

HELEN CAMPBELL

PRISONERS OF
POVERTY
ABROAD

Helen Campbell
Prisoners of Poverty Abroad

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Prisoners of Poverty Abroad:

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Prisoners of Poverty Abroad

PREFACE

The studies which follow, the result of fifteen months' observation abroad, deal directly with the workers in all trades open to women, though, from causes explained in the opening chapter, less from the side of actual figures than the preceding volume, the material for which was gathered in New York. But as months have gone on, it has become plain that many minds are also at work, the majority on the statistical side of the question, and that the ethical one is that which demands no less attention. Both are essential to understanding and to effort in any practical direction, and this is recognized more and more as organization brings together for consultation the women who, having long felt deeply, are now learning to think and act effectually. These pages are for them, and mean simply another side-light on the labor question, – the question in which all other modern problems are tangled, and whose solving waits only the larger light whose first gleams are already plain to see.

HELEN CAMPBELL.

Heidelberg, Germany,

October, 1888.

CHAPTER I.

BOTH SIDES OF THE SEA

With the ending of the set of studies among the working-women of New York, begun in the early autumn of 1886 and continued through several months of 1887, came the desire to know something of comparative conditions abroad, and thus be better able to answer questions constantly put, as to the actual status of women as workers, and of their probable future in these directions. There were many additional reasons for continuing a search, in itself a heart-sickening and utterly repellant task. One by one, the trades open to women, over ninety in number, had given in their returns, some of the higher order meaning good wages, steady work and some chance of bettering conditions. But with the great mass of workers, the wages had, from many causes, fallen below the point of subsistence, or kept so near it that advance was impossible, and the worker, even when fairly well trained, faced a practically hopeless future.

The search began with a bias against rather than for the worker, and the determination to do strictest justice to employer as well as employed. Long experience had taught what was to be expected from untrained, unskilled laborers, with no ambition or power to rise. Approaching the subject with the conviction that most of the evil admitted to exist must be the result of

the worker's own defective training and inability to make the best and most of the wages received, it very soon became plain that, while this remained true, deeper causes were at work, and that unseen forces must be weighed and measured before just judgment could be possible. No denunciation of grasping employers answered the question why they grasped, and why men who in private relations showed warm hearts and the tenderest care for those nearest them became on the instant, when faced by this problem of labor, deaf and blind to the sorrow and struggle before them.

That the system was full of evils was freely admitted whenever facts were brought home and attention compelled. But the easy-going American temperament is certain that the wrong of to-day will easily become righted by to-morrow, and is profoundly sceptical as to the existence of any evil of which this is not true.

"It's pretty bad, yes, I know it's pretty bad," said one large employer of women, and his word was the word of many others. "But we're not to blame. I don't want to grind 'em down. It's the system that's wrong, and we are its victims. Competition gets worse and worse. Machinery is too much for humanity. I've been certain of that for a good while, and so, of course, these hands have to take the consequences."

Nothing better indicates the present status of the worker than this very phrase "hands." Not heads with brains that can think and plan, nor souls born to grow into fulness of life, but hands only; hands that can hold needle or grasp tool, or follow the order

of the brain to which they are bond-servants, each pulse moving to the throb of the great engine which drives all together, but never guided by any will of brain or joy of soul in the task of the day. There has been a time in the story of mankind when hand and brain worked together. In every monument of the past on this English soil, even at the topmost point of springing arch or lofty pillar, is tracery and carving as careful and cunning as if all eyes were to see and judge it as the central point and test of the labor done. Has the nineteenth century, with its progress and its boast, no possibility of such work from any hand of man, and if not, where has the spirit that made it vanished, and what hope may men share of its return? Not one, if the day's work must mean labor in its most exhausting form; for many women, fourteen to sixteen hours at the sewing machine, the nerve-force supplied by rank tea, and the bit of bread eaten with it, the exhausted bodies falling at last on whatever may do duty for bed, with no hope that the rising sun will bring release from trial or any gleam of a better day.

With each week of the long search the outlook became more hopeless. Here was this army crowding into the great city, packed away in noisome tenement houses, ignorant, blind, stupid, incompetent in every fibre, and yet there as factors in the problem no man has yet solved. If this was civilization, better barbarism with its chance of sunshine and air, free movement and natural growth. What barbarism at its worst could hold such joyless, hopeless, profitless labor, or doom its victims to more

lingering deaths? Admitting the almost impossibility of making them over, incased as they are in ignorance and prejudice, this is simply another count against the social order which has accepted such results as part of its story, and now looks on, speculating, wondering what had better be done about it.

The philanthropist has endeavored to answer the question, and sought out many devices for alleviation, struggling out at last to the conviction that prevention must be attempted, and pausing bewildered before the questions involved in prevention. For them there has been active and unceasing work, their brooms laboring as vainly as Mrs. Partington's against the rising tide of woe and want and fruitless toil, each wave only the forerunner of mightier and more destructive ones, while the world has gone its way, casting abundant contributions toward the workers, but denying that there was need for agitation or speculation as to where or how the next crest might break. There were men and women who sounded an alarm, and were in most cases either hooted for their pains, or set down as sentimentalists, newspaper philanthropists, fanatics, socialists, – any or all of the various titles bestowed freely by those who regard interference with any existing order of things as rank blasphemy.

Money has always been offered freely, but money always carries small power with it, save for temporary alleviation. The word of the poet who has sounded the depths of certain modern tendencies holds the truth for this also: —

"Not that which we give, but what we share,
For the gift without the giver is bare;
Who bestows himself, with his alms feeds three,
Himself, his hungering neighbor and me."

Yet it is the Anglo-Saxon conviction, owned by English and American in common, and unshaken though one should rise from the dead to arraign it, that what money would not do, cannot be done, and when money is rejected and the appeal made for personal consideration of the questions involved, there is impatient and instantaneous rejection of the responsibility. Evolution is supposed to have the matter in charge, and to deal with men in the manner best suited to their needs. If the ancient creed is still held and the worshipper repeats on Sunday: "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," he supplements it on Monday and all other days, till Sunday comes again, with the new version, the creed of to-day, formulated by a man who fights it from hour to hour:

"I believe in Father Mud, the Almighty Plastic;
And in Father Dollar, the Almighty Drastic."

It is because these men and women must be made to understand; because they must be reached and made to see and know what life may be counted worth living, and how far they are responsible for failure to make better ideals the ideal of every soul nearest them, that the story of the worker must be

told over and over again till it has struck home. To seek out all phases of wretchedness and want, and bring them face to face with those who deny that such want is anything but a temporary, passing state, due to a little over-production and soon to end, is not a cheerful task, and it is made less so by those who, having never looked for themselves, pronounce all such statements either sensational or the work of a morbid and excited imagination. The majority decline to take time to see for themselves. The few who have done so need no further argument, and are ready to admit that no words can exaggerate, or, indeed, ever really tell in full the real wretchedness that is plain for all who will look. But, even with them, the conviction remains that it is, after all, a temporary state of things, and that all must very shortly come right.

Day by day, the desire has grown stronger to make plain the fact that this is a world-wide question, and one that must be answered. It is not for a city here and there, chiefly those where emigrants pour in, and so often, the mass of unskilled labor, always underpaid, and always near starvation. It is for the cities everywhere in the world of civilization, and because London includes the greatest numbers, these lines are written in London after many months of observation among workers on this side of the sea, and as the prelude to some record of what has been seen and heard, and must still be before the record ends, not only here, but in one or two representative cities on the continent. London, however, deserves and demands chief consideration, not only because it leads in numbers, but because our own conditions

are, in many points, an inheritance which crossed the sea with the pilgrims, and is in every drop of Anglo-Saxon blood. If the glint of the sovereign and its clink in the pocket are the dearest sight and sound to British eyes and ears, America has equal affection for her dollars, in both countries alike chink and glint standing with most, for the best things life holds. It remains for us to see whether counteracting influences are stronger here than with us, and if the worker's chance is hampered more or less by the conditions that hedge in all labor. The merely statistical side of the question is left, as in the previous year's work, chiefly to those who deal only with this phase, though drawn upon wherever available or necessary. There is, however, small supply. Save in scattered trades-union reports, an occasional blue book, and here and there the work of a private investigator, like Mr. Charles Booth, there is nothing which has the value of our own reports from the various bureaus of labor. The subject has until now excited little interest or attention, save with a few political economists, and the band of agitators who are the disciples, not of things as they are, but things as they ought to be. One of the most admirable and well-officered organizations in New York, "The Workingwoman's Protective Union," which gave invaluable assistance last year, has only a small and feeble imitation in London, in the Woman's Protective Union, founded by Mrs. Peterson, and now under the admirable management of Miss Black, but still struggling for place and recognition.

Thus it will be seen that the work to be done here is necessarily

more sketchy in character, though none the less taken from life in every detail, the aim in both cases being the same, – to give, as far as possible, the heart of the problem as it is seen by the worker, as well as by the eyes that may have larger interpretation for outward phases. The homes and daily lives of the workers are the best answers as to the comfort-producing power of wages, and in those homes we are to find what the wage can do, and what it fails to do, not alone for the East End, but for swarming lanes and courts in all this crowded London. The East End has by no means the monopoly, though novelists and writers of various orders have chosen it as the type of all wretchedness. But London wretchedness is very impartially distributed. Under the shadow of the beautiful abbey, and the towers of archiepiscopal Lambeth Palace; appearing suddenly in the midst of the great warehouses, and the press of traffic in the city itself, and thronging the streets of that borough road, over which the Canterbury pilgrims rode out on that immortal summer morning, – everywhere is the swarm of haggard, hungry humanity. No winter of any year London has known since the day when Roman walls still shut it in, has ever held sharper want or more sorrowful need. Trafalgar Square has suddenly become a world-wide synonym for the saddest sights a great city can ever have to show; and in Trafalgar Square our search shall begin, following one of the unemployed to the refuge open to her when work failed.

CHAPTER II. IN TRAFALGAR SQUARE

To the London mind nothing is more certain than that Trafalgar Square, which may be regarded as the real focus of the city, is unrivalled in situation and surroundings. "The finest site in Europe," one hears on every side, and there is reason for the faith. In spite of the fact that the National Gallery which it fronts is a singularly defective and unimpressive piece of architecture, it hardly weakens the impression, though the traveller facing it recalls inevitably a criticism made many years ago: "This unhappy structure may be said to have everything it ought not to have, and nothing which it ought to have. It possesses windows without glass, a cupola without size, a portico without height, pepper boxes without pepper, and the finest site in Europe without anything to show upon it."

In spite of all this, to which the pilgrim must at once agree, the Square itself, with the Nelson Pillar and the noble lions at its base, nobler for their very simplicity; its fountains and its outlook on the beautiful portico of St. Martin's, the busy Strand and the great buildings rising all about, is all that is claimed for it, and the traveller welcomes any chance that takes him through it. Treasures of art are at its back, and within short radius, every possibility of business or pleasure, embodied in

magnificent hotels, theatres, warehouses, is for the throng that flows unceasingly through these main arteries of the city's life.

This is one phase of what may be seen in Trafalgar Square. But with early autumn and the shortening days and the steadily increasing pressure of that undercurrent of want and misery through which strange flotsam and jetsam come to the surface, one saw, on the long benches or crouched on the asphalt pavement, lines of men and women sitting silently, making no appeal to passers-by, but, as night fell, crouching lower in their thin garments or wrapping old placards or any sack or semblance of covering about them, losing memory in fitful sleep and waking with dawn to a hopeless day. This was the sight that Trafalgar Square had for those who passed through it, and who at last began to question, "Why is it? Who are they? They don't seem to beg. What does it mean?"

The Square presently overflowed, and in any and every sheltered spot the same silent lines lay down at night along the Thames Embankment, in any covered court or passage, men rushing with early dawn to fight for places at the dock gates, breaking arms or dislocating shoulders often in the struggle, and turning away with pale faces, as they saw the hoped-for chance given to a neighbor, to carry their tale to the hungry women whose office was to wait. The beggars pursued their usual course, but it was quite plain that these men and women had no affinity with them save in rags. Day by day the numbers swelled. "Who are they? What does it mean?" still sounded, and at last the

right phrase was found, and the answer came: "They are the 'unemployed.' There is no longer any work to be had, and these people can neither get away nor find any means of living here."

For a time London would not believe its ears. There must be work, and so food for whoever was willing to work; but presently this cry silenced, and it became plain that somebody must do something.

Food was the first thought; and from the Limehouse district, and a refuge known as the Outcasts' Home, a great van loaded with loaves of bread came in two or three times a week, taking back to the refuge in the empty cart such few as could be induced to try its mercies. Coffee was also provided on a few occasions; and as the news spread by means of that mysterious telegraphy current in the begging fraternity, suddenly the Square overflowed with their kind; and who wanted to work and could not, and who wanted no work on any consideration, no man could determine.

With the story of this tangle, of the bewilderment and dismay for all alike, and the increasing despair of the unemployed, this chronicle has but indirectly to do. Trafalgar Square was emptied at last by means already familiar to all. Beggars skulked back to their hiding-places like wharf-rats to the rotten piles that shelter them; the unemployed dispersed also, showing themselves once more in the files that registered when the census of the unemployed was decided upon; and then, for the most part, were lost to public sight in the mass of general, every-day, to-be-expected wretchedness which makes up London below the

surface.

Scores of wretched figures crouched on the icy asphalt of the Square on a pouring night early in November, before its clearing had been ordered. The great van was expected, but had not appeared, and men huddled in the most sheltered corners of this most unsheltered spot, cowering under any rag of covering they had been able to secure. In a corner by the lions a pair had taken refuge, — a boy of ten or so, wrapped in two newspaper placards, and his bare feet tucked into a horse's nose-bag, too old and rotten for any further service in its own line of duty; over him crouched a girl, whose bent figure might have belonged to eighty, but whose face as she looked up showed youth which even her misery could not wipe out. She had no beauty, save soft dark eyes and a delicate face, both filled with terror as she put one arm over the boy, who sprung to his feet. "I'll not go where Nell can't," he said, the heavy sleep still in his eyes; "we're goin' to keep together, me an' Nell is."

"'Tain't the van," the girl said, still holding him; "they tried to take him back to the Refuge the other night, and he's afraid of 'em. They don't take any over sixteen, and so I can't go, an' he's afraid somehow they'll take him in spite of me. I'd be willin' enough, for there's no more I can do for him, and he's too little for this sort of life; but he won't go."

The girl's thin clothing was soaked with rain; she shivered as she spoke, but sat there with the strange patience in look and manner that marks the better class of English poor. "But is there

nobody to give you a shelter on such a night? You must have somebody. What does it mean?"

"I had a bit of a place till last Wednesday, but the rent was far behind and they turned me out. I was home then a day or two, but it's worse there than the streets. There was no work, and father drunk, and beating mother and all of us, and Billy worst of all; so the streets were better. I've tried for work, but there's none to be had, and now I'm waiting. Perhaps I shall die pretty soon, and then they can take Billy into the Refuge. I'm waiting for that."

"But there must be work for any one as young and strong as you."

The girl shook her head. "I've walked the soles off me shoes to find it. There's no work in all London. I can go on the streets, but I'd rather do this. My mother did her best for us all, but she's been knocked round till she's as near death as we. There's no work for man nor woman in all London."

The boy had settled down at her feet again, satisfied that no attempt was to be made to separate them, and fell asleep instantly, one hand holding her dress. To leave the pair was impossible. Other cases might be as desperate, but this was nearest; and presently a bargain had been made with an old woman who sells roasted chestnuts in St. Martin's Lane, close by, and the two were led away to her shelter in some rookery in the Seven Dials. A day or two later the full story was told, and has its place as the first and strongest illustration of the state of things in this great city of London, where, as the year 1888 opens, official

registers hold the names of over seventeen thousand men who wish to work at any rate that may be paid, but for whom there is no work, their names representing a total of over fifty thousand who are slowly starving; and this mass known to be but a part of that which is still unregistered, and likely to remain so, unless private enterprise seeks it out in lane and alley where it hides.

The father was a "coal whipper" on the docks near Tower Hill, this meaning that he spent his days in the hold of a collier or on the deck, guiding the coal basket which ascends from the hold through a "way" made of broken oars lashed together, and by means of a wheel and rope is sent on and emptied. Whether in hold or on deck it is one of the most exhausting forms of labor, and the men, whose throats are lined with coal dust, wash them out with floods of beer. Naturally they are all intemperate, and the wages taken home are small in proportion to their thirst. And as an evening solace, the father, who had once been footman in a good family, and married the lady's maid (which fact accounted for the unusual quality of Nelly's English), beat them all around, weeping maudlin tears over them in the morning, and returning at night to duplicate the occasion for more.

The mother had made constant fight for respectability. She did such dressmaking as the neighborhood offered, but they moved constantly as fortunes grew lower and lower, sheltering at last in two rooms in a rookery in Tower Hamlets.

Here came the final disablement. The father, a little drunker than usual, pushed the wife downstairs and their Billy after her,

the result being a broken hip for the first and a broken arm for the last. Nelly, who had begun to stitch sacks not long before, filled her place as she could, and cared for the other seven, all not much more than babies, and most of them in time mercifully removed by death. She was but twelve when her responsibility began, and it did not end when the mother came home, to be chiefly bedridden for such days as remained. The three little boys were all "mud-larks," that is, prowled along the river shore, picking up any odds and ends that could be sold to the rag-shop or for firewood, and their backs were scored with the strap which the father carried in his pocket and took out for his evening's occupation when he came.

The mother, sitting up in bed and knitting or crocheting for a small shop near by, fared no better than the rest, for Billy, who tried to stand between them, only infuriated the brute the more. The crisis came when he one night stole the strap from his father's pocket and cut it into pieces. Nelly, who was now earning fair wages, had long thought that her mother's life would be easier without them; and now, as Billy announced that he had done for himself and must run, she decided to run too.

"I told mother I'd have a bit of a room not far off," she said, "only where father wouldn't be likely to search us out, and I'd do for Billy and for her too what I could. She cried, but she saw it was best. Billy was just a bag of bones and all over strap marks. He'd have to mud-lark just the same, but he'd have more to eat and no beatings, and he'd always hung to me from the time he was

born. So that is the way I did, and, bit by bit, I got a comfortable place, and had Billy in school, and kept us both, and did well. But then the wages began to go down, and every week they got lower till, where I'd earned twelve shillings a week sometimes, I was down to half and less than half that. I tried stitching for the sweaters a while, but I'd no machine, and they had more hands than they wanted everywhere, and I went back to the sacks. And at last they dismissed a lot too, and I went here and there and everywhere for another chance, and not one, – not one anywhere. I pawned everything, bit by bit, till we'd nothing left but some rags and straw to sleep upon, and the rent far behind; and then I went home when we were turned out, and that father took for his chance, and was worse than ever.

"And so, when there was no work anywhere, though I was ready for anything, I didn't care what, and I saw we were just taking the bread from mother's mouth (though it's little enough she wanted), then I told Billy to stay with her, and I went out and to the Square and sat down with the rest, and wondered if I ought to sit there and wait to be dead, or if I hadn't the right to do it quicker and just try the river. But I saw all those I was with just as bad off and worse, and some with babies, and so I didn't know what to do, but just to wait there. What can we do? They say the Queen is going to order work so that the men can get wages; but they don't say if she is going to do anything for the women. She's a woman; but then I suppose a Queen couldn't any way know, except by hearsay, that women really starve; and women do for

men first anyhow. But I will work any way at anything, if only you'll find it for me to do – if only you will."

For one of the fifty-three thousand work and place have been found. For the rest is still the cry: "I will work any way at anything, if only you'll find it for me to do; if only you will."

CHAPTER III.

THE SWEATING SYSTEM IN GENERAL

"History repeats itself," is a very hackneyed phrase, yet, for want of any better or more expressive one, must lead such words as are to be said on an old yet ever new evil; for it is just forty years ago, since the winter of 1847-1848 showed among the working men and women of England conditions analogous to those of the present, though on a far smaller scale. Acute distress prevailed then as now. Revolution was in the air, and what it might mean being far less plain to apprehensive minds than it is to-day, a London newspaper, desirous of knowing just what dangers were to be faced, sent a commissioner to investigate the actual conditions of the working classes, and published his reports from day to day. Then, for the first time, a new word came into circulation, and "sweating" became the synonym, which it has since remained, for a system of labor which means the maximum of profit for the employer and the minimum of wages for the employed. The term is hardly scientific, yet it is the only one recognized in the most scientific investigation thus far made. That of 1847-1848 did its work for the time, nor have its results wholly passed away. Charles Kingsley, young then and ardent, his soul stirred with longing to lighten all human suffering, took up

the cause of the worker, and in his pamphlet "Cheap Clothes and Nasty," and later, in the powerful novel "Alton Locke," showed every phase of the system, then in its infancy, and, practically, entirely unknown on the other side of the Atlantic.

The results of this agitation became visible at once. Unions and Associations of various sorts among tailors and the one or two other trades to which the sweating system had applied, were organized and from year to year extended and perfected till it had come to be the popular conviction that, save in isolated cases here and there, the evil was to be found only among the foreign population, and even there, hedged in and shorn of its worst possibilities. This conviction remained and made part of the estimate of any complaints that now and then arose, and though the work of the organized charities, and of independent investigations here and there, demonstrated from year to year that it had increased steadily, its real scope was still unbelieved. Now, after forty years, the story tells itself again, this time in ways which cannot be set down as newspaper sensationalism or anybody's desire to make political capital. It is a Blue Book which holds the latest researches and conclusions, and Blue Books are not part of the popular reading, but are usually tucked away in government offices or libraries, to which the public has practically no access. A newspaper paragraph gives its readers the information that another report on this or that feature of public interest has been prepared and shelved for posterity, and there the matter ends.

In the present case public feeling and interest have been so stirred by the condition of unexampled misery and want among masses eager to work but with no work to be had, that the report has been called for and read and discussed to a degree unknown to any of its predecessors. While it gives results only in the most compact form and by no means compares with work like that of Mr. Charles Peck in his investigations for the New York Bureau of Statistics of Labor, it still holds a mass of information invaluable to all who are seeking light on the cause of present evils. As with us the system is closely a part of the manufacture of cheap clothing of every order, tailoring leading, and various other trades being included, furniture makers, strange to say, being among the chief sufferers in these.

With us the system is so clearly defined and so well known, at any rate in all our large centres of labor, that definition is hardly necessary. For England and America alike the sweater is simply a sub-contractor who, at home or in small workshops, undertakes to do work, which he in turn sublets to other contractors, or has done under his own eyes. The business had a simple and natural beginning, the journey-worker of fifty years ago taking home from his employers work to be done there either by himself or some member of his family. At this time it held decided advantages for both sides. The master-tailor was relieved from finding workshop accommodations with all the accompanying expense and from constant supervision of his work people, while good work was insured by the pride of the worker in his craft, as

well as his desire not to lose a good connection. There was but the slightest subdivision of labor, each worker was able to make the garment from the beginning to the end, apprentices being employed on the least important parts.

Work of this order has no further place in the clothing trade, whether tailoring or general outfitting, save for the best order of clothing. Increase of population cheapened material, the introduction of machinery and the tremendous growth of the ready-made clothing trade are all responsible for the change. The minutest system of subdivided labor now rules here as in all trades. When a coat is in question, it is no longer the master-tailor, journeyman and apprentices who prepare it, but a legion of cutters, basters, machinists, pressers, fellers, button-hole, and general workers, who find the learning of any one alone of the branches an easy matter, and so rush into the trade, the fiercest and most incessant competition being the instant result.

In 1881 a census was taken in the East End of London which showed over fifteen thousand tailors at work, of whom more than nine thousand were women. The number of the latter at present is estimated to be about twelve thousand, much increase having been prevented by various causes, for which there is no room here. As the matter at present stands, every man and woman employed aims to become as fast as possible a sweater on his or her own account. For large employers this is not so easy; for the small ones nothing could be simpler, and here are the methods.

If the trade is an unfamiliar one, there is first the initiation

by employment in a sweater's shop, and a few months, or even weeks, gives all the necessary facility. Then comes the question of workroom; and here it is only necessary to take the family room, and hire a sewing machine, which is for rent at two shillings and sixpence, or sixty cents, a week. To organize the establishment all that is necessary is a baster, a machinist, a presser, and two or three women-workers, one for button-holing, one for felling, and one for general work, carrying home, etc. The baster may be a skilled woman; the presser is always a man, the irons weighing from seven to eighteen pounds, and the work being of the most exhausting description, no man being able to continue it beyond eight or ten years at the utmost. The sweater-employer often begins by being his own presser, or his own baster; but as business increases his personal labor lessens. In the beginning his profits are extremely small, prices varying so that it is impossible to make any general table of rates. Even in the same branch of trade hardly any two persons are employed at the same rate, and the range of ability appears to vary with the wage paid, subdivision of labor being thus carried to its utmost limit, and the sections of the divisions already mentioned being again subdivided beyond further possibility. So tremendous is the competition for work that the sweaters are played off against each other by the contractors and sub-contractors, the result upon the workers below being as disastrous as the general effect of the system as a whole.

As one becomes familiar with the characteristics of the East

End, – and this is only after long and persistent comings and goings in street and alley, – it is found that there are entire streets in Whitechapel or St. George's-in-the-East, the points where the tailoring trade seems to focus, in which almost every house contains one, and sometimes several, sweating establishments, managed usually by men, but now and then in the hands of women, though only for the cheapest forms of clothing. Here, precisely as in our own large cities, a room nine or ten feet square is heated by a coke fire for the presser's irons, and lighted at night by flaming gas-jets, six, eight, or even a dozen workers being crowded in this narrow space. But such crowding is worse here than with us, for reasons which affect also every form of cheap labor within doors. London, under its present arrangements, is simply an enormous smoke factory, and no quarter of its vast expanse is free from the plague of soot and smoke, forever flying, and leaving a coating of grime on every article owned or used, no matter how cared for. This is true for Belgravia as for the East End, and "blacks," as the flakes of soot are known, are eaten and drunk and breathed by everything that walks in London streets or breathes London air.

There is, then, not only the foulness engendered by human lungs breathing in the narrowest and most crowded of quarters, but the added foulness of dirt of every degree and order, overlaid and penetrated by this deposit of fine soot; the result a griminess that has no counterpart on the face of the earth. "Cheap clothes and nasty" did not end with Kingsley's time, and these garments,

well made, and sold at a rate inconceivably low, are saturated with horrible emanations of every sort, and to the buyer who stops to think must carry an atmosphere that ends any satisfaction in the cheapness. Setting aside this phase as an intangible and, in part, sentimental ground for complaint, the fact that the cheapness depends also upon the number of hours given by the worker – whose day is never less than fourteen, and often eighteen, hours – should be sufficient to ban the whole trade. Even for this longest day there is no uniformity of price, and with articles identically the same the rate varies with different sweaters, the increasing competition accentuating these differences more and more. The sweater himself is more or less at the mercy of the contractor, who says to him: "Here are so many coats, at so much a coat. If you won't do them at the price, there are plenty that will."

Already well aware of this fact, the sweater, if the rate falls at all below his expectation, has simply to pursue the same course with the waiting worker in his shop, a slight turn of the screw, half a penny off here and a farthing there, bringing his own profit back to the rate he assumes as essential. There is no pressure from below to compel justice. For any rebellious worker a dozen stand waiting to fill the vacant place; and thus the wrong perpetuates itself, and the sweater, whose personal relation with those he employs may be of the friendliest, becomes tyrant and oppressor, not of his own will, but through sheer force of circumstances. Thus evils, which laws have not reached, increase from day to day. Inspectors are practically powerless, and the shameful

system, degrading alike to employer and employed, grows by what it feeds on, and hangs over the East End, a pall blacker and fouler than the cloud of smoke and soot, also the result of man's folly, not to be lifted till human eyes see clearer what makes life worth living, and human hands are less weary with labor that profiteth not, but that deadens sense and soul alike.

This is the general view of the system as a whole. For the special there must still be a further word.

CHAPTER IV.

AMONG THE SWEATERS

"'Nine tailors to make a man,' they say. Well, now if it takes that amount, and from some lots I've seen I should say it did, you've got to multiply by nine again if you count in the women. Bless your 'art!" and here, in his excitement, the inspector began to drop the *h*'s, which the Board School had taught him to hold to with painful tenacity. "Bless your 'art! a woman can't make a coat, and every tailor knows it, and that's one reason 'e beats 'er down and beats 'er down till 'ow she keeps the breath of life in the Lord only knows. Take the cheapest coat going and there's a knack to every seam that a woman don't catch. She's good for trousers and finishing, and she can't be matched for button-holes when she gives her mind to it, but a coat's beyond her. I've wondered a good bit over it. The women don't see it themselves, but now and again there's one that's up to every dodge but a coat seam, and she wants more money and couldn't be persuaded, no, not if Moses himself came to try it, that she isn't worth the same as the men. That's what I 'ear as I go, and I've been hup and down among 'em three years and over. Their dodges is beyond belief, not the women's, – poor souls! they're too ground down to 'ave mind enough left for dodges, – but the sweaters; Parliament's after 'em. There's enough, but ther's no man halive

that I've seen that knows how to 'old a sweater to 'em. How's one or two inspectors to get through every sweating place in Whitechapel alone, let alone hall the East End? It's hup an' down an' hin and hout, and where you find 'em fair and square in a reg'lar shop, or in rooms plain to see, you'll find 'em in basements and backyards, and washhouses, and underground, – anywheres like so many rats, though, I'm blessed if I don't think the rats has the hadvantage. Now, the law says no working over hours, and I go along in the evening, about knocking-off time, and find everything all clear only a look in the sweater's heye that I know well enough. It means most likely that 'e's got 'is women locked up in a bedroom where the Parliament won't let me go, and that when my back's turned 'e'll 'ave 'em out, and grin in his sleeve at me and Parliament too. Or else 'e's agreed with 'em to come at six in the morning instead of eight. It's a twelve-hour day 'e's a right to, from eight to eight, but that way he make it fourteen and more, if I or some other inspector don't appear along.

"Now, suppose I drop down unexpected, – an' that's the way, – before I've made three calls, and likely nailed every one in the house for violation, it's down the street like lightening that the hinspector's after 'em. Then the women are 'ustled out anywhere, into the yard, or in a dust bin. Lift up 'most anything and you'd find a woman under it. I've caught 'em with their thimbles on, hot with sewing, and now they drop 'em into their pockets or anywhere. They'd lose a job if they peeped, and so there's never much to be done for 'em. But why a woman can't make a coat is

what I study over. Did you ever think it out, ma'am? Is it their 'ands or their heyes that isn't hup to it?"

This position of the little inspector's problem must wait, though in it is involved that fatal want of training for either eye or hand which makes the lowest place the only one that the average needlewoman can fill. Their endurance equals that of the men, and often, in sudden presses of work, as for a foreign order, work has begun at seven o'clock on a morning and continued right on through the night and up to four or five of the next afternoon. The law demands an hour for dinner and half an hour for tea, but the first is halved or quartered, and the last taken between the stitches, but with no more stop than is necessary for swallowing. The penalties for violation of these acts are heavy and the inspectors work very thoroughly, various convictions having been obtained in 1886, the penalties varying from two pounds to ten pounds and costs. But the sweaters, though standing in terror of such possibility, have learned every device of evasion, and, as before stated, the women necessarily abet them for fear of losing work altogether.

Let us see now what the profit of the average sweater is likely to be, and then that of the workwoman, skilled and unskilled, taking our figures in every case from the Blue Book containing Mr. Burnett's report and confirmed by many workers. A small sweater in Brunswick Street employed a presser and a machinist, with two women for button-holes and felling, his business being the production of tunics for postmen. For each of these he

received two shillings, or half a dollar a coat, which he considered a very good price. He paid his presser 4*s.* 6*d.* (\$1.12) per day; his machinist 5*s.* (\$1.25); his button-holer 2*s.* 6*d.* (60c.), from which she must find twist and thread; and the feller 1*s.* 3*d.* (30c.), a total of thirteen shillings threepence. For twelve coats he received twenty-four shillings, his own profit thus being ten shillings and ninepence (\$2.68) for his own labor as baster and for finding thread, soap, coke, and machine. The hours were from seven in the morning to ten in the evening, less time not sufficing to finish the dozen coats, this bringing the rate of wages for the highest paid worker to 4½*d.*, or nine cents an hour. For the small sweater the profit is slight, but each additional machine sends it up, till four or five mean a handsome return. If work is slack, he has another method of lessening expenses, and thus increasing profits, arranging matters so that all the work is done the three last days of the week, starting on a Thursday morning, for instance, and pressing the workers on for thirty-three to thirty-six hours at a stretch, calling this two days' work, and paying for it at this rate. If they work fractions of a day, eight hours is called a half and four a quarter day, and the men submit with the same patience as the women.

For the former this is in part a question of nationality, the sweater's workmen being made up chiefly of German and Polish Jews and the poorer foreign element. An English worker has generally learned the trade as a whole, and is secure of better place and pay; but a Polish Jew, a carpenter at home, goes at

once into a sweater's shop, and after a few weeks has learned one branch of the trade, and is enrolled on the list of workers. For the women, however, there is a smaller proportion comparatively of foreigners. The poor Englishwoman, like the poor American, has no resource save her needle or some form of machine work. If ambitious, she learns button-holing, and in some cases makes as high as thirty shillings per week (\$7.50). This, however, is only for the best paid work. Out of this she must find her own materials, which can never be less than two and sixpence (60c.). A woman of this order would do in a day twelve coats with six button-holes each, for the best class of work getting a penny a hole, or two cents. For commoner kinds the prices are a descending scale: three-quarters of a penny a hole, half a penny, eight holes for threepence, and the commonest kinds three holes for a penny. These are the rates for coats. For waistcoats the price is usually a penny for four button-holes, a skilled worker making sixteen in an hour. Many of these button-hole makers have become sweaters on their own account, and display quite as much ingenuity at cutting rates as the men at whose hands they may themselves have suffered.

For the machinists and fellers the rates vary. A good machinist may earn five shillings a day (\$1.25), but this only in the busy season; the feller, at the best, can seldom go beyond three or four, and at the worst earns but six or eight per week; while learners and general hands make from two to six shillings a week, much of their time being spent in carrying work between

the shops and the warehouses. Six shillings a week represents a purchasing power of about forty cents a day, half of which must be reserved for rent; and thus it will be seen that the English workwoman of the lower grade is in much the same condition as the American worker, hours, wages, and results being nearly identical. The Jewish women and girls represent a formidable element to contend with, as they are now coming over in great numbers, and the question has so organized itself that each falls almost at once into her own place, and works with machine-like regularity and efficiency.

In one of the houses in a narrow little street opening off from Whitechapel, were three women whose cases may be cited as representative ones. The first was a trouser machinist, and took her work from another woman, a sweater, who had it from city and other houses. She was paid threepence (6c.) a pair, and could do ten pairs a day, if she got up at six and worked till ten or eleven, which was her usual custom. In the next room was a woman who stitched very thick large trousers, for which she received fourpence a pair. She also had them from a woman who took them from a sub-contractor. She could make six and sometimes seven shillings a week, her rent being two shillings and sixpence. On the floor above was a waistcoat maker, who, when work was brisk, could earn eight and sometimes nine shillings a week; but who now, as work was slack, seldom went beyond six or seven. Out of this must be taken thread, which she got for eightpence a dozen. She worked for a small exporter in a street some ten

minutes' walk away; but often had to spend two hours or more taking back her work and waiting for more to be given out. She fared better than some, however, as she knew women who many a time had had to lose five or six hours – "just so much bread out of their mouths."

"The work has to be passed," she said, "and there's never any doubt about mine, because I was bound to the trade, and my mother paid a pound for premium, and I worked three months for nothing – two months of that was clear gain to them, for I took to it and learned quick. But it's a starvation trade now, whatever it used to be."

"Why don't some of the best workers among you combine and get your work direct from the city house?"

"I've 'ad that in me mind, but there's never money enough. There's a deposit to be made for guarantee, and the machine-rent and all. No, there's never money enough. It's just keeping soul and body together, and barely that. We don't see butcher's meat half a dozen times a year; it's tea and bread, and you lose your relish for much of anything else, unless sprats maybe, or a taste of shrimps. I was in one workshop a while where there was over-hours always, and one night the inspector happened along after hours, and no word passed down, and the man turned me into the yard and turned off the gas; but I had to work two hours after he was gone. I'm better off than the woman in the next room. She makes children's suits – coats and knickerbockers – for ha'penny a piece, with tuppence for finishing, and her cotton to find; and,

do 'er best, she won't make over four shillings and threepence a week, sometimes less. There's a mother and daughter next door that were bound to their trade for three months, and the daughter gave three months' work to learn it; but the most they make on children's suits is eight shillings and sixpence the two, and they work fifteen and sixteen hours a day."

This record of a house or two in Whitechapel is the record of street after street in working London. No trade into which the needle enters has escaped the system which has been perfected little by little till there is no loophole by which the lower order of worker can escape. The sweaters themselves are often kind-hearted men, ground by the system, but soon losing any sensitiveness; and the mass of eager applicants are constantly reinforced, not only by the steady pressure of emigrants of all nations, but by an influx from the country. In short, conditions are generally the same for London as New York, but intensified for the former by the enormous numbers, and the fact that outlying spaces do not mean a better chance. This problem of one great city is the problem of all; and in each and all the sweater stands as an integral part of modern civilization. Often far less guilty than he is counted to be, and often as much a sufferer as his workers from those above him, his mission has legitimate place only where ignorant and incompetent workers must be kept in order, and may well give place to factory labor. With skill comes organization and the power to claim better wages; and with both skilled labor and co-operation the sweater has no further place,

and is transformed to foreman or superintendent. Till this is accomplished, the word must stand, as it does to-day, for all imaginable evil that can hedge about both worker and work.

CHAPTER V.

CHILD OF THE EAST END

"What is it to be a lady?" The voice was the voice of a small and exceedingly grimy child, who held in her arms one still smaller and even grimmer, known to the neighborhood as "Wemock's Orlando." Under ordinary circumstances, neither Wemock's nor anybody's youngest could have excited the least attention in Tower Hamlets where every doorway and passage swarms with children. But Orlando had the proud distinction of having spent three months of his short life in hospital, "summat wrong with his inside" having resulted from the kick of a drunken father who objected to the sight or sound of the children he had brought into the world, these at present numbering but seven, four having been mercifully removed from further dispensation of strap and fist and heavy boot.

Such sympathy as the over-worked drudges who constituted the wives of the neighborhood had to spare, had concentrated on Orlando, whose "inside" still continued wrong, and who, though almost three, had never been able to bear his weight on his feet, but became livid at once, if the experiment was tried, — a fact of perennial interest to the entire alley.

Wemock's fury at this state of things was something indescribable. A "casual" at the Docks, with the uncertainty of

work which is the destruction of the casual laborer, he regarded the children as simply a species of investment, slow of making any return, but certain in the end. Up to five, say, they must be fed and housed somehow, but from five on a boy of any spirit ought to begin a career as mud-lark to graduate from it in time into anything for which this foundation had fitted him. The girls were less available, and he blessed his stars that there were but three, and cursed them as he reflected that Polly was tied hand and foot to Orlando, who persisted in living, and equally persisted in clinging to Polly, who mothered him more thoroughly than any previous Wemock had been.

Not that the actual mother had not some gleams of tenderness, at least for the babies. But life weighed heavily against any demonstration. She was simply a beast of burden, patient, and making small complaint, and adding to the intermittent family income in any way she could, — charring, tailoring, or sack-making when the machine was not in pawn, and standing in deadly terror of Wemock's fist. The casual, like most of the lower order of laborers, has small opinion of women as a class, and meets any remonstrance from them as to his habits with an unvarying formula.

"I'm yer 'usban', ain't I?" is the reply to request or objection alike, and "husband" by the casual is defined as "a man with a right to knock his woman down when he likes." This simplifies responsibility, and, being accepted with little or no question by the women, allows great latitude of action.

Wemock had learned that the strap was safer than a knock-down, however, as a dose of it overnight did not hinder his wife from crawling out of bed to prepare the breakfast and get to work, whereas a kick such as he preferred, had been known to disable her for a week, with inconvenient results as to his own dinners and suppers.

"It's the liquor as does it. 'E's peaceable enough when the liquor's out of 'im. But their 'ands comes so 'eavy. They don't know how 'eavy their 'ands comes." Thus Mrs. Wemock, standing in the doorway, for the moment holding Orlando, who resented his transfer with a subdued howl of grief, and looked anxiously down the alley toward Polly's retreating figure.

"'Ush now an' ma'll give him a winkle. Polly's gone for winkles. It's winkles we'll 'ave for supper, and a blessing it's there's one thing cheap and with some taste to it. A penny-'orth even, goes quite a way, but a penny-'orth ain't much when there's a child to each winkle an' may be two."

"The churchyard's been a better friend to me than to you," said a thin and haggard-looking woman, who had come across the street for a look at Orlando. "Out of my seventeen, there ain't but six left an' one o' them is in the Colonies. There's small call to wish 'em alive, when there's nought but sorrow ahead. If we was ladies I suppose it might all be different."

It was at this point that Polly's question was heard, – Polly, who had rushed back with the winkles and put the dish into her mother's hand and caught Orlando as if she had been separated

from him hours instead of minutes. And Orlando in turn put his skinny little arms about her neck. Whatever might be wrong with his inside, the malady had not reached his heart, which beat only for Polly, his great dark eyes, hollow with suffering, fixing themselves on her face with a sort of adoration.

"A lady?" Mrs. Wemock said reflectively, eying her winkles, "there's more than one kind, Polly. A lady's mostly one that has nought to do but what she likes, and goes in a carriage for fear she'll soil her feet. But I've seen real ladies that thought on the poor, and was in and out among 'em. That kind is 'ard to find, Polly. I never knew but two an' they're both dead. It's them as has money, that's ladies, and them that hasn't – why they isn't."

"Then I can't be a lady," said Polly. "I heard Nelly Anderson say she meant to be a lady."

"Lord keep you from that kind!" said the mother hastily, with a significant look at her neighbor, which Polly did not fail to note and puzzle over. Tending Orlando gave her much time for puzzling. She was known as an "old fashioned" child, with ways quite her own, always to be depended upon, and confiding in no one but Orlando, who answered her in a language of his own.

"When I am a lady, we will go away somewhere together," Polly said. "I think I shall be a lady sometime, Orlando, and then we'll have good times. There are good times somewhere, only they don't get into the Buildings," and with a look at the sooty walls and the dirty passage she followed her mother slowly up the stairs, and took her three winkles and the big slice of bread and

dripping, which she and Orlando were to share, into the corner. Orlando must be coaxed to eat, which was always a work of time, and before her own share had been swallowed, her father's step was on the stairs, and her mother turned round from the machine.

"Keep out of the way, Polly. 'E's taken too much, I know by the step of 'im, and 'e won't 'alf know what he's about."

Polly shrunk back. There was no time to get under the bed, which she often did, and she hugged Orlando close and waited fearfully. Both were silent, but she put her bread behind her. To see them eating sometimes enraged him, and he had been known to fling loaf and teapot both from the windows.

Both were on the table now, two or three slices spread with dripping for the younger boys who would presently come in. Wemock sat down, his hands in his pockets and his legs stretched out to their utmost length, and looked first at his wife who was stitching trousers, and then at Polly, whose eyes were fixed upon him.

"I'll teach you to look at me like that, you brat," he said, rising slowly.

"For the Lord's sake, Wemock!" his wife cried, for there was deeper mischief than usual in his tone. "Remember what you did to Orlando."

"I'll do for him again. I've 'ad enough of him always hunder foot. Out o' the way, you fool."

Polly looked toward the door. A beating for herself could be taken, but never for Orlando. Her mother had come between,

and she saw her father strike her heavily, and then push her into the chair.

"Go on with your trousers," he said. "There's no money at the Docks, and these children eating me out of house and home. A man might be master of his own. Come 'ere. You won't, won't you? Then – "

There were oaths and a shriek from Orlando, on whom the strap had fallen; and then Polly, still holding him, rushed for the door, only to be caught back and held, while the heavy fist came down with cruel weight.

"Wemock's a bit worse than common," they said in the next room as the sounds began; but the shrieks in another moment had drawn every one in the Buildings, and the doorway filled with faces, no one volunteering, however, to interfere with the Briton's right to deal with his own as he will. He had flung Polly from him, and she lay on the floor unconscious and bleeding. Orlando had crept under the bed, and lay there paralyzed with terror; and the mother shrieked so loudly that the brute slunk back and seated himself again with attempted indifference.

"You've done for yourself this time," a neighbor said, and Wemock sprang up, too late to escape the policemen who had been brought by the sounds, not usual in broad daylight, and who suddenly had their hands upon him, while another stooped doubtfully over the child.

"She's alive," he said. "They take a deal to kill 'em, such do, but she'll need the 'ospital. Her arm's broke."

He lifted the arm as he spoke, and it fell limp, a cry of pain coming from the child, whose eyes had opened a moment and then closed with a look of death on the face. An ambulance was passing. Some one had been hurt on the Docks, where accidents are always happening, and was being carried to the hospital; and a neighbor ran down.

"It's best to do it sudden," she said, "or Orlando 'll never let her go or her mother either," and she hailed the ambulance driver, who objected to taking two, but agreed when he found it was only a child.

Polly came to herself at last, gasping with pain. A broken arm was the least of it. There was a broken rib as well, and bruises innumerable. But worse than any pain was the separation from Orlando, for whom Polly wailed, till, in despair, the nurse promised to speak to the surgeon and see if he might not be brought; and, satisfied with this hope, the child lay quiet and waited.

She was in a clean bed, – such a bed as she had never seen, and her soft dark eyes examined the nurse and all the strange surroundings in the intervals of pain. But fever came soon, and in long days of unconscious murmurings and tossings, all that was left of Polly's thin little frame wasted away.

"It is a hopeless case," the doctor said, "though after all with children you can never tell."

There came a day when Polly opened her eyes, quite conscious, and looked up once more at the nurse with the old

appeal.

"I want Orlando. Where's Orlando?"

"He can't come," the nurse said, after a moment, in which she turned away.

"You promised," Polly said faintly.

"I know it," the nurse said. "He should come if he could, but he can't."

"Is he sick?" Polly said after a pause. "Did father hurt him?"

"Yes, he hurt him. He hurt him very much, but he can never hurt him any more. Orlando is dead."

Polly lay quite silent, nor did her face change as she heard the words; but a smile came presently, and her eyes lightened.

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