

FACTORIES AND WORKSHOPS.

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ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

CHIEF INSPECTOR

OF

FACTORIES AND WORKSHOPS

For the Year 1898.

PART II.—REPORTS.

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The opinion of the workers, expressed to Miss Squire, that they were inhaling and coughing up silkworms thus received some support, and there is strange testimony from a keen medical observer in Italy over two centuries ago to the havoc that can be wrought by this ever-recurring tendency of a manufacture to make its profits out of cheapened materials. In his *De Morbis Artificum* (published 1670, translated into English 1705), Ramazzini wrote:—

"Worst of all is the condition of those who comb the silk cakes that remain after the making of the silk in order to spin it into thread for several uses as being less chargeable (costly!) than the silk itself. For when the bags of the silkworms after being steeped in hot water are opened and untangled by our women and wound upon reels in small threads there are still some grosser threads or filaments behind, which have parts of the bodies of silkworms mixed with them; and of these they make a sort of cakes which they dry in the sun and give out to workmen to have drawn out into threads with small combs. Now the poor people that comb these cakes are usually troubled with a vehement cough, and a great difficulty of breathing, and few of them live to old age in that way of business. The violence that gives rise to this tragedy is owing to the cadaverous particles of the silkworms that are mixed with the cake. . . . I know a whole family in this city that got a good estate by the silk trade, and dy'd miserably of consumptions; the physicians imputing the cause of their calamity to the trade they were continually employed in."

"I usually recommend to this sort of workmen a milk diet above all other things, there being nothing that more effectually corrects the corrosive and ulcerous acrimony. . . . But at the long run if they find their affliction grows upon them they must look out for another trade: for 'tis a social profit that's accompanied with the destruction of health."

Would that our workers in dangerous industries could avoid the evils that beset them by following this last recommendation!

Miss Deane reports on the abundant evidence she has had of the evil effects of dust:—

"In the majority of cases the evil is very insidious, and the general symptoms produced by dust on the various respiratory organs are to the lay mind so similar to those produced by other causes that it is not always easy to trace the connection. The incessant 'sore throat,' the irritation of the bronchial passages, the frequent 'colds on the chest,' and 'hoarse voice' and 'morning cough' from which girls employed in dusty processes suffer are all symptoms which to casual observers might be easily accounted for in other ways. One or two sad cases of phthisis medically certified to be seriously aggravated, if not induced, by work in rope factories which came under my notice have emphasized in my mind the grave possibilities arising from work in these places."

"Such instances can seldom be fully traced except with infinite labour and patience. The worker falls into ill-health, and sinks away out of sight in no sudden or sensational manner so that attention is seldom attracted to the ultimate source of the trouble."

"The evil effects of asbestos dust have also attracted my attention, a microscopic examination of this mineral dust which was made by J. M. Medical Inspector, clearly revealed the sharp, glass-like, jagged nature of the particles, and where they are allowed to rise and remain suspended in the air of a room, in any quantity, the effects have been found to be injurious, as might have been expected."

"As in china-scouring, so in a still greater degree in other dusty trades, the worker may continue for a very long time apparently unaffected, before the symptoms of the evil become marked."

"It is often impossible to bring positive proof of definite injury solely attributable to working in a dusty atmosphere, for except in extreme cases the symptoms are similar to those attributable to other causes; but the certainty of the danger can be clearly demonstrated, as, for instance, by examination of the dust particles. Even when the evil reaches such grave proportions as to be capable of easy and tragic proof as in the case of china scouring or flax preparing, there is always a certain proportion of "old workers"—the survivors of their mates—who are to be found in every unhealthy industry, and who, like the Circassian poison-eaters, appear to thrive on their unhealthy calling."

"In less obviously unhealthy conditions the only convincing proof of actual injury, viz., reliable comparative statistics of mortality, or of health-standards, is practically unattainable in the case of any given factory, at any rate with the time and opportunity at present at our disposal."

Although, in accordance with regulations, questions relating to fencing of dangerous machinery are referred by H.M. Women Inspectors to H.M. Inspectors in charge of districts (99 cases of dangerous machinery having been so referred in 1898), considerable attention has, as hitherto, been given to various illustrations of the need of increasing security for workers at their employment. Often valuable suggestions can be gathered from study of the registers of accidents which occupiers are bound to keep in workshops as well as factories, and some gross cases of neglect to keep these useful records, for example, in aerated water works and laundries, we made the subject of proceedings.

In one case, with a view to obtaining penal compensation for a poor old woman needlessly injured in a laundry, I proceeded against the occupiers, not only for failure to register and report the accident, but for failure to place such a barrier as would from the position of the machine—which was a self-acting collar ironer near the wall—have prevented the accident. Grossly careless management had neglected not only this simple precaution, but had allowed pegs to be hung for outdoor garments immediately behind the moving part of the machine. It was the accidental setting in motion of the machine, when the old woman had got behind it at the dinner hour for her shawl to go home, that caused the injury which disabled her for further following her occupation.

My attention has been called, by repeated reports from the Inspectors, to cases of injured workers being pressed to remain at work during the first three days after an injury which would not be severe if it was carefully attended to. Miss Squire especially reported serious consequences as following a comparatively slight accident at a tin cutting works. One girl she saw had lost a finger by an operation some time after the accident which caused the original injury, and it was the opinion of the surgeon that, if the girl had rested and been cared for she would not have suffered a loss which many are apt to forget is far more serious to a bread-earner, who has only her hands to depend upon, than to others. Hand presses, both in metallic capsule works and in pen-making works, are responsible for many of these minor accidents, which are often of grave consequence to the sufferer. I was much struck by the frequency of . . .