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“HARD TIMES”

HUMAN DOCUMENTS
OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

E. ROYSTON PIKE
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*Ann Coulson's Punishment*

Samuel Coulson, tailor, at Stanningley, near Leeds, with three daughters working in the mills:

Have any of your children been strapped?—Yes, every one; the eldest daughter; I was up in Lancashire a fortnight, and when I got home I saw her shoulders, and I said, 'Ann, what is the matter?' She said, 'The overlooker has strapped me; but', she said, 'do not go to the overlooker, for if you do we shall lose our work.' I said I would not

if she would tell me the truth as to what caused it. 'Well,' she said, 'I will tell you, father.' She says, 'I was fettleing [tidying up] the waste, and the girl I had learning had got so perfect she could keep the side up till I could fettle the waste; the overlooker came round, and said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I am fettleing while the other girl keeps the upper end up."' He said, 'Drop it this minute'; she said, 'No, I must go on with this'; and because she did not do it, he took a strap, and beat her between the shoulders. My wife was out at the time, and when she came in she said her back was beat nearly to a jelly; and the rest of the girls encouraged her to go to Mrs Varley, and she went to her, and she rubbed it with a part of a glass of rum, and gave her an old silk handkerchief to cover the place with till it got well.

Did you observe those marks a fortnight afterwards?—Yes . . . We could not get the rum to dress it with, but we got some milk and water, and she told me that she bathed it with it till it was completely well.

You could not afford any medical person to visit your daughter when so cruelly used?—No; all I could get to take her to the Infirmary in Leeds was 2d, and I laid out 1d of it for an orange; I thought she would fall sick, and I bought one penny roll with the other . . .

P.P. 1831-32, vol. XV, p. 193.

The Sadistic Overlooker

Samuel Downe, age 29, factory worker living near Leeds; at the age of about ten began work at Mr Marshall's mill at Shrewsbury, where the customary hours when work was brisk were generally 5 a.m. to 8 p.m., sometimes from 5.30 a.m. to 8 or 9:

What means were taken to keep the children awake and vigilant, especially at the termination of such a day's labour as you have described?—There was generally a blow or a box, or a tap with a strap, or sometimes the hand.

Have you yourself been strapped?—Yes, most severely, till I could not bear to sit upon a chair without having pillows, and through that I left. I was strapped both on my own legs, and then I was put upon a

man's back, and then strapped and buckled with two straps to an iron pillar, and flogged, and all by one overlooker; after that he took a piece of tow, and twisted it in the shape of a cord, and put it in my mouth, and tied it behind my head.

He gagged you?—Yes; and then he ordered me to run round a part of the machinery where he was overlooker, and he stood at one end, and every time I came there he struck me with a stick, which I believe was an ash plant, and which he generally carried in his hand, and sometimes he hit me, and sometimes he did not; and one of the men in the room came and begged me off, and that he let me go, and not beat me any more, and consequently he did.

You have been beaten with extraordinary severity?—Yes, I was beaten so that I had not power to cry at all, or hardly speak at one time. What age were you at that time?—Between 10 and 11.

P.P. 1831-32, vol. XV, p. 199.

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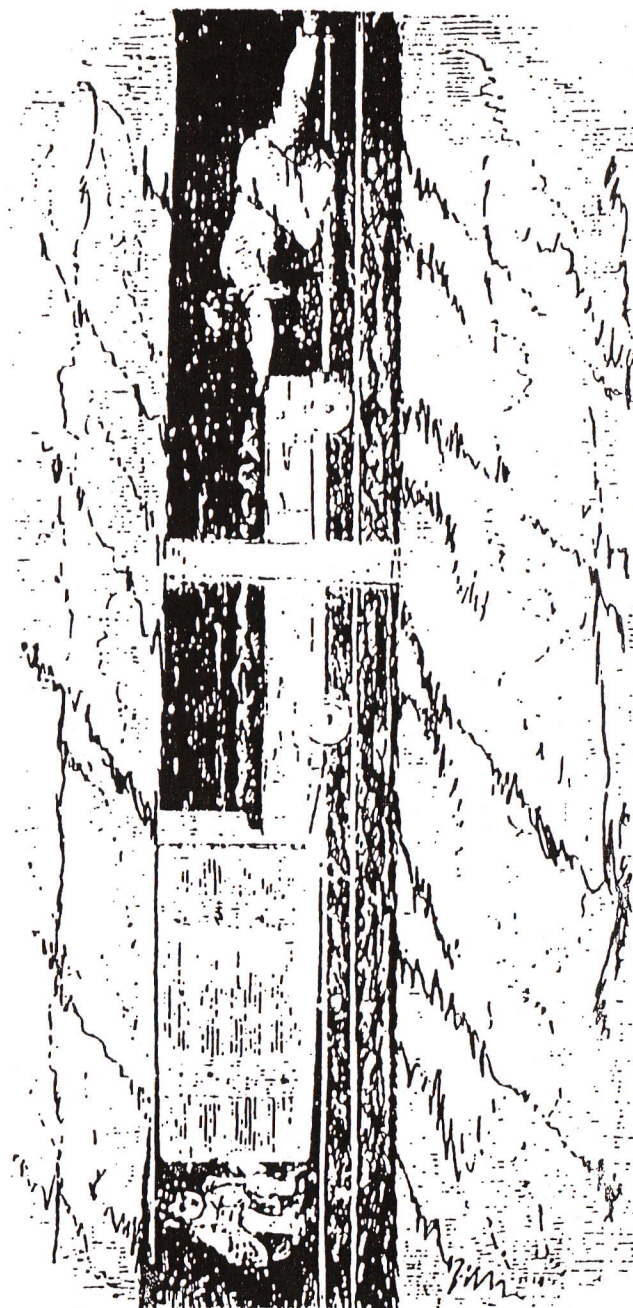
They Had No Clock

Abraham Whitehead, clothier, residing near Holmfirth, 'nearly in the centre of 30 or 40 woollen mills'.

You say you have observed these children constantly for many years going there early in the morning to their work, and continuing at it till late at night?—Yes. I have seen children during this last winter coming from work on cold dark nights between 10 and 11 o'clock.

This requires that the cottagers should wake their children very early in the morning?—It cannot be expected they can go to their work asleep.

How early do you think that they leave their homes?—I can tell you what a neighbour told me six weeks ago; she is the wife of Jonas Barrowcliffe, near Scholes; her child works at a mill nearly two miles from home, and I have seen that child coming from its work this winter between 10 and 11 in the evening; and the mother told me that one morning this winter the child had been up by 2 o'clock in the morning,



5. The Lonely Little Trapper: an illustration from the Report on the Employment of Children in Mines (P.P. 1842, vol. XV) (photo: British Museum)

when it had only arrived from work at 11; it then had to go nearly two miles to the mill, where it had to stay at the door till the overlooker came to open it.

This family had no clock, I suppose?—They had no clock; and she believed, from what she afterwards learnt from the neighbours, that it was only 2 o'clock when the child was called up and went to work; but this has only generally happened when it has been moonlight, thinking the morning was approaching . . .

P.P. 1831-32, vol. XV, pp. 18-19.

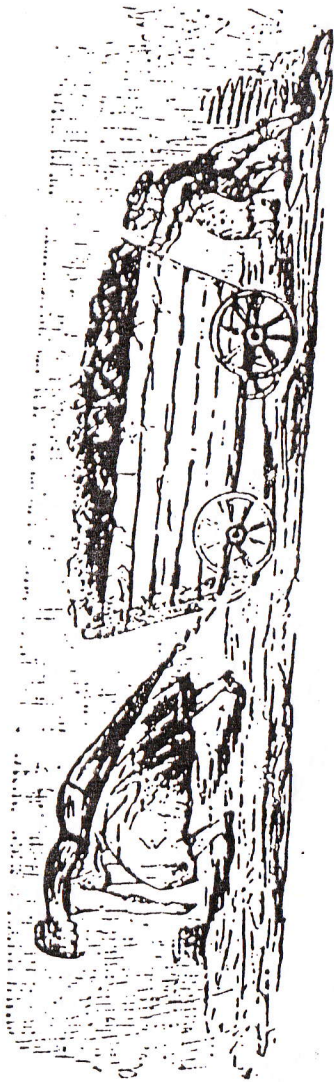
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Mother to the Rescue

William Kershaw, age 42, began work in a mill as a 'pieccer' at the age of 8, at a wage of 2s 6d a week for twelve hours a day:

Yes, I have been ill-treated myself; and I have seen others that have been a good deal worse used. There is a difference in the disposition of the slubber or person under whom the child is placed; some have more humanity, and rather wish to encourage the children to attention, than to punish them for negligence. I have been employed under both. Some of them who are kind have some rewards, such as some fruit, and say that those who have the fewest number of ends in a given time shall have this fruit; and others will keep beating the children, whether they are in fault or not. I have been beat with a billy-roller [a roller running along the top of the machine, perhaps 2 or 3 yards long and 4 or 5 inches in circumference] towards night, when I have been particularly drowsy, till I repeatedly vomited blood . . .

I entreated my mother not to make a complaint, lest I should be further beaten. The next morning after I went to work, she followed me, and came to the slubber that had used me in that way, and gave him a sharp lecture; and when she had done she retired into the engine-feeder's house, and left me to my work; and as soon as she was gone, he beat me severely again for telling, when one of the young men that served the carder, went out and found my mother, and told her, and



[Putting, in Mid and East Lothian.]



[Putting, in Fife and Clackmannan shires.]

6. Girl Putters in the Scottish coal-fields (P.P. 1842, vol. XV)
(photo: British Museum)

she came in again and inquired of me what instrument it was I was beaten with, but I durst not do it; some of the bystanders pointed out the instrument, the billy-roller, and she seized it immediately, and beat it about the fellow's head, and gave him one or two black eyes. How long ago was this?—About the year 1799.

PP. 1831-32, vol. XV, pp. 46-47.

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The Girl Who Got Away

Alexander Dean, overlooker in a flax-mill at Dundee; age, going on for 27; having no parents to take care of him, he obtained his first job at the age of twelve in a flax mill in Dundee, where they worked not less than 17 hours a day, exclusive of meals, and for wages 'sometimes we got the clothes which were taken from others who had deserted the service'. Was beaten very often. His story continued:

One time I was struck by the master on the head with his clenched fist, and kicked, when I was down. I saw one girl trailed by the hair of her head, and kicked by him, when she was down, till she roared 'Murder!' several times. The girl told me that the master had wished to use familiarities with her, and she had refused the night before; and he found a small deficiency in her work, and he took that opportunity of abusing her.

[Having run away, he eventually got work as an overlooker at Duntruin mill, where the hands were principally children, a great number of them below the age of twelve, and the poorest of the poor. Some were from the poorhouses of Edinburgh, the orphan-houses, and they were sent to the mill at six or seven, and some at the ages of three or four. From time to time there were attempts at escape.]

There were two girls that made their escape through the roof of the house, and left nearly all their clothes behind them. They finally escaped.

At the time I was in the mill, there was a young woman who had been kept seven months in the gaol at Dundee for deserting this mill; and she

was brought back, after having been in the gaol for seven months, to make up for her lost time and the expenses incurred. One day I was alarmed by her cries. She was lying on the floor, and the master had her by the hair of her head, and was kicking her in the face till the blood was running down . . . After the master had retired from the flat [work-room], I opened the door and let her out, and told her to run; and the master came back and missing her out of the apartment, began cursing and swearing at me for letting her out, and ordered me to run after her, which I refused to do. I stated that owing to the ill-treatment she had received, I never would be the man that would run after her and bring her back to the torture. She was not brought back, and, not being in a situation to get any other employment, she became a prostitute. She was tried at the circuit of Perth for stealing, and transported to Van Dieman's Land.

P.P. 1831-32, vol. XV, pp. 369-374.

