordshire* (1804), p. 222.

⁵ 20th Report of Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor (1804), pp. 104-5. Batchelor's *Bedfordshire*, 1808, pp. 504-5.

⁶ 13rd Report on Poor Law Amendment Act, 1838, xviii, Part ii, p. 13.

⁷ Tansley, *Journal of Arts*, ix, p. 70. A good worker would make three score yards of plait in a week, exceptional workers sometimes did a score a day, but much depended on the pattern. 26th and 27th Report on Poor Law Amendment Act, 1838, xviii, Part ii, p. 8.

procured, or any field work done, where this manufacture establishes itself." In a note on these unusual wages Young adds that the facts were too universally known in Hertfordshire and the information too often repeated to permit his doubting they were true.¹ It might be expected that these unusually good wages would at least have released young children from adding their quota to the family income, but on the contrary, the tendency of the age was to consider high wages as sound an argument for children's labour as low ones. "At Dunstable," says Young in 1801, "they begin to pick the straw at four years old; plait at five; and at six earn from 1s. 6d. to 2s. 6d. a week; at seven they use the instrument, and earn 1s. a day; some girls of ten years old earn 12s. a week; and one was named who at eight earned as much."² The cost of the straw was usually about 1s. a week.

Good wages, with seasonal fluctuations, continued to the end of the war. In 1809, when a Dorset labourer's wage was 9s. a week; his wife or daughter might earn 30s. if a good hand at plaiting straw. The same wage was given for Buckinghamshire in 1813, with the result that the wages of dairymaids had had to be increased, and only with difficulty could they be procured at all.³

About 1820 the English trade began to suffer from the importation of Leghorn hats, which were again admitted after the war. Much as English plaiting had improved, the split straw was still inferior to the fine straws of Italy.⁴ Wages, moreover, were soon reduced by the competition of an ever-increasing number of workers,⁵ especially after the lacemakers, whose own trade was depressed, began to take up straw plaiting. For some years the plaiters were in great distress, and suffered much unemployment.⁶ Once again, however, the Society of Arts came to the rescue, and as a result of the premiums offered by them (1822-27), and the accounts of various experiments published in the *Transactions*, English dealers began to import Italian straws to be plaited in this country.⁷ In the seven years 1825-32, imports of foreign straw rapidly increased from 629 pounds to 48,054 pounds, and while the use of English straw continued, "English made Tuscan" employed thousands of plaiters for many years.⁸

The high wages of the early part of the century were, however, never again realised. The returns made to the Poor Law Commissioners in 1833, show that in Bedfordshire women earned from 5s. to 10s. a week, and in Buckinghamshire, Essex and Hertfordshire, only from 2s. to 6s., according to the season and quality of plait.⁹ In 1838, the average wage in Bedfordshire for women working from twelve to fourteen hours a day was 5s. to 7s. a week, and married women as a

¹ Young, *Hertfordshire*, pp. 222-3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 223.

³ V. C. H., *Dorset*, p. 227. St. J. Priest's *Buckinghamshire*, pp. 334-6.

⁴ *Transactions, Society of Arts*, vol. xi, p. 218.

⁵ *Poor Laws*, 1834, xxviii, pp. 229A-230A.

⁶ *Reports of Poor Rate Returns*, 1824, vi, Appendix F, p. 15; 1825, iv, Appendix G, p. 17.

⁷ *Transactions*, vols. xi, pp. 222-5; vol. xii, p. 98; vol. xiv, pp. 59-65.

⁸ McCulloch, *Dictionary of Commerce*, 1834 (2nd ed.), Art., Hats.

⁹ *Poor Laws*, 1834, xxx. Returns from Parishes under Counties.

rule only earned 2s. or 2s. 6d.¹ Apart from seasonal fluctuations wages remained round this level for the next twenty years, and in 1860 the clear wages of a skilful plaiter in times of good trade were still 5s. to 7s. 6d. a week.²

Hat and bonnet making from plaited straw was an industry chiefly carried on by women. Young describes Mrs. Muns at Berkhamstead as "a great purchaser" of plait in 1801. "She buys the twist of the poor, and makes it up into various fabricks, chiefly bonnets,"³ Hat-makers were to be found in most villages in the straw-plaiting counties, while early nineteenth-century directories show that a number of women were thus in business for themselves in the larger towns.⁴ The plait was first sewn, then shaped and pressed on wooden blocks, and according to the Book of Trades, half a guinea a week was a common wage for a hatmaker in 1806.⁵ As the straw-plait trade increased, hatmaking came more and more into the control of capitalist dealers, who either gave out the plait to be sewed in the cottages, or established workshops of their own. After the 'seventies, English plaiting declined rapidly as a result of the cheap plait imported from China and Japan and the Continent. Sewing, on the other hand, became increasingly important and finally replaced the plaiting industry altogether; to-day it continues both as a factory and a home industry.

GLOVEMAKING

The chief centres of the glove trade at the end of the eighteenth century were Worcester, Woodstock, Yeovil, Hereford, Ludlow, and Leominster, while much of the actual making was done in the villages for miles around these towns. While the industry was not confined to women, they formed by far the greatest proportion of the workers, and the expansion of trade in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries provided employment for an increasing number of women drawn from the agricultural classes. As was always the case where a domestic industry flourished, complaints were numerous in several districts in the early nineteenth century that glovemaking was raising the wages of servants and that it "spoiled the women for domestic and husbandry employment."

The trade was only in its infancy at Woodstock when Arthur Young was there in 1767, and only employed about forty or fifty people. By 1809 it had increased to employ between fifty and sixty men, and "no fewer than 1,400 to 1,500 women and girls" as sewers.⁶ More work was also being sent out into the surrounding villages. The resolution entered in the Burgesses' Book of Burford in 1818: "Agreed that a person shall be engaged to learn one person in every poor

¹ 24th Report on Poor Law Amendment Act, 1838, xviii, Part II, p. 22. *Ibid.* 33rd Report, p. 13.

² Tansley, *Journal of Arts*, ix, p. 72.

³ *Hertfordshire*, p. 222.

⁴ See Pigot's *Directories*, 1823—

⁵ *Op. cit.*, Part I, p. 121.

⁶ *Six Weeks' Tour*, p. 98. *General View of Oxfordshire*, p. 329.

family to make gloves",¹ suggests that the industry was regarded as an increasingly important source of employment for women in agricultural districts. At Worcester the numbers were much larger. Young states "several thousands" of hands were employed in the glove manufacture there in 1768; Nash gives 4,000 for Worcester and the neighbourhood in 1782, and four years later a petition to the Commons from the Worcester manufacturers says that the glove trade "has, for Many Years, been the Support of upwards of 10,000 poor People in the said City, and its Environs, chiefly Women and Children, great Numbers of whom are now out of Employment, through a general and distressing Stagnation of their Trade."² All these estimates are vague and the last almost certainly an exaggeration. Calculations were usually based on the weekly or annual output of gloves—an unsatisfactory method in view of the large numbers of children and part-time workers employed, to whom either too little, or undue prominence might be given. At the most then, such computations can only indicate the comparative extent of an industry. The manufacture continued to flourish in the early days of the nineteenth century, and in the 1820's Hull credits the trade with 30,000 men, women and children for the whole county of Worcester, 20,000 in Somerset, 3,000 in Hereford and 1,000 in Ludlow.³ In each case women and children formed the greater proportion of workers.

The trade was organised by master glovers, who at the end of the eighteenth century frequently employed a large number of workers for different processes. Men's work was connected with tanning, staining and cutting out the skins, while sewing was done exclusively by women and girls. In the seventeenth century women appear sometimes to have been apprenticed as glovers, and although the Charter of Incorporation granted to the glovers in 1638 expressed disapproval of the practice as though irregular,⁴ apprenticeship does not seem to have been entirely discontinued.⁵ By the eighteenth century, however, few if any women attained to the position of master glovers by apprenticeship. Women included in the lists of glovers in early nineteenth century directories, were most probably widows and daughters carrying on a family business in which they had assisted and which they were quite capable to control,⁶ but apart from these possible exceptions, women in the trade at this period were engaged only in sewing the work given out by the glove masters or distributed by their agents in the villages.

¹ Monk, W. J., *History of Burford*, p. 101: quoted V. C. H., *Oxford*, ii, p. 257.

² *Northern Tour* (2nd ed.), vol. iii, p. 306. Nash, *History of Worcester*, ii, Appendix cxiv. *Commons' Journals*, February 17, 1786.

³ Hull, *History of the Glove Trade*, 1834, pp. 60-71.

⁴ The Preamble of the Charter states that glovers and their families "are much decayed and impoverished by reason of the great confluence of persons of the same arte, trade, or misery . . . that, for the most parte, have scarcely served any time thereunto . . . taking apprentices under them, many in number, as well women as men . . ." Quoted, Hull, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁵ e.g. *Middlesex Sessions Book*, 1705. "Order for the discharge of Martha Wilson, daughter of Katherine Gargrey, apprenticed to Owen Salisbury, glover." Hardy, *Middlesex County Records*, p. 293.

⁶ See Pigot's *Directories* for centres of the glove trade, e.g. 1823, Woodstock Sarah Cross, glover; Sarah Green, glover, etc. *Directory*, Oxfordshire, 1823, p. 453.

The monotony which is said to arise from the subdivision of labour in modern industrial organisation is sometimes contrasted with a so-called joy of craftsmanship, which is supposed to have existed in earlier days and is often connected with the domestic system. Actual evidence of any such pleasure is, however, completely lacking in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, at any rate so far as women's domestic industries are concerned. In the glove trade, for example, a sewer was rarely capable of completing a glove. Wages depended upon speed and efficiency, and a worker therefore, usually concentrated on one section, and "sewing the sides," "tambouring the backs," "sewing the backs," "welting the bottom" were each performed by different hands.¹ Early in the nineteenth century a machine for stitching glove backs was introduced but was little used before the middle of the century. In 1834 Hull writes, "The sewing machine does not save anything in labour, and is destructive to the eyesight."² Its slow progress may have been due to imperfection and possibly to some prejudice. By 1843, "patent" or machine work was increasing and was paid at a slightly higher rate, although in the opinion of some of the workers there was "more trouble with it."³

The earnings of sewers varied according to their skill and the amount of time they devoted to the work. Single women were most often regular workers, beginning at 6 a.m. or daylight in winter and continuing till 10 p.m., with two hours for meals. Children who began at six or seven years of age under a mistress in a glove school worked from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the six months they were learning, and afterwards from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. A great many of the workers, however, wives of labourers and small tradesmen, worked at odd times, sometimes doing "as much in three days as they will at other times in a fortnight," and their earnings varied accordingly.⁴ Contemporary statements of wages, some of which follow, may be taken as referring to full-time, regular workers, unless otherwise stated.

According to the *Parent's Directory*, women glovemakers in London in 1761 could earn the high wage of 9s. to 10s. a week if "quick hands", but, the writer adds, "most part of the Gloves, worn in London, are made in the country, where labour is cheaper than it is in the city."⁵ The truth of this is borne out by Young, who gives 4s. to 5s. for women, and 1s. 6d. to 3s. 6d. for children at Worcester in 1768.⁶ Later, during a period of flourishing trade at Worcester in 1809, he states that the 1,400 to 1,500 women and girls employed were earning from 8s. to 12s. a week "according to their diligence"—an unusually good wage for women if correct.⁷

A few years later, in 1826, Huskinson's removal of the prohibition of foreign gloves was followed by a depression in the English trade,

¹ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, p. d 34.

² Hull, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

³ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, pp. d 35, d 39.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. d 34, d 39, and vol. xiii, pp. 129-130.

⁵ Collyer, *op. cit.*, p. 153. In 1834, Hull estimated the numbers of men and women in the glove trade in London at from 1,500 to 1,700. *History of the Glove Trade*, p. 51.

⁶ *Northern Tour* (2nd ed.), iii, p. 306.

⁷ *General View of Oxfordshire*, p. 329.

in which all glovemakers suffered severely. French gloves were both better and cheaper and the English trade was affected immediately. At the same time, the cotton, woollen and silk gloves produced at Nottingham and Leicester came into fashion,¹ and this two-fold competition had disastrous effects on the leather glove trade. By 1832 the output at Worcester had dwindled to rather less than one-third of what it had been in 1825, and failures of glovers were reported from all centres.²

The chronic distress and rapid rise in poor rates which always followed when domestic industries failed, again emphasise the importance of married women's contributions to the family income, and the helpless position of single women in former times. Uneducated, untrained, the field of employment was so hopelessly restricted that periodical fluctuations in any one domestic industry left its workers with no alternative but the parish. For agricultural employment most of them were unfitted by long hours and the confinement of domestic work.

In the depression in the glove trade now under review, the amount of work was first reduced by half, only to be followed by the dismissal of large numbers of workers.³ At Woodstock, women who had previously been earning a comfortable subsistence were by 1833 reduced to working on the roads at 4*d.* a day.⁴ In Worcester (1834) women's earnings were reduced from 6*s.* to 2*s.* a week, and in the villages through the whole county the amount of employment that could be obtained was trifling.⁵ At Yeovil the Poor Law Commissioners found that the women in the workhouse had "been mostly glove-makers."⁶ From all centres came accounts of distressed families and alarming rises in the poor rates. The wages of agricultural labourers in gloving districts were still only from 7*s.* to 9*s.* a week; consequently a falling off in women's earnings usually meant that the family had to be partially supported by the parish. It is therefore scarcely surprising that at Worcester the poor rates were trebled in the period 1825-1832, and at Woodstock and Yeovil they were almost doubled. In the latter place distress was so serious that dragoons had to be quartered in the town and immediate neighbourhood.⁷ At both Worcester and Yeovil manufacturers attempted to cheapen the cost of production by employing women already subsidised by the poor rates, which again lowered the wages and increased the distress of those who tried to maintain their independence.⁸

The period of depression and a considerable amount of unemployment

¹ In 1831, Leicester was turning out as many as 50,000 pairs of "Berlin" gloves a week. 'Commons' Debates, *Hansard*, Third Series, January 31, 1832. Speech of Poulett Thomson.

² Hull, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

³ Lords' Debates, *Hansard*, March 9, 1832. Viscount Strangford.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Poor Laws*, 1834, xxx, p. 582a.

⁶ *Poor Laws*, 1834, Appendix, B 2, xxxv, p. 206g.

⁷ Lords' Debates, *Hansard*, March 9, 1832. Viscount Strangford. Hull, *op. cit.*, pp. 62, 72.

⁸ *Poor Laws*, 1834, Appendix A, Part ii, xxix, p. 38a; Appendix B, Part ii, xxxv, p. 206g.

continued until about 1840, after which the definite attempts made to improve the quality and workmanship of English gloves began to have effect and prosperity slowly returned. Inquiries in connection with the Children's Employment Commission (1841-3) showed that while at Worcester the trade was "almost extinct,"¹ it was slowly improving in other centres. In the immediate neighbourhood of Yeovil there were said to be at least five or six thousand women and children employed and although wages were still from 20 per cent. to 25 per cent. lower than before the depression, women could commonly earn from 4s. to 5s., and occasionally a skilful woman could reach 6s. to 7s.² Out of this the sewers had to provide their own needles and silk. About 2d. a week was generally reckoned for needles, and 4d. to 5d. for silk. The latter, the sewers were compelled to purchase from the manufacturer, a source of much complaint, since he generally contrived to make a profit on the transaction.³

HAND KNITTING

In the eighteenth century hand knitting was only a relic of what had once been an important industry. The stocking frame, invented in 1589, made slow progress for a century, but by the beginning of the eighteenth century the issue between the hand and framework knitters was already decided. In 1704 Defoe writes: "The city of Norwich and parts adjoining were for some Ages employ'd in manufacturing Stuffs and Stockings. The latter Trade, which was once considerable, is in a manner wholly transported to London by the vast quantity of Hose woven by the Frame, which is a Trade within this twenty years almost wholly new . . . and whereas the Hose Trade from Norwich once return'd at least 5,000s. per Week, and as some say twice that Sum, 'tis not now worth naming."⁴

The evidence of tourists and topographical writers, however, suggests that in spite of the greater speed and output of the frame, hand knitting for market continued on a small scale in many parts of the country throughout the eighteenth century, and in some isolated districts well into the nineteenth. In the North was the old established Westmorland knitting industry, with its centre and market at Kendal, extending through the villages of Westmorland and Cumberland and over the Yorkshire borders into the Dales. Here apparently the knitters were not affected by the competition of the frame, at any rate during the first half of the eighteenth century. "Here you see all the People, great and small, a Knitting," writes Defoe, in 1724, "and at Richmond you have a Market of Woollen or Yarn Stockings, which they make

¹ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiii, p. 6.

² *Ibid.*, xiii, pp. 128-130.

³ e.g. Sewers were obliged to give 5d. for two drachms of silk which they could have purchased for 4d. in the town. Evidence Sarah Harris. *Ibid.*, xiv, p. d 34.

⁴ *Giving Aims No Charity*, p. 19. The frame apparently had not affected the Norwich trade before 1678, since Firmin then quotes Chamberlain's *Present State of England*, "that in the city of Norwich it hath been of late years computed and found, that yearly children from six to ten years of age have gained £12,000 more than what they have spent, and that chiefly by knitting fine Jersey Stockings." *Some Proposals for the Employing of the Poor* (1787 reprint), p. 3.

of coarse and ordinary, and they are sold accordingly; for the smallest siz'd Stockings for Children are here sold for eighteen Pence per dozen, or three half Pence a pair, sometimes less. . . . It is indeed a very considerable Manufacture in it self, and of late mightily increased too."¹ At Kendal as late as 1768, stocking knitting was still the "chief manufactory" employing, according to Young, nearly 5,000 workers, including wool combers, spinners and knitters. "They make 550 dozen a week the year round," he writes. "Price per pair is from 22d. to 6s., but generally from 22d. to 4s."² Doncaster continued famous for its "knit waistcoats and petticoats, gloves and stockings" until well past the middle of the century.³

Dorset, "once famous for making the finest, best, and highest Priz'd Knit Stockings in England," felt the effects of frame competition early in the eighteenth century,⁴ but on a smaller scale the industry was still carried on in different parts of the county, including Wimborne, where in 1793 there were 1,000 women and children engaged in knitting worsted stockings.⁵ In Hampshire, in 1799, there were 1,000 of "the poorer sort of women" in Christchurch and neighbourhood knitting silk stockings and worsted hose,⁶ and among other well-known knitting centres in the eighteenth century were Shepton Mallet, Wells, Glastonbury, Evesham, Bridgnorth, and Nantwich. In Wales and Scotland, where there were few machines, knitting was a widespread industry, although in both countries labour was so cheap that it had chiefly to be carried on as a subsidiary occupation.⁷ At Bala, the Welsh centre of the stocking trade, "great markets" were held "every Saturday morning, when from two to five hundred pounds' worth" of woollen stockings were sold each week (1781).⁸ while the yearly export from Aberdeen was in 1805 estimated at £100,000.⁹

The chief market for the English knitting industry was London, where there was a good demand for hand knitted articles of all kinds and especially for stockings, which were believed to be warmer and more durable than those made by the frame. From Kendal and the Yorkshire Dales (1768) goods were brought up weekly by "broad wheel wagons" and pack horses, and occasionally middlemen from the Dales rode up to London "to deal personally with the merchants of Cheapside."¹⁰ In the Home Counties, the knitters were employed by London firms, which sent out materials to the villages and received

¹ *Tow*, (1927 ed.), ii, pp. 629-630.

² *Northern Tow*, iii, p. 113.

³ Postlethwayt, *Dictionary*. Art., Yorkshire.

⁴ Defoe, *Tow* (1927 ed.), i, pp. 208, 217-8.

⁵ Claridge's *Dorset*, p. 40.

⁶ *Hampshire Repository*, 1799, p. 165.

⁷ "Stockings in many parts of Scotland are knit much cheaper than they can anywhere be wrought upon the loom." Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, ed. Cannan i, p. 119.

⁸ Pennant's *Tow in Wales*, ii, pp. 67-8. Davies in 1799 says this statement "tallies pretty well with information now collected." *Welsh hosiery* then estimated the annual value at £17,000 to £19,000. *Survey of North Wales*, p. 403.

⁹ Macpherson, *Annals of Commerce*, Appendix iv. *Commercial Gazetteer*, vol. iv. Art., Aberdeen. Two-thirds of the exports went to Holland and Germany and the rest to England, Portugal and America.

¹⁰ Young, *Northern Tow*, vol. iii, p. 133. *Life and Letters of Adam Sedgwick*, ed. Clark and Hughes, p. 16.

back the finished goods according to order—the village shopkeeper frequently acting as an agent.¹ In Wales, farmers' and cottagers' wives worked up a good deal of the wool produced on their own mountain sides, and supplies were also purchased at the great wool fairs held yearly in Denbighshire.² The women generally carded and span their own wool and sold their knitted articles at the local market either to hosiers or middlemen.³

In spite of the demand for hand knitted articles, the remuneration for knitting was in most cases appallingly low. This was only to be expected where the hand knitters had to compete with the frame, but it is noticeable that even for highly-priced articles, the knitters had little return. The finest and best stockings knitted in Scotland were commonly sold in the mid-eighteenth century from 14s. to 30s. a pair, and some superfine ones even reached £4 a pair, "yet the poor who knit them," says a contemporary, "if they get two pence sterling a day, think they make a good day's work."⁴ At Kendal, in 1768, when trade was "as good as ever known," women only earned 2s. 6d. and children 2s. a week, and the same rates were still being paid when Eden was in Westmorland in 1795.⁵ At Christchurch, in 1799, wages were rather better, and women earned on an average about 4s. a week. This may, however, have been the result of longer hours and more constant occupation, since the writer implies an ignorance of domestic duties—"It is an observation that young women brought up in this employment rarely make good servants."⁶ In Wales, in 1794, a woman, who "with very close application" might card, spin and knit four pairs of coarse stockings a week, had at the end 1s. for her profit. Yet "this pitiful and ill-judged employment" was the only means of subsistence within the reach of poorer women in many extensive districts in Wales.⁷ There can be little wonder that in spite of their "unexampled industry", Welsh women who were dependent on the knitting industry were "obliged to beg to make up the deficiencies of their earnings."⁸ Finer work paid very little better, and the result of these low earnings was that every possible moment was occupied in knitting. "Nothing is more common," writes a tourist, in 1814, "than to see the women trotting rapidly to market, with a most unconscionable load upon their heads, and with their hands, as if they were doing nothing else, actively and incessantly employed in knitting."⁹

The truth was that it had become almost impossible for a woman

¹ *Poor Laws*, 1834, xxvii, p. 51. Evidence of Sleeth.

² Pennant's *Tour in Wales*, ii, pp. 8, 68.

³ The premiums awarded by the Cardigan Society for the Encouragement of Agriculture and Industry, give some idea of what a cottager's wife or child could earn in spare time knitting. In 1796, Anne Thomas was awarded £1 10s. for knitting without assistance 29 pairs of stockings, sold for £5 os. 6d. Mary Philip, knitted 43 pairs sold for £3 17s., and Mary David, 48 pairs sold for £4 os. 4d. *Annals*, xxiv, p. 304.

⁴ Campbell, *London Tradesman*, p. 215. Postlethwayt, *Dictionary*. Art. Aberdeen.

⁵ Young, *Northern Tour*, iii, p. 133. Eden, *State of the Poor*, iii, p. 776.

⁶ *Hampshire Repository*, 1799, p. 165.

⁷ Davies, *South Wales*, ii, p. 442, quoting Clark's *Survey*, 1794, p. 45.

⁸ Davies, *Case of Labourers in Husbandry*, p. 191.

⁹ Ayton, *Voyage Round Great Britain*, ii, p. 70.

to earn a living by knitting alone and it became more and more a subsidiary employment occupying every spare moment. In knitting districts women and children might always be seen with their work on the roads and in the fields in summer, and when winter evenings came, neighbours went from house to house for the sake of sharing a better fire than each might have separately at home.

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century the industry declined in many districts. Knitters as well as spinners were being driven out of the market, and although many parishes tried to encourage its revival by supplying materials and offering premiums to industrious knitters, their efforts only ended in failure.¹ As a result of the low remuneration, knitting had become "very unpopular with the poor," and realising that "nothing [was] to be got at it but by constant work," parents refused to put their children to knitting schools and to bring them up to so unprofitable a labour.² The greater facility in obtaining poor relief in the early nineteenth century seems also to have had some effect on the decline, since the production of knitted goods almost ceased in the southern counties, yet continued in the West and North, where parish allowances were not so easily obtainable.³

The amount of hand knitting for market that continued in the nineteenth century was negligible. Apart from the few women employed in the western counties, the industry continued on organised lines only in Westmorland and in the Dales of Lancashire and Yorkshire. There, where the only other employment possible for women was a few weeks' haymaking in the summer, knitting schools were still flourishing in the 'forties, and labourers' wives and children were fully employed in knitting coarse stockings, vests, drawers and jackets for sailors in the Greenland fishery, and gloves, stockings, waistcoats, caps, petticoats and frocks for the home market.⁴ The knitters were mainly married women and children; single women could not earn a livelihood and went into service. In 1843, a clever knitter by working incessantly from ten to twelve hours earned 6d. a day, but on an average few women earned more than 2s. to 2s. 6d. a week, and children from 6d. to 1s. 3d. according to their age and skill.⁵ An explanation for the continuance of the industry at these wretched wages is found in the statement that in all these dales the poor "lived hard", and subsisted chiefly on

¹ In certain parishes in Rutland at the end of the eighteenth century it was ordered "that parents were not to obtain relief on account of any child above six years who could not knit." - V. C. H., *Rutland*, i, p. 225. A little knitting still persisted in Rutland in 1833. *Poor Laws*, 1834, xxx, pp. 382a, 384a.

² *Poor Laws*, 1834, xxviii, p. 301A.

³ *Poor Laws*, 1834, xxiv, p. 271a. Evidence of Mr. Wm. Sleeth. The decline in the south of England brought a temporary prosperity to the few knitters who continued. "Surviving knitters were so comparatively few in this period, that they were always fully employed at prices much higher than had ever been known when the practice was general . . . The earnings of a family by knitting sometimes amounted to more than £20, and commonly from £12 to between £16 and £18 . . . These latter earnings . . . were frequent in parts of Sussex ten years ago [i.e. 1824], where the practice is unknown now, except by some single superannuated old woman." *Ibid.* Witness was [1819-1831] employed in a commercial house in London for the sale of hand-knitted goods.

⁴ J. L. Green, *Rural Industries*, p. 129.

⁵ *Report on Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture*, 1843, xii, pp. 295, 348, 352.

oatbread and milk.¹ The pressure of poverty alone kept women at the work in these isolated districts until the 'seventies, when power machinery made knitting a factory industry.

BUTTON MAKING

An early eighteenth century petition of buttonmakers estimates their numbers "by modest computation" to be "above One Hundred Thousand, if not more, in Cheshire, Staffordshire, Dorset, London and other places." Among these were "a great many poor Widows and Fatherless Children, and Weakly, Aged, and Decrepid Persons (not capable of hard labour) who if deprived of their Livelihood, must of necessity become chargeable to their respective Parishes."² In other words button making was, to a large extent, a pauper trade.

There were several different branches in the trade. Silk, mohair and thread buttons, worked with the needle in a variety of patterns were, for the most part, made in the country and sent up to London by capitalist buttonmakers, some of whom employed hundreds of workers.³ Large numbers of children from six years old and upwards were employed in making "needlewrought" buttons,⁴ and the rest were chiefly women, who in the mid-eighteenth century were "able to get but a poor living."⁵ Gold and silver buttonmakers, on the other hand, worked chiefly in London and were employed by the "Lace Man," who provided gold and silver thread and all materials except moulds, and paid for the work when done. According to the *Parent's Directory*, gold and silver button making was "a pretty ingenious Business," and the boy or girl designed for it ought to have "some fancy and genius" for inventing new fashions. By 1761 the trade was chiefly in the hands of women and girls and although Collyer quotes an apprenticeship fee of £5 or £10, it is doubtful whether any girls were then apprenticed except those put out by the parish.⁶ The women in the trade seem indeed to have belonged to the lowest classes, and Campbell, writing in 1747, states that the number of women has "reduced the Trade to small Profits, and a small Share of Reputation." "The Women are generally Gin-Drinkers, and, consequently, bad

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

² Reasons Humbly Offered to the Honourable House of Commons for Encouraging the Making of Needlewrought Buttons and Buttonholes. *B.M. Tracts*, 816 m. 14/6.

³ "By the Importation of Foreign Hair Buttons, the Button Trade of England is so much Decayed, that several Button-Makers, who . . . used to employ Eleven or Twelve Hundred Persons, cannot now Employ One Hundred." Reasons Humbly Offered for Bringing in a Bill for Prohibiting the Importation of Foreign Buttons, etc. *B.M. Tracts*, 816 m. 14/8. Leek was one of the chief centres of the silk button trade, which employed several hundreds of women and children in the town and surrounding villages in 1836. *Langford, Staffordshire and Warwickshire Past and Present*, Appendix, p. lxxxi.

⁴ "In this Trade Children are employed from Six Years old and upwards, and very few, if any other Manufactures, doth employ the third part of the Children that in this trade do get their own Maintenance." Reasons for Suppressing the Wearing of all Cloth, Stuff, and other Wove Buttons. *B.M. Tracts*, 816 m. 14/7.

⁵ Collyer, *Parent's Directory*, 1761, p. 84.

⁶ In the earlier part of the century girls were frequently apprenticed to women button makers. *Middlesex County Records*, Ed. Hardy, (*Session Books*, 1689-1709), e.g. pp. 222, 300.

Wives; this makes them poor, and, to get something to keep Soul and Body together, work for a mere Trifle, and hawk their Work about to the Trade at an Under-Price, after they have cheated the Lace-Man of his stuffs. This has reduced the Craft to a very low Ebb; however, a good Workman, if he can get employ among the Crowd, may earn Twelve or Fifteen Shillings a Week.¹

Dorset was, from the beginning of the eighteenth century, the chief centre for all kinds of shirt buttons, the manufacture of which took the place of the early lace industry at Blandford, Shaftesbury and Sherborne. In 1793, "upwards of 4,000 women and children" were said to be employed in making shirt buttons in the town and neighbourhood of Shaftesbury, and for the "most inferior sorts" workers received "the low price of 5d. per gross of twelve dozen" and found their own thread.² In 1812, women who worked up the employer's materials received 8d. to 3s. a dozen for mould buttons and from 18d. to 4s. a gross for wire work. A few expert workers were said to be able to make a gross of wire buttons a day, but between six and seven dozen was the average, and a married woman's earnings were generally 6s. or 7s. a week, although some of the best hands, probably single women, were said to earn 10s. to 12s.³

In the button-making districts nearly all the women and children of the population seem to have been employed. At six and seven years old, children began to work at home, at first merely covering the wire, which was afterwards filled in by their mothers, while in many places so-called schools were established by dealers, in which children were first taught button making, and then continued in the employ of the manufacturer. For the first three or four weeks they earned nothing, but "spoiled much thread." Afterwards for two months they received 1d. a day, and 1s. a week for a further two months, after which earnings increased with output until the best workers reached 10s. or 12s. a week.⁴ Women were employed by dealers, one of whom in Shaftesbury in 1812 employed as many as 1,200 women and children, or by the grocers and mercers who gave out materials to be made up, and generally contrived "to pay the greater part of their wages in goods."⁵

By the 'thirties, buttonmakers were beginning to suffer from the use of horn and pearl buttons, and earnings steadily diminished while payments in truck became more frequent. At Blandford the best wage was about 6s. a week in 1832, but in some of the villages women could not earn above 2s. 6d.⁶ In 1843, a young woman constantly employed could only earn 3s. a week after paying for materials, and the average wage was lower. The use of the pearl button had lessened the demand for finer kinds of wire buttons, and for coarse work the rate was only 3d. a gross, while materials cost 1½d. Most of the buttons were bought by the drapers, and although wages had dropped by more

¹ *London Tradesman*, p. 152.

² Clardige, *Agriculture of Dorset*, p. 39.

³ Stevenson's *Dorset*, pp. 448-9.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 450-451.

⁶ *Poor Laws*, 1834, xxviii, p. 12A; 1834, xxx, pp. 1408-1458. Returns from Dorset parishes.

than half, women had frequently to take part-payment in cotton goods and clothing¹. Earnings of agricultural labourers were, however, so low (8s. to 10s. a week), that it was imperative for women and children to make some contribution to the family budget, and from 3s. to 5s. a week might be earned by the constant labour of mother and children together. This explains why children in Dorset were allowed to make buttons between lessons at school, for unless a certain amount of time was given up to it, "generally three or four days a week," parents refused to allow their children to go to school, although their earnings were only a few pence a week.² For a few more years this wretchedly paid work continued, until the introduction of the patent machine-made linen button about 1851 brought the Dorset trade to an end.³

THE EXPLOITATION OF CHILD LABOUR

Some idea of the extent to which domestic industries depended on the labour of children will already have been gained from the occasional references to their work in the industries outlined above. The exploitation of child labour in the early factories has probably caused more horror and indignation, and rightly so, than any other feature connected with the industrial revolution; but it is not so often realised that the same sort of thing was equally characteristic of the older domestic industries. Hidden away in cottages, where they attracted no attention, thousands of children in rural areas worked factory hours every day, under conditions which were often no better than those which aroused so much feeling in industrial centres.

The age at which children began to work at domestic industries was in many instances younger than that of factory children. In pillow lace, children were taught to handle the bobbins as mere infants of three and four years old, and were often working regular hours in a lace school at five.⁴ In straw plaiting, children were sorting straws at four, plaiting at five and earning a regular wage at six,⁵ and in glove and button making, knitting and embroidery, children were regularly at work at six and seven, and not infrequently before.⁶ In the machine lace trade, the *Report of 1843* states: "It is common in this district [Notts, Derby, Leicester] for children to commence work at four, five and six; the evidence renders this fact indubitable." In one extreme instance personally investigated by the Commissioner, a child of four years had been drawing lace for two years, and was then working twelve hours a day with only a quarter-of-an-hour interval for breakfast, dinner and tea, and never going out to play. Two other children in the same family, aged six and eight, were working fifteen hours a day. Among the little embroiderers some were so

¹ *Report on Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture*, 1843, xii, p. 87.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 81, 87.

³ *Green, Village Industries*, pp. 57-8.

⁴ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, p. 251. Evidence of Jane Keynes, Eve Paine. Palliser, *History of Lace*, p. 414.

⁵ Young, *Herefordshire*, 1804, p. 223.

⁶ *Children's Employment Commission*, xiv, pp. d 34, d 36. Evidence of Martha Oastler, Sarah Higgins.

young when they began that they could not reach the regular frame on which the work was stretched and were therefore obliged to stand.¹

The majority of children employed in these industries worked in cottage schools owned either by the mistress herself, or by a dealer who provided materials and employed a teacher or overlooker to supervise for him. In some schools reading was taught once a day—generally verses from the Bible—but in actual practice the schools were nothing but workshops in which children were commonly tasked beyond their strength either by parents or mistresses.² Sometimes a weekly sum was paid while learning, but more often children served a period of apprenticeship which varied from six months in the case of glove-making and straw-plaiting to two or two and a half years in lace-making, and afterwards had the profits of their work for themselves, paying a weekly sum of 3*d.* or 4*d.* for house-room and light. While learning, children generally worked from five to eight hours, and afterwards, a twelve or fourteen-hour day with two hours for meals was the rule.³ Some idea of the conditions and pressure under which children worked may be obtained from the following description of an early nineteenth century Northamptonshire lace school:

"Here the hours were from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., in the summer, and from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. in the winter. Half an hour was allowed for breakfast and for tea, and one hour for dinner, so that there were ten hours for actual work. The girls had to stick ten pins a minute, or six hundred an hour; and if at the end of the day they were five pins behind, they had to work for another hour. On Saturdays, however, they had a half-holiday, working only to the dinner hour. They counted to themselves every pin they stuck, and at every fiftieth pin they called out the time, and the girls used to race each other as to who could call out first.

"They paid 2*d.* a week (or 3*d.* in winter) for lights, and in return they received the money realised from the sale of the lace they made, and they could earn about 6*d.* a day. . . . In the evenings 18 girls worked by one tallow candle, value one penny; the 'candle-stool' stood about as high as an ordinary table with four legs. In the middle of this was what was known as the 'poke-board,' with six holes in a circle and one in the centre. In the centre hole was a long stick with a socket for the candle at one end and pegholes through the sides, so that it could be raised or lowered at will. In the other six holes were placed pieces of

¹ *Ibid.*, 1843, xiii, p. 10.

² "In my judgment I think the mothers task the children too much; the mistress is obliged to make them perform it, otherwise they would put them to other schools . . . I teach my own children sewing and reading as well as plaiting, and have offered to teach the scholars who come to my school, but the parents care nothing for it, and plaiting alone is everything to them; grown up girls have no more idea of sewing, or making a shift for themselves than a baby." *Ibid.*, 1843, xiv., p. a 30. Evidence of Mrs. Watts, mistress of a plaiting school at Hemel Hempstead.

It was not only in schools that children were overworked; cases of cruelty in the home can be found to rival the worst accounts of apprentice labour in factories, e.g. Deposition of Eliz. Oldham, "That she has often heard the blows which the said Ruth Goodson gave to the said Elizabeth Goodson (aged 12) . . . the blows were with a stick and too hard to be given her. She has used the child most cruelly by not allowing her proper subsistence, and almost starving her, and that the task set her to perform in making lace in one day was more than it was in her power to do." *Hertfordshire County Records*, ii, p. 193 (1801).

³ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv., pp. A 10, d 27, d 34. Evidence of Anne Newbury, Martha Oastler.

wood hollowed out like a cup, and into each of these there was placed a bottle made of very thin glass and filled with water. These bottles acted as strong condensers, or lenses, and the 18 girls sat round the table, three to each bottle, their stools being on different levels, the highest nearest the bottle, which threw the light down upon the work like a burning glass. In the daytime as many as thirty girls, and sometimes boys, would work in a room about twelve feet square, with two windows, and in the winter they could have no fire for lack of room."¹

In the lace schools monotony was sometimes relieved by the singing of "lace tells" or doggerel verses, which assisted in counting and stimulated the workers to a regular pace,² but all schools were alike in that children were kept closely to their tasks, often not daring to move for hours on end, and beatings and other harsh punishments were frequently administered. Betty Yewdale says of her Yorkshire knitting school, "We knit as hard as we cud drive, striving whilk cud knit 't hardest yarn again anudder. . . . They had o' macks o' contrivances to larn us to knit swift . . . that 'at knit slawest . . . gat weel thumpt."³ In lace schools and among embroiderers where the mistress or overlooker often sat with a cane, "any looking off" was considered as "losing a stitch" and for that children were "well beaten."⁴ Crowded into the tiny rooms of insanitary cottages,⁵ stimulated by competition to work at fearful pressure and under threat of punishment, children in the domestic industries must often have fared worse than those in factories. Moreover, their conditions were unalleviated long after the labour of young children was regulated in factories. Evidence given by the children themselves best describes the conditions which prevailed in 1843: Jane Keynes, aged eleven, said: "Been at the lace-making ever since I was five; the work ain't so very hard; some days I feel poorly, have sick headache; don't know, but think it is from sitting so long, and confinement; don't feel it so much now as when I first began, more used to it." Eve Paine, also at a lace school since five, said: "Work is hard and very tiring; my hands and arms ache."⁶ At Yeovil, Martha Oastler,

¹ Palliser, *op. cit.*, p. 390.

² Many of the patterns consisted of nineteen rows: hence the counting frequently began with that number:

"Nineteen miles to the Isle of Wight,
Shall I get there by candle light?
Yes, if your fingers go lissom and light,
You'll get there by candle light.

"Nineteen long lines being over my doun,"
The faster I work it'll shorten my score,
But if I do play, it'll stick to a stay,
So high ho! little fingers, and twank it away."

³ The parchment pattern. Quoted, Wright, *Romance of the Lace Pillow*, p. 179. Gibbs, *History of Aylesbury*, p. 620.

⁴ "A True Story of the Terrible Knitters of Dent," in Southey, *The Doctor* (ed. 1847), vol. vii, pp. 79-80.

⁵ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, p. 15. Evidence of Anne Corbett, Eliz. Sweeting. "After sitting some time at lace work the fingers get stiff and in cold weather benumbed for want of circulation; this would cause the work to go on slowly, and then the children were beaten; have known them to drop and faint at their work."

⁶ In one plait school visited by a Commissioner in 1843, 18 children were crowded into a room seven feet square. *Report*, 1843, xiv, p. A 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. a 51.

aged ten, "began to 'glove' about three years ago; she learned in six months, then worked for 6d. a week, then for a 1s., and 'now working for what I can yearn.' She usually begins at about 7 o'clock, and goes on till 9, with time out for breakfast, dinner and tea, altogether about two hours. She gets a "pat" sometimes for not working; lives near, and has plenty of time for sleep; gives her 'yearning to her mother.' She cannot quite finish two pair of gloves a day at 1½d. the pair."¹

This absorption in industrial work was "a complete bar to anything like education." Attempts to establish ordinary schools in districts where domestic industries were carried on frequently ended in failure, and most children depended entirely on Sunday Schools for such education as they received.² The result was that for the most part they grew up in complete ignorance of everything but their particular industry. The popular outcry against the factory system, that it prevented girls acquiring any knowledge of domestic duties, was a mere repetition of an argument that had long been used against all domestic industries in turn. The girl who had been perpetually spinning from infancy knew nothing, it was asserted, but how to turn her wheel; in straw districts girls were "ignorant of everything but straw plaiting"; buttonmakers were "so ignorant as scarcely to know how to wash and mend their own clothes," and lacemakers were "helpless" and "good for nothing else."³ When asked to find a nurse girl for a friend, Cowper could only reply, "Girls fit to be nurses . . . are . . . especially scarce in this country, where the lace pillow is the only thing they 'dandle'."⁴ Home making depends too much on the individual for the acceptance of these sweeping generalisations, but at the same time it must be admitted that where all efforts were concentrated on industrial work for the greater part of each day, the standard of domestic comfort could not have been high; contemporaries frequently placed it at the minimum.⁵

THE CONDITIONS OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

The homes of the workers were, in most cases, completely unsuitable for industrial work. Labourers' cottages, declared a writer in 1786, were so constricted in size they seemed "to be built as discouragements

¹ *Ibid.*, p. d 34.

² "Parents will not send their children to a place where in lieu of gaining anything they are obliged to pay something." *Report*, 1843, xiv, p. A 10. In plaiting districts children were sometimes allowed to attend day schools in slack periods. "They learn of a winter, and forget in the summer." *Report on Women and Children in Agriculture*, 1843, xii, p. 238.

³ *Poor Laws*, 1818, v, p. 94. *Stevenson's Dorset*, 1812, p. 453. *Annals* xxxvii, p. 449.

⁴ *Correspondence of Cowper*, (ed. Wright), vol. iv, p. 355.

⁵ Speaking of lace districts in 1797, Langley says: "From the general appearance of the peasantry, the trade does not induce those habits of neatness and industry which appear highly necessary to render an occupation beneficial to a country." *History of the Hundred of Desborough*, p. 10.

In 1843 Dr. Flaxman said of lace makers: "After marriage the houses of these people are generally filthy, and their families much neglected." *Report on Women and Children in Agriculture*, 1843, xii, p. 104.

to industry," and were "fit for nothing but eating and sleeping places."¹ Confinement in small, low, overcrowded rooms, not only in childhood, for adults frequently assembled together for company and to share light and warmth, was in itself often a prelude to disease; but this was not all. Injurious effects often resulted from the actual occupation. Laceworkers especially suffered from diseases of the eye and chest brought on by continued stooping over the frame and the pillow, and contemporaries frequently drew attention to the unhealthiness of these occupations. "It has been humanely remarked as a melancholy consideration," says one of them, "that so much health and comfort are sacrificed to the production of this beautiful though not necessary article of production. The sallow complexion, the weakly frames, and the general appearance of languor and debility of the operatives, are sad and decisive proofs of the pernicious nature of the employment."² Another tourist in 1785, was struck by the "frequent sight of deformed and diseased women" in Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire. "Many of the workers of lace are deformed," he wrote, "occasioned by their uneasy posture, and many more are diseased, seemingly owing, in great measure, to their inclined posture while working, which prevents their lungs having a free play."³ Among lace runners, a slight distortion of the spine was said to be "almost universal," but even worse was the effect of their long hours on eyesight. Dr. Williams, who gave evidence before the Commission of 1843, declared that he personally had attended at least 10,000 cases of diseased sight in Nottingham alone in the preceding fourteen years. Not only runners, but menders in particular, suffered from amaurosis, and many young women, he asserted, before the age of twenty years, were compelled to give up the trade or lose their sight altogether.⁴ Similar evidence was collected by Mr. Sub-Commissioner Power in 1833. In one instance he examined five sisters, all lace runners, aged fifteen to twenty-two, whose replies not only revealed the disastrous consequences of their occupation, but artlessly reflected the social conditions of the times: "We are reckoned to begin at six; sometimes later. We keep on to ten generally. Take two hours for meals. Those are longer hours than in the factory. It is not so tiring; we sit down all day, instead of standing all day. It is a very bad trade for the eyes. Where I sit I can't see the hands and figures on the clock face a bit."

"Is that so with any more of you?"

Second: "Me! I can see the clock very well, but I can't tell what time it is. I can't see which is hands and which is figures. I went a long way to see a man hanged t'other day, and couldn't see him a bit after all. I heard folks talking; that was something. I got very

¹ *Annals*, viii, p. 325. A few improving landlords were building better cottages at the end of the century. Some built by the Duke of Grafton in 1804, for lace-makers (in Northants) contained two and sometimes three bedchambers, a large living-room, and a work-room for lace making. But rural cottages in general were still notoriously bad to the middle of the nineteenth century. *Annals*, xlii, p. 259.

² Cooke, *Topography of Devon*: quoted Palliser, *History of Lace*, p. 414-5.

³ Letter in *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 55, pp. 938-9.

⁴ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, p. 155.

near at last. A man asked me couldn't I see him now. I said I could, I was so ashamed, but I could not. None of us can see much except the youngest: she has not been at it so long."¹

Not only did many of the workers become too short-sighted to follow their employment but they were frequently unfitted for other occupations. "The effects of lace running, chevening, tambouring and embroidering of gloves are so injurious to the eyes and general health, that they do not like to take them into the factory," said Jedediah Strutt in 1843. "The manager, when parties apply for employment, in the first instance inquires into the state of their sight; and if they have been employed in the above occupations, he finds that many of them are thereby disqualified for factory work."² Many who before middle age were compelled to give up running, could only take coarse and badly paid sewing for the frame-work knitters, such as seaming stockings and "stitching cut-ups."³

Yet, in spite of these great and obvious disadvantages, domestic workers for the most part preferred their conditions to the alternatives of domestic service and the factory. Incredible as it may seem, one of the lace runners in the family referred to above, earning only 3s. 6d. a week, said in continuing her evidence, "I like it better than the factory, though we can't get so much. We have our liberty at home, and get our meals comfortable, such as they are."⁴ Although their hours were excessive, domestic workers regarded discipline and regularity with so great a horror, that the absence of these two, says Power, reconciled the young people at any rate, "to an employ usually less lucrative and certainly in other respects more irksome and injurious to health."⁵ In country districts a similar attitude was observed towards domestic service. "A trifling remuneration and liberty" were ever preferred to the confinement and restraints of service—hence the complaints of farmers and the middle classes wherever domestic industries flourished.⁶

This preference for work in the home not only induced a willingness to put up with numerous disadvantages, but it also tended to reduce the rate of wages. For married women it was often a case of domestic industry or nothing, and the necessity of contributing something to the family income made them ready and even anxious to work for wages on which a single woman found it almost impossible to live. This, and the large number of children employed, meant that the supply of labour almost always exceeded the demand, and the workers were unable either to demand an adequate wage, or to resist oppression in the form of unjust prices for materials, arbitrary reductions of rates and payment in goods.

¹ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. C2, 18. The sight of pillow lacemakers, was also affected, though not to so great an extent. "Being a business which requires a good sight, it at length affects the eyes; so that when they grow old, not being accustomed to any other work, they often become necessitous." *Eden State of the Poor*, ii, p. 549, referring to lacemakers in Northamptonshire.

² *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, p. f 7.

³ *Ibid.*, p. f 58.

⁴ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. C 2, 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. C 2, 17.

⁶ *Stevenson's Dorset*, 1812, p. 453. *Lords' Committee on Poor Laws*, 1818, v, p. 94. *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, p. A 10, D 6.

But in estimating the value of women's work in the domestic industries it is perhaps too easy to fall into the temptation to criticise conditions in the light of subsequent developments. The eighteenth century saw nothing unusual in long hours, insanitary conditions, subsistence wages and the labour of little children. Rather was there cause for remark when the women and children of the poor neglected to support themselves, as evidenced by Batchelor's reference to the lacemakers of Bedfordshire—"But there are few parishes that do not afford *several instances* of women, whose whole employment consists in nursing their children."¹ In rural districts especially it was necessary for women and children to earn something. Sometimes, as has been shown, women earned really good wages by domestic industry, and even when wages tended to be low, wife and children together often doubled the labourer's wage and raised the standard of living accordingly. Contemporaries frequently refer to the comparative comfort of the poor where women and children were engaged in some sort of work. The advantages derived from women's earnings during the high prices of the war period have already been referred to. In 1826 Cobbett writes that the earnings of glovemakers in Worcestershire have preserved the poor from the "horrid misery" existing in other parts of the country,² and during the period of agricultural depression and incendiarism, the labourers of Worcestershire and Somerset were said to be "comparatively happy and tranquil in consequence of women and children in the villages being employed in the glove trade and mainly supporting the men."³ There was, however, another side to the picture. Women and children who could earn enough to support themselves were sometimes left to keep the home going, while men, feeling freed of responsibility, betook themselves and their own earnings to the beer house.⁴

The decline of domestic industries undoubtedly caused much suffering in rural districts in the interval in which men's wages failed to find their proper level. Women workers themselves lost a measure of economic independence, low as the standard often was, and probably, too, lost something in external interests, though apart from some of the more skilled lacemakers, there was little craftsmanship that could have been pleasurable in any of the domestic industries. Moreover, the hours given to industrial work were necessarily so long that the economic value of women's work could not in many cases have counterbalanced the domestic loss.

"Maids by their trades themselves to such a pass do bring,
That they can neither brew, bake, wash, nor wring,
Nor any work that's tending to good housewifery,
This amongst many too often I see.
Nay, their young Children must pack off to Nurse,

¹ *Bedfordshire*, 1808, p. 608. *Italics mine.*

² *Rural Rides*, pp. 510-511.

³ Hull, *History of the Glove Trade*, p. 111, f.n.

⁴ *33rd Report on Poor Law Amendment Act*, 1838, xviii, Part ii, p. 12. *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, p. a 50. "In Hempstead it is too much the case that married men, knowing their wives and families earn enough to support themselves by plaiting, take no care about them, and spend all their own earnings at the beer houses." Evidence of Mrs. Watts.

All is not got that is put in the Purse,
Therefore of old I this lesson have learn'd,
*A penny well sav'd is as good as one earn'd.*¹

From the modern point of view the decline of out-work industries can only be regarded in the light of progress. Freedom from industrial work meant better opportunities for home making, and above all for the proper care and education of children—facts beginning to be recognised even in the eighteenth century. A writer in the *Hampshire Repository* (1799) commenting on the fact that women in his parish neither spin nor knit and contribute very little to the earnings of their husbands, nevertheless adds: "This leisure, however, has one good effect, it makes the mothers better and more wholesome nurses, and induces them to keep themselves and children clean and tight, and contributes greatly to the healthy and good looks universally met with."² From the point of view of the welfare of the country, there can be no question as to the relative value of cottage industry and the results of what the eighteenth century was pleased to call "leisure."

¹ "The Good Wife's Forecast; or The Kind and Loving Mother's Counsel to her Daughter after Marriage," in *A Century of Ballads*, collected by J. Ashton, p. 9.

² *Op. cit.*, 1799, p. 231, *Parochial Report for Nisom, Isle of Wight*.

CHAPTER XI

WOMEN'S WORK IN MINES AND METAL TRADES

EARLY WORK IN COAL MINES

OF all the different types of work in which women were engaged, no kind of labour, in the opinion of the Commissioners of 1842, had a "more important and more distinctly appreciable influence over the physical, the intellectual, and the moral condition" of those who were engaged in it, than coal mining.¹ So injurious and demoralising did they consider their work here to be, and so condemnatory were the disclosures in connection with it, that the Legislature, roused by the indignation and disgust expressed by the whole country, ended once and for all time the work of women and young children in coal mines. Thus was terminated an association which in the case of women probably dated from the earliest days of mining in this country.

In the Middle Ages and up to the end of the seventeenth century, coal pits were rarely more than shallow holes or slants in which only a few workers with the simplest tools were engaged. The output was small and was commonly brought to the surface by the wives and daughters of the miners, who in early days carried the coal on their backs up ladders and in later times drew it to the surface in baskets by means of a windlass.² While the numbers of both men and women engaged in these early mining operations were very few, it is probable that women were more often employed in the early pits than they were after the great expansion of the industry. The introduction of machinery for raising coal and pumping water did away with the necessity for much of this early labour, and by the nineteenth century the employment of women in mines was unknown in many of the districts in which they had previously worked.

One of the earliest references to choke damp was made in 1322, in connection with the death of Emma, daughter of William Culhare, who was killed by "Je Damp" while drawing water from the "colepyt" at Morley, Derbyshire;³ and in 1587, women were mentioned as working the mines at Winlaton, "for lack of men."⁴ In the metal mines washing and breaking the ore was from early times done principally by women. During the reign of Edward II women were employed in the Derbyshire lead mines at a wage of a penny a day,⁵ and in the seventeenth century they were earning 6d. a day. According to Stringer, who wrote in 1699, a good many women were then engaged in the metal

¹ *P.P. Report on Mines, 1842*, xv, p. 5.

² Boyd, *Coal Pits and Pitmen* (2nd ed.), p. 5.

³ Salzman, *English Industries of the Middle Ages*, p. 8.

⁴ *38th Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records*, p. 237: quoted alloway, *Annals of Coal Mining*, vol. i, p. 91.

⁵ V. C. H., *Derbyshire*, ii, p. 329.

mines in various parts: "There is washing and knocking of Ores, which are Works that many good Men's Daughters are now glad to do, in many places of this Kingdom, for Bread for them and their Children."¹

As the mining industry developed and pits became larger and deeper, the age of accidents began. Women's names frequently occur in the lists of casualties in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, showing the areas in which they were working,² and almost the last mention of a woman employed underground in the Tyne district occurs in an account of a shaft accident in 1772: "A woman employed in putting at South Biddick (was) riding up one of the pits (when) the other hook, in passing, caught her clothes. The weight of the rope forced her out of the loop, and she fell to the bottom of the shaft."³ Shortly after this, about 1780, women and girls, with a few exceptions, ceased to be employed underground in the pits of Durham and Northumberland.⁴ It has been suggested that the northern pits at this time were attracting some of the small farmers displaced by the agrarian revolution;⁵ if so, this new supply of labour may have had something to do with women's disappearance from the pits. It is more likely, however, that the introduction of tramways and horses by the more enterprising owners of the northern pits, proved to be a cheaper means of transport and enabled them to do without women's labour.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the windlass and horse gin for raising coal had long been in use on all coal fields except the East of Scotland; where the "bearing sytsem", the primitive method of raising coal on the backs of women, was still in use and was continued into the nineteenth century. The "bearers" were for the most part the wives and daughters of the colliers, who attended their men folk in the pit and carried up their coal as it was cut. A few who were known as "fremit" bearers were employed by those who had no family to assist them.⁶ This persistence of family labour was no doubt due to the system by which in Scotland, up to the year 1775, all colliers, bearers and their children, if they had ever worked in a colliery, became the property of the coal master, and they and their services were transferable with the land on any change of proprietor. Until the final act of emancipation in 1799, the men and women employed in collieries were literally slaves, unable to seek other work without permission of the mine owner, and liable to be seized and brought back if they attempted to escape.⁷ Their liberation then

¹ H. Stringer, *English and Welsh Mines and Minerals, etc.*, p. 16.

² Galloway, *History of Coal Mining*, pp. 70, 88.

³ *Newcastle Journal*, February 8, 1772: quoted Welbourn, *Miners' Unions of Northumberland and Durham*, p. 13.

⁴ *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, May 9, 1784: quoted Galloway, *Annals of Coal Mining*, vol. 1, p. 305.

⁵ Welbourn, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁶ Boyd, *Coal Pits and Miners*, p. 45.

⁷ The system dated back to a Scottish Act of 1606, by which all "coilezearis, salters, and coilebearis" were forbidden to leave their service "under pain of punishment in their bodies." By an Act of 1661 they were declared to be "necessary servants", and any person employing or detaining them was liable to be subjected to a fine of £100 Scots. In 1775, with the idea of increasing the number of colliers, it was enacted by 15 Geo. III., c. 28, that all who should *afterwards* be employed, should be engaged and treated as free labourers. A later Act of

was due not so much to the desire "to remove the reproach" of servitude in a free country, as to attract a larger number of workers to the coal industry. The rapid growth of the iron trade towards the end of the eighteenth century was already making unprecedented demands on the collieries, and ironmasters were beginning to complain that the numbers engaged in coal mining were insufficient to keep the industry supplied.¹ The expansion of the two trades caused a great increase in the mining population towards the end of the eighteenth and in the early days of the nineteenth centuries, an event which would not be without influence on the employment of women in those areas in which they continued to be engaged.

Up to this time the employment of women in coal mines seems to have called forth no comment. Mining villages were generally isolated, and their occupants, with a dress and dialect peculiar to themselves, and known to indulge in cruel and brutal sports, were often regarded as savages and outcasts. Some early descriptions of the wild, uncivilized state of mining villages are to be found in Wesley's *Journal*. Of the people around Huddersfield (1743) he wrote: "A wilder people I never saw in England. The men, women and children filled the street as we rode along, and appeared just ready to devour us. They were, however, tolerably quiet while I preached; only a few pieces of dirt were thrown." Farther north, he described the colliers of Plessy, near Newcastle, as "such as had been in the first rank for savage ignorance and wickedness of every kind." On Sunday, "men, women and children met together to dance, fight, curse, and swear, and play at chuck, ball, span-farthing, or whatever came next to hand. I felt great compassion for these poor creatures," he continues, "from the time I heard of them first; and the more because all men seemed to despair of them."² Apart from the efforts made by Wesley and his followers, little was done to improve conditions in the mining villages, and ignorance of mining operations was responsible for the apathy concerning colliery employment. Hence, while oppressive conditions in some of the early factories roused public attention in industrial centres and led to attempts to remedy the worst abuses, women and children under infinitely worse conditions remained hidden away in the mines, the facts relating to their employment unknown, their sufferings unrelieved. The first pleader for colliery women was Lord Dundonald who, in 1793, called attention to the slavery of women bearers in Scotland, and a few years later, in 1808, Robert Bald tried to arouse public indignation by describing the conditions of this class of women "whose peculiar situation was but little known to the world." In England, the first protest against women's underground employment seems to have been made by Ayton in his vivid description of his visit to the Whitehaven mines in 1813. There he

1799 (39 Geo. III. c. 56) declared that all colliers and bearers who were still in a state of bondage were henceforth "to be free from their servitude." Erskine, *Institutes of the Law of Scotland* (ed. 1838), p. 187. *P.P. Mines*, 1842, xvi, pp. 345-6, 384-385.

¹ Ashton, *Iron and Steel in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 101.

² J. Wesley, *Journal* (ed. N. Curnock), vol. iv, May 9, 1757, p. 210; vol. iii, April 1, 1743, p. 73.

saw a horse drawing a long line of baskets "driven by a young girl, covered with filth, debased and profligate, and uttering some low obscenity as she passed by us. We were frequently interrupted in our march," he continues, "by the horses proceeding in this manner with their cargoes to the shaft, and always driven by girls, all of the same description, ragged and beastly in their appearance, and with a shameless indecency in their behaviour, which awe-struck as one was by the gloom and loneliness around one, had something quite frightful in it, and gave the place the character of a hell. All the people whom we met with, were distinguished by an extraordinary wretchedness; immoderate labour and a noxious atmosphere had marked their countenances with the signs of disease and decay; they were mostly half naked, blackened all over with dirt, and altogether so miserably disfigured and abused, that they looked like a race fallen from the common rank of men, and doomed, as in a kind of purgatory, to wear away their lives in these dismal shades." It is worth noting that this was a description, not of a small uneconomic pit in which conditions were likely to be at their worst, but of one of the larger undertakings in which 600 people and more than 100 horses were employed. Yet he tells us the workers were looked upon as "mere machinery, of no worth or importance beyond their horse power. The strength of a man is required in excavating the workings, women can drive the horses, and children can open the doors; and a child or a woman is sacrificed, where a man is not required, as a matter of economy, that makes not the smallest account of human life in its calculations."¹

Twenty years after this plea for the removal of women and children from the mines, the attention of the government was drawn for the first time to the conditions of colliery labour by one of its own commissioners. Engaged on the Factory Commission of 1833, Mr. Tufnell made some inquiries into the workings of the mines in Lancashire. A comparison of the conditions of employment in mines and factories as he had seen them, led him to the conclusion that "it must appear to every impartial judge of the two occupations that the hardest labour in the worst room in the worst-conducted factory is less hard, less cruel, and less demoralising than the labour in the best of coal-mines."² No immediate action followed these observations, but the evidence collected by Mr. Tufnell was used by Lord Shaftesbury in 1840 as the basis of his plea for a Royal Commission to investigate the employment of children in mines and collieries. After a speech packed with evidence³ showing the necessity for an inquiry, not only in mines but in all trades and manufactures unregulated by the Factory Acts, the Commission was granted. The members appointed were Thomas Tooke, the economist, Dr. Southwood Smith—both of whom had served on the Factory Commission of 1833—the Factory Inspectors Leonard Horner and Robert J. Saunders and some twenty sub-commissioners who served under them.

¹ R. Ayton, *Voyage Round Great Britain*, vol. ii, pp. 155-160.

² *P.P. Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. D 2, 82.

³ *Hansard*, House of Commons, August 4, 1840.

THE 1842 REPORT

The investigations of the Commissioners were originally confined to the employment of children in mines and manufactures, but fortunately, in 1841, they were instructed to include young persons also in their inquiry. As soon as the Commissioners had got to work, an independent movement was started by private individuals in the neighbourhood of Manchester to acquaint the public with the lot of women employed in mines and to procure their exclusion from underground work.¹ Numerous petitions on the subject were addressed to Parliament from Lancashire and Yorkshire towns, and it was probably as a result of this popular agitation that the Commissioners felt justified in extending their investigations to all women in mines, irrespective of age. Their revelations proved they were warranted in thus interpreting their instructions and as a result of their action protective legislation for women was made possible for the first time.

The first *Report on Mines*, accompanied by two volumes of minutes of evidence, and illustrated by sketches drawn in the pits of women and children at work, was issued in May, 1842. Written with conviction, yet without extravagance or any trace of sensationalism, the *Report* shocked and horrified the whole of England by its disclosures. "The Report of the Commission is out—a noble document," wrote Shaftesbury in his diary for May 7th, 1842, . . . "Perhaps even 'Civilisation' itself never exhibited such a mass of sin and cruelty. The disgust felt is very great, thank God."²

THE EXTENT OF WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

While the most distressing part of the Report is perhaps that which deals with the misery and cruelty of the lot of young children, it is only possible in the present chapter to deal with the various aspects of women's work. The Commissioners found that by 1840, the employment of women in collieries was by no means general. Misgivings as to its suitability and real value together with the advance of mechanical power had brought women's work to an end in some districts, and in many others opinion was strongly against the employment of women underground, although they still worked on the bank and in different capacities about the collieries. The chief districts in which they were still engaged underground were Lancashire and Cheshire, the West Riding, South Wales and the East of Scotland.³ On the Durham coal field women had ceased to be employed before the end of the eighteenth century; in Cumberland their employment, which had lasted into the nineteenth century, was "rapidly disappearing under the general odium" it excited, there being only one pit in which a few women were left.⁴ In the Midlands there was no evidence of their recent work, except in Staffordshire, where some of the colliers

¹ The leader of this movement was Mr. E. W. Binny of Manchester. Galloway, *op. cit.*, vol. ii, p. 149.

² Hodder, *Life of Shaftesbury*, p. 224.

³ *P.P. Mines*, 1842, xv, p. vi.

⁴ *P.P. Mines*, 1842, xvi, pp. 302, 876.

remembered women being in the pits,¹ and according to Dr. Holland, they had worked in Staffordshire and Shropshire mines so late as 1835.² In Gloucestershire it was stated that women's labour was "altogether dispensed with . . . though a few amazons yet practice the vocation of coal carriers, on their own account, from the pits into the city or suburbs"³—a relic of the old days when colliers' wives used to carry home the free allowance of coal on their heads. In Ireland no single instance of women or girls working underground was found.

Within these well-defined areas in which women's underground labour still persisted, its extent varied considerably. In the general horror and disgust excited by the findings of the Commission it was perhaps natural that an exaggerated impression of its extent should be created. Contemporary statements in the Press and some rather loose evidence in the Report tended to support the view, which seems to have persisted, that the numbers of women so engaged were greater than they really were. The more recent statement of a well known authority, for instance, that "thousands of women" were employed in the mines in the neighbourhood of Manchester alone,⁴ and the computed evidence of an underlooker that "many a hundred women and children" were in the pits about St. Helens,⁵ do not agree with the statistical calculations based upon the returns obtained by the Commissioners. While it is true that women and girls were regularly employed throughout the whole of North Lancashire and that the proportion of women to men was higher there than elsewhere in England, being one to twelve, yet it has to be remembered that mining was not then a trade of the first rank. Many of the pits were quite small, in some cases little more than outcrops employing only a few individuals.⁶ The returns obtained by the Commissioners there, fall far short of the estimates quoted above. Of 56 pits which made returns from Lancashire, 30 employed no women or girls at all, and in the remaining 26 there were only 365 adult women, 315 girls between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, and 114 girls under thirteen years.⁷ Allowing for the fact that some pits sent no returns at all, and that these figures probably came from the larger and better pits, where the proportion of women was possibly less, there is still a very wide discrepancy

¹ P.P. Mines, 1842, xxxv, p. 6.

² Fossil Fuel, p. 242: quoted Galloway, ii, p. 151.

³ Mr. Commissioner Tancred's statement (*Midland Mining Commission, P.P.*, 1843, xiii, p. xxix) that "the Staffordshire coalfield is one of those exempt from the reproach of ever having employed females below ground" appears to be incorrect in view of this evidence to the contrary. There are, moreover, among the Darlaston (South Staffs) Parish Apprenticeship indentures, numerous instances of boys apprenticed to women who describe themselves as "miners". e.g. John Sheldon apprenticed to "Elix. Sheldon, widow and miner", "to instruct John Sheldon in the art of mining." *Darlaston Parish MSS.*

⁴ P.P. Mines, 1842, xv, p. 37.

⁵ Galloway, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 149.

⁶ P.P. Mines, xvii, p. 213.

⁷ "So late as 1850 it was not claimed even by an admiring statistician that the average British coal mine employed more than about eighty 'men, women and boys under ground and above.'" Clapham, *Economic History*, p. 185: quoting *Statistical Journal*, xiii, p. 64.

⁸ P.P. Mines, xvii, pp. 194-6.

between these figures and those suggested above for what was a comparatively small area.¹

While women were employed in many of the small backward pits around Wigan, Bolton, Bury and Rochdale, in Oldham and to the east of Manchester tradition was against women's underground labour. So strong was the feeling there that a man from Wigan who took his wife into the pit was compelled to leave the district.² This difference in custom was partly due to the employment offered to women in cotton mills; in the Blackburn and Burnley districts also there were few women in the mines, because, it was stated, "the factories take them nearly all."³

As a general rule, where factory employment was available, few women were to be found in mines. But in country districts where the absence of manufactures usually meant a thinner population, labour was sometimes scarce, and miners were glad to get women and girls to work as drawers in the pits. In the West Riding, women's underground labour in the neighbourhood of the towns, especially around Leeds, Bradford and Sheffield, had almost ceased by 1840, although at one time it had been general. "It is an exception now, since the mills became more plentiful," said one witness, "but formerly there were as many as boys."⁴ In addition to the increase of alternative occupations, there was, even in the districts where employment was still customary, a decided and growing unwillingness on the part of some owners to employ women. In the neighbourhood of Halifax, one of the worst districts in so far as no distinction of sex was recognised in determining the type and heaviness of work, there were stewards and owners strongly against the practice. "We would not allow of it by any means," said one witness, "... it is in fact not their labour and ought to be entirely prohibited." The owner of another pit in the same district said: "We have no girls, because I would not have them—it is not their duty; I have worked in pits where there were girls, but ... I have seen such indecencies and improprieties as to determine me never to give my consent to their being where I am again."⁵ Further evidence of the same kind gives relief to a dark picture which has perhaps been too blackly painted. While nothing can be said in extenuation of the practice of employing women in colliery labour, it is at any rate a welcome thought that the employing conscience in England was not so generally asleep as some of the unstatistical statements in connection with women's labour would lead us to suppose.

Throughout the East of Scotland and in parts of South Wales, the employment of women and girls was more extensive than in any part

¹ According to the Census of 1841, there were 1,185 women over twenty, and 1,165 under twenty years of age in the coal mines of Great Britain; but since the returns made to the Commissioners from East Scotland show that there were 1,189 adult women, and 1,152 girls under eighteen employed there alone, this is evidently an understatement of the total numbers employed. *Mines*, 1842, xvi, pp. 379-81.

² *P.P. Mines*, 1842, p. 320.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 815.

⁴ *P.P. Mines*, 1842, xvi, p. 288.

⁵ *P.P. Mines*, 1842, xvii, pp. 113, 110.

of England. In East Scotland the returns received by the Commissioners showed 2,341 women and girls to be employed, of whom 1,189 were adults.¹ Some pits were on a large scale and there were instances of single collieries employing from 100 to 150 females below ground.² In West Scotland, where the horrible bearing system was unknown, comparatively few women were employed; and those few had only recently been introduced into the pits, "it having been one of the rules of the colliers' union that no females should be allowed underground," on account of the temptation to employ them to save the higher wages paid to men.³ In Pembrokeshire where nearly all the collieries employed women, the proportion was slightly higher than in the East of Scotland, but in the western parts of Glamorgan and Carmarthen women rarely worked underground. The Commissioner who investigated mining conditions in South Wales found that women were employed most in districts where wages were at their highest and lowest. High wages usually denoted a scarcity of workers, and women and girls were employed to supply the deficiency. Where wages were low, women felt compelled to help in the support of their families. On the other hand, where wages were moderate, as in Glamorgan and Carmarthen, women were seldom employed and feeling was definitely against their heavy labour in mines and metal manufactories.⁴

The following comparative table summarises the returns received by the Commissioners from all districts and shows the proportion of females to males engaged in underground labour in all of them.

District.	Adults.	From 13 to 18.	Under 13
Yorkshire	1 to 45	1 to 28	1 to 25
Lancashire	1 „ 12	1 „ 13	1 „ 37
<i>Scotland.</i>			
Mid-Lothians	1 „ 3	1 „ 5½	1 „ 20
E. „ „	1 „ 3	1 „ 3½	1 „ 10
W. „ „	1 „ 5	1 „ 7	1 „ 10
Stirlingshire	1 „ 4½	1 „ 8	1 „ 10
Clackmannshire	1 „ 5	1 „ 5	1 „ 11½
Fifehire	1 „ 5½	1 „ 10	1 „ 30
<i>Wales.</i>			
Glamorganshire	1 „ 53	1 „ 53	1 „ 83
Pembrokeshire	1 „ 2½	1 „ 8½	1 „ 53

Unfortunately, the returns were not so complete as to enable the Commissioners to estimate the aggregate number of persons employed in the various branches of the industry. The numbers being returned by the employers, the Commissioners were only able to verify their general fidelity, hence they pointed out that "as it was the highest class of employers generally who made these returns, they exhibit a less proportion of the younger hands than the average, and perhaps also a less proportion of females in those districts in which females are employed underground."⁵

¹ *P.P. Mines*, 1842, xvi, pp. 379-381. These returns were not quite complete, but according to the Commissioner, were in general "as accurate as can well be expected."

² *P.P. Mines*, 1842, xvi, pp. 445, 449, 477.

³ *P.P. Mines*, xv, p. 96.

⁴ *Mines*, 1842, xxvii, pp. 587, 691.

⁵ *P.P. Mines*, 1842, xv, pp. 37-39.

In addition to these underground workers, many collieries employed women and girls on the banks in different types of surface labour. The tin, copper, lead and ironstone mines also gave employment to many women and children ; but in no case did they work underground except in a few of the ironstone mines where women were occasionally employed as hurriers. By far the greatest number of those employed in metal mines was in Cornwall, where, according to an approximate estimate obtained from returns, there were 2,700 women and 2,436 girls, chiefly in the copper mines.¹ The practice of employing women and children in lead mines was declining and had been given up altogether in some districts.

CONDITIONS OF WOMEN'S WORK IN COAL MINES.

In investigating the nature of employment in coal mines, the Commissioners found that wherever women and children were employed they were engaged in tasks of appalling drudgery under almost indescribable conditions. Of the southern part of the West Riding—and it was equally true of collieries in some other districts—the Commissioner reported : " In many of the collieries in this district, so far as relates to the underground employ, there is no distinction of sex, but the labour is distributed indifferently among both sexes, excepting that it is comparatively rare for the women to hew or get the coals, although there are numerous instances in which they regularly perform even this work. In great numbers of the coal-pits in this district the men work in a state of perfect nakedness, and are in this state assisted in their labour by females of all ages, from girls of six years old to women of twenty-one, these females being themselves quite naked down to the waist."² Quite often women did the lifting and heavy part of the work, and endured conditions which men would not tolerate. " Females submit to work in places where no man, or even lad, could be got to labour in," said one mining foreman ; " they work in bad roads, up to their knees in water, in a posture nearly double."³ The natural result of this compliance was that women's labour was most frequently to be found in the worst mines, where they endured the most arduous toil in a foul atmosphere, dragging their loads along low, slushy roads in water-laden pits.

Many women began their career in the mines as " trappers " or air-door keepers at the age of six or seven, occasionally before. In Scotland girls were " invariably set at an earlier age than boys to their peculiar labour, from a notion very generally entertained amongst the parents, that girls are more acute and capable of making themselves useful at an earlier age than boys."⁴ The trappers, young as they were, attended the doors on which the ventilation and entire safety of the mine depended. The opening and shutting of doors required little in the way of physical energy, but their hours were longer than those of any other workers, since their task required them to be the

¹ *P.P. Mines*, 1842, xvi, p. 764.

² *P.P. Mines*, 1842, xv, p. 24.

³ *Ibid.*, xvi, p. 387.

⁴ *P.P. Mines*, 1842, xv, pp. 90-91.

first down and the last to go up; and their entire day was spent in darkness, and except for the passing of the corves, in solitary confinement. At the age of seven or eight they usually proceeded to other occupations about the mine.

The task which employed the greatest number of women and young people of both sexes was "hurrying" or "putting," that is, conveying the coal won from the workings along subterranean passages either to the horseways or to the bottom of the shaft. Dressed either in a loose pair of trousers or a coarse flannel shirt, women could only be distinguished by their earrings and coloured glass beads. In the better pits the "corves" or waggons were mounted on wheels, and were pushed forward on small iron railways which by this time were laid wherever the roads were good enough. In the thin seams and the small pits with little capital, the old method of drawing by girdle and chain persisted. In this case the hurrier buckled round the waist a broad leather belt, to which was attached a ring and about four feet of chain which passed between the legs and hooked on to a sledge shod with iron. Then, with candles stuck in their caps, and crawling on hands and knees, girls and women dragged their heavy loads over soft slushy floors which added to their difficulties, as did also the inclination of the roads which was frequently one in three to one in six.¹ "Chained, belted, harnessed, like dogs in a go-cart," said a Commissioner in describing this labour, "black, saturated with wet, and more than half naked, crawling upon their hands and feet, and dragging their heavy loads behind them—they present an appearance indescribably disgusting and unnatural."² The girdle and chain which cut and blistered the sides of the drawer, and was "a hundred degrees more slavish" than pushing the corves, had been in common use at the beginning of the century, but by 1840 was only found in the smaller and poorer pits. And even this method, bad as it was, was an improvement on the days when hurriers went on one hand and feet, and pulled the sledge with the other hand.³ The tremendous relief that the invention of iron rails brought to all who hurried in coal mines is poignantly suggested in the following lines:⁴

"Trams now run on metal ways.

"God bless the man wi' peace and plenty
That first invented metal plates;
Draw out his years to five times twenty,
Then slide him through the heavenly gates.

"For if the human frame te spare
Frae toil an' pain ayont conceevin',
Hae aught to de wi' gettin' there,
Aw think he mun gan' strite te heeven."

The laboriousness of hurrying varied considerably in different pits. The size and weight of the corves, the depth and condition of the passages, the state of the air and most of all perhaps, the disposition of

¹ *Mines*, xvi, p. 479.

² *Mines*, xvii, p. 75.

³ *Ibid.*, xvi, p. 243.

⁴ *The Pitman's Pay*, by Thos. Wilson: quoted Galloway, *op. cit.*, i, p. 325.

the collier for whom the hurrier was working—all affected the degree of exertion. Weight was often determined by the height of the roads. In thin seams the lowness of the roof prevented a weight of more than $1\frac{1}{2}$ to $2\frac{1}{2}$ cwt.; sledges were commonly from $3\frac{1}{2}$ to $4\frac{1}{2}$ cwt.—more than heavy enough on soft roads—and wheeled corves, easier to manage except when on a steep incline or when they became derailed, varied from 5 to 10 cwt. with an average of about 8 cwt.¹

The youngest children were of necessity employed in the thin seams, in roads which were occasionally found as low as 16 and 18 inches.² In many of the small pits of the West Riding, girls had to leave the pits when they reached the age of fourteen to eighteen, being by that time too big to crawl through passages of 22 to 26 inches.³ Growing girls must have suffered intolerable pain and weariness in sustaining this crouched position for hours on end, with no opportunity to straighten their backs. Many of them must have agreed with the testimony of Sarah Jowett, a "short, stout" girl of seventeen and a half, who said: "I do not like working in pit at all, because the gate is too low for me now—I am too big and hurt my back."⁴ Janet Duncan, working in a comparatively good road of three to four feet, said: "It makes me stoop so much, and being tall I am compelled to bend my legs double";⁵ and yet there were instances of women working in passages of 27 to 30 inches. The hard economy that ruled the continuance of these conditions justified such labour with the specious argument that if the measures were cleared to make room for men and horses, "the expense would be more than twice over what the coals would be worth after they were got out."⁶

The danger and difficulty of hurrying was intensified by the incline of the roads, which followed the rise and dip of the seam. Sometimes the loaded corve had to be pushed up a steep incline, but this was preferable to the risk and danger of a steep descent, as pointed out by Janet Duncan: "It is very severe work, especially when we have to stay before the tubs, on the brace, to prevent them coming down too fast; they frequently run too quick and knock us down; when they run over-fast we fly off the roads and let them go, or we should be crushed. Mary Peacock was severely crushed a fortnight since."⁷

In well-managed pits where the corves were not too heavy, where roads were well drained and the tramways kept in good repair, much was done to lighten the labour of hurrying. Unfortunately, in the pits where women were most frequently employed, it was often *made* into slavery by the want of good superintendence. Rails were allowed to fall into such bad repair that the corves were constantly derailed, and the exertion required to replace them was infinitely greater than hurrying itself. Falls from the roof were left to impede the roads, which in bad pits were constantly water-logged. The evidence of Fanny Drake, a hurrier in the West Riding, describes what it was really like to work in a wet pit: "I have had to hurry up to the calves of my legs in water. It was as bad as this a fortnight at a time; and this was for half a year, last winter; my feet were skinned, and just

¹ *Mines*, xvii, pp. 165-6; xvi, p. 176.

² *Ibid.*, xvii, p. 65.

³ *Ibid.*, xvi, p. 237.

⁴ *Mines*, xvii, p. 123.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xvi, p. 460.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁷ *Mines*, xvi, p. 460.

as if they were scalded, for the water was bad : it had stood some time ; and I was off my work owing to it, and had a headache and bleeding at my nose. . . ."¹ The roads in which this girl worked were only 32 inches, and in some places a yard high ; yet from the lack of experience of other work she described her labour as only " middling hard."

The distances travelled through these wretched conditions varied in different pits. The single journeys were longer where horses were not used, but exertion was not necessarily greater. Once the main gates were reached the corves would go of their own accord down the gentle descent to the shaft. Although distance alone cannot be taken as any criterion of a hurrier's work, the evidence on this point is not without interest ; 17½, 11, and 9 miles were the longest distances given for a day's work with corves, but the drawers with their sledges naturally could not cover anything like this distance. Speaking of Lancashire, the opinion of the Commissioner was that on an average the drawers did not drag their tubs more than from four to six miles daily. But this, he says, is " hard work when we consider that the air they have to breathe is exceedingly impure, and in the thin mines the height of the roads is in some cases not more than 20 to 30 inches."²

The evidence given by some of the women themselves shows more clearly than any description what hurrying entailed. Ann Eggle, a hurrier, aged eighteen, in the West Riding, says : " We go at four in the morning, and sometimes at half-past four. We begin to work as soon as we get down. We get out after four, sometimes at five in the evening. We work the whole time except for an hour for dinner, and sometimes we haven't time to eat. I hurry by myself, and have done so for long. I know the corves are very heavy, they are the biggest corves anywhere about. [The Commissioner stated that these corves weighed 12½ cwt.] The work is far too hard for me ; the sweat runs off me all over sometimes. I am very tired at night. Sometimes when we get home at night we have not power to wash us, and then we go to bed. Sometimes we fall asleep in the chair. . . . I began to hurry when I was seven and I have been hurrying ever since. . . ." According to the Commissioner this girl was working under good conditions in a large, well-regulated and well-ventilated pit, but the size of the corves rendered the work " far beyond the strength of females at any age." After taking a turn at the corves himself, he added : " I can not only corroborate their statements, but have no hesitation in adding that were they galley slaves their work could not be more oppressive, and I believe would not in all probability be so much so."³ Elizabeth Day, at Barnsley, had " to hurry up hill with the loaded corves, quite as much up as down. . . . It is harder work than we ought to do a deal," she continued, " I have been lamed in my ankle, and strained in my back ; it caused a great lump to rise in my ankle-bone once. The men behave well to us, and never insult or ill-use us. I am sure of that. We go to work between five and six, but we begin to hurry when we get down. We stop an hour to dinner at 12 ; we generally have bread and a bit of fat for dinner, and some of them a sup of beer ; that's all ; we have a whole hour for dinner,

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

² *Mines*, xvi, pp. 165-6 ; xvi, p. 178.

³ *Mines*, xvi, pp. 252, 282.

and we get out from four to five in the evening ; so that it will be eleven hours before we get out. We drink the water that runs through the pit."¹ Betty Harris, a woman of thirty-seven, described her work as a drawer in a pit at Little Bolton, where the girdle and chain was still used : " I have a belt round my waist, and a chain passing between my legs, and I go on my hands and feet. The road is steep, and we have to hold by a rope ; and when there is no rope, by anything we can catch hold of. . . . The pit is very wet where I work, and the water comes over our clog-tops always, and I have seen it up to my thighs : it rains in at the roof terribly ; my clothes are wet through almost all day long. . . . I am not so strong as I was, and cannot stand my work so well as I used to do. I have drawn till I have had the skin off me ; the belt and chain is worse when we are in the family way. . . ."¹ Yet in spite of their fatigue and exhaustion and the bad conditions under which so many of them worked, women proved to be steady and reliable workers. " They make far better drawers than lads, they are more steady ; " said one collier, " when a lad gets to be ' half,' he is all for getting coal, but a lass never expects to be a coal getter, and that keeps her steady to her work." Another witnessed to the determination with which they kept up. " Women are better to manage, and keep the time better ; " he said, " they will fight and shriek and do everything but let anybody pass them."²

While hurrying was the chief employment of mining women in England, in East Scotland most of them were engaged in the primitive and barbarous system of coal bearing, which had persisted only in this area—"the remnant of the slavery of a degraded age." " Persons employed in coal-carrying," said the Commissioner, " are almost always girls and women. Boys are sometimes engaged in the same labour, but that is comparatively rare. The coal bearers have to carry coal on their backs in unrailed roads with burdens varying from $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. to 3cwt." Although he described this labour as " cruel, slaving, revolting to humanity," yet he found engaged in it children from six years of age to women of sixty and over.³ The proportion of married women so employed was high, as the bearing system was based on the old methods of family labour ; the man cut out the coal and his wife and daughter carried it from the workings to the shaft, and frequently, in the absence of any raising machinery, up ladders or stairs to the surface. About three hours after the collier left home, the mother and daughters descended the pit. " Each, having a basket of a suitable form, lays it down, and into it the large coals are rolled ; and such is the weight carried that it frequently takes two men to lift the burden upon their backs ; the girls are loaded according to their strength. The mother sets out first, carrying a lighted candle in her teeth ; the girls follow, and in this manner they proceed to the pit bottom, and with wary steps and slow, ascend the stairs, halting occasionally to draw breath, till they arrive at the hill or pit top, where the coals are laid down for sale ; and in this manner they go for eight or ten hours almost without resting." It was not uncommon, said Bald, for the women ascending the pit to weep " most bitterly " from the severity

¹ *Mines*, xvi, p. 244.

² *Mines*, 1842, xvii, pp. 215, 217.

³ *Mines*, xv, p. 91 ; xvi, p. 450.

of their labour. One whom he saw came forward, "groaning under an excessive weight of coals, trembling in every nerve, and almost unable to keep her knees from sinking under her. On coming up, she said in a most plaintive and melancholy voice: 'O Sir, this is sore, sore work. I wish to God that the first woman who tried to bear coals had broke her back, and none would have tried it again.'"¹ This grievous suffering continued because owners, with short-sighted economy, refused to give up methods of working which had long been regarded as obsolete elsewhere. It was cheaper to transport coal by women than to incur the cost of laying rails. Even in thick seams where horses might easily have been introduced, the extra capital required and incidental expenses connected with their maintenance were regarded as an unnecessary outlay where colliers could get the work performed so cheaply by their families.² It was also maintained that horses would be useless in the steep inclines of the edge seams in Scotland; but in Wales this difficulty was surmounted by the use of windlasses. Moreover, other means were speedily thought of and introduced in 1842 when women's further labour was forbidden. Needless to say, these primitive methods reacted upon the prosperity of the mine. Although the amount of coal raised by women in this way was described as "incredible," the total annual output could only be negligible when compared with that of pits in which horses were used and coal was brought to the surface by mechanical means. The amount carried by the bearers on a single journey varied from $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. in the case of children, to 2, $2\frac{1}{2}$ and sometimes 3 cwt. by women. Mary Duncan said: "I make 40 to 50 journeys a day [to the surface], and can carry 2 cwt. as my burthen. Some females carry $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 cwt., but it is over straining."³ Unfortunately, women frequently were tempted to overstrain in order to reduce the number of their journeys and so get back early to their homes. "I know many," said a collier, "who have filled tubs of $5\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. in two burthens and brought them 200 fathoms."⁴ In this way, working ten hours a day, a woman would often bring from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 tons to the surface during the day, for which the wage was often no more than 8d.⁵ The coal was placed in a basket made specially to fit the back when bent in a semi-circular position. A tug or strap was placed over the forehead and before the journey commenced large lumps of coal were placed on the neck. "However incredible it may appear," said the Commissioner, "I have taken the evidence of fathers who have ruptured themselves from straining to lift coal on their children's backs."⁶ Sometimes the tugs broke and the bearer or those who followed were thrown down and injured by the falling load. Agnes Moffat, who had been injured in this way, said: "It is no uncommon for women to lose their burthen, and drop off the ladder down the dyke below; Margaret M'Neil did a few weeks since, and injured both legs. When the tugs which pass over the forehead break, which they frequently do, it is

¹ Bald, *Coal Trade of Scotland*, pp. 130-132, 141-2.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 91-2. *Mines*, 1842, xv, p. 94.

³ *Mines*, xvi, p. 464.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

⁵ Bald, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

⁶ *Mines*, xvi, p. 447.

very dangerous to be under with a load. The lassies hate the work altogether, but they canna run away from it."¹

The life of the coalbearer engaged in this horrible labour in an unwholesome atmosphere from ten to fourteen hours every day, and in most weeks once through the night as well, was surely the most wearisome and oppressive of all those engaged in colliery work. In the opinion of the Commissioner, this labour, which was not merely performed in isolated instances, but was the actual every-day existence of hundreds of women and girls, presented a picture of "deadly physical oppression and systematic slavery, of which . . . no one unacquainted with such facts would credit the existence in the British dominions."²

On the anthracite field of Pembroke, the problem of highly inclined workings was solved by the use of windlasses fixed at convenient distances on the incline of the vein. Thus the odious bearing system was avoided, and although the work of winding, performed by women, was certainly severe, it was a very great improvement on the Scottish system. In this way strong women, working from eight to ten hours, could haul up 400 loads of from 1½ to 4cwt. each.³

In other types of underground labour few women only were engaged. They were sometimes found working as "pumpers" and pony drivers, and in a few exceptional cases as hewers or getters. One of the advantages of their labour from the men's point of view was that women did not in the normal way enter into competition with them as hewers. The few instances noted in the Report where women or girls were actually getting the coal, occurred either in small pits in the West Riding, or in cases where the collier employed his hurrier to assist him.⁴ Occasionally if a man became incapacitated his wife would take his place and do the ordinary work of a hewer.⁵

The surface workers in collieries included many women in their numbers, and there was usually little or no feeling against this type of labour in districts where underground labour was objected to. The work was mostly unskilled labouring, and though heavy in many cases, the Commissioners did not consider it generally to be beyond the strength of the workers. In South Staffordshire, where there were nearly a thousand bankswomen in the Bilston district alone,⁶ women landed and weighed the coal as the skips came up the shaft, and both there and in other districts loaded the canal boats. Other tasks included screening, picking and cleaning coal, and drawing up both coal and workers from the bottom of the pit by windlass. In this group of surface workers must be included all those employed in metal mines. In ironstone pits the work was very similar to that on the colliery banks, and consisted in breaking and cleaning the ore, and gathering and stacking the ironstone. Many of the Shropshire women engaged in this work left the pits in the spring, and travelling to London, entered the service of the market gardeners around the city, and in addition to their agricultural work became the fruit and vege-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 440.

² *Mines*, xvi, p. 387.

³ *Ibid.*, xvii, pp. 475, 573-80.

⁴ *Mines*, xv, p. 24; xvi, p. 234; xvii, p. 658.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xvi, p. 475.

⁶ *P.P.*, 1844, xvi, p. 55.

table sellers in the streets and at Covent Garden, returning to the pits again at the end of the season.¹

Tin and copper mines, like lead mines, had employed women and children from early times, and the abundant and regular employment provided in the preparation of the ore was always a cause of satisfaction to poor law officials in a mining district.² Since, however, this was all outdoor surface labour, conditions were entirely different from those in coal mines. Girls were employed from the age of nine or ten years; many of them married miners early in life, and continued at the mines until the size of their families prevented further regular employment. Little children were engaged in a preliminary picking of the ores, while older girls "cobbled" or broke up the larger pieces. The hardest task left to women was "bucking," a process in which the small pieces of ore were pulverised by means of a hammer and anvil. This work entailed a good deal of exhaustion, but in many mines by the mid-nineteenth century a crushing mill had been introduced to do away with this severe manual labour. The more delicate of the washing operations were chiefly entrusted to women and many were employed in the final preparation of the ores for sale.³ Similar work had been done by women and children in the lead mines throughout the eighteenth and in the early days of the nineteenth centuries, but by 1840 very few women or girls were employed.

HOURS OF LABOUR

The hours of labour in coal mines varied in different districts, but irregularity in this matter was common to all areas and one of the worst features of the employment. Although owners sometimes represented the usual hours to be six or seven a day, the majority of agents and managers gave eleven hours as the average working day; an estimate which agreed more closely with the time given by the workers themselves. The evidence on this point showed that whatever were the hours of the colliers, the hurriers and drawers had usually to work about two hours longer, until they had brought the last of the coal hewn by the men to the bottom of the shaft. Thus the collier's normal day of nine hours meant eleven or eleven and a half for women and young people, and in winter, when the demand for coal was greatest, this period was extended to twelve, thirteen and sometimes even fifteen and sixteen hours. The worst evidence came from East Scotland, where the Commissioner reported: "There is overwhelming evidence that the labour of the coal pits in this district is often continued, on alternate days at least, for 15, 16, 17, and even 18 hours out of the 24, and great numbers of Children and Young persons state that 14 hours is the regular and ordinary time during which they daily work in the pits. Some witnesses, indeed, state that they not infrequently work the whole 24 hours."⁴

¹ *Mines*, xvi, pp. 41-2.

² Poor Law Commissioners in 1834 found women and children of mining villages regularly employed at the mines at a wage of 6d. and 3d. a day. *P.P. Poor Laws*, 1834 (44), xxx, pp. 81a-87a.

³ *Mines*, xvi, pp. 755 ff.

⁴ *Mines*, 1842, xv, pp. 106-110.

It was in collieries where night work was not regularly organised that the fluctuating demand for coal caused the greatest suffering, since no relays of workers were provided and the colliers were encouraged by piece rates to extend their ordinary working hours on into the night. In most cases they compelled their hurriers and drawers to remain in the pit with them for the same period, with the result that women and children began and ended their labours at all hours of the day and night. Dr. Scott Allison, speaking of this irregularity, said: "I have seldom walked or ridden through the coal villages at any hour during the night, summer or winter, without seeing little boys and girls going to and from the collieries, with their oil lamps in their hands or stuck in their caps, lighting them on their weary way."¹ It is only fair to add that employers were not always responsible for the long hours worked in some of their pits. Workers themselves were often willing to extend the hours unduly for the sake of extra money that could be earned. It is true that many of the women and children who were in the pay of the colliers had often little choice in the matter, but on occasion, they, too, were not without blame. The excessive hours worked sometimes by Ann Hamilton, for instance, are thus significantly explained: "I have repeatedly wrought the twenty-four hours, and after two hours rest and my peas (soup) have returned to the pit and worked another twelve hours. It is quite our own will, but make more money by it."² The severe physical strain produced by these long hours may readily be imagined, the more so when it is realised that there were few collieries in which there was any regular cessation of work during the day for meals. South Staffordshire and the Forest of Dean were the only districts where a regular period was set apart and observed for the rest and refreshment of the workers. Elsewhere in a few districts a fixed time was nominally allowed for meals, but the full period was rarely taken, and the Commission found that in "the great majority of coal districts of England, Scotland and Wales, no regular time whatever is even nominally allowed for meals, but the people take what little food they eat during their long hours of labour when they can best catch a moment to swallow it."³ The result of these long hours of unbroken toil was that the colliers considered it a physical impossibility to keep them up day after day. The Monday after pay day was always regarded as a holiday, but the policy of "taking it easy" at the beginning of the week only aggravated the evil, since the lost time had to be made up at the end. Thus women and children were kept half employed for the first two or three days of "the reckoning", only to be worked past their strength towards the end. The desire to make up for lost time without actually extending the already long hours, led to an over exertion which, in its sacrifice of health and strength, was far worse than overtime itself.

WAGES

Though the wages of women and young people in collieries might be described as inadequate considering the severity of the labours

¹ *Mines*, 1842, xvi, p. 441.

² *Mines*, xvi, p. 484.

³ *Mines*, xv, p. 118.

they had to perform, yet in all except the worst paid districts, they compared favourably with those paid to women and children in other occupations.¹ As a general rule the underground workers, with the exception of the trappers, pumpers and drivers hired by the proprietors, were employed and paid by the individual colliers for whom they worked. The latter undertook to deliver the coal to the bottom of the shaft at a certain rate, hence the women and children who conveyed the coal were their servants, a fact which sometimes accounts for the different rates of wages paid to hurriers working in the same pit. Of three hurriers working in a Scottish pit, for instance, one received 14*d.* for a twelve hour day, and 7*d.* for a night shift of six hours; the second, a younger girl, had 1*s.* a day, and the third, 15*d.* a day.² Age, strength and the speed of the worker were all taken into consideration in determining the rate of pay.

Some difficulty was experienced by the Commissioners in ascertaining the actual wages earned by different classes of workers, from a tendency on the part of some to describe their wages as less than they really were. In Lancashire, the lowest paid district was in and around Worsley, where the wages of hurriers and drawers varied from 1*s.* 9*d.* to 9*s.* a week, according to age; elsewhere in the county the Commissioner estimated the range to be from 4*s.* to 15*s.* a week, but in actual evidence few women admitted a higher wage than 10*s.* In the West Riding, hurriers of eleven, fourteen, seventeen and older were stated to earn about 5*s.*, 8*s.*, and 12*s.* respectively,³ but again the wages actually given in evidence were considerably below this. Margaret Westwood, aged fourteen and a half, earned 6*s.* 6*d.*, Sarah Wood, aged seventeen, had 7*s.*, and Ann Eggle, whose heavy corves of 12½ cwt. should surely have commanded the maximum wage, had 10*s.* a week.⁴ In Scotland women's wages at both putting and bearing only averaged 11*s.* to 12*s.* 10*d.* a fortnight of eleven working days—little more than half the wages earned by women in England.⁵ Even this was not all profit, the workers having to provide their own candles or oil and wick for their lamps, an expense which was estimated at from 7*d.* to 10*d.* a week.⁶ The drawers who used the belt and chain had also to provide their own "harness."⁷ These low rates for women's work in Scotland were, however, higher than those paid for agricultural work there. Eliza Dixon, for instance, said she left field work—at which she could never earn more than 8*d.* a day—for the pit, because she could earn "15*d.* when working in the wet roads."⁸

In many cases where women and girls were working for husbands and parents they received no separate wage, the total earnings of the

¹ A comparison of wages paid to children and young persons (aged 6 to 18 years) in collieries and other occupations, gave the following results:—

Average weekly wage of 352 (Chas. & Y.F.) in collieries (Yorkshire),	45. 8 <i>d.</i>
" " " " 161 " " " " " "	45. 4 <i>d.</i>
" " " " 717 " " " " " "	38. 9 <i>d.</i>
" " " " 100 " " " " " "	35. 0 <i>d.</i>
" " " " 119 " " " " " "	15. 7 <i>d.</i>

Mines, 1842, xvii, pp. 68-69.

² *Mines*, xvi, p. 503.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 276, 218, 256.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 451.

⁵ *Mines*, xvii, p. 180.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 496-7, 481, 440.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 451.

⁸ *Mines*, xvi, pp. 191-2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 451.

family being paid to the collier's account. Many of them, therefore, never saw their hardly earned wages and scarcely knew what they earned. Until the end of the eighteenth century, colliers frequently borrowed money which was repaid out of the labour of their children, and although this had been forbidden in 1799 and was now obsolete, the wage of a grown-up daughter in the employment of another collier was frequently paid, not to the girl herself, but directly to her parent. Elizabeth Day, a girl of seventeen, at Barnsley, said: "I am not paid wages myself; the man who employs me pays my father; but I don't know how much it is. I have never been at school."¹ In a few of the pits in Scotland where colliers were not responsible for the conveyance of their coal, women were able to contract for putting on their own account, and in this case the wages were not only higher, but they had a more independent position. "Janet Adamson and I contract for putting on our own account," said one of them, "the road is 100 fathoms in length, and we run the races singly; we frequently run 50 races between us; we get 14d. per score, and 1s. per week extra for clearing pit-bottom and working the pump."² The lowest wages of all were paid to the windlass women in Pembrokeshire, whose weekly earnings rarely exceeded 3s. 6d. or 4s.³ Their work demanded great strength as well as patience to endure the monotony of continuous winding, but their hours, seven or eight a day, were considerably shorter than those in either England or Scotland. Their acceptance of this small wage is, however, explained by the fact that their earnings did not constitute the sole means of livelihood. Most of them lived on tiny holdings and were able to supplement their wages by gardening and the profits from a cow.

The rate of wages on pit banks ranged from 6d. in the case of young girls to 1s. 4d. a day for women. A good deal of surface work was irregular, and therefore, although it was suggested that women could earn from 7s. 6d. to 9s. a week, in actual practice few women could get sufficient employment to bring their wages to this amount. Many, both in England and Scotland, could only get work on alternate days, especially in slack periods in the summer, and their average wage over a period was often not more than 4s. 6d. to 6s. weekly.⁴ In South Wales, where workers were not in excess of the demand, it was possible for some women to earn a regular wage of 40s. a month.⁵ In the metal mines a woman's wage was theoretically 1s. a day, but again irregularity of employment caused a fluctuating wage, and actual receipts were considerably lower than wages would have been from constant employment.⁶ Some idea of the actual wages paid may be obtained from the list of wages paid by the Fowey Mines in Cornwall, where the average monthly wage of 324 women and children in 1839 was 16s. 3d., with a maximum of £1 3s. 10d. and a minimum of 8s. 8d. In Ireland, labour

¹ *Mines*, xvi, p. 244. ² *Mines*, xvi, p. 510. ³ *Mines*, xvii, pp. 573-5.

⁴ *Mines*, xvi, pp. 80, 495-6, 500. *Midland Mining Commission*, 1843, xiii, Appendix, p. 117.

⁵ *Mines*, xvii, p. 514.

⁶ At the United Mines in Cornwall, for example, the average monthly wage of six girl workers was 15s. 6d. If constantly employed they would have been entitled to 18s. 6d. *Mines*, xvi, p. 182.

was "so abundant and cheap" that "strong able young women" between the ages of twenty and thirty earned only 4d. a day at the metal mines.¹

In most cases the wages of workers in collieries, whether paid weekly, fortnightly or monthly, were paid in coin, although the Commissioners found that in some remote districts, and especially in Staffordshire, the West of Scotland and in many parts of Wales, the Truck Acts were grossly violated and workers were compelled either to take payment in goods or to lose from 2s. to 3s. in the pound in making their purchases at Tommy shops.²

PHYSICAL AND MORAL EFFECTS OF EMPLOYMENT.

One of the most important subjects to which the Commissioners turned their attention was the health and physical condition of colliery workers, and especially that of women and children. Some of the owners and many of the agents considered that the labour was not too severe—one viewer declared that hurrying was a healthy occupation because it "promoted perspiration"—but the mass of evidence collected on this point was condemnatory. In a few words the Report summed up the general effect of labour on the colliers: "The evidence collected in almost all the districts proves that too often the collier is a disabled man, with all the marks of old age upon him, when other men have scarcely passed beyond their prime."³ Of the younger people who gave evidence a few declared that they liked working in the pit, and some said they had now got used to the fatigue, but the great majority stated that they were "always tired," and evidently felt their work to be too exhausting and oppressive. One thing was in their favour. It was undoubtedly true that colliers as a class lived better than many artisans. Their superior wages enabled them to consume a good deal of meat, milk and beer, and in general they were well fed and well clothed. There were, of course, numerous exceptions to this,⁴ but there was no evidence of the general underfeeding so common at that time among hand-loom weavers and agricultural labourers. To this potent factor the healthy appearance of many of the young collier girls was due, but among those who had worked for longer periods in the pit, it was observed that the advantages procured by high wages were insufficient to counteract the injurious effects of excessive labour.

The commonest complaint among women and children was that of extreme fatigue; many of them said that the close of the day found them too tired to wash or eat, or do anything but sleep. Many women and girls were compelled to spend Sunday, their one day of leisure, in bed, to recuperate and prepare for the labours of the following week. While this fatigue was sometimes traceable to occasional rushes of extra severity, in some districts it was so common among all workers as to suggest a continuous and general excess of labour, as a result

¹ *Mines*, xvi, p. 863.

² *Mines*, xv, p. 159.

³ *Ibid.*, xv, p. 191.

⁴ "It is but too evident that such laborious and exhausting work . . . does not always bring with it even so much as the reward of sufficient food and raiment." Commissioner speaking of the West Riding. *Mines*, xv, p. 163.

of which health was impaired, disease promoted and old age and death anticipated. An extraordinary muscular development, the outcome of their labour, which amounted almost to deformity in numerous instances, rendered young people capable of "prodigious muscular exertion"; but after a few years, it was found that their strength diminished, leaving them as adults "pallid, stunted in growth, short of breath, sometimes thin, and often crooked and crippled."¹ The evidence of Jane Johnson gave an instance of early muscular development followed by later weakness: "I could carry 2 cwt. when fifteen years of age, but I now feel the weakness come upon me from the strains . . . Many women lose their strength early from overwork, and get injured in their backs and legs."² Of Lancashire it was said: "The women drawing in pits are generally crooked. (You) Can tell any woman who has been in the pits; they are rarely if ever so straight as other women that stop above ground."³ Diseases were brought on as a direct result of heavy labour combined with the unhealthy conditions under which so many of them worked. Much could be done to improve the conditions in mines, and owners of some pits spared no expense or precaution to render them healthy and safe. There were many mines, however, in which both ventilation and drainage were grossly neglected, sometimes to an extent which made them positively dangerous. The diseases suffered most frequently from this neglect were asthma and diseases of the lungs, rheumatism and inflammation of the joints; excessive labour was often followed by loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, pains in the stomach and rupture.⁴ Minor ailments, nevertheless the cause of much suffering, included inflammation of the head, irritation of the feet, back and skin, and occasional lameness from running over the uneven ground.⁵ In addition to these risks there was the constant liability to accidents.

It is perhaps difficult in these days of legislative protection and inspection to realise how frequent and often fatal were mining accidents at a time when they were rarely reported or investigated. The Report stated that there were many mines in which the most ordinary precautions against accidents were neglected, and "in which no money appears to be expended with a view to secure the safety, much less the comfort of the work-people"; while Dr. Mitchell, speaking of South Staffordshire, said: "To judge from the conversation which one constantly hears, we might consider the whole population as engaged in a campaign."⁶ Fatal accidents among men, women and children were all far too common, and the fact that wholly unnecessary deaths—arising from the unguarded state of the pit mouth, the badness of the ropes used for raising and lowering the workers, and the accumulation of water in the pits—tended to exceed those caused by explosive and suffocating gases showed how cheap was the estimate of human life.⁷ As for lesser accidents, involving broken bones and the loss of limbs, one has only to read the medical evidence and that given by the women themselves to realise how frequently they occurred. Dr. Scott Allison declared that many women at the age of twenty were

¹ *Mines*, xv, p. 194.

² *Mines*, xvi, p. 456.

³ *Mines*, xv, p. 186.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 187-8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-7.

⁶ *Mines*, xv, p. 257, xvi, p.

⁷ *Mines*, xv, p. 136.

to be found suffering from the effects of violence which had generally proceeded "from collision with waggons, from the falls of stones and coals;" and which resulted "in lameness, imperfections in the motions of the limbs, hands and feet, abortion and premature parturition."¹

If any further proof were needed to show the complete unsuitability of this employment for women, it was given in the evidence showing its effects on childbirth. As to the harm done in this respect and the better health of children whose mothers were not employed below ground, medical evidence was conclusive. Among many who spoke of the harmful effects in this connection was Dr. Makellar, who gave it as his decided opinion "that the effect of exhausting labour of females in coal-pits has a marked influence over the physical development of the infants at birth, . . . and for this reason especially," he continued, "I disapprove highly of female labourers in coal-pits."² Distortion in the spine and pelvis from which colliery women were especially liable to suffer, caused difficulty at childbirth. Many continued to work during pregnancy, and sometimes up to the very day of birth: "I had a child born in the pit," said one woman, "and I brought it up the pit shaft in my skirt." The evidence of a Lancashire woman who said that four out of the eight children born while she was in the pits were still-born,³ is one of many given to the same effect, and another witness speaking of her thirty-three years' experience in the mine, said: "A vast of women have dead children and false births, which are worse, as they are no able to work after the latter. I have always been obliged to work below till forced to go up to bear the bairn, and so have all the other women. We return as soon as able, never longer than ten or twelve days; many less, if they are much needed. It is only horse work, and ruins the women; it crushes their haunches, bends their ankles, and makes them old women at forty. Women so soon get weak that they are forced to take the little ones down to relieve them; and even children of six years of age do much to relieve the burthen."⁴

Surface operations in both coal and metal mines were, on the whole, free from the evils connected with underground work. There were only one or two occupations, such as "bucking" and "jigging", which could be described as excessive labour, and for these machinery was gradually being introduced. The general condition of the workers was described as one of "robust health," but the exposed situation of some of the mines on bleak hill sides and the very inferior and inadequate provision of shelter sometimes had injurious consequences to the workers.⁵ Hernia also was not infrequent among those who had to lift and carry heavy boxes of ore. Accidents, however, were rare and then only slight, and there was no evidence of disease caused by surface employment or of any "malformation, distortion or infirmity."⁶

The "robust frames" and "rude health" of women and girls employed in this outdoor labour was, in the opinion of one medical witness, sufficient evidence that their physical condition was immeasurably superior to those engaged in domestic industries and the textile manufactures of the north of England.⁷

¹ *Mines*, xvi, p. 412.

² *Mines*, xvi, p. 422.

³ *Mines*, xvi, p. 214.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 458.

⁵ *Mines*, xv, pp. 260-261; xvi, p. 781.

⁶ *Mines*, xvi, p. 793.

⁷ *Mines*, xvii, p. 634.

Deplorable as were the effects of underground employment on women's health, the brutalising conditions and vicious depravity with which they came in daily contact had moral results which were far more serious in so far as they affected not only the character of the women themselves but the standards of the whole mining community. Of the women in the West Riding the Commissioner wrote: "They are to be found alike vulgar in manner and obscene in language: but who can feel surprise at their debased condition when they are known to be constantly associated, and associated only, with men and boys, living and labouring in a state of disgusting nakedness and brutality . . . ?"¹ All classes of witnesses, indeed, bore "the strongest testimony to the immoral effects of their employment." The tragedy was that "the savage rudeness" of the upbringing of girls in the pits was not counteracted by any system of education. Introduced into the pit in early childhood before any correct ideas of conduct could be formed, they gradually grew accustomed to obscene language, vice and debauchery, and knew no impropriety in them. It is true that since the days when Wesley recorded his "compassion" for the neglected state of the miners, the establishment of chapels by his followers in colliery districts had introduced a civilising influence, which had diminished drunkenness and fought against the brutal sports with which miners had always been associated; and although they were still regarded by other classes as an ignorant and almost uncivilized race, the Report paid tribute to the improvements already achieved by Methodism. The complete lack of educational opportunities for girls in colliery villages was, however, a serious handicap on mining communities and was constantly lamented by witnesses and Commissioners alike—the more so as the women were said to exercise "an unusual and unlimited influence over the miners." Parental duties were in many cases left entirely to them, and at the same time children were put to labour so early that almost their sole chance of education was in the home. How little they would receive from a mother who had herself been brought up in the pit may readily be imagined. Moreover, since muscular strength and ability to endure arduous labour was the grand qualification for marriage where women still worked underground, the practice tended to prevent marriage and civilising contact with other classes of the community. The standard of living was noticeably different in areas where miners benefited by mixing with other artisans.

Sunday Schools, which were doing much for the education of working classes in industrial areas, had not so extensive an influence among colliery workers. Some of the young people interviewed by the Commissioners said they attended them and were learning to read, but more often the answer was, "Nay, I work here in the dark six days, and I can't shut myself up on Sundays too."² The result, declared one of the Commissioners, was "a picture of moral and mental darkness which must excite horror and grief in every Christian mind. . . . I unhesitatingly affirm that the mining children, as a body, are growing up in a state of absolute and appalling ignorance."³ In addition to

¹ *Mines*, xvii, p. 73.

² *Mines*, xvi, p. 519.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

the inability of the majority to read and write,¹ ignorance of the most elementary matters was naturally accompanied by an extremely low standard of domestic comfort. The slender knowledge of domestic economy which was one of the results of underground employment, often led to the mismanagement of earnings, and rough and inadequate housekeeping. Dr. Sadler declared that he saw "the greatest differences" in cleanliness and good management in the homes of those colliers whose wives did not work in the pits,² and while no sweeping generalisations on this point could be made, the evidence undoubtedly pointed to a higher standard of comfort in districts where the employment of women and girls had ceased. The description of miners' homes in Durham, for example,³ where miners declared they had as much right to domestic comfort as other men, stands out in strong contrast to the deplorable pictures of filth, wretchedness and perpetual poverty in the districts where women were employed. Mining communities, in their isolation, showed more distinctly than others the extent of women's influence in determining the state of society, and it was realised on all sides that it was useless to attempt to improve the moral and social conditions in mining areas until women's underground work was abolished, and some system of education was put within their reach. In the words of the Report—"It is at this point that the habits of the collier population must be attacked in order to be improved! Give to the collier the comforts of a clean and cheerful home, and the companionship of a sober and decently-educated female, not degraded to brute labour by working in the pits; let her attend to a mother's and a housewife's duties; and you will soon change the moral condition of the collier."⁴

CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDE TO WOMEN'S COLLIERY EMPLOYMENT.

Since the Commissioners had nothing but condemnation for women's colliery employment, and could only ascribe to it pernicious effects and no countervailing advantages, either to the public or the people employed, the question of contemporary attitude is not without interest. Why had it persisted for so long and to what extent did the owners, the miners and the women themselves, share the views of the Commissioners? In the first place, it may be said that the owners generally were in favour of the exclusion of women and girls from the mines.⁵ Since they were for the most part engaged by the colliers, it made little difference to the owners whether women or boys did the work. Some few were of opinion that the price of coal would be raised by their expulsion, but the majority welcomed the reform. There was certainly no strong objection such as that made recently by the Indian Mining Federation to the proposals made by the Government of India

¹ *Mines*, xvii, p. 186.

² *Mines*, xvi, p. 261.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁴ *Mines*, xvi, p. 396.

⁵ Some of the owners had little knowledge of, or interest in, the management of their pits and were as astonished at the disclosures of the Report as the general public. A proprietor near Barnsley said: "I have never been in the pit, and never will go. . . I don't know whether there are lasses or not working in the pit, but I must refer you for all information to the underground steward." *Mines*, xvi, p. 254.

to prohibit the employment of the 70,000 women now working underground in the mines of that country.¹ Moreover, the obvious improvements in those areas where humanitarian owners had recently abolished women's work, would have led others to follow their example without legislative interference, had it not been for the fear of losing some of their best workmen who insisted on their right to employ their wives and children.²

Resentment on the part of the miners against interference with women's labour was due both to cupidity and conservatism. They were obstinately attached to old habits and depended on the support of women and children to make up for their own irregular labour. But apart from the financial loss, miners stood to benefit by improvements in their own conditions. Speaking of the changes brought about in the Duke of Buccleugh's pits, his agent said: "I feel confident that the exclusion of females will advantage the colliers in a physical point of view, inasmuch as the males will not work in bad roads, and that will force the alteration of the economy of the mines. Owners will be compelled to alter their system; they will ventilate better, make better roads, and so change the system as to enable men who now work only three or four days a week to discover their own interest in regularly employing themselves."³

It was the cheapness of a wife's labour that provided the incentive to early marriages in colliery districts. "Men only marry us early because we are of advantage to them," said Janet Selkirk, and the truth of her statement was borne out by an old collier who said he had been "obliged to get a woman early" to avoid paying away all his profits.⁴ In the same way the preference for women and girls as hurriers was largely due to the fact that they were cheaper than men and boys. Stewards and agents said they could not do without them because they were better and more attentive to their work, but the colliers also declared they could not afford to pay more to men. That this was a mere excuse for avarice was shown by the fact that the employment of women was confined to local areas where wages were no lower than elsewhere, and by the statement of an overlooker: "A girl of twenty will work for 2s. 0d. a day or less, and a man of that age would want 3s. 6d.; it makes little difference to the coal master, he pays the same whoever does the work; some would say he got his coal cheaper, but I am not of that opinion, the only difference is that the collier can spend 1s. to 1s. 6d. more at the ale house, and very often the woman helps him to spend it."⁵ Among the more far-seeing miners the very cheapness of women's labour with its possible effects on the wages and employment of men, was a reason for opposition to it. There were colliers in the West Riding who strongly objected to their

¹ The Federation stated that the mineowners were "amazed that the Central Government have so lightly dismissed the weighty objection to the proposal put forward by the Federation, namely, a probable rise in the wages." The owners, moreover, declared that women were quite able to work in the mines "without impairing in the least, their capacity to bear healthy children"! In 1922 there were 78,806 women and 8,603 children under twelve years of age working underground in Indian mines.

² *Mines*, xvi, p. 400.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 441-2.

⁴ *Mines*, xvi, pp. 475, 452.

⁵ *Mines*, xvii, p. 205.

employment, because "they prevent lads and men from getting their proper wages." In parts of Scotland also it was opposed, "not so much from the soreness of the work as from a notion they have that it cheapens their own labour"¹; and in accordance with the policy pursued by the Unions to force up wages after 1825, the men themselves had in 1836-7, excluded women from both coal and ironstone pits. For a time it remained a rule of the Unions that no woman should be allowed underground, but the temptation to employ them proved too strong, and they found their way back again.² It is possible that a similar notion of self interest had its influence in prompting the resolution of 350 Barnsley miners—some of them employers of women—who, in 1841, declared with only five dissentients, "that the employment of girls in pits is highly injurious to their morals, that it is not proper work for females, and that it is a scandalous practice."³

In the parents, no sense of pity seems to have been aroused by the hardships of their children. For the most part they were reconciled by use to children's early introduction to the pit, and hardened by similar experiences in their own youth. "I went to pit myself when I was five years old," said one Yorkshire mother, "and two of my daughters go. It does them no harm. It never did me none."⁴ Many declared that they could not exist without the wages of their children, yet it was often in the best paid districts that the worst abuses in this respect were found. In the West Riding, the Sub-Commissioner found that the work of young children was in almost every instance "compelled either by the avarice or improvidence of their parents."⁵

Of the attitude of women themselves towards their work some idea will have been gained from the evidence already quoted. Some few of the younger women employed as hurriers found little fault with their position; they described their work as hard, but "not too hard." Brought up in a mining community and accustomed to view this type of life as inevitable, they lacked experience of any other conditions with which to compare their own arduous toil. The great majority however, found their labour intolerable and would have endorsed heartily the opinion expressed by an old Scotch woman, Isabel Hogg: "You must just tell Queen Victoria that we are guid loyal subjects; women-people here don't mind work, but they object to horse-work; and that she would have the blessings of all Scotch coal-women if she would get them out of the pits, and send them to other labour."⁶ Unfortunately, while the Legislature could take women out of the pits it could not "send" them to other labour. Isabel Hogg here touched upon the crux of the whole problem in mining areas. Much as women hated employment in the pits, it was at any rate preferable to unemployment and starvation—hence the bitter resentment of the women who in 1842 found themselves excluded from the pits without means of support and any alternative employment. Of all who gave evidence before the Commissioners, few had knowledge of any other occupation with the exception here and there of a hand-loom weaver who had found

¹ *Mines*, xvi, pp. 284, 285, 251, 471.

² *Mines*, xvi, p. 324, 364.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁴ *Mines*, xvi, p. 276.

⁵ *Mines*, xvii, p. 73.

⁶ *Mines*, xvi, p. 461.

employment in the pit preferable to the long hours and inadequate wages of that depressed trade. But over and over again, women and girls declared they would gladly work out of the mines if only they could obtain other occupations. Where factories offered an alternative, women were rarely found in the pits, but apart from that, a mining district as a rule provided little but domestic service for which their upbringing gave them neither aptitude nor inclination. The fear of unemployment was the spectre that kept women underground. "I don't like being in the pit if I could get anything else," said a Yorkshire hurrier. "I have not tried to get a place because I know I could not, there is over many out of place already."¹ Similarly in Staffordshire, Dr. Mitchell hesitated to condemn heavy pit-bank work for women on account of the scarcity of other employment. Referring to those who objected to the arduous nature of this work for women, he said: "When we consider how many employments men have engrossed to themselves, and how few ways there are for women to gain their living, we must be cautious not to attempt to narrow what is already so limited."²

THE EXCLUSION OF WOMEN FROM THE PITTS.

The publication of the Report in May, 1842, roused intense indignation that such a state of affairs as existed on some of the coal fields should have remained unknown. A wider interest was secured for the Report by the woodcuts showing women and children at work, since they captured the imagination of many who might not have been tempted to read an ordinary Blue Book. To their influence not a little of the "great mania" for a bill to end this slavery was due. "These prints were seen in the *salons* of the capital" wrote Lord Londonderry, "the ladies were all enlisted in the cause of their own sex, thus represented in so brutal a manner."³ Again, in the great wave of feeling which passed over the country, the woodcuts probably helped to convey an impression that such revolting labour was characteristic of all mining areas, and made more imperative the demand for reform. Almost more than by their heavy labour, Victorian England was shocked and horrified by accounts of the naked state of some of the workers, although the prejudicial influence of this was probably far less—among people accustomed to housing conditions in which any degree of privacy was almost unknown—than the Commissioners and their readers imagined.⁴ But even so, and allowing for the fact that external appearances might in some instances have led to exaggerated conclusions on the part of the Commissioners, enough had been proved to show the necessity for legislative interference. The Home Office, fearful of the effects of its publication, made a vain effort to hold up the Report, but once issued, enthusiastic support enabled Lord Shaftsbury, the promoter of the Commission, to act at once. Within a week he had given notice of the Bill he intended to introduce. "The Govern-

¹ *Mines*, xvi, p. 257.

² *Mines*, xvi, p. 12.

³ *Letter to Lord Ashley on the Mines and Collieries Bill*, p. 29.

⁴ See letter from "A West Riding Coal Master," in *Manchester Guardian*, June 15, 1842.

ment cannot, if they would," he wrote in his diary on May 14th, "refuse the Bill of which I have given notice, to exclude females and children from the coal-pits—the feeling in my favour has become quite enthusiastic; the Press on all sides is working most vigorously."¹ On June 7th, Shaftesbury introduced his Bill in an eloquent speech of two hours' length, which was perhaps the most powerful of his career. The effect on the House was sensational. Two days later he wrote in his diary: "On the 7th, brought forward my motion—the success has been *wonderful*, yes, really wonderful—for two hours the House listened so attentively you might have heard a pin drop, broken only by loud and repeated marks of approbation—at the close a dozen members at least followed in succession to give me praise, and express their sense of the holy cause. . . . Many men, I hear, shed tears. . . ."² With consummate skill, Shaftesbury dealt briefly with the main features of the Report, quoting copiously from the evidence of the workers themselves and pleading specially the cause of women and children. He showed their labour to be needless, "wasteful and ruinous to themselves and their families." "They know nothing that they ought to know," he declared, "they are rendered unfit for the duties of women by overwork, and become utterly demoralized. In the male the moral effects of the system are very sad, but in the female they are infinitely worse, not alone upon themselves, but upon their families, upon society, and, I may add, upon the country itself. It is bad enough if you corrupt the man, but if you corrupt the woman, you poison the waters of life at the very fountain."³ Subsequently in the Bill, Shaftesbury demanded the abolition of all female labour below ground; the exclusion of young boys up to the age of thirteen; the termination of the system of pauper apprenticeship in mines, and the appointment of suitable persons to have charge of all machinery which involved the safety of colliery employees.⁴ Certain penalties were to enforce the observance of the Bill. In the House of Commons, although the mining interest had organised opposition to some clauses of the Bill by the time the third reading was reached, there was no attempt to withstand the clause relating to women. Ainsworth, a mine owner, merely expressed the view that their exclusion would increase the distress already prevailing from unemployment. In the country, the proceedings on the Bill were watched with interest and enthusiastically supported. In his Diary, Shaftesbury wrote: "Accounts from all parts full of promise. The collier people themselves are delighted; the hand loom weavers (poor people!) rejoice in the exclusion of the females, as they themselves will go down and take their places."⁵ With certain modifications the Bill passed to the Lords on July 5th, where it was to encounter bitter and interested opposition. Already before the Bill came up, Londonderry, himself a great owner, had announced his intention of opposing all clauses "except that relating to the exclusion of females working in mines."⁶

¹ Hodder, *Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, (popular ed, 1887), p. 324.

² *Ibid.*, p. 226

³ *Hansard*, House of Commons, June 7, 1842.

⁴ *Bills Public*, 1842, iii. 5 Vict., 7 June, 275 ff.

⁵ Hodder, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

⁶ *Hansard*, House of Lords, June 30, 1842.

As the opposition hardened, however, this clause too was included in Londonderry's vehement attack. He declared that some seams of coal required the employment of women; and certain pits, which could not afford to pay men's wages must either employ women or close down. In Scotland, he contended, women bearers ascending by ladders preferred this mode of earning a living, since by it they could gain higher wages than by other employment. He betrayed the interested motives behind such pleading by stating that these collieries were now making little profits, and if increased wages had to be paid to men for women's work, many collieries would have to abandon their workings. In Lord Londonderry's opinion, such arguments "afforded satisfactory ground for the belief that the exclusion of female labour would be an injurious measure."¹ In reply, the Duke of Buccleugh gave evidence of the beneficial effects of excluding women in his own mines, and stated that most of the pits certainly could be worked without the use of women. Other speakers opposed the clause as an interference with the individual's right to dispose of her labour in what way she pleased, and suggested the clause should not be extended to adult women. Two amendments, one to exclude women at the age of twenty-one, and the other at forty, were moved and lost. It was also contended that as the practice was apparently dying away, there was no necessity for legislative action, but this view disregarded the fact that the number of girls working underground far exceeded that of adult women, and that they represented an entirely new generation growing up in the mines. A more justifiable criticism was that the Bill, while depriving colliery women of a livelihood by prohibiting their employment, suggested no substitute and made no provision for their maintenance and for those who were dependent on them. But while the Lords raised this point and foretold the suffering and destitution which must inevitably follow, the question of compensation, or of a maintenance allowance to tide over a difficult transition, was so far beyond their horizon as never to be suggested or discussed.

There is no doubt that, but for the pressure of public opinion, the Lords would have thrown out the Bill. As it was, Shaftesbury had to make concessions on almost every point, except that relating to female labour. In its final form, the Bill excluded all women and girls from underground labour within six months of the passing of the Act; boys under ten were also excluded and apprenticeship, abolished in the case of girls, was in future only to be allowed from the age of ten to eighteen for boys. The Commons had made provision for the appointment of an inspector to report on the state and condition of the mines, but the Lords limited his authority to the state and condition of the workers,² and to enforcing the observance of the Act by means of fines for the evasion of these and other clauses contained in the Act. The Royal assent was given on August 10th, 1842, and the Bill—a personal victory for Shaftesbury, and the greatest of all his achievements—became law.

The Act (5 and 6 Vict. c. 99) which has been well described as "the most high-handed interference with industry enacted by the State in

¹ *Hansard*, House of Lords, July 24, 1842.

² Inspection of mines was granted in 1850. Hammond, *Lord Shaftesbury*, p. 83.

the nineteenth century,"¹ was not allowed to come into force without one more attempt on the part of the Scottish owners to continue women's labour. Early in 1843, Lord Londonderry began to organise an attempt for the repeal of the Colliery Act.² In accordance with this plan, Mr. Cumming Bruce in the House of Commons in May, 1843, drew attention to certain petitions stating the distress of ex-colliery women who were unable to obtain other employment, and asked leave to bring in a Bill amending the Mines and Colliery Act, to allow women over the age of eighteen to continue their work in mines. In his reply, Shaftesbury produced letters from Scotland showing that the petitions originated at the instigation of the masters to forward their own pecuniary gain, and that in many cases the women had been "dragooned by their masters" and "commanded to sign." He was able to prove that in England women were gradually being absorbed into other employments, whereas in Scotland many collieries had turned out their women "en masse" at the last moment merely for the sake of creating confusion. In the division which followed, the motion was defeated by 137 votes to 23, and victory was assured for Shaftesbury's Act, which was never questioned again.³

The expulsion of women from the mines was undoubtedly accompanied by much suffering, yet little was done to alleviate the distress. The greatest pressure occurred in East Scotland, where 2,400 had been employed, and where the isolation of the mining districts made it exceedingly difficult to get other employment. In many collieries in consequence, the Act was disregarded until 1844, when the first official visit of Tremeneere—the Commissioner appointed under the Act—brought women's employment as a system to an end. Numbers of women, however, unable to procure a living any other way, continued to go down the pits by stealth, sometimes disguised as men. And since in Scotland, the law gave them no claim to parish relief, the plight of many, especially those who had parents or children dependent on them, was pitiable in the extreme. The miserable pittance and humiliating employments to which some of the single women were reduced,⁴ obscured for a time the benefits of the Act; but in the case of married women, while the financial loss was questionable, the benefits gained were inestimable, as is shown by the following statement made by a colliery woman. "While working in the pit I was worth to my husband 7s. a week, out of which we had to pay 2s. 6d. to a woman for looking after the younger bairns. I used to take them to her house at 4 o'clock in the morning, out of their own beds, to put them into her's. Then there was 1s. a week for washing; besides, there was mending to pay for, and other things. The house was not guided. The other children broke things. . . . Then when I came home in the evening, everything was to do after the day's labour, and I was so tired I had no heart for it; no fire lit, nothing cooked, no water fetched,

¹ Harrison and Hutchins, *History of Factory Legislation* (3rd ed.), p. 82.

² Hodder, *op. cit.*, p. 263-4.

³ Hansard, House of Commons, May 16, 1843.

⁴ Some of the women were found to be making about 3d. a day at hawking and collecting manure on the roads. *Mining Commissioner's Report*, 1844, xvi, p. 4.

the house dirty, and nothing comfortable for my husband. It is all far better now, and I wouldna' gang down again."¹

The owners in some places showed a humane and active interest by providing schools for instruction in laundry work, sewing and reading; so helping the younger people to obtain domestic service. As time went on, the distress gradually diminished and the benefits of the Act were universally acknowledged, especially in connection with the increased opportunity for education. Legal proceedings arising out of evasions of the Act were, however, frequently necessary, especially round Wigan and in parts of South Wales and East Scotland where proprietors connived at the employment of women. So late as 1850 Tremeneere estimated that 200 women and girls were still working in certain collieries in South Wales, many of whom were only eleven or twelve years of age.² By continued prosecutions, and later by inspection of the mines, evasion became more and more difficult, until finally, with the exception of the "pit-brow lassies" who still remain in Lancashire, collieries ceased entirely to be places of employment for women.

METAL TRADES.

The Commissioners who reported on Mines in 1842, included in their investigations the work of women and children in metal manufactories, chiefly in the iron, copper and tin trades. At the same time inquiries were being made into conditions in the smaller metal and hardware trades, which were still carried on as outwork industries in small workshops and cottages throughout the Black Country, at Sheffield and a few other local centres. The reports published in the following year showed that large numbers of women and girls were employed in many different branches of metal manufacture, but although their hours were, in many cases, excessive, and their conditions as bad as any that had previously been described in connection with women's work, the findings of the Commission had no practical results. Factory labour might be regulated with comparative ease, but the complexity of the numerous metal and hardware trades, and the conditions and irregular hours in homes and scattered workshops presented altogether different problems, which the Commissioners in 1843 made no attempt to solve. Their efforts were therefore limited to a description of existing conditions.

WORK IN METAL MANUFACTORIES

In the iron trade prior to the Industrial Revolution, workers in the early forges were often assisted by their wives, who did odd jobs, such as breaking the ore, attending to the bellows and general labour about the forge.³ But until the developments of the eighteenth century, the numbers in the trade were very small, and it was only

¹ *Ibid.*

² One pit alone employed 70 women and girls in 1849. *Mining Commissioner's Report, P.P.*, 1850, xxiii, pp. 59, 63.

³ Salzman, *English Industries of the Middle Ages*, p. 34.

when the expansion of trade led to a shortage of workers and high wages, that there was any inducement to employ women and children to any extent. It might well be supposed that there would be few tasks suitable for either women or young children in iron works and metal manufactories, but in the new iron centres which sprang up, notably in South Wales, there were at first few other occupations or trades. Hence, in an age when children's employment was the rule, girls as well as boys were put to any occupation that offered, and in South Wales, girls of eight and nine years were frequently found either as tip girls or as assistants in the iron works. The returns made from certain metal manufactories here in 1842, showed 1,565 women to be employed—roughly in the proportion of one in eighteen to men—while in the class of young persons, 1,062 girls were in the proportion of one in three to boys of the same age.¹ In addition there were 261 girls under the age of thirteen. Not all metal works in the district employed women and girls, and in some the percentage of female labour was negligible. At the Beamish Forges, in Durham, about 50 women were employed during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Children of seven were employed to blow the bellows, and the total earnings of husband, wife and child often reached as high as £5 a week.²

Women and children were chiefly engaged in casual labour. Some, who described themselves as "labourers in ironyards", were engaged in preparing the ore, wheeling it to the furnaces, filling them with iron and limestone, making coke and carrying it to the refiners, and removing cinders from the furnaces. Breaking limestone, which was used as a flux for the ironstone, was left entirely to women, and the "pilers" also, employed in one of the processes of manufacturing bar iron, were principally women and girls.³ A good deal of this general labouring was heavy work, and while it was done for the most part in the open air, and under fairly healthy conditions, the hours of labour were such as frequently caused severe physical strain. As the furnaces were always kept in blast, the work was continuous, and many of the men, women and children worked alternate weeks of seven days or nights for twelve hours on end, frequently spending the whole twenty-four hours in labour at the change over.⁴ The absence of any one day for rest was felt most severely by the women limestone breakers, whose daily task of breaking from ten to fourteen tons of limestone required incessant effort to keep the furnaces supplied.⁵ In copper works the few women employed were again casual labourers, while in the tin plate industry, women and girls were more generally engaged, both as assistants to different classes of workmen, and as rubbers, scourers and pickers in the finishing processes, some of which required a considerable amount of experience and skill.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THE SMALL METAL TRADES

In the smaller metal trades, by far the greater number of workers were congregated in the small towns and villages within a few miles'

¹ *P.P. Mines*, xvii, p. 594.

² V. C. H., *Durham*, ii, p. 288.

³ *P.P. Mines*, 1842, xvii, pp. 504, 623, 511, 478-9.

⁴ *P.P. Mines*, 1842, xvii, pp. 511, 504, 629.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 428, 654, 505.

radius of Birmingham, where the metal trades early became localised. On the Worcestershire side and in South Staffordshire, where, said Defoe, "every Farm has one Forge, or more,"¹ the manufacture of locks, nails, nuts, bolts, screws, buckles, bits and stirrups was carried on purely as domestic industry throughout the eighteenth century. Birmingham itself was the centre of the "toy trade" (small metal goods of all kinds), which, according to the manufacturers in 1759, then employed "at least 20,000 people" in that and the neighbouring towns.²

The Birmingham trade was remarkable, not only for the many different branches of metal manufacture—a Government Commissioner enumerated ninety-seven separate trades in 1841³—but also for the minute sub-division of labour, observed in many of them. Much of the work was done on the out-work system by men, women and children in their own homes, engaged in piece work on material received from the manufacturer, and the rest in small workshops all over the town. In these the employer ranged in importance from the "garret-man,"⁴ who had three or four boys and girls working for him in an attic, to the man who employed perhaps one hundred and fifty workers on his own premises and some hundreds of outworkers besides. With the development of steam power in the nineteenth century came so-called manufactories, in which various of the metal trades were carried on. These were, however, quite different from the normal factory, in that the workshop organisation was maintained. Such a building was subdivided into little shops each occupied by a small master, who by thus hiring his "shopping" from a capitalist manufacturer, obtained the necessary motive power to work his machinery.⁵ Matthew Boulton's manufactory at Soho, in which in the latter part of the eighteenth century he employed a thousand men, women and children in different branches of the metal trades, appears to have been unique.⁶

As might be expected under these conditions of domestic and workshop organisation, girls as well as boys were put to the metal trades at an early age. In 1759, a Birmingham manufacturer employing 600 workers stated that girls from seven to twelve years of age earned from 1s. to 4s. a week in different branches of the toy manufacture.⁷ The prevalence of such early work may be judged from the subject of a debate advertised to take place in Birmingham in 1774—"Is the Custom so much practised (in Birmingham) of sending Children to the Shops to work as soon as they are well able to walk, injurious or

¹ *Tour* (1769 ed.), vol. ii, p. 412.

² *Commons' Journals*, March 20, 1759.

³ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, p. F18.

⁴ The small employer was usually known as an "undertaker", i.e. he worked exclusively for one of the capitalist manufacturers, and undertook to get worked up all the materials supplied to him. *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, pp. B 1, 2, B 1, 4.

⁵ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, p. F 18. In a button manufactory, for example, visited in 1833, there were 318 people employed, and the workers "were scattered through a great many small rooms," rented by different masters. *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. B 1, 2.

⁶ *Smiles, Lives of Boulton and Watt*, p. 168, f.n.

⁷ *Commons' Journals*, March 20, 1759.

advantageous to the Inhabitants in general? "¹ In the small towns and villages around children worked with their parents at an equally early age, or were hired by other small domestic manufacturers. Apprenticeship, being the cheapest form of labour, was frequent, and neighbouring parishes by offering a premium of £4 or £5 had little difficulty in putting out their children to the small iron trades.² The apprenticeship indentures at Darlaston (S. Staffs) show that girls were usually apprenticed from seven to ten years of age, until twenty-one or marriage, and the trades to which they were most frequently put were nail-making—including nuts, bolts and rivets—set-making, chape filing, screw making, and bit and stirrup making.³

The investigations made by the Children's Employment Commissioners in the Black Country (1841-3) showed that although apprenticeship by that time was declining,⁴ the early work of children was still common in practically all trades. In Birmingham the average age for both boys and girls was from eight to nine years, and even younger in some branches of the button trade, to which they were put "as soon as they are in any way tall enough to reach the lathe." In the small iron trades around Wolverhampton children began "hard work regularly at nine", and in chain making districts from eight to nine.⁵ Pin makers both at Birmingham and Warrington frequently began at five years of age, since it was asserted, pin heading "can be done by a child as soon as it acquires the use of its arms and legs"; and when one of the Factory Commissioners visited a pin manufactory in 1833, he declared in astonishment that it "reminded him more of an infant school than anything else."⁶ That such work passed unnoticed throughout the agitation against children's early labour in factories was due to the little shops and forges in which the work was carried on. "You might pass along a street fifty times, up the passages and courtyards of which there were shops containing nests of young children, and never know it," wrote the Commissioner in his Report in 1843. "They are as much out of sight as birds' nests."⁷

Accustomed to all kinds of rough and heavy work from childhood, girls employed in the small metal trades were grown up long before they were out of their teens. "The effects of early work, particularly in forges," says the Report of 1843, "render these girls perfectly independent. They often enter the beer shops, call for their pints, and smoke their pipes like men." Some of them supported three and four illegitimate children and worked for them "without a murmur."⁸ Others at sixteen or seventeen married workmen in the same trade,

¹ *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, May 2, 1774, advertised for discussion at the Birmingham Robin Hood Free Debating Society.

² Speaking of the temptation of the premium given by parishes with apprentices, the Commissioner in 1843 stated that "the benevolent intentions of decessed founders of charitable funds have been abused to a great extent—certain masters being accustomed to get two or three new apprentices in order to pay their rent." *P.P.*, 1843, xv, p. Q 62.

³ *Darlaston Parish MSS.* Apprenticeship Indentures.

⁴ *P.P.*, 1843, xv, p. q 42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1843, xiii, pp. 7-8; xiv, p. f 136.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1843, xiii, p. 7. *Factory Commission*, 1833, xxi, p. D 2, 43.

⁷ *P.P.*, 1843, xv, p. Q 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, xv, p. Q 62.

and as wives of little masters continued their industrial occupations in their homes. In the Birmingham trades also, it was customary for women to continue work after marriage, either in workshops, where they frequently worked with their children, or at home.¹ As in all other districts where domestic industry flourished, the standard of home comfort in the Black Country was low.² And here, too, Godfrey's Cordial, the drug indispensable to working mothers, was freely administered to quieten young children. Throughout the district "Godfrey's" stood "in a great jug" on every chemist's counter.³

The different branches of the metal and hardware trades in which women and girls were employed are too numerous to be discussed in detail. Many of the trades were themselves subdivided, and women's occupations ranged from skilled handicrafts and semi-skilled machine attendance down to such unskilled work as the carding of buttons, hooks and eyes, which was generally sweated labour carried on in the poorest homes. In Birmingham, to name only some of their occupations, women worked in the jewellery trade, in all the various branches of button manufacture, in pin and pen making, in some branches of the brass trade, at lacquering, in the tin plate and japan trades. Much of the work was light, unskilled labour, such as stamping and punching out small articles with hand machines, drilling and polishing, and gold and silver chain making for the jewellery trade. Only two of women's trades in Birmingham in 1843 were held by medical opinion to be injurious: the lacquering of metals, from the hot impure atmosphere in which the work was carried on, and the drilling of pearl buttons, from the dust inhaled by the workers.⁴ In other trades such ill-health as occurred resulted from working conditions in small over-crowded workshops that were frequently damp and ill-ventilated, rather than from the actual occupation.⁵

In the villages of South Staffordshire and Worcestershire women and girls were chiefly employed in making nails, chains, nuts, bolts, screws, files, buckles and stirrups, and to a less extent in the lock-making trade.⁶ Throughout the eighteenth century these were all domestic industries with the exception of screw making, which began to be organised on the factory system in the latter half of the century. Domestic workers were still in the majority in the middle of the nineteenth century, although by that time women and girls were extensively employed in manufactories for screw making, punching washers, nails and tips and in other branches of the tin toy trade.

¹ *Ibid.*, xiv, p. f 180.

² An exception was noted in the cases of Willenhall and Wednesbury, where work was heavier and fewer girls were employed. Here many of the girls, it was stated, "can do needlework, knit, cook, and mend, or make clothes, which may truly be regarded as extraordinary accomplishments among girls of the working classes in South Staffordshire." *Ibid.*, xv, p. Q 86.

³ *F.F.*, 1843, xv, p. Q 30.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xiv, p. f 181. Sarah Cadby, a pearl button worker, complained of "pearl dust on the chest." "Her breathing is very bad in the morning. Has had constant pain in the side since she worked at the pearl button trade. These effects are common to all the mechanics in this business." *Ibid.*, p. f 133.

⁵ 1843, xiv, p. f 181.

⁶ In the 1860's the proportion of women in the lock trade was only about 10 per cent. *Birmingham and District Hardware Trades* (ed. Timmins), p. 91.

The introduction of machinery in these trades in the early nineteenth century was accompanied by an increase in the proportion of women employed in them. The Report of 1843 states: "In many of the manufacturing processes carried on in the Birmingham district, girls are employed equally with boys, and the system has lately become prevalent of substituting in many branches the labour of women for that of men. 'I saw,' says the Sub-Commissioner, 'in some manufactories, women employed in most laborious work, such as stamping buttons and brass nails, and notching the heads of screws: these are certainly unfit occupations for women. In screw manufactories the females constitute from 80 to 90 per cent. of the whole number employed.'"¹ Similarly, the button trade was carried on principally by women and children.² Machinery and a series of trade depressions which permitted the exploitation of women's labour appear to have been responsible for this increase. A brass manufacturer giving evidence in 1833 stated: "There are many inferior parts of the work that used to pass through the men's hands; we take as much of this as we can off the men, and have it done in parts by the boys or the women, and then give it to the men to finish; . . . formerly when trade was good we did not resort to that screwing system; if we had done so we should not have had a single workman to work for us the next day."³ Among domestic manufacturers also, the proportion of women workers probably increased when spinning left the rural districts. An old nail maker in 1843 declared that since the introduction of spinning and weaving machinery "ten times as many girls" had come to work at nails and chains as formerly.⁴ While his estimate was probably exaggerated, it can hardly be doubted that the loss of spinning in this district would result in a greater number of girls being put to the metal trades.

At Sheffield, according to Arthur Young in 1770, women and children were "all employed" in various branches of the manufactures there and earned "very good wages, much more than by spinning wool in any part of the Kingdom." Girls in the silver plate trade earned from 4s. 6d. to 5s. a week, and some "even to 9s."⁵ Apart from the manufactories in the silver plate and white metal trades in which women and girls were employed as burnishers and polishers, the greater part of the work in Sheffield, as in the Black Country, was carried on in small domestic workshops by little masters, many of whom were assisted by their wives and children. Among the cutlers, since women do not appear to have been admitted to apprenticeship, few can have been engaged in skilled work, although the census of 1841 included 159 women working as cutlers, 158 scissor makers, 42 fork makers,

¹ P.P., 1843, xiii, p. 16.

² "The system now in operation in this town has led to the employment of children and women rather than men; in the button trade almost every branch is carried on principally by women and children; in his establishment they are in the proportion to the men of ten to one." *Ibid.*, xiv, p. i 140. Evidence of Mr. Morton, Button Manufacturer.

³ P.P., *Report on Manufactures*, 1833, vi, p. 275. Evidence Mr. T. C. Salt.

⁴ P.P., 1843, xv, pp. q 83-84.

⁵ *Northern Tour* (and ed.), vol. i, pp. 125-6, 123.

and a few workers in other branches.¹ For the most part, women and girls worked as hafters and bone cutters, and on the inferior cast cutlery which was given out to be filed in the workers' homes. A little bench and a rough vice was all the equipment necessary, and such work was carried on in the poorest cottages.²

File makers also, strongly though unsuccessfully, opposed the admission of women to their trade. Women were apparently working as file cutters in the eighteenth century,³ and 123 women file makers were returned in the census of 1841. A few years later in 1847, renewed attempts were made to exclude the 200 women and girls then in the trade. The file-smiths' society drew up rules which limited the right to work to widows and orphans, and imposed a fine of £3 on any member who allowed his wife or daughter to work, or assisted any woman with tools. It proved impossible to enforce these new regulations, however, possibly because threequarters of the women at work were the wives or daughters of file-smiths, and a compromise was therefore arrived at, by which women were restricted to certain classes of work definitely given over to them.⁴

Elsewhere the chief trades in which women and girls were employed were watch making, and pin and needle making. The watch trade was already minutely sub-divided in the eighteenth century, and the branches of it in which women were employed were chain making, watch springing and lining (i.e. work on the cases of watches), and gilding.⁵ In the eighteenth century girls were frequently apprenticed to these trades, and chain making was often done as outwork by married women in the country round London, Coventry and in Hampshire.⁶ According to Campbell, the work required "no great ingenuity"; a hand machine was used to form the links and these were afterwards rivetted together. Needle making was similarly an outwork industry in which women and girls were employed in the villages of Warwick and Worcestershire, and at Long Crendon, in Oxfordshire,⁷ until the introduction of machinery in the second quarter of the nineteenth century made this a factory occupation.

The manufacture of pins was carried on in several provincial centres, the more important of which were Gloucester, Bath, Bristol, Birmingham and Warrington. From the earliest days the trade appears to have been carried on principally by the labour of women and young children, many of whom were drawn from the lowest classes. Workers

¹ *Population Returns*, "Occupation Abstract," 1844, xxvii, pp. 31-44.

² *P.P.* 1843, xiv, p. E 3.

³ Mather's verse contains the following reference (c. 1785): "'Twas Jezebel's daughter I saw chopping files." *Songs of J. Mather* (ed. John Wilson, 1862): quoted Lloyd, *Cutlery Trades*, p. 200.

⁴ Cf. Disraeli's *Sybil* for references to the file makers of the Black Country: "There isn't a gal in all Wodgate what handles a file like Sue." Sue is described as "a stunted and meagre girl, with a back like a grasshopper; a deformity occasioned by the displacement of the bladebone, and prevalent among the girls of Wodgate from the cramping posture of their usual toil." Book iii, ch. iv.

⁵ Lloyd, *Cutlery Trades*, p. 319.

⁶ Collyer, *Parent's Directory*, pp. 289, 292.

⁷ Campbell, *London Tradesmen*, p. 251; *P.P.*, 1843, xv, pp. 5-7.

⁸ Lardner's *Cyclopaedia* (ed. 1853), vol. ii, p. 401; *Poor Laws*, 1834, xxx, p. 590a; 1834, xxxvi, p. 236h; V. C. H., *Worcestershire*, ii, p. 274.

were employed in small manufactories and workshops as well as outworkers in their homes. Young describes a pin manufactory near Bristol in 1767, where were employed "a great number of girls, who with little machines, worked by their feet, point and head them with great expedition; and each will do a pound and half in a day. The heads are spun by a woman with a wheel, much like a common spinning wheel, and then separated from one another by a man, with another little machine like a pair of sheers."¹

The simple mechanical processes of heading and sheeting pins were so easily performed by young children that adult women found it almost impossible to earn an adequate wage. Those employed as full-time workers in manufactories were usually overlookers who superintended the work of young children; and the greater number of adult women in the trade were outworkers. Some, chiefly married women with domestic duties, worked on their own at pin heading and sheeting in their spare time, and earned very poor wages of one or two shillings a week.² More often women outworkers employed a number of children and conducted little heading and sheeting shops in their own homes, being supplied with hand machines and all equipment by the firms for which they worked.³

DOMESTIC CONDITIONS OF THE NAIL MAKERS

Of all these different trades, nail making employed by far the greatest number of women workers. In the Black Country nearly all the small towns and villages in the eighteenth century were engaged to some extent in the nail trade, and the number of workers was estimated at nearly 40,000 at the end of the eighteenth century, and 50,000 in 1830.⁴ The number of women included in these estimates must have been considerable, since in the great majority of cases men were assisted by their wives and children.⁵ Nail making was, moreover, frequently undertaken by women whose husbands were employed in the mines or in other occupations.⁶ At Sedgely in 1842, the number of girls in the trade was said to exceed considerably that of the boys—"Sedgely might appropriately be termed the district of female blacksmiths. They are its most prominent characteristic."⁷

For how long women had been associated with the trade is difficult to determine, but they were certainly well established in it in the early

¹ *Six Weeks' Tour*, p. 150.

² *P.P.*, 1843, xiv, p. f 119; 1843, xv, pp. m 4, m 7.

³ For details of such shops see article by T. Ashton, "Records of a Pin Manufactory," in *Economica*, November, 1925.

⁴ *S.C. on Manufactures*, 1833, vi, p. 594. Lloyd, *Cutlery Trades*, p. 402.

⁵ The census of 1841 gives 4,039 women nailers, but this would appear to be an understatement and suggests that the wives of many workers were not returned under this heading. The trade was gradually declining from 1830 onwards, yet as late as 1861, women and girls in the trade numbered 11,000. *Population Returns*.

⁶ Sometimes girls apprenticed by the parish were indentured to miners, but were "to be instructed in the art of nailing." In such cases, nailing was apparently the trade of the wife, who took an apprentice as an assistant. *Darlaston Parish MSS.*

⁷ *P.P.*, 1843, xv, p. Q 78.

eighteenth century. A petition of iron manufacturers in 1737 speaks of "Artificers, Women, and Children, who were formerly employed in that Manufactory, in making Nails and Scythes, etc., for Exportation,"¹ and a few years later Hutton remarked on the number of women he observed in the trade on his first visit to Birmingham: "When I first approached Birmingham, from Walsall, in 1741, I was surprised at the prodigious number of blacksmiths' shops upon the road; and could not conceive how a country, though populous, could support so many people of the same occupation. In some of these shops I observed one or more females, stripped of their upper garments, and not overcharged with their lower, wielding the hammer with all the grace of the sex. The beauties of their faces were rather eclipsed by the smut of the anvil. . . . Struck with the novelty, I inquired, 'Whether the ladies in this country shod horses?' and was answered with a smile, 'They are nailers.'"²

Eighteenth century allusions to nail shops and little forges attached to cottages and small farm houses suggest pleasant pictures of domestic industry carried on under very favourable conditions, but on the contrary, all accounts agree that the lot of the nailmakers, even then was miserable. Hutton speaks of their "scanty gleanings" and "penury" and says plenty was unknown among them "except in rags and children."³ Their workshops in the early nineteenth century were of the most primitive description and though the "squalid wretchedness" of the nailmaking districts was probably increased with the growth of population in the early nineteenth century, working and housing conditions can never have been very good. The Sub-Commissioner who reported on the nail makers in 1840 stated, "I never saw one abode of a working family which had the least appearance of comfort or of wholesomeness, while the immense majority were of the most wretched and sty-like description."⁴

Of the conditions under which they worked he wrote: "The best kind of these forges are little brick shops of about fifteen feet long and twelve feet wide, in which seven or eight individuals constantly work together, with no ventilation except the door and two slits, or loop-holes, in the wall; but the great majority of these work-places are very much smaller (about ten feet long by nine feet wide), filthy dirty, and on looking in upon one of them when the fire is not lighted, presents the appearance of a dilapidated coal-hole or little back den. They are usually ten or twelve inches below the level of the ground outside, which of course adds to their slushy condition, since they can never be cleaned out except by a shovel, and this is very seldom, if ever, done. In this dirty den there are commonly at work a man and his wife and daughter, with a boy and girl hired by the year. Sometimes there is an elder son with his sister, and two girls hired; sometimes the wife (the husband being a collier, or too old to work, has taken to drinking, or is perhaps dead) carries on the forge with the aid of her children. These little work-places have the forge placed in the centre generally, round which they each have barely standing-room at an

¹ *Commons' Journals*, March 21, 1737.

² Hutton, *History of Birmingham* (6th ed.), p. 192.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *P.P.*, 1843, xv, p. Q 75.

anvil; and in some instances there are two forges erected in one of these shops. . . . The effluvia of these little work-dens, from the filthiness of the ground, from the half-ragged, half-naked, unwashed persons at work, and from the hot smoke, ashes, water, and clouds of dust . . . are really dreadful."¹

Children were made useful at an early age, first blowing the bellows and at seven or eight learning to make the easiest kind of nails. Girls, being in great demand as nurse girls at an early age, were frequently put to the trade at about nine years of age, and either worked with their parents or were hired out by the half year. For the first six months they learned the trade and worked for nothing, and in the three succeeding half-years received 1s., 2s. and 2s. 6d. per week. During this period the daily stint was gradually increased, until at the end of the second year the child of ten or twelve was turning out a thousand nails a day—an arduous task in the heat and smoke of the forge.²

In chain making districts, at Stourbridge and Cradley Heath, women and girls worked at the lighter sort of chains as well as at nail making. The number of women in the chain trade in the early nineteenth century was small as compared with later developments, and girls in these districts were usually put to learn both nail and chain making so that when one trade was slack they could take to the other.³

The hours of labour in workshops in the Birmingham trades and in the screw manufactories in the early nineteenth century were usually twelve a day with two hours for meals.⁴ This ten hour working day compared favourably with the hours of domestic workers which were frequently characterised by great irregularity and severe overwork of women and children. Conditions varied somewhat in different trades; buckle and stirrup makers, for instance, appear to have worked more regularly a ten or twelve hour day,⁵ but the hours of nail makers were notoriously long at all periods. The Report of 1843 states that the usual hours were 6 a.m. to 9 or 10 p.m., with two hours for meals, and at week-ends wives, children and apprentices were "almost worked to death", from 3 or 4 a.m. to 9 p.m. and sometimes all night on Friday to get the work completed for Saturday, when the nails were weighed up and taken in to the factors.⁶ After these excessive hours at the end of the week, Monday was usually spent in

¹ *Ibid.*, p. Q 76.

² *Ibid.*, 1843, xv, pp. Q, 76-77.

³ "The making of a nail," says Adam Smith, "is by no means one of the simplest operations. The same person blows the bellows, stirs and mends the fire as there is occasion, heats the iron, and forges every part of the nail; in forging the head, too, he is obliged to change his tools." *Wealth of Nations* (ed. Cannan), vol. I, pp. 9-10.

⁴ *P.P.*, 1843, xv, pp. Q 88, q 83-84.

⁵ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. B 1, 3; *P.P.*, 1843, xiv, p. F 19.

⁶ Cf. Evidence of Rosanna Meredith, "going in eleven." "Works at stirrups; works from six in the morning till six at night; time for meals two hours and a half in the day. Is stinted two dozen; files two dozen stirrups. Goes earlier than six sometimes, when she gets done her stint sooner; does not find it hard work, only it hurts her hand a bit." 1843, xv, p. q 46.

Nancy Blackmore, works with father, 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. "Is very tired at night." *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, xv, pp. Q 24, Q 75, q 56, q 79. Evidence of Mary Humpherson, Geo. Jenkins, Mary Woolridge.

idleness and drinking, but this appears to have been a holiday only for men; women and girls were compelled to use this time for domestic duties. "Don't work much on Monday," said Elizabeth Pritchard in 1843, "don't play, but do washing, and fetch coals, and other work for the home."¹

WOMEN'S WAGES IN THE METAL TRADES.

Women's wages in the metal trades in the eighteenth century were relatively good. In 1759 a Birmingham manufacturer stated that girls from seven to twelve years employed in the toy trade earned 1s. to 4s. a week, and above that age from 4s. to 8s.² At the end of the century in 1791, Arthur Young was inclined to the belief that wages at Birmingham were "higher than in any place in Europe." Women's wages then ranged from 4s. to 20s. a week, with an average of about 6s.,³ and a few years later (1796) Eden said that women in the buckle and button trades earned 7s. to 10s. a week.⁴ At Gloucester in the pin trade in 1767, women who were "good hands at pointing and sticking" could earn from 10s. to 12s. and even to 15s. a week;⁵ whereas in the nineteenth century, expert workers rarely exceeded 8s. a week, and the average was from 4s. 6d. to 6s.⁶ At Birmingham in 1840, women's wages in different trades varied from 5s. to 14s., the average being round 7s. or 8s. a week;⁷ and at Sheffield, workers in the silver plate manufacture earned by piece work 8s. to 15s.⁸ Among the domestic nailmakers variations in wages were frequent from trade fluctuations, and during the eighteenth century wage statements nearly always refer to family earnings. In 1833 women at Sedgeley were said to earn about 5s. or 6s. a week at nailmaking,⁹ and in 1843 women's wages averaged from 6s. to 8s.¹⁰

In the heavier trades in metal manufactories, wages that were really high for women were earned in certain classes of work, although when dependent on piece rates, they were sometimes the result of exertion too great for the health and strength of the workers. In 1842, girls of ten and thirteen years of age employed at the forges earned from 4s. to 5s. a week. Women who attended the furnaces at the Penndyarron Iron Works earned from 8s. to 15s. a week and in copper smelting works from 7s. 6d. to 10s.¹¹ As pilers in iron works, young women earned from 7s. to 12s. a week, and in the Pontypool district, as much as 15s.¹² Sometimes these high wages were gained

¹ *P.P.*, 1843, xv, p. q 76.

² *Commons' Journals*, March 20, 1759.

³ *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xvi, p. 534.

⁴ *State of the Poor*, vol. iii, p. 739.

⁵ Young, *Six Weeks' Tour*, p. 109.

⁶ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, pp. B 1, 8, 9, 28; *P.P.* 1843, xiv, pp. f 120, 124, 125; xv, p. O 8.

⁷ *P.P.*, 1843, xiv, pp. f 178-9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, xiv, p. e 33.

⁹ *Poor Laws*, 1834, xxx, p. 445a.

¹⁰ *P.P.*, 1843, xv, q 45, 79. *S.C. on Payment of Wages*, 1842, ix, pp. 63-4.

¹¹ *P.P. Mines*, 1842, xvi, pp. 584, 652, 680.

¹² *Ibid.*, xvii, pp. 512, 584.

by women who, instead of working as men's assistants, contracted for certain kinds of work by the ton and employed younger women to assist them.¹ Limestone breaking was another employment paid by the ton, at which good wages could be earned. Mary Richard, aged twenty-five, earned from £2 15s. to £3 a month at this heavy work. For this she broke more than fourteen tons of stone a day, but admitted that she had "often worked too hard" for the sake of earning more money.²

¹ Evidence of Sarah Jones, a piler of sixteen: "I work for the young woman who takes work by the ton, she has been here twelve years, she is older than me a good deal." *Ibid*, xvii, p. 604.

² *P.P. Mines*, 1842, xvii, p. 654.

CHAPTER XII

CRAFTSWOMEN AND BUSINESS WOMEN

MARRIAGE A BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

WOMEN's industrial work in the eighteenth century was by no means limited to the textile and smaller domestic industries. There were in addition numerous crafts and trades in which they were engaged, either on their own account, or as married women assisting their husbands. The eighteenth century was still the day of small scale business and in many trades the skilled worker was both craftsman and merchant, producing goods at home and selling direct to the consumer. Such workers, both men and women, formed a considerable section of the shopkeeping classes.

Where the workshop was attached to the home it was customary for the whole family to work together in the craft. Goldsmiths' daughters, for example, were frequently skilled in designing and chasing, and furniture makers, stone masons and engravers brought up their daughters to assist them in carving, sculpture, drawing and graving.¹ The craftsman's wife was usually so well acquainted with her husband's business as to be "mistress of the managing part of it," and she could therefore carry on in his absence or after his death, although she herself might lack technical skill. Marriage was, in fact, as much a business partnership as it was among the small domestic clothiers and the farming classes. Servants were kept for domestic work so that the mistress could give her attention to more important business affairs, hence Defoe's disgust that servants' wages had so increased that "an ordinary Tradesman cannot well keep one; but his Wife, who might be useful in his Shop, or Business, must do the Drudgery of Household Affairs; And all this, because our Servant Wenches are so puff'd up with Pride now-a-Days that they never think they go fine enough."²

Except in the trades conducted chiefly by women, the tendency was for women's activity in the business sphere to decrease during the period of the industrial revolution. This was due first to social changes following on the increase in wealth, and secondly to the reorganisation demanded by commercial and industrial changes. When the home was separated from business premises women ceased to take an active share in their husbands' affairs and so lost the experience they would otherwise have gained. At the same time the development of large scale business and the need for greater capital made it increasingly difficult for women, even in their own trades, to set up in business on their own account.

¹ Butler, J., *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*, p. xliv.

² *Everybody's Business is Nobody's Business*, 1725, p. 6.

The influence of increased wealth on women's contact with affairs is noticeable from the Restoration onwards. At first women of the upper classes only were affected. The end of the seventeenth century saw women of the aristocracy taking less and less interest in the management of their households and estates in which hitherto they had been actively concerned.¹ This new freedom from responsibility was not without effect on the classes below, and early in the eighteenth century the ambitious tradesman's wife was beginning to aspire to a life of idleness that she might be considered a gentlewoman. "They act as if they were ashamed of being tradesmen's wives," says Defoe, and "scorn to be seen in the counting-house, much less behind the counter."² In some cases, he continues, "the tradesman is foolishly vain of making his wife a gentlewoman, forsooth; he will have her sit above in the parlour, receive visits, drink tea, and entertain her neighbours, or take a coach and go abroad; but as to business, she shall not stoop to touch it; he has apprentices, and journeymen, and there is no need of it."³

This withdrawal of women from business affairs, while discernible to a keen observer like Defoe, could not, however, have proceeded far in his day, and the change was only gradually completed. Defoe, indeed, admits that although fewer tradesmen's widows than in former times continued in business, there were still many who procured honest journeymen to assist them, and themselves kept the books, did the business abroad and conducted affairs generally until the eldest son, having completed his apprenticeship to his mother, was ready to be taken into partnership.⁴ And this was still the common practice at the opening of our period in the mid-eighteenth century. In view of this, it seems probable that the changing attitude, so scorned by Defoe, was noticeable only in London, where wealth was increasing most rapidly. Numerous advertisements in contemporary newspapers show that in the provinces, at any rate, it was still customary for more than half a century after Defoe was writing for widows to continue the management of their husbands' businesses. Not until the end of the eighteenth century do such notices become less varied and less frequent.

Reference has already been made to upper class women who in the eighteenth century were still personally interested in the management of their estates.⁵ Among those who were also interested in industrial undertakings was Mrs. Montague, famous for her London salons, whose husband was a northern colliery owner. From the time of her marriage Mrs. Montague seems to have taken an active interest in her husband's concerns and to have undertaken the management of all colliery business. In 1766 she writes to a friend: "I am still in the northern regions, but I hope in a fortnight to return to London. . . . Business has taken up much of my time, and as we have had farms to let against next May-day, and I was willing to see the new colliery begin to trade to London before I left the country, I had the prudence to get the better of my taste for society. I had this day the pleasure

¹ Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, ch. ii.

² *Complete English Tradesman* (ed. 1738), vol. i, pp. 279-280.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

⁵ See *Agriculture, etc.*

of a letter from Billingsgate (a polite part of the world for a lady to correspond with) that the first ships which were then arrived were much approved. At Lynne they have also succeeded, and these are the two great coal-markets. So now, as soon as I can get the ends and bottoms of our business wound up, I shall set out for Hill St."¹

A few years later, she writes at the New Year, "I have almost put my eyes out with accounts, of which our steward brings a plentiful quantity at this time of year. He is a very diligent person, and expects that I will apply many hours in the day. Our affairs go on very prosperously and in great order, so that I have as little trouble as is possible in a case where so many large accounts are to be look'd over."² This was still during her husband's lifetime, and after his death we find Mrs. Montague, in 1775, busier than ever with increased responsibilities. Her letters show her visiting her agricultural tenants, rejoicing in the great improvement of her land by good cultivation, and adopting a worldly-wise attitude towards the fourscore families employed in her colliery. "Some have more children than their labour will clothe, and on such I shall bestow some apparel. Some benefits of this sort, and a general kind behaviour, gives to the coal owner, as well as to them, a good deal of advantage. Our pitmen are afraid of being turned off, and that fear keeps an order and regularity amongst them that is very uncommon." The coal trade and all her concerns are in a thriving way, and if they continue to go well, she promises "to establish a spinning, knitting, and sewing school for ye girls."³

Such a preoccupation with industrial affairs was sufficiently rare among aristocratic women at the end of the eighteenth century for Mrs. Montague to refer to herself as "a country gentlewoman of the last century." It was more common for women of the middle class to engage in capitalistic enterprises, and up and down the country there were no doubt many engaged in business on a considerable scale, as, for example, Sholl's employer, a widow gentlewoman of Taunton, who was "in the serge-making, farming, and wool-stapling business, and had some good estates besides."⁴

BUSINESS ACTIVITIES OF WIDOWS

It is only when we come to the skilled artisan and trading classes, however, that we find women still taking a share in their husbands' concerns as a matter of course, and in almost every trade innumerable instances can be cited of widows and single women in business. In 1775, for instance, Mrs. Baskerville, widow of a printer and letter founder, announces that she has declined the printing business but "begs leave to inform the Public, at the same time, that she continues the business of Letter-founding, in all its parts, with the same care and accuracy that was formerly observed by Mr. Baskerville." The same year at Chester, Margaret Murray, an Engraver and Copper-Plate Printer, states that she "Takes this opportunity of returning

¹ Doran, *A Lady of the Last Century*, pp. 139-40.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 184-5.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 199-202.

⁴ Sholl, *Short Historical Account of the Silk Manufacture of England*, p. 39.

her sincere thanks to her friends and the public in general, for the many favours they have already conferred on her, and hopes for their continuance. . . . N.B. Commissions from the country punctually answered."¹

In heavier trades or those requiring technical training, a widow usually engaged able workmen to assist her, while retaining the management in her own hands, as shown in the following notice at Newcastle (1779):

"M. Hawthorn, Widow of the late John Hawthorn, Watchmaker of this town, tenders her grateful thanks to the friends of her late husband; and begs to acquaint them and the public, that she will carry on the said Business (having engaged able workmen therein) and hopes for the continuance of their favours, which she will at all times studiously endeavour to merit.

"Jewelry, Trinkets, Watches, Music and Musical Instruments."²

Similarly, at Chester (1775), Sarah Gorton announces that she intends carrying on as Saddler and Cap-Maker, "having engaged a capital hand from London for that purpose";³ and others in like manner announce that they will continue as coopers, plumbers, soap-makers and tallow chandlers, to name but a few trades. Mrs. Garland, Parson Woodforde's tailor, was in all probability conducting her business in the same way. On December 6th, 1782, he writes in his Diary, "Went to Mrs. Garlands, my Taylor, and paid her a Bill of £2 os. od., and afterwards he adds, "Gave Forster, my Taylor's Man, 40 rs. od."⁴

Although widows were held to have a prescriptive right to continue in their husbands' trades⁵ without having served any apprenticeship therein themselves, apparently they were sometimes regarded with jealousy and hostility by others of the same craft. Occasionally we find such women publicly denying "malicious rumours" spread by others in the same trade to lessen their custom. Thus in 1787, Mary Vinson, Chimney Sweeper, makes the following announcement: "Many of the same Business have reported I am married again, which is totally false and without Foundation, it being calculated to mislead my Customers, therefore hope they will take the Trouble to enquire of the Boys where they come from." She goes on to speak of the well-known care she has always taken of the "many poor Boys" she has had in her service, and hopes that the good opinion of her customers will never be lessened by "such malicious and ungrateful proceedings," as she has "no other way but the Business of a Chimney Sweeper to procure a livelihood."⁶

¹ *Chester Chronicle*, June 26, 1775.

² *Newcastle Courant*, February 13, 1779.

³ *Chester Chronicle*, August 26, 1775.

⁴ *Parson Woodforde's Diary*, vol. II, December 6, 1782.

⁵ From *Sessions Records* it would seem that the parish recognised the right of a widow to continue her husband's occupation in the case of gaoi-keepers and conveyors of vagrants. e.g. The appointment of Ann Hunt as Conveyor of Vagrants in 1779, in the place of her late husband, Wm. Hunt. *Hertfordshire County Records*, vol. IV, p. 16.

⁶ 1760, Order that Mary Twitchell, widow of James Twitchell, be continued in the office of Keeper of House of Correction at St. Albans, "in the same manner as her husband held the same." *Ibid.* p. 67.

⁷ Lysons, *Collectanea*, vol. II, p. 213.

Contemporary newspapers, family and institutional accounts all throw valuable light on the numerous activities in which women were engaged in the eighteenth century, but at their best these sources tell us far too little and leave too much to conjecture. The Bristol work-house in 1787, for instance, paid £9 1s. 0d. to Sarah Lewis for glazing; 14s. to Susannah White, pump maker, and £82 12s. 0d. to Mary Lear for 1525 horse-loads of coal; and at Wrexham (1790-1794) the overseers paid yearly accounts to Widow Evans for coffins, and to Mrs. Price, Hatter;¹ but such entries give us no definite information as to the scale of business, the manner in which it was conducted and how far the owner was successful. Similarly from newspapers, we can only glean information that is tantalisingly vague. The day of advertising can scarcely be said to have begun, and although public notices inserted by women are numerous enough to suggest that a great many were in some kind of business, they are for the most part of the simplest kind. The milliners indeed appear to have appreciated the value of an immediate announcement upon the arrival of a new set of fashions, but in most other trades any sort of regular or continuous advertisement was unknown. In most cases the press was used merely to notify "their friends and the public in general" of the opening of a business, a change of address or a contemplated partnership. Towards the end of the eighteenth century longer advertisements become more frequent, and lists of goods and occasional descriptions are given, but these again are chiefly useful in showing the variety of women's business interests and the trades in which they were most frequently engaged.

Limited as is the information they give us, eighteenth century newspapers and accounts nevertheless reveal evidence of women's activities in roles which cause some astonishment at the present day when it is so often wrongly assumed that women have only just begun to enter the business world. Here for example is the advertisement of a woman auctioneer in 1776:

"The Female Auctioneer's compliments to the Nobility, Gentry, and Public in general, and acquaints them, that she intends to sell by auction, this day, at the Castle, New Brentford, a neat assortment of linen-draperies and silks, the whole of which are warranted sound, and must be sold without reserve . . . [Details of materials follow] . . . To be viewed till the time of sale, which will begin at Eleven o'clock. Catalogues to be had at the place of sale."²

As valuers also, women were not unknown. One of the entries about which we should like to know more, occurs in the Brandsby Accounts of the Cholmeley family in 1750—a payment of six guineas to Mrs. Lydia Walters for "valuing Brandsby Wood."³ To what extent women were thus employed in the eighteenth century we do not know, but it is interesting to note that in the first occupational census taken in 1841, 38 women were returned as auctioneers, appraisers and house agents.⁴

¹ Eden, *State of the Poor*, vol. ii, p. 187; vol. iii, pp. 894-7.

² Lysons, *Collectanea*, vol. ii, p. 164.

³ T. Rogers, *History of Agriculture and Prices*, vol. vii, p. 508.

⁴ *Population Returns* (Occupational Abstract, 1841), 1844, xxvii, p. 31.

MILLINERS, MANTUA-MAKERS AND NEEDLEWOMEN.

Of the skilled trades left almost entirely in the hands of women, the chief were the clothing trades in which thousands of women were engaged as milliners, mantua makers, staymakers, embroiderers and seamstresses. Among these, and in fact among all business women, the milliners ranked first in importance. Their trade in the eighteenth century was of much greater diversity than the term implies to-day, and was then distinguished from that of the mere Hatter who was in a much smaller way of business.¹ Gallants, as well as ladies, were frequent and lucrative customers of the milliner.

"The Milliner furnishes them with Holland, Cambrick, Lawn, and Lace of all sorts, and makes these Materials into Smocks, Aprons, Tippets, Handkerchiefs, Neckties, Ruffles, Mobs, Caps, Dressed-Heads, with as many Etceteras as would reach from Charing-Cross to the Royal Exchange.

"They make up Cloaks, Mantelets, Cheens and Capucheens, of Silk, Velvet, plain or brocaded, and trim them with Silver and Gold Lace, or Black Lace. They make up and sell Hats, Hoods, and Caps of all Sorts and Materials; they find them in Gloves, Muffs, and Ribbons; they sell quilted Petticoats, and Hoops of all Sizes, etc., and lastly some of them deal in Habits for Riding, and Dresses for the Masquerade."²

The trade offered greater scope than any other in which women were concerned, and therefore attracted women with capital and some social standing.³ A five or seven year apprenticeship was required and a milliner in good business demanded a fee of at least £40-£50. The capital required to set up in business afterwards varied from £100 to £1,000 according to the scale of business, but at least £400 to £500 was considered necessary "to set up genteelly."⁴

In addition to practical ability and expert knowledge of dress and fashion, good business capacity was essential to the successful milliner. According to Campbell, "vast profits" were made by those in good business, and already in the mid-eighteenth century the more enterprising of them kept a woman agent at Paris who had "nothing else to do but to watch the Motions of the Fashions, and procure Intelli-

¹ Originally women's hats of felt and beaver were sold by a Men's Hatter or Haberdasher of Hats, and it was not until the early eighteenth century, when hats instead of hoods came into more general use, that hat shops for women were started. At first these dealt only in the straws imported from Leghorn and those made at Dunstable, but by the mid-eighteenth century women's hat shops were rapidly increasing, and it had become "a very pretty business", employing many hands. Collyer, *Parent's Directory*, pp. 162-3.

The stock in trade of Elizabeth Todd, Hatter, at Newcastle, in 1766, was as follows: "Beaver, Cloth, Felt, and Waterproof Hats—Lady's white Riding Hats—Blue, Green, and Black ditto—Ostrich Feathers—Hackle ditto. Gold and Silver Lace—Tinsel Lace—Silk—Worsted—Thread stockings—Gloves, etc. Green Oil Cloth, Black Oil Cloth to cover Hats—Plait for Hats and Bonnets." *Newcastle Journal*, October 18, 1766.

² Campbell, *London Tradesman*, p. 207.

³ Parson Woodforde, for instance, writes in his *Diary* on his journey through London: "A Miss Stevenson, No. 33 Greek Street, Soho, Nancy's London Milliner, breakfasted with us this Morning." *Diary*, vol. ii, October 8, 1786.

⁴ Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 336. Collyer, *Parent's Directory*, p. 196.

gence of their Changes ; which she signifies to her Principles."¹ London milliners also paid frequent visits to Paris themselves. Mrs. Mayer, of Dover St., Piccadilly, for instance, in 1791, informs "the Nobility and Gentry" that she has recently returned from Paris and brought with her "the newest and most elegant Patterns."² Provincial milliners more often journeyed by coach to London and obtained their fashions from London houses. But this, considering the state of the roads, was likely to be a sufficiently hazardous undertaking from towns in the West and North, especially when the return was made "with a vast Collection of New and Fashionable Goods."³

The number of milliners' advertisements, in a day when the press was so little used for business purposes, is striking. Apprentices and journeywomen are advertised for, and journeywomen from fashionable London shops announce that they are setting up in business in the provinces.⁴ There are announcements of the sale of businesses and the stock-in-trade of successful women who have "determined to retire from Business"; there are notifications when the "present Parisian Fashion will be ready for Inspection," and what was still more unusual at that time, there are descriptions of goods such as would be likely to stimulate sales, as for instance, the delightful announcement inserted in the *Morning Post* by Miss Blacklin, of Bond Street (1808), that she "is prevailed upon by some Ladies of Distinction by this means to inform Ladies of Fashion, that the QUEEN CATHERINE CAP is the most nouvelle thing of the day. To prevent trouble, price 31s. 6d."⁵

In allied, but less important trades, were the cap-makers, who made and dealt in millinery goods of silk and velvet; mantua-makers, muff-makers, quilters, hoop-petticoat-makers and child's coat-makers, who sold all kinds of children's clothes. A five-year apprenticeship was usual in these trades and fees varied from £5 to £30, but good needlewomen, who had qualified in one branch, had little difficulty in practising another, and sometimes, especially in provincial towns, we find a woman combining three or four of these branches in one business.⁶ On the other hand, an apprenticeship fee as low as £5 implies that many who entered these trades could have had little hope

¹ *London Tradesman*, pp. 207-8.

² *The World*, January 11, 1791.

³ *Bath Chronicle*, October 31, 1805.

⁴ "Wanted, A young Person as an Apprentice to a Milliner in this City, with whom a Premium will be expected. Much regard will be paid to the Character of any one applying and her Connections." *Bristol Journal*, March 20, 1784.

⁵ Margaret Watson,

"From Mrs. Brunton's, at the Golden Fan, Mount St., Grosvenor Sq., London.

⁶ "Takes this Method to inform the Public, That she has opened Shop in the High Street, Sunderland, and has got a large Assortment of Millinery Goods, which she intends to sell at the most reasonable Terms—All who please to favour her with their Custom, may depend on having their Commands executed as neat as in London: Makes up Cloaks, French Scarfs, Hats, Bonnets, and Caps; also washes Blondes and Gauzes." *Newcastle Journal*, November 29, 1766.

⁷ *Morning Post*, Feb. 25, 1808.

⁸ "Agnes Pitcairn, Stay, Child's Coat, Hoop and Petticoat Maker, removed to a House in the Orange-Grove, returns thanks to her friends and those Ladies who have honoured her with their Commands, and humbly hopes to merit a continuance of their favours. She sells Haberdashery, and has Teas of the highest flavour fresh from London." *Bath Chronicle*, February 12, 1784.

of setting up in business for themselves, and as in the millinery trade, the prospects of all who remained journeymen were extremely poor. Campbell as early as 1747, cautions parents not to put their daughters to this business, unless they are able to set them up afterwards, for, he says, in spite of their "vast profits" the milliners "yet give but poor, mean Wages to every Person they employ under them: Though a young Woman can work neatly in all manner of Needle-Work, yet she cannot earn more than Five or Six Shillings a Week, out of which she is to find herself in Board and Lodging."¹ Fashionable milliners might pay their shop-women from £15 to £20 a year with board,² but hours were often incredibly long at busy times, and food and accommodation frequently poor and inadequate. Mantua-makers also had the reputation of paying poor wages,³ and journeymen who worked for the cap-makers, quilters, upholsterers, and child's coat-makers earned on an average only about a shilling a day and one-and-sixpence if exceptionally poor hands.⁴ These were all trades to which poor children were frequently apprenticed by the parish, there being plenty of small mistresses glad to take them for the sake of the premium and their labour. In the better class trade also, cheap labour resulted from an overstocked market. In an age when it was desired above all things to be considered "genteel," millinery and mantua-making were the most favoured occupations for those in the class "a little above the vulgar." Hence in spite of seasonal unemployment and long hours at other times, these trades never lacked applicants. Low wages were the natural consequence.

Among the outworkers who earned a living by the needle, and who were frequently sweated, were the staymakers, embroiderers and seamstresses. Staymaking was a skilled trade, chiefly in the hands of men, and widows who succeeded to a business usually required the services of a journeyman.⁵ Campbell in 1747 expresses surprise that "Ladies have not found out a way to employ Women Stay Makers," but explains that "the Work is too hard for Women, it requires more Strength than they are capable of, to raise Walls of Defence about a Lady's Shape, which is liable to be spoiled by so many Accidents."⁶ All the sewing, however, was given out and employed large numbers of women in their homes. In London, stay sewing was enumerated among the poorer trades and a woman could only earn 5s. or 6s. a week, "let her sit as close as she pleases."⁷ As a cottage industry in the country the wage was most probably lower. In 1841 the average wage for full time work was still only 4s. to 6s. a week.⁸

Towards the end of the century and in the early years of the nineteenth, newspaper advertisements show that women were beginning

¹ *London Tradesman*, p. 208.

² Collyer, *Parent's Directory*, p. 90.

³ Their journeymen "may make Shift with great Sobriety and Oeconomy to live upon their Allowance; but their Want of Frugency, and general Poverty, has brought the Business into small Reputation." Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 171, 210, 213.

Collyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 101, 234, 287.

⁵ "Margaret Earle, Widow of the late William Earle, Stay Maker in this City . . . continues to carry on his trade, with the assistance of her late Husband's foreman . . ." *Chester Chronicle*, June 5, 1775.

⁶ Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 224, 225.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, p. d 54.

to start in business as actual staymakers. It would be interesting to know whether their entry into the trade in the first instance was due to reforming zeal, for in most cases they advertise themselves as makers of "hygienic" or "anatomical" stays. Some of them evidently obtained an assured position in the trade, as for instance those who announce themselves as staymakers to members of the royal family,¹ and others appear to have travelled around with the idea of establishing a connection in several towns. Mrs. Lloyd Gibbon, of Sackville Street, London, Stay Patentee, in 1811 for example, announces that "she is arrived at Cheltenham, where she purposes to remain for a short period, during which Ladies can be immediately suited with her highly distinguished Anatomical Stays; by the King's Letters Patent, granted to her for the scientific principles upon which they are constructed."²

Seamstresses and embroiderers, though in a better position than in the nineteenth century, when they were reduced to compete with machines, yet earned "but poor bread," unless they were able to set up as mistresses for themselves. Family accounts at Castle Howard show that a seamstress was paid at the rate of 6d. a day in 1778-9,³ and in addition, a daily seamstress would receive her meals. When in business, the profits of a seamstress might be considerable according to her connection and the number of apprentices she employed. Lydia Durrant, for instance, seamstress to Her Majesty in the early eighteenth century, seems to have been in a good position and required a fee of £30 with her apprentices.⁴ Similarly, women in business as embroiderers were in a very different position from the sweated journeymen who worked at home on the materials and patterns supplied to them. Sadlers, tailors and milliners were their customers as well as the general public, and for advertisement the more enterprising of them occasionally held exhibitions of all kinds of needlework, including the then popular pictures in silk and worsted. Such businesses were usually combined with a retail trade in materials, for which there was a good demand in a day when needlework was so universal an occupation.⁵

FANMAKERS AND HAIRDRESSERS

While the clothing and needlework trades continued without any radical change or reorganisation during our period, there were others

¹ Mrs. Harman, of New Bond St., and Bath, Her Majesty's Staymaker. *Morning Post*, January 15, 1808; Mrs. and Miss Laura Pearce, Stay Merchants to Princess Charlotte.

² *Gloucester Journal*, October 14, 1811.

³ Rogers, *History of Agriculture and Prices*, vol. vii, p. 519.

⁴ Hardy, *Middlesex County Records*, p. 295.

⁵ "To the Nobility, Gentry," etc.

"This day is exhibited, next door to the Royal Academy, in Pall Mall, the largest and most complete collection of Needlework . . . consisting of several historical pieces, with the Death of General Wolfe, copied from Mr. West's original painting, with the greatest exactness . . . likewise several Scripture pieces, and Rural landscapes . . ." Lysons, *Collectanea*, Public Exhibitions, vol. ii, p. 181.

"Miss Hare . . . sells all kinds of silks, gauze or muslin, painted or stained in most elegant tastes for ladies negligees, shawls, or aprons, and . . . drawings of all sorts for every kind of needlework on the shortest notice." *Ibid.*

which, for various reasons, ceased to provide employment for women. In some cases, as in fanmaking and hairdressing, the change was due to the caprice of fashion. In the eighteenth century no lady's toilet was complete without her fan, and although the trade had been injured earlier in the century by the importation of fans and printed mounts from India and China,¹ numerous advertisements suggest that fan-painting, mounting and making still gave occupation to a considerable number of women. Journeywomen in a good shop could earn 12s. or 15s. a week in 1761,² but generally the fanmaker had a shop of her own. One of the most amusing advertisements describing her stock-in-trade is that of Jane Jones :³

" This, Ladies, is to let you know,
Jane Jones, from Crompton-Street, Soho,
Who quondam kept the Star and Fan
Near to the Church of good St. Ann,
Of Fans the Mounter and the Maker,
Is lately moved to Long Acre ;
To make direction still more plain,
Within few doors of Drury-Lane ;
Where Fans of diff'rent Sorts conduce
To suit each Taste and ev'ry Use :
Fans fit for Gayety and Airs,
And decent Mounts to use at Pray'rs ;
Designs expressing ev'ry Passion,
Painted well, and quite in Fashion.
She mends of damag'd Sticks the Flaws ;
For Needlework neat Patterns draws,
Note, At the same Shop are Plays, new Pamphlets, sold,
And likewise Prints, some modern, others old."

Another trade generally accepted as a woman's occupation until after the mid-eighteenth century, was that of hairdressing and peruke making. In some cases advertisements show a man and his wife working together in partnership, but there are also numerous advertisements of women in business on their own, up to the last quarter of the eighteenth century.⁴ According to Collier, however, this business,

¹ "The Fann-Makers' Grievance," an undated pamphlet, presumably early eighteenth century, petitions the House of Commons to prohibit the importation of "vast quantities" of "Indian Fanns and Fann-sticks" in view of the fact that the English trade "employs multitudes of Men, Women and Children in making the Sticks, Papers, Leathers, in ordering the Silk . . . likewise great numbers employ'd in Painting, Varnishing and Japanning, and preparing abundance of Materials for Fanns, by which there is a great Consumption of Foreign Commodities, viz., of Whale-bone, Tortoise-shell, Ivory, Box, Ebony . . ." *B. M. Tracts Relating to Trade*, 816 m. 12/57.

² Collyer, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

³ Lysons, *Collectanea*, ii, p. 162.

⁴ John Piesley, Perriwig maker, 1744 : "I likewise make of the same Hair, in the best manner, Ladies' Riding-Wigs, and Dressing Curls ; to be disposed of either by myself, or by my Spouse, who cuts Ladies' Hair very genteelly." Lysons, *Collectanea*, ii, p. 97.

"G. F., Ladies' Hairdresser . . . continues to full dress Ladies' hair in the present taste, for 1s. per time, once a day, or 5s. a week. Cut and dress at 1s. 6d." 1786. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

Women hairdressers also advertise their own preparations of "chemical hair water," dyes, creams for the complexion, etc., from their own and family receipts.

which had given "many women in London genteel bread," was already being invaded by the foreigner in 1761, and women were finding it increasingly difficult to make a living. Rising standards of luxury and new French fashions demanded a male hairdresser and a French one at that. "Now the ladies cannot be dressed with elegance," continues Collyer, "except a French Barber, or one who passes for such, by speaking broken English, adjusts and curls their hair at the exorbitant price of a crown or half a guinea at a time."¹ How completely the trade was lost to women by the end of the century is shown by the comments made on "male hairdressers" in 1804 by the Ladies' Committee, and their suggestion that "a well educated English-woman" should be accepted as an attendant at the toilet, "in preference to *men*, unknown, unaccredited, and not otherwise recommended than by having been imported from the shores of France or Italy."²

In other instances, industrial reorganisation and the increasing importance of capital closed the door to women. The bleaching of linen cloth, for example, in early times entirely a woman's occupation,³ ceased to be a possible trade for women at the end of the eighteenth century. The old method of bleaching was a simple and prolonged process of alternate steepings in alkaline lyes and "croftings" on open bleach fields. Northern papers particularly are full of advertisements inserted by the owners of bleaching grounds, both men and women, seeking customers. In 1767, for example, Elizabeth Hare states that "she continues the Bleaching of Linen Cloth as usual . . . and intends to lay down directly. Those who please to favour her with their Custom, are requested to send their Cloth, etc., to the following Places, where it will be taken in and forwarded." The list of thirty five receiving agents which follows, including two shops belonging to Elizabeth Hare herself at Durham and Sunderland, suggests that she had a widespread connection.⁴ With the discovery in 1785 that chlorine could be adapted for bleaching, the old slow method of open bleaching fields rapidly gave way to speedy chemical processes carried on in new bleaching factories, and the old association of women with the trade was terminated.

WOMEN GOLDSMITHS.

Reference has already been made to the organised gild trades, with which women were ceasing to be connected as a result of the

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 278-9.

² Extract from "An Account of the Ladies' Committee." *Reports of Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor*, vol. iv, pp. 188-9.

³ So the old term "whitster" suggests.

⁴ Elizabeth Hare's charges for bleaching were as follows:

"Prices of cloth as follow, viz., fine Cloth at Fivepence and Fourpence per Yard, Coarser at Three-pence Halfpenny, Three-pence, Twopence Halfpenny, and Two-pence per Yard; and so in proportion for broader or narrower; also gradually in proportion for finer. Whatever Number of Yards come to Hand, the same must be paid for without any Abatement. Those that send their Cloth, are desired to write their Names and Places of Abode at Length on each Piece, and to mark it with Thread, and not with Silk. Yarn boiled at a Penny per Score, and bleached High White at Four-pence per Score, after the best Manner. But all Cloth at Two-pence per Yard must pay Carriage. N.B. The Price of Bleaching to be paid to any of the Persons that take it in, on Delivery of the Cloth Back." *Newcastle Journal*, March, 21, 1767.

separation of home and workshop. Although women were most often helpers, rather than trained or skilled workers, many of them must have acquired a working knowledge of the particular craft in which they assisted. Such opportunities were becoming more and more rare as the eighteenth century advanced, and at the same time the apprenticeship of girls in the few trades in which it was allowed, was becoming less frequent. Among the City Companies the Goldsmiths was one of the few which permitted girls to be apprenticed so that they might afterwards work and hold a recognised position in the craft themselves. The Freedom Roll of the Company shows that women fairly frequently entered the trade by apprenticeship in the mid-eighteenth century,¹ although the number who assisted at home in certain branches of the work without definite technical training was probably far greater. In the last quarter of the century, fewer women took up their freedom by service, and early in the nineteenth century the apprenticeship of women ceased altogether, although they continued to be admitted to membership of the company by patrimony for the sake of enjoying certain privileges. The apprenticeship book shows that the fees paid with girl apprentices in the middle of the century varied from £30 to £63, and that some of them were afterwards working in the craft is shown by their taking apprentices themselves. Ann Jaquin, for example, who was entered on the Freedom Roll in 1746, took an apprentice the following year:

"Memorandum, That I Elizabeth Bence, Daur. of Peter Bence, late of the Parish of St. James, Westminster, in the County of Middlesex Chocolate Maker deced. Do put myself Apprentice to Ann Jaquin. Citizen and Goldsmith of London for the Term of Seven Years from this Day there being paid to my said Mistress Thirty Pounds.

"ELIZABETH BENCE."*

As the century advanced, apprenticeship fees among the Goldsmiths increased—as much as two to three hundred guineas was quoted by Collyer in 1761²—and it seems probable that the greater expense of training together with the increased capital required to set up in business afterwards, were the chief factors in preventing the continuance of girl apprenticeship in this craft. In the separate and dangerous trade of gilding, journeywomen continued to be employed by the goldsmiths, but this only ranked with the poorer of the London trades.

RETAIL TRADERS AND CATERERS.

For women who had no special skill or technical training and had yet to earn a living, retail shopkeeping or street trading was the easiest resource. Newspaper advertisements and early directories suggest that an enormous number of women, wives, widows and single women alike, were shopkeepers in various branches of trade. In Manchester it was even part of the poor law policy in the early nineteenth century to assist poor widows with families and other impoverished persons

¹ Goldsmiths' Company, MSS. *Freedom Book*. Goldsmiths' Hall.

² Goldsmiths' Company, MSS. *Apprenticeship Book*, 1747; also 1750, Mary Howard is apprenticed to Jane Hudson, Citizen and Goldsmith of London.

* *Op. cit.*, p. 154.

with a small stock in trade by means of which they might "turn their industry to best account."¹

It seems not unlikely that the less vigorous enforcement of the Act of Apprenticeship in the first half of the eighteenth century, and its non-observance later, increased considerably the proportion of women retail traders. In the seventeenth century girls were more often apprenticed to shopkeepers than to the gild trades, but the frequent indictments against women traders who had not been apprenticed², suggest that but for the Act a greater number of women would have been in business. Sessions Rolls of the first quarter of the eighteenth century show that women traders were still being presented for non-apprenticeship,³ but as the century advanced evasion became easier, until with the final disregard of the Act, there was complete freedom for any woman to engage in retail trade.

References to women retailers in accounts, sessions papers, advertisements and directories show the great variety of trades in which they were engaged. At York, where all who desired to set up in business were first required to take up the freedom of the city, the occupations of women on the roll in the period 1750 to 1820 include those of linen-draper, haberdasher, milliner, dressmaker, hosier, perfumer, basket maker, brewer, wine-draper, ale-draper, innkeeper, earthenware dealer, plumber and glazier, and coal-dealer.⁴ At Gloucester, 1802, women's businesses included those of cheesemonger, baker, flour dealer, butcher, farrier, wine merchant, glass and china dealer, shoe warehouse keeper, and general shopkeeper.⁵ Early directories show that women were in similar businesses elsewhere and in addition, they are to be found as grocers, tallow chandlers, mercers, hatters and hosiers, furniture brokers, stationers, booksellers and pawnbrokers. In country districts many of the small general shops appear to have been managed by women.⁶

Apart from the large number of general shopkeepers in country and small market towns, the most popular businesses with women, to judge from their advertisements, were those dealing with some kind of drapery, books and stationery, grocery and other branches of the provision trades. Notices from haberdashers, who traded in stuffs and drugs as well as small wares, silk mercers, woollen and linen drapers are common, and sometimes two or more of these branches were combined as in the shop of Mrs. Mary Dixon, of Newcastle, (1767), who sold "Broad Cloths, Shalloons and other Mercery-Woollen-drapery

¹ *Poor Laws*, 1834, xxviii, p. 922A.

² Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 200, 201.

³ In 1718, Elizabeth Ludlow, of Bingham, was presented for exercising the trade of a butcher without apprenticeship. *Nottinghamshire Sessions Rolls MSS.*, April 21, 1718: quoted by D. J. Chambers in an unprinted thesis on Nottinghamshire and the Industrial Revolution.

⁴ In 1721, Elizabeth Hood, widow of the parish of Stevenage, was indicted, "for exercising the trade of a baker without having been apprenticed for seven years." *Sessions Records, Hertfordshire County Records*, ii, p. 56.

⁵ *Freedom Roll of York* (Surtees Society pub.), vol. cii, 1899, vol. ii. Robt. Davies, *The Freedom Roll*, 1835.

⁶ Directory appended to the *Gloucester New Guide*, 1802, pp. 144 seq.

⁷ *Derbyshire Quarter Sessions MSS.* Register of persons who have had weights and balances tried and adjusted, 1797.

Goods."¹ Occasionally such businesses were conducted in partnership either with a man or another woman. That these were not always successful is evident from the lists of bankrupts published from time to time.²

References to women booksellers and stationers are frequent both in London and provincial towns. Mrs. Montague, in 1757, orders from Mrs. Denoyer at the Golden Bible, Lisle St., "a hundred of the best pens, and half a ream of the finest and thinnest quarto paper,"³ and in 1784, the death was announced of Mrs. Green, a Fleet Street stationer, who was also "pencutter to His Majesty."⁴ At Cockermouth in 1783, died Mrs. Cowley, "for many years a bookseller in that place."⁵ In London were also numerous little "pamphlet shops" in important thoroughfares which were almost invariably kept by women. Here were sold all kinds of newspapers and journals, almanacks, parliamentary speeches, plays and pamphlets of all sorts, and, according to Collyer, it was a "very profitable" business in a good situation.⁶

In the grocery and provision trades women retailers were numerous. These were businesses which women could manage perhaps more easily than any other, and in which they almost invariably assisted. "Not one Grocer in twenty employs a regular bred Journeyman; their Wives, Daughters, or perhaps a Servant-maid does all the business of the Shop."⁷ The tea shop or tea warehouse, where coffee, chocolate and sugar were frequently sold as well, was also a business much favoured by women, since it was not only lucrative, but was the most "genteel" of all the provision trades.⁸ Even haberdashers and milliners advertised "fresh Teas of the highest Flavour." Bakers we expect to find, but women butchers appear to be as numerous, both in London markets and in the provinces. How far women were responsible for all the business connected with this trade is not clear, but they sometimes served an apprenticeship to it, and of one woman at least, in Carnaby market, it is recorded that when out of her time she "lived by killing of beasts in which . . . she was very expert."⁹

¹ *Newcastle Journal*, April 11, 1767. The whole stock in trade of Mrs. Mary Dixon consisted of "a large assortment of Broad Cloths, Yard-wides, Serges, German-serges, Shalloons, and Trimmings of all sorts, Thicksets, Fustians, Dimities, Hair and Worsted Shags, Fringes, Hunters, Plains, Kerseys, Flannels mill'd, and half Jerseys, etc." *Ibid.*, May 16, 1767.

² e.g. Mary Vipont and Sarah Fielden, late of Marsden in Lancaster, Linen Drapers. *Newcastle Journal*, February 21, 1767.

³ Amelia Adams and Sam D. Furlington, near the Haymarket, Silk Mercers, *Gentleman's Magazine*, December 1783, p. 1067.

⁴ Doran, *Lady of the Last Century*, p. 70.

⁵ *Bath Chronicle*, January 15, 1784.

⁶ *Gentleman's Magazine*, June, 1783.

⁷ *Parent's Directory*, p. 206.

⁸ Campbell, *London Tradesman*, p. 189.

⁹ "Tea Warehouse. Eastgate Street. S. Swann with gratitude returns her sincere Thanks to the Ladies and Gentlemen, and all her Friends for the many repeated Favours they have so long indulged her with; and to inform, that she is removed to a House opposite the White Lyon Inn . . . in particular she will keep the choicest Teas, etc., and Sell on the most moderate Terms. N.B. To Dealers in Tea, for a Trifling Profit." *Adam's Weekly Courant*, November 7, 1775.

¹⁰ George, *London Life in Eighteenth Century*, p. 170; quoting *London Sessions Papers*, June, 1737. Case of Ann Mudd.

For catering of all kinds, and the production as well as the retailing of food and drink, women were particularly well fitted, especially in the days when domestic housekeeping demanded wider activities than now. There was still a good deal of domestic brewing in farm-houses and large households in the eighteenth century, but the monopolistic organisation of "common-brewers" in the seventeenth century had succeeded in limiting the trade to members of that body, and women to a great extent had lost their former position in the trade.¹ The day was long past when alewives and innkeepers brewed their own beer for sale, but there were still in the eighteenth century a few women brewers left in the wholesale trade. Thus at York, Elizabeth Greenbury, a single woman, daughter of Joseph Greenbury, tanner, was in business as a brewer in 1755,² and Mary Johnson, beer brewer at Liverpool, was declared a bankrupt in 1783.³ References to partnerships of men and women as common-brewers are fairly frequent, but how far women were actively concerned in the management of such businesses does not appear.⁴

In the retail trade, the keeping of inns and alehouses was regarded as a very proper and suitable business for women, and one by which they could easily maintain their independence. Eighteenth century lists of licencees show how large was the proportion of inns managed by women, and these appear to have included all types, from the small village alehouse to the busy hostelries which supplied the needs of travellers and accommodated numerous passengers by stage coach. At Chesterfield, for example, most of the sixteen coaches which passed daily through the town in the early nineteenth century ran to the Angel, "in consequence of Miss Johnson, the spirited landlady, being the most extensive proprietor."⁵ In 1789, we find S. Whale, of the Bear Inn, Hungerford, contradicting the malicious reports which have been circulated that her house has been fully occupied "on account of Sir James Long and Lady having been there some time"; and she informs "the Nobility and Gentry" that her house is still open for their reception, and declares that "no one on the Bath road shall ever excell her in good accommodations, kind treatment, and reasonable charges."⁶

Occasionally an enterprising woman organises her own coach service:

"Oxford Flying Coach.

"If any Gentleman, or others, have occasion to Ride to London in a Coach, let them repair to the Three-Tun Tavern, where Places may be taken, to go from Oxford, every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, and return from the Oxford-Arms in Warwick Lane, London, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. . . . The Price Ten Shillings, and each Passenger is allow'd to carry Six Pounds Weight.

"Perform'd (if God permit) by ANNE MOORE."

¹ Clark, *Op. cit.* pp. 226-7.

² Surtees Society Pub., vol. cii, 1899, vol. ii, *Freedom Roll of York*.

³ *Gentleman's Magazine*, July, 1783, p. 630.

⁴ e.g. Wm. Clarke and Sarah Stephens, common-brewers, Kingwood, Southampton. *Ibid.* Sophia Willmore and John Jude, brewers, Spitalfields, *Ibid.*, March, 1783.

⁵ Glover, *History of Derby*, vol. ii, p. 259.

⁶ *Bath Chronicle*, November 19, 1789.

⁷ Lysons, *Collectanea*, ii, p. 3.

It is of additional interest to find that the Englishwoman inn-keeper was even to be found on the Continent in the eighteenth century. In 1789, Mrs. Knowles, of Bologne-Sur-Mer, had an advertisement in *The World*,

"to inform the Nobility and Gentry, who frequent the English Hotel, that she has made some material improvements in her establishment. It is now, beyond comparison, the First Inn upon the Continent. The fitting up of the home . . . the beds . . . the furniture, are all ENGLISH. . . ."

Coffee Houses, which played so large a part in eighteenth century social life, had also their women proprietors, both in London and provincial towns.¹ In 1743, the Widow Eden announces the opening of the Marine Coffee House in Well-close Square, where she "will endeavour to make as good Coffee, Tea, Chocolate, etc., as may be had in any part of the Town"; and in 1750, the Widow Randall announces the removal of her House from Ludgate Hill to "The Hyde Park Corner Coffee House (a House much wanted at that End of the Town for several Years)" where gentlemen "may depend upon having the very best of Teas, etc., and Liquors, no one Place excepted."² In the Strand, in 1775, the Turk's Head Coffee House was kept by the Widow Smith.³

In another class of caterers were the women who supplied fresh milk, whey and syllabubs at the "lactariums";⁴ the cook-shop keepers who had "hot Roast and Boil'd every day, and an Ordinary every Sunday," and the pastry cooks and confectioners, some of whom managed to combine with their businesses, schools where ladies might be taught "the Art of Cooking in all its Branches."⁵

STREET AND ITINERANT TRADERS.

In addition to the retail shopkeepers and provisioners, there was a large class of women engaged in trade on a smaller scale. The dis-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4, from *The World*, August 21, 1789.

² Cf. a Birmingham advertisement in 1774: "The Amicable Debating Society. This Society will meet on Friday next, at Mrs. Ashton's Coffee Room, in the Cherry Orchard, Birmingham." *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, May 2, 1774.

³ At Newcastle, 1766, Sarah Tyack "Bega leave to acquaint her Friends and the Public, That she has opened a Coffee and Punch House . . . All the Public Papers, are here taken in as at the other Coffee Houses." *Newcastle Journal*, September 13, 1766.

⁴ Lysons, *Collectanea*, ii, pp. 11, 13.

⁵ *Parson Woodforde's Diary*, i, April 10, 1775.

⁶ "Elizabeth Hannever presents her grateful respects to the public in general, and her friends in particular, and begs to inform them, that her new Lactarium, near the Obelisk, in St. George's Fields, is just finished, where Ladies and Gentlemen may be supplied with new milk from the cow; likewise whey made fresh every day. A daily paper taken in. Syllabubs any time; if her customers bring their own wine. N.B. Due attendance paid to carriages, in which the Quality may sit and be supplied." *Lloyds' Evening Post*, July 2, 1772.

⁷ Mrs. Smith, of Newcastle, in 1767, "Bega leave to inform the Public That she will open a School at her House on Monday the 3rd of August next, where Ladies, etc., will be taught all sorts of Pastry, Pickling, Preserving, setting up Desert Frames, Ice Creams, Aspect Jellies, Savoy Cabs, etc., etc., and Made Dishes of all sorts, both English and French . . . N.B. Gentlemen and Ladies in Town may be served, upon proper Notice, with any of the above mentioned Things, at the most reasonable Prices." *Newcastle Journal*, July 4, 1767.

tribution of goods, and especially of perishable goods, was not an easy matter before improved roads and railways had solved the problem of transport. There was therefore scope for innumerable pedlars, hawkers, fruit and vegetable sellers and all kinds of street traders in both town and country. The registers found among Sessions papers, of those who took out licences to trade as badgers, swailers and hucksters, show that women formed a large proportion of those engaged in such small trade.¹ Most numerous of this class were the women badgers, who travelled from farm to farm, sometimes with pack horses, buying up, according to their licences,² butter, chickens, eggs and corn, which they afterwards sold either from door to door, or at their homes.³ As well as these dealers in food and perishable goods, pedlars and hucksters carried on a considerable trade in all kinds of articles in country districts. Boxes of hardware as well as packs of Manchester goods and small wares were carried by sturdy women who tramped long distances from village to village.⁴ Some of these, like the famous Hannah Snell,⁵ had an established round with regular custom and earned a decent livelihood, but there were many others, casual traders, who seem to have lived on the poverty line, and to have merged into the vagrant class. The depositions of women taken before justices, for vagrancy or for trading without a licence, suggest that many women left destitute by the death of their husbands or by their enlisting for the wars, took to the roads with a box of goods in the hope of making a living. The number of women who were convicted for unauthorised trading in hardware, Manchester goods, quack medicines, and ballads, however, suggests that many of them had but small trade and meagre profits.⁶

¹ At the Derbyshire Quarter Sessions at Michaelmas, 1766, nineteen women took out licences as badgers. Of these only two were widows; and a considerable number of the rest were married women whose husbands and occupations were named in their recognizances. Thus Sarah Bray and Hannah Bowden who took out licences to trade as badgers at Glossop were wives respectively of Henry Bray, cotton manufacturer, and John Bowden, shoe maker. *Derbyshire Sessions Papers*, MS. Register of Badgers and Swailers.

² In accordance with the Act 5 Eliz. c. 12, all badgers were required to take out licences and to give security against forestalling and regrating. Two innkeepers under a bond of £20 each, for instance, are named in the recognizance of Ann Gardner of Clifton, in 1766: "The Condition of the Recognizance is such that if the said Ann Gardner doth not Forestall, Regrate, Ingross or Buy any Corn, except in open markets, and if the said Ann Gardner shall demene herself in the office of a badger of corn according to the law and customs of this realm, then this recognizance to be void, otherwise to be and remain in full force and virtue." *Derbyshire Sessions MS.*, Recognizances, 1766.

³ "The next set of people he's got to face,
Are badgers—a people who swarm in this place—
So much so, that every two doors, or three,
A sign with 'Sold here, meal and flour,' you may see."

The Weaver's Complaint, p. 2.

⁴ "Last week a woman who carries a box of hardware, was stopped on the road leading to Sunderland, near Sunnyside, by a footpad, and robbed of five guineas." *Newcastle Journal*, March 21, 1767.

⁵ Hannah Snell, who achieved fame by serving twenty-one years in the army, afterwards travelled the country "with a Basket at her back, selling Buttons, Garters, laces, etc." For one of her periodic visits, see *Parson Woodford's Diary*, vol. i. May 21, 1778.

⁶ *Derbyshire Quarter Sessions MSS.* Depositions of Settlement Cases, Calendar of Prisoners.

In the towns, street traders of all kinds were numerous. Milk selling, for instance, was mainly a woman's business in most places up to the third or fourth decade of the nineteenth century, there being as many as 1,674 women milk sellers returned in the Census of 1841.¹ In London the trade was chiefly in the hands of Irish women who contracted for their supplies with the cow keepers around the city. The retailers were usually responsible for milking, and afterwards the milk was carried back to the city in pails suspended from the shoulders of the sellers, and cried through the streets for sale.² At best, it was a slavish trade demanding physical strength and endurance, which partly accounts for the large number of Irish and Welsh women employed in it. The majority of them were wives of labourers and drawn from the lowest classes, although some small capital was required in the first instance for the purchase of the round, or milk walk. In Lancashire, country women from farms within a ten mile radius of Liverpool and Manchester carried supplies into those towns in wooden vessels slung over the backs of pack horses. Only at the end of the eighteenth century did better roads enable the milk women to use carts and carry greater supplies.³

Similarly the distribution of fruit, vegetables and fish in London was largely in the hands of women. In the first instance market gardeners around the city depended almost entirely on basket-women to convey their crops to Covent Garden and other markets,⁴ and from there fruit and vegetable women hawked their wares through the streets.⁵ In like manner, much of the Billingsgate custom depended

¹ *Population Returns* (Occupation Abstract, 1841). 1844. xxvii, p. 38.

² *Annals*, xxi, pp. 527-533.

³ "It is a common practice with retailers of this useful article to carry the milk first home to their own houses, where it is set up for half a day, when the cream is taken from it, at least all that comes up in that time, and it is then sold for new milk. By which means, what is delivered in the morning, is no other than the milk of the preceding afternoon, deprived of the cream it throws up by standing that time . . . Every cow house is provided with a milk room . . . and this room is mostly furnished with a pump to which the retail dealers apply in rotation, not secretly but openly, before any person that may be standing by; from which they pump water into milk vessels at their discretion. The pump is placed there expressly for that purpose, and is seldom used for any other . . . When such a pump is not provided for them, things are much worse; for in that case the retailers are not even careful to use clean water." Middleton, *Survey of Middlesex*, 1807, pp. 422-3.

⁴ "The conveyance of milk has of late years been in wooden vessels in carts, instead of the backs of horses, as formerly. One horse can convey a greater quantity in a cart, with more ease, than on his back, besides affording more comfortable accommodations to the good woman, who also can carry along with her milk some little garden stuff, according to the season of the year; and there are but few milk carriers that do not take a few greens, etc., from their gardens, which they can dispose of amongst their customers, whilst they are selling off their milk." Marshall, *Review of Reports of Board of Agriculture* (Northern Department) 1795, pp. 314-5.

⁵ "Wives of Irish labourers were largely employed in carrying these heavy loads of fruit and vegetables to and from the markets. *Report on Education of Lower Orders in the Metropolis*, 1816, iv, p. 4. *Report on Vagrants*, 1821, viii, p. 92.

⁶ "Both growers and consumers are much indebted, for the moderate price and the consequent increased consumption, to the jack-ass drivers, barrow women, and other itinerant dealers in these articles, who buy of the gardeners in the market, and hawk through the streets of London and its environs, vegetables and fruit at a moderate price." Middleton, *Survey of Middlesex*, p. 337.

on the fishwives who attended daily at that market, and when, during the fruit season, Covent Garden proved the more profitable market, Billingsgate merchants suffered considerably from the lack of women to dispose of their supplies.¹

As a class, street sellers belonged to the lowest rank of traders. Some of their occupations were considered disreputable; a good deal of their work was casual and the majority appear to have lived from hand to mouth, frequently depending on the pawnbroker for means to purchase a stock in trade.² For wives of labourers, however, who had almost always to do something to supplement the family income, street trading was an easy way of earning a livelihood, especially for those who had neither trade nor capital.

WOMEN IN MEDICINE—OCCULISTS, SURGEONS AND DENTISTS

Of professional women, strictly speaking, there were none in the eighteenth century, but there were a few nevertheless, who were practising successfully in occupations which to-day would be termed professional. Of these some even achieved fame as oculists, surgeons and dentists, although their practice was mainly empirical.

In the seventeenth century every good housewife was expected to understand the use of herbs and simples and to be able to prepare such drugs as were likely to be required for the treatment of minor ailments in her own family, and well on into the eighteenth century it was customary for ladies to look after their neighbouring poor, or depute their housekeepers to do so. *The Compleat Servant-maid* in 1700, states that all housekeepers should "have a competent knowledge in Physick and Chyrurgery, that they may be able to help their maimed, Sick and indigent Neighbours; for Commonly, all good and Charitable Ladies make this a part of their Housekeepers business."³ It is true that fearsome remedies were sometimes concocted and that much of the so-called treatment was mere quackery, but it has to be remembered that medical science was still only in its infancy, and the standard among male practitioners was still deplorably low. Such success as was achieved by women may, therefore, have been due in part to the extra care and attention in nursing which women were more likely to give. There is evidence, too, that women who were interested in doctoring their sick poor, spared no pains to make their treatment as efficient as the knowledge of their day permitted. Mrs. Cappe, in 1765, describes her friend, Mrs. Lindsey, who excelled in all domestic occupations as "visiting the sick, studying the case if any difficulty

¹ Fruit selling gave better and more secure profit with less risk and trouble, while Covent Garden was a more easily accessible market than Billingsgate. During the fruit season, writes Sir Thos. Bernard, Billingsgate fishermen had almost to discontinue the mackerel fishery from lack of fish women, and all that arrived "beyond the estimated demand" had to be thrown into the Thames "however fresh and good and so destroyed." *Pamphleteer*, vol. i, p. 432.

² Cf. the idea that the pawnbroker was "a great accomodation" to the poorer classes, enabling them to "carry on most profitable pursuits." "A woman can pawn her garments, and with the produce go to Billingsgate and buy mackerel, and afterwards fruit, and by the sale keep her family for three days." *Police Reports*, 1816, v.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 40: quoted Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 225.

occurred (for she had a good medical library, and great acuteness in the discrimination of diseases), and in prescribing and making up medicines. She was careful always to obtain the best drugs from Apothecary's Hall, and generally administered them in person; and such was her knowledge, her care, and her assiduity, that if the disease was not absolutely incurable, she generally succeeded."¹ Mrs. Cappe's own mother also was so successful in her medical work among the poor, that "all the village came to her to be attended."²

To what extent women in the eighteenth century used their medical knowledge professionally, as apart from this benevolent interest, it is impossible to determine. There were probably few villages where the services of a "wise woman" were unobtainable, but the attempts to put down witchcraft, and the growth of the exclusive associations of surgeons, apothecaries and physicians from the previous century onwards, must have been making it increasingly difficult for women to work professionally in this sphere. The beginning of scientific training from which women were excluded, was even ousting them from the practice of midwifery, which had hitherto been their monopoly.³ That "female practitioners" remained, however, in both medicine and surgery is evidenced by occasional references to them and their cures, and also by innumerable quack advertisements which abound in all newspapers of the period.⁴ Mrs. Joanna Stephens, a noted eighteenth century practitioner, was granted £5,000 by Parliament on condition that she made known for the use of the public, "her Method of preparing her Medecines," which, quack compounds though they were, were claimed to have cured many influential people of a painful disease.⁵ Of a woman surgeon, Catherine Hutton writes in 1788, "I saw in the newspaper the advertisement of a noted surgeon called Ellen Haythornthwaite . . . who is supposed to be one of the best surgeons in the country. She has performed several amazing cures given up for being incurable."⁶ The most famous bone-setter of the century was Mrs. Sarah Mapp, who lived at Epsom and drove her coach and four twice a week to London to the Grecian Coffee House, where she received her patients. So popular was she that the authorities at Epsom offered her £100 a year to remain in the neighbourhood.⁷ A large number of women, to judge from their advertisements, earned a living by the preparation and sale of patent medicines. Many of them travelled from town to town

¹ *Memoirs of Catherine Cappe*, pp. 111-112.

² *Ibid.*

³ Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, ch. vi.

⁴ The most amazing treatments and cures are advertised, not a few of which were inherited by daughters from their fathers, as the following, for example: "The following remarkable Cures of Cancers without incision. By Mrs. A. M. Plunket Edgcombe, (only surviving daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Plunkett) may be depended upon, as the Cancers are all preserved in spirits!" According to custom there follows a list of names of people who have been cured, "with many others—All of whom have enjoyed very good health since their cures have been performed." *Bath Chronicle*, January 15, 1784.

⁵ *Commons' Journals*, March 26, April 10, 1739. Hill, *Women in English History*, vol. II, p. 282.

⁶ Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 280. Gibbs, *History of Aylesbury*, p. 374.

with their remedies, and of these not a few specialised in cosmetics and beauty treatment.¹

In some instances, wives and daughters of professional men appear to have been so closely associated with their work, that they were considered almost as partners, and after the death of husband or father, as the case might be, continued to practice independently. This was notably so in the case of oculists, and although their treatment was based almost entirely on observation and experiment, a number of women seem to have been judged successful in their day. The wife of Sir William Read, who had been oculist to William III. and Queen Anne, was one woman who continued to practice after her husband's death. In 1719 she advertises: "The Lady Read, in Durham-Yard in the Strand, having obtain'd (by several Years Experience) a peculiar Manner of Couching of Cataracts, and curing most Diseases of the Eyes by the late Sir William Read's Method and Medicines. She hath had great Success in curing Multitudes that were Blind and defective in their sight, particularly, several who were born Blind. She is to be advis'd with as above; where may be had . . . all the other Medicines that Sir William used in his Practice."² About the same time Mrs. Mary Turberville, the sister of a noted West Country oculist, was also practising in London, "with good reputation and success. She has all her brother's receipts, and having seen his practice during many years, knows how to use them. For my part, I have so good an opinion of her skill that should I again be afflicted with sore eyes, which God forbid! I would rely upon her advice rather than upon any pretenders or professors in London or elsewhere."³ The way in which family knowledge was handed down from one generation to another is shown in the amusing advertisement inserted by Mrs. Deane in 1744:

"Mrs. Deane gives Notice, that she is to be consulted and spoke with in all Cases relating to the Eyes, on Mondays and Fridays, at any Hour of the Day, which Days have been set apart for those Purposes upwards of 100 Years past, without any Intermission, by the same Family, she being the only Survivor, and brought up in this useful Art by the Well-known Mrs. Jones, and practis'd with great Success herself for upwards of twenty Years Past. . . ."

At the end of the eighteenth century and early in the nineteenth, two of the most noted oculists in London were Mr. and Mrs. Williams,

¹ The following is a typical advertisement: "To the Nobility, Gentry, etc. The Famous Mrs. Bernard (from Berlin, in Brandenburg) Is just arrived in this City, and to be met with at Mr. Wolfe's, Cabinet-maker, near the Eastgate, Who is possessed of an infallible secret for cleaning the Teeth, and rendering them as white as alabaster, notwithstanding they may be as black as coal . . . The public may be satisfied of the efficacy of her remedies by most of the nobility and gentry that visit the German Spa, Bath, Bristol, Scarborough, and in most of the principal towns in Great Britain." Mrs. Bernard also advertises her "Royal Beautifying Wash for the face, neck and hands," and a "Wash Ball, much used by the Turkish and Armenian Ladies, the Proprietor having been favoured with a receipt for making it by two ladies of distinction, lately arrived from those parts." *Chester Chronicle*, October 9, October 30, 1775.

² Lysons, *Collectanea*, i, p. 123.

³ Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-9: quoting Hoare, Sir R. C., *History of Modern Wiltshire*, 1843, vol. vi, p. 467.

⁴ Lysons, *Collectanea*, i, p. 128.

who also were honoured by royal patronage. In what appears to have been an extensive practice—"the Nobility and Gentry" being received at Red Lion Square and "the indigent" at the Royal General Dispensary in High Holborn, "where one of their assistants constantly attended"—Mrs. Williams was an active partner, and during her husband's many absences in the country, she remained in town and received all London patients.¹

In dentistry women's work is still to-day regarded as a comparatively new departure and women in that profession are not yet numerous. It is, therefore, all the more remarkable to find advertisements of women dentists in the eighteenth century. Makers of artificial teeth, to judge from the newspapers, were fairly numerous, but there were at least a few women practising who appear to have been equipped with all the dental knowledge of that day, and who undertook all kinds of work. The advertisement of Mrs. De St. Raymond, in 1777, for example, gives a full account of her activities:

"Mrs. De St. Raymond, Dentist (No. 9, King's-square Court, Soho), takes the liberty to recommend to the Nobility and Gentry, her well-known skill in the performance of chirurgical operations for the various disorders of the mouth; especially the lightness of her hand, in removing all tartarous concretions, so destructive to the teeth, and her dexterity in extracting stumps, splints and fangs of teeth. She also draws, fills up, fastens, and preserves teeth, corrects their deformity, transplants them from one mouth to another; grafts on, and sets in human teeth; likewise makes, and fixes in artificial teeth, from one to an entire set, and executes her newly invented masks for the teeth and Obturators for the loss of the palate."²

She also advertises her dentifrice for keeping the teeth "clean, sound and white" and her "antiscorbutic liquid for the gums." It would be interesting to know how such women obtained their training, and whether they ever served an apprenticeship in this country as in France, but on this point the newspapers give us no information. One Frenchwoman so trained, however, was practising in London in 1751:

Madame Ranxcourt, a famous Dentress, lately arrived from Paris, who served her time to the most famous Monsieur Caperon, Dentist to the King of France, cures the Toothache, makes artificial Teeth not to be distinguish'd from real; sells a Powder she has invented and a most admirable opiate, and cures the Scurvy; lives at Mrs. Sadiere's, in Church-street, St. Ann, Soho."³

THE RESTRICTION OF WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL AND BUSINESS ACTIVITIES AT THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

Changes which were taking place in the medical world during our

¹ Cf. their advertisements, Lysons, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

² *Morning Post* February 21, 1777. In a previous advertisement in the *York Chronicle*, March 10, 1775, Mrs. De St. Raymond, states that "having received much patronage in York, she is now about to leave for Edinburgh." The transplanting of teeth, referred to above, is explained by: "she transplants teeth from the jaws of poor lads into the head of any lady or gentleman." This was evidently a common practice to judge from the advertisements offering a "good price" to "Persons disposed to part with their Front Teeth!"

³ Lysons, *Collectanea*, vol. i, p. 132.

period, were, however, to curtail women's activities in this, as in the industrial sphere. The hospital movement of the second half of the eighteenth century resulted in new opportunities for scientific study and training from which women were excluded, and with the increase in medical skill, mere empirical knowledge could hold no place. Women were most seriously affected in the practice of midwifery, in which they not only lost their monopoly but ceased to hold any recognised position. In other branches of medical practice, women's professional activities had been gradually decreasing from the seventeenth century onwards, and developments at the end of the eighteenth century merely completed that process and made final the exclusion of women from any further participation in medical affairs.

As a result then, of the increased wealth and new knowledge which accompanied the industrial revolution, women's activities were restricted in various directions. Increased wealth brought new standards of luxury and new ideas of refinement which prevented women in the business and trading classes taking any further share in their husbands' concerns, and experience in such matters was lost. At the same time, through industrial changes, the growth of capital and reorganisations in the business world, women lost touch with undertakings with which in varying degrees they had long been associated. In the old handicraft system, although women rarely received technical training, the lack of it was not of vital importance since they could give valuable assistance in other ways, and the knowledge and experience they acquired was usually sufficient to enable them to carry on such businesses when necessary. But with the increase of skill and new technique, such conditions were no longer possible. It was, inconceivable, for instance, that the woman who had successfully managed a bleaching business in the fields around her home, should adopt the new methods and set up a chemical bleaching factory. She had neither training nor capital for such an enterprise, nor were there means of her acquiring either. Similarly in other directions lack of training and lack of skill circumscribed women's opportunities for useful work. And because in the past their activities had been based on experience rather than on specialised training, except in the trades conducted by women, there was as yet no notion that women should be educated and trained to enable them to take a place in the new order of things.

One attempt, indeed, was made to draw attention to the increasing restriction of women's employment. In 1804, the Ladies' Committee was formed with the specific object of promoting the education and employment of working women. In a preliminary address it was stated that much of the "profligacy and misery" among women, not only in London but in the kingdom at large, originated in the want of education and employment. The Committee drew attention to the fact that women were excluded from many occupations, and that in those which came "within their sphere of action," they were "grievously and unjustly intruded upon by the other sex"; in consequence of which they were "confined, most frequently, to a few scanty and unproductive kinds of labour." They urged that it was to the benefit of the nation as a whole that women "should not be

precluded from contributing their portion of productive industry," and that it was only just that women should be restored to occupations for which they were fitted. "If," they continued, "without carrying the war into the aggressor's country, the fair sex can only regain the territory which has been wrested from them; or (to drop the metaphor) if, without interfering with any occupation which properly belongs to men, they can resume those which do peculiarly and exclusively appertain to their own sex—those which public morals and female decency require to be in the hands of women, and which the candour and good sense of every unprejudiced man would admit to be proper for women only; and if to this they can add, . . . such a degree of education, as may make them useful to themselves and to society . . . millions, who might otherwise have sunk in misery and vice, will live innocent and happy. . . ."¹

¹ Extract of an Account of the Ladies' Committee for Promoting the Education and Employment of the Female Poor. *Report of Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor*, vol. iv, pp. 182-192, Appendix, pp. 61-63. The proposals put forward by the Committee to further their aims are stated in detail on pp. 67-71 of the Appendix, but I have been unable to trace any subsequent reports of the Committee, or to discover how far these were put into practice successfully.

CONCLUSION

THE progress of the Industrial Revolution was marked by far-reaching changes. In the foregoing chapters a description has been given of some which occurred in the industries in which women were engaged ; it remains to estimate their effect and the importance of the social and economic developments of the period on the position of women generally.

In the mid-eighteenth century the population of England was mainly rural, and women were largely engaged in productive work in their homes and in some form of domestic industry. In the towns the industrial woman wage earner was not unknown and a large number of women were engaged in some form of trade ; but here again, women more often shared the activities of their husbands and acted as partners in the industrial, as in the agricultural sphere. As a result of the changes which took place in the latter half of the eighteenth century, this state of affairs became no longer possible. It has already been shown how women's opportunities for productive work at home were gradually lessened as the agrarian revolution proceeded, while at the same time industrial changes deprived them of employment in the older domestic industries. In other directions also, women's activities, as described in the last chapter, were gradually diminishing in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

At the turn of the century, in the transition period before women were re-absorbed, or had found their place in the new order of things, there was a great deal of distress and unemployment among women. Evidence of this is to be found in the formation of the Ladies' Committee,¹ in the numerous complaints of the lack of employment made by pamphleteers, by Eden, Young, Cobbett and Reviewers to the Board of Agriculture, and in the greatly increased poor rates in rural areas.² Since in spite of changed conditions the labourer's wage still remained below the level of family subsistence, new activities for women and children became a matter of urgent necessity. Where possible new domestic industries were introduced by philanthropists and parish officers to take the place of the old, and lace-making, straw plaiting, glove-making, tambouring, lace running and button making, each received a new influx of workers as other opportunities of remunerative work declined. At the same time the adoption of new methods and cultures and the desire of agriculturalists to keep down rates and wages

¹ See p. 304 *ante*.

² "The circumstance most to be regretted in the state of the labouring classes is the want of constant and suitable employment for women and children." Eden (1796), *op. cit.* iii, p. 704.

"The wives and daughters of farm labourers in agricultural districts are already become almost entirely destitute of employment." Marshall (1814), *Review of Reports to Board of Agriculture* (Midland Department), p. 245.

by providing employment for women on the land, resulted in the development of a new class of women day labourers in agriculture. A large proportion of those who remained in rural areas was absorbed by this new and growing demand for cheap occasional labour, and the exploitation of women and children at its worst was seen in the Gang System. Meanwhile, the town population was rapidly increasing and here the factory system, especially after the adoption of steam power in the early nineteenth century, provided an ever widening field of employment for women.

These changes radically affected the lives of the women concerned. It has been generally admitted that women gained greatly by the transference of manufacture from the home to the factory. As Commissioner Hickson stated in his Report in 1840, "domestic happiness is not promoted, but impaired by all members of the family muddling together and jostling each other constantly in the same room."¹ Moreover, dust and oil and offensive smells were often the necessary accompaniments of domestic industry; hence, however, the industrial revolution may have affected the married woman's economic position in the home, it cannot be denied that it immensely improved her domestic conditions. Now that the home was no longer a workshop, many women were able, for the first time in the history of the industrial classes, to devote their energies to the business of home making and the care of their children, who stood to benefit greatly by the changed home conditions.

The women who found employment in the factory under the new industrial regime undoubtedly encountered difficulties and disadvantages in the early stages. As regards long hours and unhealthy conditions, there was at first little to choose between the old system and the new, but in addition, power driven machinery introduced a new element of compulsion. In the factory, human labour was "yoked with iron and steam," and the workers were subjected to a regularity and discipline which in their newness proved irksome and intolerable to those accustomed to the independence and irregular hours permitted by the domestic system. On the other hand, labour which was often heavy and unpleasant was exchanged for the lighter work of machine attendance, and although the latter has met with much adverse criticism on the score of monotony, it must be remembered that many of women's occupations in the domestic industries were equally monotonous and dull. And when, ultimately, the State regulated the hours and conditions of factory workers, the new system began to advance on lines which proved it to be immeasurably superior to the old domestic system, in its provisions for the health and well-being of the workers.² Again, women undoubtedly benefited by the wider experience and

¹ *Handloom Weavers' Report*, 1840, xxiv, p. 44.

² Already by the 'forties of the nineteenth century a new attitude was observable on the part of factory owners towards their workers. *Factory Inspectors' Reports* show that in addition to the provision of educational facilities demanded by the Act of 1833, enlightened owners were also providing weekly medical attendance, lending libraries, sick funds, yearly outings for their workers, and canteens where cheap meals could be obtained by workers who lived at a distance. *Reports*, 1846, xx, pp. 574-577; 1847, xv, Appendix 3, p. 31.

more varied interests they gained by working together in a community. The women of the industrial areas in the North were by the 'forties already remarkable for their greater intelligence and acuteness as compared with women of the same class elsewhere. The factory and workshop, it has been well said, "take the girl out of 'the home,' cribbed, cabined, and confined as to space, light, air, ideas and companionship, mould her in habits of punctuality, obedience, promptness, handiness, 'gumption,' and sustained attention and effort, spur her on to work well, bring out her capacities for comradeship and social action, and train her in self-respect, self-reliance and courage."¹ As scattered domestic workers women had had few opportunities for any interchange of ideas among themselves, and still less for any form of co-operation in their common interests. It was partly for this reason that women's work in the past had been so badly paid, and although the old tradition persisted and women's wages were still comparatively low, and the progress of co-operation was slow among women throughout the nineteenth century, yet it is interesting to note that there were signs of the beginnings of this new spirit among almost the first generation of factory workers.²

The progress made in these various directions by the mid-nineteenth century appears little enough when judged by modern standards. How much had been achieved can only be seen in its true perspective when the conditions of other workers at the same period are taken into consideration. Among lacemakers, straw plaiters, glovemakers, frame-work knitters, nailmakers and other domestic workers, women and children were still working in overcrowded insanitary cottages for long hours each day; few of them, in spite of unremitting toil, could earn a living wage, and they were powerless to resist payments in truck, petty exactions and such tyrannies as might be imposed by the greed or dishonesty of the middleman. Even worse were the frightful conditions among London dressmakers and milliners, where it was customary for several months in the year to work for eighteen and twenty hours out of the twenty-four, and not infrequently through

¹ Caroline Foley, in *Economic Journal*, 1894, p. 187. Reviewing Royal Commission on Labour. *The Employment of Women*, 1893.

² In Lancashire, women were among the members of the Manchester Spinners' Society of 1795, and in 1830 were urged to form separate organisations in connection with the Grand General Union of Operative Spinners. Chapman, *Lancashire Cotton Industry*, p. 213. Webb, *History of Trades Unionism*, p. 118.

In Glasgow in 1833, women spinners and power loom weavers combined and raised their own funds in an effort to raise wages to the same rate as paid to men. "We had an intimation that they had meetings, and I saw a letter signed by a woman, calling upon one house to raise wages equal to the men's." *Evidence of Cotton Manufacturers, before Select Committee on Manufactures*, 1833, vi, p. 323.

At Wakefield in 1833, a number of women were charged "with assaulting and using threatening language to Mary Hilton, with a view of preventing her from working at the factory of the said Messrs. Hebblethwaite and Co. It appeared in evidence that Mary Hilton had been beset by the defendants, with a crowd of other women as she came from her work at the mill. They swore that they would murder her if she continued to work for Messrs. Hebblethwaite, and not content with assailing her with their tongues, they proceeded to throw a large stake and stone at her. The complainant stated that she had frequently before been assailed with cries of 'blacky,' (i.e. black sheep, out of the Union)." *Halifax Guardian*, May 11, 1833.

the night. "The protracted labour," wrote the Commissioner who investigated their conditions in 1843, "is quite unparalleled in the history of manufacturing processes. I have looked over a considerable portion of the Report of the Factory Commission, and there is nothing in the accounts of the worst conducted factories to be compared with the facts elicited in the present inquiry."¹ The working life of these women was estimated at not more than three or four years, and only a "constant accession of fresh hands from the country" enabled the business to be carried on.

In the same way the charges made against the factory system, that it resulted in the breaking up of home life, the lowering of the standard of domestic comfort and a general debasement of life for the workers, must be examined in the light of previous standards and those prevailing among the working classes generally at this period. It has already been shown that contemporary critics exaggerated the extent of married women's work in the factory,² and that the proportion of married to single women in the factory was relatively small. Hence, in the entire factory population the proportion of married women who worked, to those who remained at home, must have been far too small to justify the statement that the factory system destroyed the home life of the workers generally.

That the standard of domestic comfort was low among factory workers cannot be denied, but statements only true of the poorest and most improvident classes have been used without discrimination to describe conditions among all classes of factory operatives. In all inquiries into the domestic conditions of factory workers, opinion was divided as to the proficiency of factory women in domestic affairs, and in numerous instances women who had spent their early life in the factory and who gave evidence before the Commission of 1833, showed that they were no less competent in the home than other women and resented the assumption to the contrary. "You think we can do nought but work at factories," said one of them, "neither brew, nor bake, nor sew."³ The truth was that in the controversy which raged around the whole question of factory labour, every aspect of the workers' lives came in for scrutiny and criticism such as was not directed to any other class in the community, and more extensive investigations would have revealed the fact that the standard of domestic economy was everywhere among the working classes deplorably low. "It is exceedingly lamentable," said Kay in 1838, "that a very slender acquaintance with domestic economy is generally possessed among the

¹ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, p. F 30.

"In many establishments the hours of work, during the season are unlimited, the young women never getting more than six, often not more than four, sometimes only three, and occasionally not more than two hours for rest and sleep out of the twenty-four; and very frequently they work all night." *Ibid.*, xiii, p. 114.

"Some witnesses who were in a position freely to state the facts, mention that they have for three months successively worked twenty hours out of the twenty four." *Ibid.*, xiv, p. F 29.

This evidence received repeated confirmation.

² See pp. 197-199 *ante*.

³ *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, pp. D 2, 110; D 1, 38, 96.

poorer classes, not only in the manufacturing, but also in the agricultural districts."¹

It is indeed difficult to see how this could have been otherwise, or how the standard could ever have been much higher. Not only were the women of the working classes in the eighteenth century busily engaged in earning their living in either agriculture or industry, but their facilities for acquiring any measure of skill in domestic management were exceedingly limited. Cottage accommodation was often of the meanest; food in many homes was limited to oatmeal porridge, milk, bread, cheese and potatoes, with meat as a rare luxury; cooking utensils were few and turf and furze were the common fuel used by a great proportion of the population. Brick ovens, though common in farm houses, were by no means in general use among the cottagers, and iron grates only began to be supplied at the end of the eighteenth century, after the expansion of the iron trade. In these circumstances it is inconceivable that the standard of culinary skill could ever have been high, or that the training of children in domestic affairs could have been much superior to that of children who spent their early lives in the factory. Knowledge was limited to the economy practised in the humble homes of their parents. The domestic servant, it was said, made the most suitable wife for the working man, but this was simply because she had, as a rule, come into contact with better conditions and had received some training in domestic affairs. Not only factory women, but all women of the working classes were handicapped by ignorance and the lack of any proper system of instruction, and until some measure of education and training was placed within their reach, it was unreasonable to expect any raising of the general standard of domestic skill or intelligent use of their resources.

In the same way the moral degradation so often spoken of by opponents of the factory system was due, less to a "debasement" of life through the system, as they believed, than to the standards prevailing among the working classes generally. "In regard to morals," states the Report of the Factory Commission in 1833, "we find that though the statements and depositions of the different witnesses that have been examined are to a considerable degree conflicting, yet there is no evidence to shew that vice and immorality are more prevalent among these people, considered as a class, than amongst any other portion of the community in the same station, and with the same limited means of information."² This evidence is confirmed by any inquiry into conditions among agricultural, and all classes of domestic workers. Information was always forthcoming that the state of morals among the workers in any particular industry was very low. Immorality among dressmakers and domestic servants was proverbial.³ Among the straw plaiters in 1841, chastity was said to be "at a sad discount, while prostitution was at a high premium." At the same time the moral condition of the lacemakers was said to be "nearly as low as the plaiters." Prostitution was "rife among them from the same causes—scanty earnings, love of finery, and the almost total

¹ *Report*, 1838, vii, p. 23.

² *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. 32.

³ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, pp. f 172, 173.

absence of early moral culture";¹ and similar evidence can be found for every domestic industry in turn in both the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Low standards were due not so much to congregating together in their work, as to the lack of education, the want of decency in their homes and bad conditions all round. There appears to be some evidence for an increase of intemperance among factory women in the early nineteenth century,² but this can be attributed as much to the "new beer houses" and bad housing as to the long hours and monotony of their work, and young women particularly had higher wages and more independence than they had ever had before. That prostitution was prevalent during periods of unemployment was also very probable, but this was equally true among dressmakers and milliners and all workers in seasonal trades.³ Here the moral standard which prevailed was the result in great measure of low wages, the lack of reserves for times of unemployment, the limited openings available for women and the general economic conditions which ruled in women's employment.

Although the workers did not participate to the extent they might have done in the advantages arising from the use of machinery, yet even so, for the majority of workers the factory meant higher wages, better food and clothing and an improved standard of living. This was especially so in the case of women, who in the first instance, were drawn from badly paid unskilled work in various trades, from agricultural labour and domestic service. "No unprejudiced observer could come to any other conclusion," wrote Horner in his Report of 1837, "that in no occupation could there possibly exist among the working people a larger proportion of well-fed, well-clothed, healthy, and cheerful looking people."⁴ The rise in the standard of living was

¹ *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, pp. A 10, A 12.

² "I can see now troops of young women that work in manufactories go to spirit shops, that would have been ashamed of it some years ago." *S.C. on Manufactures*, 1833, vi, p. 624.

It was the general opinion that the new beer shops had greatly increased intemperance. "They are the greatest pests of the country, and no language can express the injury they produce upon the social and moral condition of the neighbourhood." *Report on Mines*, 1842, xvii, p. H12.

³ "Vast numbers of girls who have wrought in factories are driven to prostitution when they are deprived of employment; girls not belonging to the parish of Leeds, probably to distant parishes, in some cases to no parish at all, have absolutely no other alternative but that of prostitution when trade is low and times are bad, so that they have no employ in mills; this was the universal complaint when I was at the workhouse Board." Evidence of William Osburn *S.C. on Factory Bill*, 1831-2, xv, p. 467.

Of the precarious existences of London dressmakers, a witness in 1841 stated: "Many young persons are engaged for the season—about three or four months—at a salary perhaps of £18 a year; thus they receive from £4 10s. to £6 for the period they stayed. At the end of the season, has known that many of these young women are subject to great distress; has known some under these circumstances who have been obliged to sleep with a servant in a garrett; others, having no means of subsisting, have gone on the town." *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843, xiv, p. f 225.

⁴ Quoted by Ward, *Handloom*, House of Commons, May 3, 1844.

"There is one thing which particularly struck me in visiting the towns where machinery was most in use, and that is the excellent condition of the labouring people. They were well clothed, well fed, and well employed." Evidence of Mr. Stark, a Norwich Manufacturer. *Handloom Weavers' Report*, 1840, xxiii, p. 308.

shown by the increased consumption of fresh meat—still a rarity among the agricultural classes, who at this time subsisted mainly on a bread and potato diet—and by the greatly improved clothing of all but thriftless workers. For the first time working women had the means to gratify a taste for dress, although expenditure under this head was a matter for much adverse criticism. "I would state as an important fact with which I am well acquainted," said the Rev. G. S. Bull, in 1832, "that in many cases the young women employed in factories do not make their own clothes at all; their working clothes they obtain at the slop-shops which abound in the manufacturing districts, where ready-made clothes are to be had; and their Sunday dress is, of course, of a very smart description, wherever they can afford it, and is manufactured by some notable milliner who knows how to set those matters off to the best advantage."¹ The fact that women were no longer content to contrive for themselves clumsy, ill-fitting garments, was regarded by contemporaries only as a sign of incompetence and deterioration, and they completely overlooked the fact that from the woman's point of view the change betokened some measure of social advance.²

Economically, women were vitally affected by the industrial revolution. In the past, marriage for many women had been some sort of business partnership in agriculture, trade or domestic industry, but in the reorganisation which accompanied the industrial revolution, the majority of married women lost their economic independence. Unless they became wage earners outside the home they ceased to contribute to the family resources and themselves became financially dependent upon their husbands. Married women had never possessed a legal right to their own earnings, or their share of the family wage, nevertheless, in the new situation their financial subjection was greater than in the days when they contributed their share to the family income. While from the individual standpoint this might appear to be a retrogressive tendency, yet, among the working classes, it was not always a sound economic proposition for the married woman to be a wage earner. Her earnings rarely balanced the loss to the family from the non-performance of more important domestic duties; her own labour was often exploited and in many instances women's earnings only served to keep their husbands' wages at the level of individual subsistence.³ In this sense the industrial revolution marked a real

¹ *S.C. on Factory Bill*, 1831-2, xv, p. 423.

² One of the Commissioners in 1833 described the clothing of a power-loom weaver, a girl of eighteen. She was dressed "very elegantly," and had on a silk gown which cost her £1 16s. 6d.; her bonnet cost £1 9s. 6d.; silk gloves 1s. 6d.; and for shoes she paid about 15s. a year. *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, pp. D 1, 34-35.

³ The effect of women's wages on labourers' earnings may be seen from the following statement explaining the contemporary attitude to subsistence wages: "The price of labour, on the whole, is equal to the general cost of the labourer's subsistence. . . . If any additional pay or allowance be given to the Labourer . . . its first consequence will be by so much to indispose him to exertion, and estrange him from the interest of his immediate employer. The next consequence must be that the Employer will speedily discover the accession to the income of his Labourer, and by so much will he, in the end, lessen his wages, for the latter cannot long be permitted to receive more than what is necessary to his subsistence." *Eight Letters on the Management of our Poor . . . by an Overseer Nicholls*, 1822, p. 3.

advance, since it led to the assumption that men's wages should be paid on a family basis, and prepared the way for the more modern conception that in the rearing of children and in home-making, the married woman makes an adequate economic contribution.

In the case of the single working woman, the most striking effect of the industrial revolution was her distinct gain in social and economic independence. In industries in which a family wage prevailed, women scarcely knew the extent of, or had any opportunity of handling, their own earnings, and among women who earned an individual wage, few earned sufficient to give them any real sense of independence. Under the new régime every woman received her own earnings as a matter of course. The significance of this change was at once seen in the new sense of freedom which prompted so many young women to retain control of their wages, and even to leave home at an early age in order to "become their own mistresses."¹ Though the individual wage was at first bitterly resented by the heads of families,² it led ultimately to a new attitude towards the whole question of economic independence for women. It is interesting to note that the possibilities of the new system and its influence in this direction were commented upon by Hickson in his Report of 1840:

"One of the greatest advantages resulting from the progress of manufacturing industry, and from severe manual labour being superseded by machinery, is its tendency to raise the condition of women. Education only is wanting to place the women of Lancashire higher in the social scale than in any other part of the world. The great drawback to female happiness, among the middle and working classes, is, their complete dependence and almost helplessness in securing the means of subsistence. The want of other employment than the needle cheapens their labour, in ordinary cases, until it is almost valueless. In Lancashire profitable employment for females is abundant. Domestic servants are in consequence so scarce, that they can only be obtained from the neighbouring counties. A young woman, prudent and careful, and living with her parents, from the age of sixteen to twenty-five, may, in that time, by factory employment, save £100 as a wedding portion. I believe it to be to the interest of the community that every young woman should have this in her power. She is not then driven into an

¹ In 1833 it was stated that factory girls usually insisted on their independence at about sixteen years of age. "They are anxious to do it as soon as they can, and become their own mistresses. Many times they leave, if the parents refuse this arrangement [i.e. to retain their own wages and pay a definite sum for board] and go into lodgings. It would be a trifle more they would have to pay for board, lodging, and washing elsewhere; say 5s. I think that would be enough; 1s. for lodging and washing, and 4s. for the rest." *Factory Commission*, 1833, xx, p. C 2, 59. Evidence of John Yewdale.

² Gaskell describes the individual wage as "another evil of the factory system." "This has led to another crying and grievous misfortune, namely, that each child ceases to view itself as a subordinate agent in the household; so far indeed loses the character and bearing of a child, that it pays over to its natural protector a stated sum for food and lodging; thus detaching itself from parental subjection and control. The members, therefore, of a spinners' or weaver's family become a body of distinct individuals, occupying occasionally, but by no means universally, the same home, each paying its quota to the joint expenses, and considering themselves as lodgers merely, and appropriating any surplus which may remain of their wages to their own private purposes, accountable to no one for the mode in which it happens to be used or wasted." *Manufacturing Population of England*, 1833, p. 93.

early marriage by the necessity of seeking a home ; and the consciousness of independence in being able to earn her own living, is favourable to the development of her best moral energies. It is a great error in our views of social economy to suppose that the interest of either sex requires that the other should be restricted in the right of acquiring or holding property."¹

It remains to sum up this review of the effects of the industrial revolution on women's employment and economic status by a brief statement as to the position generally at the end of our period in the mid-nineteenth century. By that time the position of women in industry and their suitability for wage earning occupations outside the home, had become subjects for public discussion. Victorian reformers and philanthropists, led by Lord Shaftesbury, having first directed their attention to children, now laid a new emphasis on the social value of women and the importance of their influence on the national welfare. The facts revealed by various Parliamentary Commissions of inquiry supported their arguments for some measure of state protection, and national responsibility for women workers. The Reports of the Sadler Committee and the Factory Commission of the early 'thirties, together with the controversy which raged round the factory system, had made known the conditions of women's factory labour, and in 1843, the Report of the Children's Employment Commission had made known the work of women in the mines, in hardware manufacture, in domestic industries, and the horrible sweating among slop workers, dressmakers and milliners. The national conscience had been roused by accounts of heavy unsuitable labour in which women were engaged, and already public indignation had brought to an end their work in coal mines. Stimulated by this success, Shaftesbury was already drawing attention to and attacking their employment in brick yards and lime kilns.

This new interest, and the conviction that certain forms of labour in mines, foundries and brickyards were unsuitable for women, was so far good. But Victorian sentiment and prejudice would have gone further and would have withdrawn women gradually from all forms of factory labour also. Too close themselves to the industrial revolution to grasp the full significance of its changes and their economic importance for women, and unmindful of the part played by women in the past, the Victorians were shocked and horrified by the appearance of a new class of women workers in industrial centres, and could only reiterate that women's place was in the home. It was fortunate for women as a class that the extremists did not win the day, and that the more moderate section of reformers concentrated on securing measures of protection which should make industrial employment a fitting occupation for women. As a result of their efforts, by the mid-nineteenth century, factory women were in the van of all other workers. Legislative protection had secured them a recognised place in productive industry, and the emancipation of working women had definitely begun.

The importance of this, at a time when factory work was the only expanding field of employment for women, can hardly be overestimated. The industrial revolution had enormously increased the

¹ *Handloom Weavers' Report*, 1840, xxiv, p. 44.

amount of employment for men by new developments in mining, engineering and transport and the expansion of other industries, but there was no corresponding increase for women except in this sphere; in other directions their opportunities had actually declined. The Population Returns of 1841 were, for the first time in the case of women, made on an occupational basis, and although the information is not altogether accurate, the statistics at least give a rough idea of the distribution of women workers. At first sight, the great variety of women's occupations appears little short of amazing; but a closer examination soon reveals the fact that the great majority of women were working under five heads, as domestic servants, factory operatives, needlewomen, agricultural workers and those employed in domestic industries.¹ Of all these, factory women were by far the best off, working the shortest hours and receiving the same rate of wages as men where they were employed in the same kinds of work. In other occupations low wages and bad conditions were the rule—the inevitable results of an overstocked labour market. Here lay the explanation for most of the drudgery of domestic service, and the sweated slavery of the needle workers, whose wages were kept down by a constant stream of women compelled by adverse fortunes to enter the labour market, and for whom there was no alternative but the needle.² Middle class women were in an even worse position. Victorian ideas of "refinement" prescribed a life of idleness for women, unless stern necessity ruled otherwise. Even then they were limited to the genteel but overcrowded trades of dressmakers and milliners, or to what Charlotte Brontë described as "governessing slavery."

By this time the effects of increased wealth and the exclusion of upper class women from industry and trade were easily discernible. "A lady, to be such, must be a mere lady, and nothing else," wrote Margaretta Greg in her Diary in 1853. "She must not work for profit, or engage in any occupation that money can command, lest she invade the rights of the working classes, who live by their labour. Men in want of employment have pressed their way into nearly all the shopping and retail businesses that in my early years were managed in whole, or in part, by women. The conventional barrier that pro-

¹ See Appendix.

² "Thousands of young females of respectable parents who have been discreetly brought up and educated, and who are therefore unfitted for the drudgery of common service, are necessitated by the pecuniary misfortunes of their parents to earn a livelihood by needlework. All other female occupations equally suitable for them, or of a superior kind, require comparatively few individuals to supply them; it is notorious that such is the rivalry amongst females in this business, that employment is generally exceedingly precarious, and the profit very small. Many of such young ladies having in vain sought for a slender pittance, their parents being either dead or through misfortunes unable to provide for them, therefore without a home and pressed by poverty, in a moment of despair, resort to prostitution and its concomitants, misery, disease and death! The police reports of the Metropolis show that many young prostituted females from the polish of their manners, and from the history they relate, must have had a respectable origin: and that they have become a prey to this vice through their inability to procure an employment suited to their capacities, and through the impulses of sheer want. Hence the great extent of prostitution . . ." *Pamphleteer*, vol. xxviii (1827), pp. 115-6, J. R. Pickmere: "An Address to the Public on the Propriety of Midwives, instead of Surgeons practising Midwifery."

nounces it ungentle to be behind a counter, or serving the public in any mercantile capacity, is greatly extended. The same in household economy. Servants must be up to their offices, which is very well ; but ladies, dismissed from the dairy, the confectionery, the store room, the still room, the poultry yard, the kitchen garden, and the orchard, have hardly yet found themselves a sphere equally useful and important in the pursuits of trade and art to which to apply their too abundant leisure."¹

It is only necessary to contrast the vigorous life of the eighteenth century business woman, travelling about the country in her own interests, with the sheltered existence of the Victorian woman, to realise how much the latter had lost in initiative and independence by being protected from all real contact with life. To contemporaries, however, the new independence of working women was an even more striking contrast. Individual women among the middle classes were awakening to a consciousness of their position, and the importance of the economic emancipation of working women was at once manifested in its influence on better class women and their demands for a wider sphere and the right to individual independence.

With the desire on their part for social and economic freedom came first, in the mid-nineteenth century, the demand for higher education and training, and secondly, the agitation for the re-admission of women to industry and the professions. How far these demands have been successful is a matter of contemporary history. Women's work in these spheres as has been shown, is not an altogether new thing ; but it is new in the sense that it is now definitely based on education and training which are enabling women to take their proper place in the affairs of the world, and that it is accompanied by new ideals of economic independence. In these respects the position of women to-day marks a very real advance—the possibilities of which we are as yet scarcely able to determine. Herein lies the ultimate importance of the industrial revolution for women.

¹ J. E. Butler, *Memoir of John Greg*, pp. 326 ff. n. Margareta Greg was born in 1787.

APPENDIX

OCCUPATIONS OF WOMEN IN 1841.

The following figures taken from the Occupational Abstract of the Census Returns, 1841, (P.P. 1844, xxvii., pp. 31-44), while not altogether accurate, are interesting in showing the distribution of women in industry at this time. The numbers given are for England alone, and trades employing only very few women have for the most part been omitted.

	Females 30 years and upwards	Under 30 years		Females 30 years and upwards	Under 30 years
Accountment			Bonnet Maker ...	3,331	976
Maker	39	4	Bookseller, Book-		
Actor (Play)	310	71	binder, Publisher	1,561	458
Agent and Factor			Boot and Shoe		
(branch not			Maker	8,611	1,953
specified)	40	1	Brace and Belt Maker	322	80
Agricultural Im-			Braid Maker	34	10
plement Maker.	40	18	Brass Founder and		
Anchor Smith and			Moulder	39	4
Chain Maker ..	54	49	Brazier, Brass Fin-		
Artist (Fine Arts)	261	17	isher, Tinker ..	100	10
Auctioneer, Ap-			Brewer	172	5
praiser and			Brick and Tile		
House Agent ..	37	1	Maker	261	169
Author	15	—	Brick Layer	106	—
Baby Linen Dealer			Broker (branch		
and Maker	68	8	not specified) ..	256	3
Bacon and Ham			Broker, Furniture	84	5
Dealer and Fac-			Brush and Broom		
tor	23	1	Maker	535	137
Baker	3,144	79	Buckle Maker	31	12
Banker	7	—	Builder	74	—
Basket Maker	262	51	Burnisher	168	48
Bath Keeper and			Butcher	1,047	26
Attendant	77	—	Butcher, Pork ...	85	—
Bazaar Keeper ..	26	2	Butter Dealer,		
Bead Maker	26	10	Merchant, Factor	39	1
Bed and Mattress			Button Dealer and		
Maker	90	7	Merchant	13	—
Blacking Maker			*Button Maker ..	1,031	607
and Dealer	26	4	Cabinet Maker and		
Blacksmith	469	—	Upholsterer ...	1,846	181
Bleacher (branch			Cap Maker and		
not specified) ..	185	164	Dealer	837	237
Boat and Barge			Card Maker	488	362
Builder	19	—	Carpenter and		
Boat Woman	117	13	Joiner	389	—
Boat and Barge			Carpet and Rug		
Owner	19	—	Manufacturer...	87	158
Bobbin Maker and			Carrier, Carter and		
Turner	19	10	Waggoner	464	14

* An understatement.

	Females 20 years and upwards	Under 20 years		Females 20 years and upwards	Under 20 years
Carver and Gilder	68	10	Farmer and Grazier	15,392	—
Cattle and Sheep			Farrier, Cattle		
Dealer and Sales-			Doctor, and Vet-		
man	13	—	erinary Surgeon	78	—
Chair Maker	237	43	Feather Maker,		
Charwoman	18,019	265	Dealer, Dresser	97	15
Chaser	46	3	File Maker (all		
Cheesemonger and			branches)	92	31
Factor	115	1	Fish Monger and		
Chemist and Drug-			Dealer	614	42
gist	148	4	Fisherwoman	277	29
Chemist, Manu-			Flax and Linen		
facturing	11	1	Manufacture (all		
Chimney Sweeper	125	—	branches)	2,746	3,625
China, Earthen-			Flour Dealer and		
ware and Glass			Mealman	207	5
Dealer	602	84	Flower (artificial)		
Clerk (Commer-			Maker	475	380
cial)	137	22	Fork Maker	32	10
Clock and Watch			French Polisher ..	81	23
Maker	164	21	Fringe Manufac-		
Clothes Dealer and			ture	207	106
Outfitter	206	11	Furrier	664	134
Coach Maker (all			Fustian Manufac-		
branches)	108	8	ture	918	354
Coal Labourer,			Gardener	891	75
Heaver, Porter,	184	187	Gas Fitter	2	—
Coal Merchant and			Glass and Bottle		
Dealer	371	18	Manufacture ..	209	70
Coffee-House			*Glove Maker	4,249	1,600
Keeper	178	4	Glove Manufac-		
Comb Maker	97	33	ture, Silk	106	81
Cooper	113	6	Government Post		
Corn Merchant,			Office	449	11
Dealer, Factor,	114	10	Greengrocer and		
Corn Cutter (Chir-			Fruiterer	2,629	70
opodist)	12	—	Grocer and Tea		
Cotton			Dealer	7,005	127
Manufacture			Gun Maker and		
(all branches) ..	65,839	49,586	Gun Smith	67	12
Cupper and Dentist	23	—	Haberdasher and		
Currier and Leather			Hosier	779	109
Seller	140	5	Hairdresser and		
Cutler	129	30	Barber	231	15
Die Engraver and			Hatter and Hat		
Sinker	6	2	Manufacturer .	1,711	544
Draper	1,596	377	Hawker, Huckster		
Draper, Linen	529	100	and Pedlar	3,177	214
Dressmaker, Mil-			Hook and Eye		
liner	70,518	18,561	Maker	33	34
Dyer, Calenderer,			Hose Manufacturer		
and Scourer	417	74	(all branches) ..	5,934	2,371
Eating House			Iron Monger	259	9
Keepers	173	1	Japanner	328	165
Embroiderer	593	209	Jeweller, Gold-		
Engine and			smith and Silver-		
Machine Maker.	45	8	smith	296	69
Engineer and En-			Keeper, Lunatic		
gine Worker ...	45	57	Asylum	157	6
Factory Worker			Keeper, or Head of		
(manufacture not			Public Institu-		
specified)	4,338	4,449	tion	1,427	8

* An understatement.

APPENDIX

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	Females			Females	
	30 years and upwards	Under 30 years		30 years and upwards	Under 30 years
Knitter	814	274	Muslin Manufac-		
Labourer	9,398	1,757	turer	35	11
— Agricultural	26,815	8,447	*Nail Manufacturer	2,673	1,366
Lace Agent	15	1	Needle Manufac-		
Lace Dealer and			turer	505	243
Laceman	100	25	Net Maker	106	26
— Manufacturer			Newsagent and		
(all branches) ..	14,394	5,651	Vendor	67	3
Lamp and Lantern			Nurse	12,476	517
Maker	10	—	Nurseryman and		
Lapidary	21	10	Florist	183	49
Laundry Keeper,			Oil and Colourman	62	9
Washer and			Optician	17	—
Mangler	43,497	1,522	Painter, Plumber		
Lead Manufac-			and Glazier ...	349	25
turer	47	21	Paper Hanger ...	10	1
Leech Bleeder and			— Manufacturer		
Dealer	51	1	(all branches)	857	370
Librarian	106	3	— Stainer	60	32
Lime Burner	54	7	— Box Maker ..	42	38
Lint Manufacturer	84	28	Parochial Church		
Livery Stable			and Corporation		
Keeper	107	—	Officer (exclusive		
Locksmith and			of those returned		
Hell Hanger ..	35	7	in trade)	359	5
Lodging and Board-			Pastry Cook and		
ing House Keeper	6,073	33	Confectioner ..	1,681	158
Maltster	121	5	Pattern and Clog		
Map Maker and			Maker	65	10
Publisher	34	5	Pawnbroker	242	14
Marine Store			Pearl Cutter and		
Dealer	90	1	Worker	60	41
Mason, Faviour			Pen Maker and		
and Statuary ..	146	4	Dealer	66	27
Mat Maker	89	7	Pen (Steel) Maker	128	104
Match Maker and			Percussion Cap		
Seller	58	14	Maker	17	8
Mathematical In-			Perfumer	86	11
strument Maker	2	—	Pewterer and Pew-		
Medicine Vendor ..	23	2	ter Pot Maker ..	17	1
Merchant	77	—	Pig Dealer and		
Metal Manufac-			Merchant	11	1
turer	89	74	Pin Manufacturer		
*Midwife	676	—	(all branches) ..	472	356
Milk Seller and			Pipe Maker	343	98
Cow Keeper ...	1,622	52	— Tobacco		
Miller	410	47	Maker	18	3
Millwright	25	3	Plasterer	69	2
Miner (branch not			Plater	20	5
specified)	334	364	Polisher	151	40
— Copper	903	1,200	Porter, Messenger	165	36
— Iron	363	36	Potato Dealer and		
— Lead	25	18	Merchant	33	—
— Tin	68	82	Pottery, China and		
Mop Maker	33	4	Earthenware		
Moulder	12	5	Manufacturer		
Music Seller and			(all branches) ..	3,843	3,253
Publisher	33	—	Poulterer and		
Musical Instru-			Game Dealer ...	196	7
ment Maker ...	23	—	Press Worker ...	32	32
Musician and Or-			Print Seller	36	9
ganist	199	52	Printer	114	43

* An. understatement.

APPENDIX

	Females		Females	
	20 years and upwards	Under 20 years	20 years and upwards	Under 20 years
Printer, Copper			— Mercer	128
Plate	10	2	— Merchant ...	13
— Cotton and			Skinner and Skin	
Calico	239	384	Dresser	49
Provision Dealer ..	217	12	Slater	11
Pump Maker	17	4	Stopmaker and	
Quarrier (branch			Seller	261
not specified) ..	15	4	Small Ware Dealer	92
— Stone	15	18	Small Ware Manu-	
Quill Cutter	11	4	facturer (all	
Quilter and Quilt			branches)	122
Maker	92	18	Smelter (ore not	
Rag Cutter Dealer			specified)	118
and Gatherer ..	446	93	Snuffer Maker	16
Reed Maker	26	8	Spectacle Maker ..	8
Register Office			Spinner (branch	
(Servants')			not specified ...	3,458
Keeper	19	—	Spoon Maker	87
* Ribbon Manufac-			Spring Maker	16
turer	2,394	636	Stationer	387
Roller Maker and			Stay and Corset	
Turner	114	27	Maker	4,149
Rope and Cord			Steel Workers	18
Spinner and			Stewardess (Ship) ..	27
Maker	401	85	Stock (Men's)	
Rush Dealer and			Maker	318
Manufacturer ..	21	4	Straw Bonnet and	
Sack and Bag			Hat Maker	6,457
Dealer and			— Plait Dealer,	
Maker	187	31	Factor, Mer-	64
Saddle, Harness			chant	19
and Collar Maker	272	36	— Plait Manu-	
Sail, Sail Cloth and			facturer (all	
Tarpaulin Manu-			branches)	5,686
facturer	99	22	Stuff Manufacturer	
Saleswoman	117	5	(all branches) ..	2,028
Sand Merchant ..	37	1	Sugar Baker,	
Sawyer	12	—	Boiler and Re-	
Schoolmistress,			finer	12
Governess (see			Surgical Instru-	
also Teacher) ..	27,754	1,499	ment Maker ...	9
Scissors Maker ..	101	47	Tailor and	
Screen Maker	88	75	Breeches Maker	5,155
Screw Cutter and			Tallow and Wax	
Maker	279	122	Chandler	71
Screw (wood)			Tanner	38
Maker	22	7	Tape Manufacturer	
Seamstress	15,680	2,266	(all branches) ..	258
Seedsman and			Tassel Maker	62
Seed Merchant ..	52	3	Tavern Keeper, vis.	
Servant, Domestic	447,606	264,887	Beershop Keeper	1,471
Shawl Manufac-			Hotel and Inn	
turer (all			Keeper	2,941
branches)	107	60	Publican and	
Ship and Smack			Victualler	5,574
Owner	48	—	Spirit Merchant.	114
Shopkeeper and			Tea Broker and	
General Dealer ..	9,316	266	Merchant	3
Shroud Maker ...	14	4	Teacher—see also	
Sieve Maker	72	24	Schoolmistress .	
Silk Manufacturer			Dancing and	
(all branches) ..	18,038	11,795	Gymnastics ..	60

* An understatement.

APPENDIX

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	Females			Females	
	so years and upwards	Under so years		so years and upwards	Under so years
Languages.....	62	6	Weaver (branch		
Miscellaneous ...	36	6	not specified) ..	17,728	8,583
Music and Singing	629	91	Wheelwright	141	5
Thimble Maker ..	18	11	Whip Maker	41	8
Thread Manufac-			Whitesmith.....	23	—
turer (all branches)	172	181	Willow Weaver		
Timber Merchant			and Worker....	56	20
and dealer.....	33	4	Wire Agent and		
Tin Manufacturer			Merchant.....	79	1
(all branches)..	125	149	Wire Drawer and		
Tinplate Worker .	72	31	Maker	9	1
Tobacconist and			— Worker and		
Tobacco and			Weaver ...	88	56
Souffl Manufacturer (all branches)	1,683	89	Wood Cutter and		
Toll Collector	426	20	Woodman	61	12
Tool Dealer and			— Merchant and		
Maker (all			Dealer	33	—
branches)	58	13	Wool Agent, Mer-		
Toy Dealer and			chant and Stapler	34	5
Maker	386	76	Wool (Berlin),		
Tray Maker.....	47	10	Dealer and		
Trimming Maker .	162	72	Worker	22	2
Tripe Dealer and			Woollen and Cloth		
Dresser	71	6	Manufacturer		
Trunk and Box			(all branches) ..	13,196	7,742
Maker	226	84	— Draper	57	3
Truss Maker.....	22	5	Worsted Dealer		
Turner	74	20	and Merchant...	26	6
Umbrella; Parasol			— Manufacturer		
and Walking-			(all branches)	6,016	6,126
Stick Maker ...	423	118	Yarn Manufacturer		
Undertaker	69	3	(all branches) ..	118	48
Warehouse			Yeast Dealer and		
Woman	567	202	Merchant.....	51	1

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