

high school pupil and the university graduate will not farm. If we cannot have farmers versed in Latin, dancing, and French, let us have them without. It is surely cheaper and better for the country in every way to keep our farmers' sons at home than to replenish the vacated homesteads with immigrants from Europe at the cost of \$100 a head, and is it after all more elevating or more ennobling to loiter in a dusty law office waiting for clients than to plough in the open field? As a remedy for the present condition of things, if it is not too late to go back upon our tracks, we would suggest that any amendments of the system should be in the direction of extending and perfecting the public schools, and making all higher education more nearly self-maintaining with a liberal system of scholarships to provide free education to those who rise above the average level.

It is devoutly to be hoped that the question may receive the fullest discussion from every point of view in the pages of THE WEEK. It is undoubtedly the most important Provincial question of the day

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### Unhealthy Conditions of Women's Work in Factories.

MOST of us have heard of the fabled Minotaur of Crete, which yearly demanded seven youths and maidens to devour,—a myth which doubtless had its origin in some authentic development of old-world tyranny. But the exactions of the Pagan Minotaur,—whoever, or whatever, he may have been,—were moderate compared with those of a so-called Christian society. This will not seem too strong to those who know anything of the dark statistics of vice. But neither is it too strong language to apply to the exactions of industrial enterprise even in our own Canada. There has, no doubt, been much improvement in this direction, since Mrs. Browning uttered her passionate plea in "The Cry of the Children,"—a cry which we would fain think in no respect applicable to this new and happy land. Yet, even among our free-born Canadian people, it is true that

"Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,  
Grinding life down from its mark  
And the children's souls, which God is calling sunward,  
Spin on, blindly, in the dark!"

Possibly there are some who will regard this as merely poetical exaggeration. Let us see, then, what is said, in sober prose, in the official Report of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital, which was printed some years ago at the expense of the Canadian people, and which it is only right that the Canadian people should turn to some account. The evidence taken before this Commission,—as some will doubtless remember,—brought to light a startling degree of petty tyranny over women and children more especially, of which there had previously been little suspicion. Here are some of the deliberate statements embodied in the condensed Report:

"It has also to be pointed out that, in acquiring the industries at one bound, we have also become possessed, just as quickly, of the evils which accompany the factory system, and which, in other lands, were creatures of a gradual growth. These evils have engaged the serious and special attention of the legislators of the mother land for generations. They sprang from the desire to acquire vast fortunes in the shortest possible time, regardless of the suffering which might be caused to the individual, or the bad effects on the State. There seems to be no idea of any obligation existing between the employer and his operatives, any more than the mere payment of wages. To obtain a very large percentage of work with the smallest possible outlay of wages appears to be the one fixed and dominant idea. There is no bond of sympathy existing between the capitalist of the large mill and his employees, such as prevailed when smaller works were the rule, and an intimate personal acquaintance existed between the employer and the workman.

"To arrive at the greatest possible results for the smallest expenditure, the mills and factories are filled with women and children, to the practical exclusion of adult males. The reason for this is obvious. *Females and children may be counted upon to work for small wages, to submit to petty and exasperating exactions, and to work uncomplainingly for long hours.* These are the inducements to employ this class of labour, and why it is being utilized so largely. So long as

one employer is permitted to fill up his factory with this cheap labour, without any restrictions, the others are compelled to do likewise, or suffer the consequences of being undersold in the general market."

The Report then goes on to refer to some of the evidence taken in the city of Montreal, when it was already proved that, in one factory, *apprentices were imprisoned in a "black hole" for hours at a time.* Occasionally, the incarceration would stretch beyond the working hours, and a special visit would be made to the factory to release the poor little fellows. Further reference is made to an admittedly systematic terrorism, and to the infliction of corporal chastisement at the will of the overseer,—or master,—from which even young women were not always exempt. The Report rightly says that, so long as such things are permitted or permissible, "Canada has no right to class herself among the civilized nations of the earth."

These latter abuses are, as the Report truly says, rather excrescences which grow out of a vicious system, than of it,—for which, however, the system is, to a certain extent, responsible. But its ordinary fruits are bad enough, when we consider the fact stated above that it is on the *weakest and most helpless workers*,—the women and children,—that the heaviest burden rests—the burden of the longest hours; the smallest pay, the harshest and most unreasonable exactions—simply because they are the most helpless and uncomplaining. It is the textile factories, hosiery and cotton-mills, in which women—or rather girls and children—compose the great body of the employed,—that keep the hands at work from half-past six a.m. till half-past six p.m. at wages averaging from two to four dollars a week,—a scale of hours and wages to which few *men* would be found willing to submit. In the dark, often stormy mornings of our severe winters, these poor girls have to plod, often for long distances, through the frequently unbroken snow, with no time for a sufficient breakfast, often with scanty clothing,—and then, in the majority of cases, have to *stand or walk* all day while at their work! The fact that this rate of eleven hours on five days is accepted by the hands for the sake of securing the Saturday half-holiday does not make the injurious effect much less, and surely, in ordinary humanity, the Saturday half-holiday should be granted without being so dearly purchased by an exhausting system of hours which competent medical testimony, as well as common sense, pronounces most injurious,—especially to the young and growing girls who compose the majority of the workers. When we take into consideration the fact that many of these girls, sometimes unlawfully admitted before the permitted age of fourteen, not infrequently through hard necessity, remain at such work more or less steadily till twenty or even longer, it is no wonder that physicians should tell us, as they do, that these unfortunate victims of our industrial despotism very often bear with them through all their future lives the injurious consequences of such long-continued and severe toil, in enfeebled constitutions, or in painful and often incurable ailments. As for the children, as we may still call them,—boys and girls of from thirteen to sixteen, for they often enter under age,—it is painful to see the dull sallow faces and stunted figures of the more delicate victims. And let it be remembered that when the mills are running over-time, which is permitted up to a certain limit, they sometimes keep up work till *nine p.m.*, with a short recess for refreshment about six, and that the evidence taken before the Royal Commission showed "many children of tender age, *some of them not more than nine years*, were employed in cotton, glass, tobacco and cigar factories, and in other places,"—there being apparently no factory legislation outside of Ontario and Quebec, and the Quebec factory laws being very inefficiently enforced. Is not Mrs. Browning's picture, then, applicable to Canada?

"For oh, say the children, we are weary,  
And we cannot run or leap;  
If we cared for any meadows, it were merely  
To drop down in them—and sleep!"

For detailed accounts of a flourishing crop of subsidiary oppressions and exactions, the reader who desires to be really informed as to the conditions of labour in Canada, is referred to the condensed Report and the volumes of evidence accompanying it, where ample information and much food for thought will be found. As to the tyrannical practice of *fining* operatives—too common in these factories,—it must suffice to quote a passage or two from this authorized Report: