

The Meat Boycott and What it Means

(By Ralph D. Paine, in Collier's)

FRED W. SEBELIN is the name of the man who quite casually lighted the fuse of what proved to be a national explosion. He is the general foreman of a Cleveland factory, and during a daily round of inspection on Friday, January 14, he happened to chat with one of his men about the meat business.

Presently Sebelin picked up a scrap of paper and scribbled thereon a resolution, in which he proposed to abstain from eating meat for thirty days.

At noon he went to the shop dining-room armed with his resolution in typewriting. The twenty foremen at his table signed it with a unanimous voice. Before the whistle blew the recall to work, the twenty foremen were organized as a "meat strike committee." Next day 466 signatures were obtained among the employees of this one factory.

The crusade swept up thousands of wage-earners in a twinkling. It moved like a prairie fire. Within a week almost 100,000 people in Cleveland had foregone meat. The Sebelin committee was reinforced by the newspapers and the Mayor, and the agitation soon spread to a hundred or more cities of fifteen states.

It is significant that this peaceable insurrection was not set brewing by men out of work or harassed by starvation wages. It was more like a Boston Tea Party than a "bread riot" or the uprising against the English Corn Laws. Sebelin and his twenty foremen were much above the average, both for intelligence and earning capacity. The great army of industrial toilers who promptly joined their cause were also working full time for good wages.

From Denver to the Atlantic Coast and south to New Orleans, mass meetings were held, labor unions were endorsing the movement, and the meat boycott pledge was being signed by hundreds of thousands of men and women. In Baltimore a campaign button was adopted with the slogan: "I don't eat meat. Do you?" Staid Boston crowded her venerable Faneuil Hall to the doors, while clergymen, educators, and business men of solid station framed a resolution demanding "some action by the State and Nation which shall reduce the price of the necessities of life to a reasonable level."

In the same week the Federal Government was putting the Beef Trust on trial charged with violating the Sherman Law; a grand jury in New York City was investigating the price of the meat and milk supply; the Missouri Legislature was considering similar action, and the National Congress was discussing the need of overhauling the general problem of high prices.

In Rochester an endless chain of postal-cards was started to drum up recruits for the "meat strike." In Pittsburg and throughout the region of iron and steel the men who earn their wages by long hours of the most exhausting bodily toil cheerfully went without meat, which had been the mainstay of their diet. A miner who was seen coming out of a butcher's shop with a package under his arm was set upon by his zealous comrades and soundly thrashed.

The fight against the increased cost of living spread with swiftness from the ranks of the wage-earner to the ranks of the man on salary or in business for himself; and women, who have worried and suffered most because of the problem of the household budget, put herself on record in organized revolt, and petitions, pledges, and resolutions were circulated in a thousand towns and cities by suffragette and anti-suffragette, by the Daughters of Rebecca and the Daughters of the Revolution.

The direct results were soon visible. Prices of fresh meats, of eggs and butter and poultry, both wholesale and retail, suddenly tumbled in Washington, Milwaukee, Omaha, Cleveland, Baltimore, Buffalo, and other widely separated cities. On the other hand, the cattle raisers of the Western States and the farmers of other regions, alarmed by the crusade, with held shipments lest they might be hurt by a falling market. And where a surplus began to accumulate, the distributors of the perishable food supply, placed the boycotted products in cold storage, to await events, and increased the shipments naturally turned the tide of prices toward the former high levels. The main trend, however, was downward, affording a respite or breathing spell from what has become a struggle for existence in the average American home.

The retail dealer, who was emulating the get-rich-quick spirit of the corporation from which he got his supplies, has been coerced into contenting himself with smaller profits. If he happened to be an honest man, who dealt fairly with his customers, he was caught between the devil and the deep sea and forced to put up his shutters. Hundreds of butchers and shops, sixty of them in Pittsburg alone, have been compelled to quit business because of the ban placed on steaks, chops, and roasts. This phase of the movement has been hard and unjust in many instances, striking at the little fellow instead of the "man higher up." Yet, on the whole, it has helped to fix the responsibility for extortionate prices and to throw some light on a problem hitherto befogged. For example, recent investigation has discovered that the average difference between the wholesale and retail prices of meat is almost 40 per cent. In some cities it is less than 20 per cent, while in others it runs as high as 50 per cent. In case of milk this tax is even larger, amounting to 100 per cent., the farmer receiving only four cents per quart when the consumer is charged eight cents.

Spectacular as the meat boycott has been, its causes, and not its results, are the vital issue. An immense amount of grumbling, of restlessness, of acrid suffering, and a bitter sense of injustice, have been seeking expression, else that bit of paper upon which Foreman Sebelin happened to scrawl his resolution would not have been the tinder to kindle so great a blaze. It is now evident that popular opinion has refused to believe that high prices are the result of a mere race with the demands of the consumer, and to national extravagance and waste. Three causes are blamed today by the people and the press: (1) The tariff, (2) the trusts, (3) the greed of the middleman and the retailer. Other explanations have been angrily swept aside. The public holds that the national supply and demand have been side-tracked to serve selfish ends.

The American wage-earner and salaried worker and small business man—that is to say, 13,000,000 of the 15,000,000 families that comprise the nation, and whose incomes are less than \$1,200 a year—have seen the average cost of living increase to 69 per cent. in twenty years, while wages have increased to no more than 25 per cent. This is the issue in a nutshell. So long as the most recent protective tariff was in the making, this average American was dumb, but now he clamors to be heard, and declares that the Payne-Aldrich schedules, instead of giving him relief here, only added to his burdens, because while prices are higher than they ever were, the protected manufacturer has failed to increase wages in anything like due proportion.

The present agitation condemns the tariff and the trusts in the same breath as twin brothers in iniquity. And of the latter, the Beef Trust is the chief target. Coal, lumber, clothing, and other common needs have shared the staggering increase in cost, but war is raging mainly around the market basket and the dinner pail, and with good reason, because at present the average family must spend almost 50 per cent. of its income for food. Wholly apart from the other factors that affect prices, it is commonly believed that the nation's supply of fresh and salt meats of all kinds, and to a large extent its butter, lard and poultry, is controlled by the great organizations of Armour, Swift, Morris, and the National Packing Company, which altogether transact a total business of \$700,000,000 annually. These corporations are ostensibly independent of one another, yet they are charged with secretly combining to manipulate prices at their will to fatten dividends.

In 1902 it was shown by documentary evidence in the hands of the Federal Government that the packing house corporations at that time composing this trust, or virtual monopoly, were guilty of fixing the prices of all kinds of meat in every city or distributing centre of this country by means of secret meetings held weekly. Shipments were curtailed or diverted from one point to another in order to maintain prices artificially. Territory was divided after the manner of feudal barons, and within agreed defined boundaries the members of the trust agreed not to compete with one another. The secret telegraph code by which these agreements were maintained was produced in evidence. A central agency was secretly conducted for the purpose of black-listing the retail butcher who should fail to pay his bills promptly to the hour charges. Independent dealers, both wholesale and retail, were deliberately undersold in order to drive them to the wall and throttle competition.

All this evidence was laid before Judge Grosscup in the

Federal Court of Chicago. He promptly issued a temporary injunction forbidding these practices, and a few months later, after hearing the trust's defense, made his injunction permanent.

Several years later Secretary Garfield of the Department of Commerce and Labor conducted an investigation of the Beef Trust. His report surprised those familiar with the inside history of the packing industry, inasmuch as most of his energy was focused in proving that these corporations were unable to earn more than two per cent. profit on the total amount of their annual sales. This verdict was welcomed by the Beef Trust, which, since then, has continued to white wash its profits from each animal slaughtered, and so pitifully small that only by means of the very vastness of its operations can it glean even a modest return. The fact of the matter is that for the year ending October 2, 1909, Swift & Company could show net earnings of 13.6 per cent. on a capitalization of \$60,000,000, which capitalization has been increased \$40,000,000 within the last ten years. The first statement made public by Armour & Company, last year, revealed net earnings of 35.6 per cent. on a capitalization of \$20,000,000.

While from time to time the methods have been changed to avoid exposure and punishment, the packing houses have continued to fix prices and check competition by means of "gentlemen's agreements." The Federal prosecution waged under President Roosevelt was futile, not for lack of evidence, but because the famous "immunity bath" granted by Judge Humphreys to the trust officials who appeared as witnesses. Recently agents of the Government have again gathered new evidence which forms the basis of the present proceedings in the Federal Court of Chicago.

In defending high prices, the packers who control the nation's meat supply claim that a shortage of live stock is chiefly responsible. During the decade from 1900 to 1910, while the supply of live stock was so pitifully small that it was impossible to raise as many cattle as previously because the Beef Trust kept the price of beef on the hoof as low as possible by wiping out the competitive market for live stock in the stockyards of Chicago, Kansas City, St. Joseph, Omaha, and other selling points. In many instances the rancher turned farmer because he was fairly starved out of the cattle business. In three years, ending January 1, 1905, the value of the beef cattle in the United States declined \$163,000,000, while there was actually a slight increase in the number of cattle raised during these years. Thereafter the supply began to diminish, and quite logically. While this immense shrinkage in value, \$163,000,000, was occurring, and, it is of course, represents the decrease in price of beef on the hoof, the cost of meat to the consumer was steadily advancing.

When demand increased with the growth of population and the rising price of corn made it more costly to fatten cattle, the wholesale price of beef was naturally pushed up



IS IT WISE TO CHANGE THIS

ward, but the packer was largely responsible for the fact that fewer cattle were raised. With every increase in the cost of live stock, the consumer has been squeezed in an exorbitant ratio. For instance, the increase in the price of hogs, from 1907 to 1910, was from \$7 to \$8.50 per hundred pounds, or 21.4 per cent., while salt pork, by the barrel, jumped from \$18.50 to \$24.50, or almost 33 per cent., and ham cost 50 per cent. more.

When a shortage of live stock is given as the reason for the trend of prices, the Beef Trust has been shipping vast quantities of meat abroad. In 1909 the value of the meat and dairy products exported from this country was \$131,300,043. What this takes away from the home market may be understood if it is explained that the average expenditure of the American wage-earning family for fresh meat, eggs, butter, and cheese is about \$100. The amount of these staples exported, therefore, would supply throughout the year 1,310,000 households.

If one seeks causes for the meat boycott and the sense of wrong that inspires it, let it be further considered that these exported meat and dairy products do not leave America to seek higher prices than can be obtained at home. A trust is not hampered by the natural laws of supply and demand. In London several cents a pound beef is sold today cheaper in the markets of London than in the butcher shops of New York or Chicago. In other words, the packer can ship his beef to the Atlantic Coast, send it across the ocean, including all expenses of cooling, handling, and transportation, and sell the kind of meat can be bought for at home. In England he comes into direct competition with the frozen beef of the Argentine. In the United States he has no competition worth the name, because he is doubly protected, both by a tariff and by the machinery of a trust or monopoly.

In 1909 the British markets used 551,748,700 pounds, or, in round numbers, one-half billion pounds of frozen meat from the United States, and about the same amount from the Argentine. In order to hold this market, the Beef Trust was compelled to meet the prices at which South American meat could be laid down in London at a profit. During the height of the present agitation, when the packers were refusing to make any notable reduction in prices, which are higher than this country has ever before known, beef was selling in New York and London as follows:

In London	In New York
Loins 15 to 19 cents	23 to 28 cents
Round steak 10 to 20 cents	20 to 24 cents
Chuck steak 12 to 16 cents	14 to 18 cents

To put it in another way, the retail price of American beef in London was about the same as the wholesale price in New York. The explanation of these singular facts is that offered concerning the sale of American watches, bicycles, and sewing machines abroad for much less than they can be bought in their own country. The consumer now realizes the necessity of seeking some kind of protection for himself and his abundance, as well as for the products of his factories.

As to the question of the shortage of meat at home, as posed by the export market, is the part played by the cold-storage warehouse in creating an artificial level of prices. Theoretically, the cold storage warehouse ought to check the exorbitant prices. It is filled during seasons of great abundance, when prices are lowest, and is presumed to be emptied during the unproductive winter months, thus keeping supply and demand in touch with each other. In practice it does nothing of the sort. In 1904 there were 620 cold-storage warehouses in the United States; in 1910 there are 800 of them. Instead of serving the public need and at the

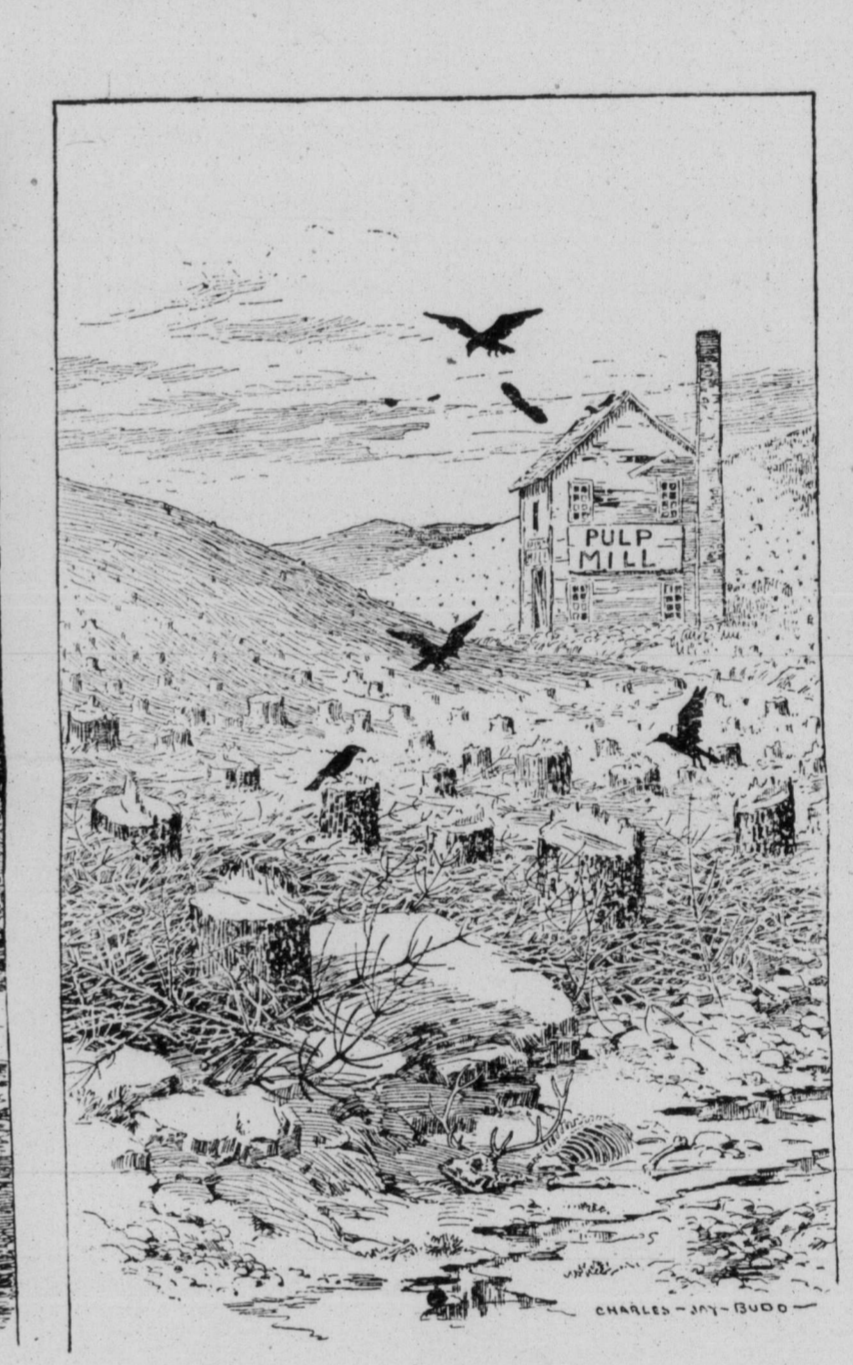
same time yielding a fair return on the capital invested, they are employed to create "corners" in perishable foods and to manipulate prices.

For example, from 3,000,000 to 5,000,000 cases of eggs, each case containing thirty dozen, are placed in storage during the summer, when they can be bought at wholesale in the country districts for from fourteen to sixteen cents a dozen. Withdrawing this huge quantity of eggs from the open market inevitably increases the price of fresh eggs to the consumer in the season when they ought to be cheapest. During the winter these storage eggs are sold for from fifty to sixty cents per dozen. Within twenty years the total output by the American hen has increased several hundred per cent. faster than the population of this country, yet the average price of eggs has been steadily advanced, and is higher today, even in winter, than before there were cold-storage warehouses.

In the same way more than 100,000,000 pounds of butter, valued at \$25,000,000, is annually placed in cold storage and sold in winter for forty cents, or more, per pound. Of poultry, more than 120,000,000 pounds are frozen every year. Yet in much higher prices for chicken, turkey, or duck, than when the farmer shipped his fowls to market as the dealer ordered them. The farmer, who is blamed for prevailing high prices, is really robbed of his legitimate profits by the cold-storage warehouse. This is, perhaps, the most conspicuous example of the extortion of the middleman as a factor in the general problem of the cost of living. When the farmer sells his eggs at sixteen cents a dozen, he does little more than pay the cost of feeding his hens. In winter the cold-storage company reaps profits of 200 or 300 per cent. from these same eggs, and the consumer bears the burden.

Legislation has begun to recognize the cold storage business as a menace to the general welfare, since the outbreak of the meat boycott, and several measures have been framed for the purpose of bringing its prices under some kind of regulation. The tendency toward combination and monopoly in restraint of trade has invaded this field of production, and the possibility of a storage warehouse trust, organized for the purpose of "cornering" food supplies, is neither remote nor fantastic. The public has learned by hard experience that no mercy is shown the consumer if dividend can be increased. This was conspicuously shown by the Ice Trust, which advanced its price in New York from twenty-five to sixty cents per hundred weight in the middle of a broiling summer, thereby causing the death of hundreds of babies. It has been illustrated also in the conduct of the various local milk trusts. In New York, whose supply is controlled by two great corporations, one with capital stock of \$30,000,000, the price of milk was recently advanced from eight to nine cents

THE PRICE THE FORESTS PAY FOR YELLOW JOURNALISM



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per quart. Popular protest was so violent, and the District-Attorney so promptly began to investigate the alleged monopoly, that the price went back to eight cents within a fortnight. It costs 100 per cent. to carry the milk from the dairy to the consumer, of which more than 25 per cent. is profit for the middleman. The American dairyman today who sends his milk to the city is barely able to make both ends meet and has found none of the joyous prosperity popularly credited to the farmer.

On the one hand, the retailer is told that he must combine in order to cut down the excessive cost of handling and distribution; on the other, every combination of dealers in food supplies thus far undertaken has resulted in higher prices to the consumer, because of the shameful fact that greed is so prevalent and the doctrine of the square deal is diminished in corporation control wherever competition can so little be needed and better farmers, else there can be no escape from the grip of advancing prices, and that population has far outstripped the nation's production of staple foods. This is not true. In fifteen years the population has increased no more than 15 per cent., while in the same time the cost of many staple foods has risen more than 100 per cent., such, for example, as the following:

Wheat, 100 per cent.	corn, 106 per cent.	flour, 66 per cent.
eggs, 204 per cent.	butter, 153 per cent.	potatoes, 100 per cent.
beans, 147 per cent.		

Where the shoe pinches worst is among the people who receive, not wages, but salaries which have not been appreciably increased during the last fifteen years. This is why the meat boycott gained such incredibly rapid headway, as an issue of moral protest, among what may be called the "middle class" of supposedly well-to-do Americans. Unless one faces the facts as coldly set forth in figures and percentages, it is difficult to realize that the average cost of living has increased 60 per cent. in a little more than twenty years, and that to come out as well at the end of the year, the man who received a salary of \$1,200 in 1896 must today be paid \$1,920. If \$5,000 a year was a handsome income in professional business life then, its equivalent today is \$8,000.

After laying the blame at the doors of the trusts, the tariff, the distributor, and the ratio between supply and demand, there remains a large reckoning with national waste and extravagance. This year, as one item in a long list, \$250,000,000 worth of automobiles will be manufactured and sold in the United States. The purchaser will think he is paying for it in the final issue. The American consumer pays for it in the final issue. The money comes out of your pockets and mine as profits taxed on the necessities of life somewhere in the chain of links between the farm, the forest, and the mine, and the household budget necessities must be levied upon to pay for luxuries as inevitably as for necessities. When newspapers announce an "unprecedented rush" of tourists to Europe, the man who stays home at work is paying the piper. Larger profits are demanded than the preceding generation was contented with, and a little more profit is taken here and a little more there until the total tax becomes a staggering burden for the average man to carry.

FAMOUS FAKES IN HISTORY OF WORLD

A SICKLY 7-year-old boy, Thomas Chatterton, was expelled from the charity school at Bristol, England, in 1759 because he was so stupid he could not learn to read or write. He was the only son of his widowed mother, a poor

Redcliffe Church, where his uncle was sexton. The child was seized with a wild longing to know what these old documents were about. With such parchments as for text books and his mother for teacher he quickly learned to read. After that his craze for education was as great as had been his former stupidity. He went to another charity school, but there he could learn little. All he cared for was to pore over ancient manuscripts and to study the history of half forgotten bygone days. The old parchment documents were few, so Chatterton hit on a plan of making new ones of the same sort.

He invented a character—Thomas Rowley, a fifteenth century monk—and began to write poems and bits of history which he pretended were by Rowley. He scribbled these writings on scraps of parchment, imitating the queer old-time spelling and setting forth in verse and prose the literary work of the imaginary Rowley. Then he would discolor the parchments to give them the look of extreme age. And he found he had the faculty of providing himself with "handwritten" ancient manuscripts. It was all a beautiful and wonderful game that the lonely, dreary lad had devised as a joke.

Meanwhile Chatterton had been apprenticed to a lawyer and had met numbers of the richer Bristol folk. He wanted to mingle with such people on equal terms. Also, he was tired of playing his "manuscript game" by himself. When, in 1768, a new bridge was opened with much ceremony at Bristol he set to work writing a description ("by Rowley") of a medieval fair's impressions of a fifteenth century bridge that crossed the same river. He turned this manuscript over to a local paper, saying he had found it in an aged chest at Redcliffe Church. So perfect was the imitation of ancient spelling, phrasing and obsolete words and so yellow was the crackling parchment that he was believed. The "discovery" made a great stir.

All this encouraged Chatterton to "find" a number of Rowley's poems and historic anecdotes. These were received with full belief. The fame of the "discoveries" spread throughout England. Next Chatterton pretended to unearth a history of Bristol's earliest churches and from stained scrolls traced heraldic ancestries for self-made men of wealth. The whole thing was part of his "manuscript game." But everyone was deceived. The "Rowley" poems especially were hailed as veritable gems of literature. They were quoted, copied, praised. None suspected that these masterpieces of verse were the work of a half-educated fifteen-year-old boy.

But Chatterton was not content with local fame. He sent a batch of the "Rowley" poems to London to Sir Horace Walpole, one of the foremost statesmen and literary lights of his time. Walpole read the poems with amazement. He praised them to the skies and was ready to proclaim himself a joint discoverer of rare manuscripts from bygone centuries.

TANTALIZING MYSTERY
Who is the author of this...
WHY GIRLS BLUSH
Do You Walk Like a Duck?
JUST WHY YOUR HEART DOES NOT PUMP PROPERLY
CAUGHT IN THE COGS OF FATE
I Was Buried Alive Because I Needed the Money

TO MAKE THIS?

All England was ready to follow where Walpole led. But the poet Gray (author of the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard") examined the "Rowley" poems and declared them frauds. Walpole, in fury, denounced the lad whose praises he had just been singing. Too vain and pompously self-complacent to forgive the hoax and to see the real genius in Chatterton, he wrote most insultingly to him. Chatterton replied with a stinging satire.

The boy was not discouraged. He went to London to try his luck as a writer. There he starved. He could get no employment that would pay. He lived in a garret on bread and water, and often had nothing to eat at all. Yet so proud was he that he let no one know how poor he was. He wrote letters to his mother and two sisters in Bristol, telling them he was making a fortune and that great men were his dear friends. He spent the few shillings of his literary earnings on buying presents for his mother instead of getting food and clothes for himself. Once his landlady, knowing he had nothing to eat for three days, invited him to dine with her. The proud youth refused, saying he had just eaten heavily.

All night he wrote and all day tried in vain to sell his poems or satires to one editor after another. He said the moon inspired him, so he usually wrote by moonlight. Wonderful literary works he created in his bare garret, but nowhere could he find recognition. Finally, in August, 1770, when he was only seventeen, Chatterton spent his last penny on a dose of arsenic. Next morning he was found dead in his attic, all his unsold manuscripts lying, torn to fragments, about his body. He was buried in a pauper's graveyard.

After Chatterton's death Walpole wrote too late in glowing terms of the lad's genius and tried to excuse his own behavior toward him. Wordsworth named Chatterton "The Marvellous Boy." Other great poets delighted to do honor to the memory of the young genius who had been allowed to starve in obscurity and disgrace. At Bristol a monument was erected to him, bearing this epitaph, which he himself had written:

"To the memory of Thomas Chatterton. Reader, judge not! If thou art a Christian, believe that he shall be judged by a Higher Power."

A NEW USE FOR BLOTTING PAPER

IN GENERAL blotting paper is used to clean machinery. Towels refuse, sponge cloths, and jute waste are the materials usually employed for the cleaning of machines and parts of engines which are soiled by dust and lubricating substance. The better varieties of cotton waste are very good for scouring purposes, but the cheaper grades are charged with dust, and in using them a sponge cloth, specially manufactured for the purpose, is employed.

In using blotting paper for scouring purposes the use of cotton waste is decreased, and the sponge cloths are entirely dispensed with. On an average the German workman receives, under the former system, two hundred and fifty grams of cotton waste, one new sponge cloth, and one or two renovators every week. Now he is supplied with one hundred and fifty grams of cotton waste, and about eight or ten sheets of blotting paper, at a cost of two and a half cents, or one-third the cost of the cotton waste.

The paper is not only cheaper, but it does not soil machinery with fibres and dust, as do the woolen refuse sponge cloths. It is also less combustible than the cleaning materials, and if it should be caught in the machinery while engines in motion are being cleaned it tears and the workmen run no risk of having their hands drawn into the machinery.