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INDUSTRIAL EUROPE SEEN THROUGH AMERICAN EYES

The Women Chain Makers of Cradley Heath —Their Wages and Home Life.

By Jerome Greenell.
(Copyrighted, 1904, by Jerome Greenell)

Birmingham, England, June 14.—Women chain makers! Frail girls wielding heavy hammers! Amidst the grime of the forge, married and unmarried women toiling all the day at work fit only for men! Are not these some of the thoughts of the average newspaper reader when hearing of women making chains? Indeed, it would seem as if the women were forging links to chains that bound them to the men; degrading conditions.

It was with peculiar feelings, therefore, that I came within sound of hammers wielded by women and clinking merrily on anvils at Cradley Heath. It was all true! There were the humble homes of humble toilers who divided their time between their domestic duties and their daily toil. The shops were not in the front rooms of the houses, to be sure, as one person had informed—or misinformed—me; but they were in the back yards, where outhouses are usually located, though in a single instance I did find one in a front yard. Yes, married and unmarried women were making chains, while babies were playing in the dirt. In one case a man was at the bellows, but in others young girls worked the bellows that fanned the forge, while men made the chains.

Healthier Than Factory Girls.

And yet, after all, the sight was not such a horrible one. In some respects the women were better off than their sisters working in the factories. Certainly they had a healthier look, and those who were working for themselves could work fast or slow, as suited their convenience.

Imagine, if you can, a young girl arms bare to elbows and waist loosened at the neck, with one hand on the bellows and the other holding an iron rod in the forge. She works the handle that presses the leaves of the bellows together, and the flames play around the heating bar. Suddenly, it is withdrawn from the fire, and biff! a piece drops on the anvil just the right length. Then with a twist and a turn, the while the sparks fling, this maiden Vulcan wields her hammer as swiftly as a woodpecker taps with its beak a hollow tree, and her trained eye and hand have in combination made another link to a seeming endless chain. Degrading! Rather it is something to be proud of!

These women chainmaking shops have much the outward look of a blacksmith's forge. A big hand-worked bellows supplies the draft for the fire into which is thrust the bar of iron. When the end of the bar is sufficiently heated—a matter of experience—it is withdrawn and a piece is deftly cut the required length for a link. This is thrust through the last link of the completed chain, which hangs suspended from a loop overhead, with a few taps and a twist of the wrist the ends of the new link are forged quicker than one can read this paragraph. Attached to the anvil is a hammer which is so suspended that it is worked with the foot. This gives the finishing touches that make each new link the exact counterpart of the others.

The women chainmakers of Cradley Heath, which is practically a suburb of Birmingham, work by the week in some instances; in others they work by the piece, being paid for the number of pounds of chain forged; and in still others rent the shop by the week, and sell the chains made to dealers who take all they can get. Some of these dealers provide the stock. These chains made by the women are all of the lighter sort and as a matter of fact the hard labor necessary is not as much as a washer-woman exerts over an old-fashioned washboard.

Some Earn Thirty-six Cents a Day.

What do these women chainmakers earn? I asked a dozen people, and received all kinds of answers. This is certain: the girls who are hired by the hour or week will not consent to work for less than the wages they would be paid working in factories, while those working for themselves cannot afford to work for less. One young girl told me she earned 18 pence—36 cents—a day. She was working for herself, and I understood her hours were as she made them, certainly not more than 50 a week. Many of the women chainmakers of Cradley Heath simply put in their spare time at this work, much as some women take half-completed clothing stock home to be turned into ready-made garments.

The wages of these workers—men and women—must be low, for they compete with machine made chains; but a hand-made chain has virtues all its own, and so, like hand forged table cutlery, which is still made in Sheffield, and finds a ready market, bringing the highest price, finds purchasers where the machine-made product will not be bought.

Is the work degrading? Are the women unsexed? I should answer no to both questions. Too hard toil of any kind is demoralizing, yet it looked to me that these women chainmakers are not compelled to work any harder than their sisters in cotton and woollen factories or behind store counters.

Look Too Often Into the Beer Glass.

There are hard visaged women making chains; there are women who look too often into the beer glass, and take too many sips from "thrippenny" purchases of gin and water; there are women who show in their rounded shoulders and seamed faces that they are too familiar with hard work and too unacquainted with rest; but there are also women working at chain making who are the pictures of health and contentment, and who, if placed in the confined atmosphere of a factory would soon die. They love the free and practically outdoor life chainmaking offers them, and they would not change their work for increased wages. The self-employed woman is better off at the forge, than confined in the factory at the loom.

All this is not saying that the economic and social conditions of these women are as they should be. This work ought to be done by men, as also should many other occupations now monopolized by "the weaker sex." But if women must work, they can be just as happy and just as womanly over a chainmaker's anvil as over a counter or a sewing machine.

As to the social environments of these women, they are no different from those of their sisters working in other occupations. Some of the cottages were tidy, and others were well furnished, from the British artisan's standpoint. There were many things lacking that the average American workman would demand, but this lack is to be seen in most of the homes of British workmen.

It is not necessary to shed crocodile tears over the sad condition of these chain-making women. They are holding their own with true British tenacity. What is really needed is some industrial shock to the whole British nation which will direct their gaze toward the real cause of their poverty and social degradation. This great cause is the monopolization of all the natural wealth of Great Britain by a comparatively few, who reap where they have not sown, and who compel millions of people to crowd into foul slums in order that their own children may sit in the lap of luxury and be denied nothing.

What is the average British artisan's ideal of a home? In my next I shall try to answer this question.

THE COLORADO OUTRAGES

We have heard from time to time through the daily papers of a state of lawlessness prevailing in the State of Colorado in consequence of labor troubles, the event not long since being a shocking dynamite outrage. "The Public," of Chicago, has a comprehensive summary of the Colorado situation which we quote, as follows:

No merely wanton and unprovoked outrage was that blowing up of the Colorado railroad station with its horrible destruction of life—even assuming it to have been done by enemies of the miners. Human nature being as it is, such outrages are perfectly natural epi-sodes, to be immediately expected in any community where, as in Colorado for months past, the law has been flagrantly defied by its own administrators in the interest of a rich class of citizens against a poor class.

The present labor conflict in that State is between organized miners on the one hand and mineral deposit owners on the other. Primarily, of course, the trouble springs from the fact that the laws secure to these owners, contrary to natural justice, a monopoly of natural mineral deposits. But as the laws do secure that monopoly, this fault is not with the law's administrators. It is with the people themselves, including the striking miners. Not so, however, with the corporate and official defiance that caused and has attended upon the progress of the Colorado miners' strike.

Through their monopoly the owners of the mineral deposits of Colorado have acquired great influence and consequent power over the governmental machinery of the State. It is freely asserted, with every appearance of truth, and is not denied, that they lawlessly killed the force of a constitutional amendment made for the relief of workingmen; this was the cause of the strike. It is absolutely known that the militia is at their command regardless of the law; Adjutant General Bell has publicly confessed it. The inference is warranted, therefore, that the Governor is their tool; he commands the militia. There is no longer any doubt that he may with impunity place the militia in Arbitrary command of the property rights and personal liberties of the people anywhere in the State, with or without cause, and that there is no redress while he remains in office; in a case it has just decided the Supreme Court of the State so adjudges. The property and liberties of the people of Colorado are consequently at the mercy of the great corporations which own the mineral deposits of that State.

And right recklessly have those corporations used this most dangerous power. They have caused the Governor to declare martial law in counties where no violence had occurred with which the civil authorities could not and did not cope. Through him they have placed troops in those counties who have spurned the civil authorities, including the judiciary, and administered civil affairs in abject obedience to the orders of the corporations that placed them there. They have suppressed newspapers for criticising them. They have placed a military censorship over news reports of their doings, even going so far as to attempt of forbidding the telephoning or telegraphing of any reports whatever of the local situation. They have deported citizens coming from other States, and exiled established residents. They have arrested men without warrant and without cause and held them in prison indefiance of the courts. At this moment they hold in custody the president of the Western Miners' Federation, for no other reason than that he is the president of that body; and the Supreme Court, one judge dissenting, holds that the courts are legally as well as physically powerless to release him. Until the military chooses to let him go—which means, according to the Adjutant General's disclosure, until the mine owning corporations consent—he cannot be released. All his rights as a citizen are in abeyance. If his death were desired he could be executed arbitrarily, so the Supreme Court holds, and without responsibility to anyone. What is true of him is of course true of anyone else whom arrest these mine owning corporations may desire in any part of the State wherein it may cause a pliant governor, however unnecessarily, to suspend the civil law. The man who is surprised at assassinating dynamite explosions under these circumstances, would be surprised if he got smallpox in a pest house.

CORRESPONDENCE

ORGANIZE THE VOTE.

Editor Toiler,—I am afraid I used rather strong language in my last letter. I apologize for any unnecessary offensiveness that may have been in my words, but hope the truths have gone home. I was trying to prove that the present transition state of trades unionism is very unsatisfactory, causing oftentimes unpleasantness on the job, or in the union and financial loss to the toilers. I tried to show that this miserable condition of things can only be ended by the united political action of all toilers, as in Australia and New Zealand. To impress on every toiler the fact that it is a bounden duty to himself, his family and his union to do this as speedily and thoroughly as possible, I sought a.d the following remarks. Twenty-five years ago carpenters in Toronto were getting 12½ to 15 cents an hour, labor ex 10 cents an hour, painters, tailors, shoemakers, bricklayers, printers, all about 15 or 17 cents an hour, and all working ten hours a day. Twenty-five years have passed away, and to-day the building trades are working eight hours a day at from 25 to 47½ cents an hour. What causes have been operating in those twenty-five years to produce this vast change. Does anyone imagine that the "Progress of Civilization," "the advance of education," or "the state of the labor market" has made this change? Why, then, is plenty of unorganized work being done in Toronto to-day at 15 cents an hour. We who have lived through the mill know, and know well that it is only where trades unionism has caught on, got a good grip of the situation, and has been wisely and prudently operated, that the conditions of labor have been so wonderfully improved in Toronto. Now, my fellow trade unionists who despise the Labor Party, have no use for politics in the unions, and neglect to mark your ballots for the labor candidates, how much have you done to bring about this great improvement? Your wages have doubled, your hours are shortened and between you and "a general reduction of wages" stands the power of your International Union. You say you "pay your dues," yes, my brother, but does you don't keep a union running. Have you patiently picked out tangled accounts, reconciled diverse opinions, charging stagnant discord into harmonious progress. You admit the vast improvement accomplished in the last twenty-five years, but brothers is it not a fact that the improvement has been won by an expensive, toilsome and ever fierce agitation, oftentimes almost amounting to civil war, and we maintain our position to-day by the same methods. In Colorado, Pittsburg and New York the strained relations between labor and capital is a disgrace to our manhood. We are in the position of rolling a heavy barrel up hill, if we remove our shoulder from the load it immediately rolls back on us. Our aim should not be simply better conditions for labor, but better conditions secured and maintained by the constitution of our Dominion, as in New Zealand. Just look at the outrageous injustice being inflicted on labor just now. The Pennsylvania coal barons pay their taxes for the support of the police and militia, and when through their own greedy methods of doing business their privileges and property were in danger the whole of the State militia was called out by the government at a cost of one million dollars for the protection and assistance of these multi-millionaires. Coal advanced 75 to 100 per cent., but that did not bother the government. Last year in Toronto the carpenters asked for an advance of five cents per hour, an advance fully justified by the general prosperity of the city and the rise in house rent, and even that advance in wages they offered to submit to arbitration. Did the government give them any assistance in protecting their interests and privileges? No, sir! The carpenters had to put their hands into their own pockets for that purpose. Last year my union spent £20,000 in defence of trade privileges ($100,000). Do you see the point, my brother? We have to pay our taxes as citizens and then we have to tax ourselves again as trade unionists to obtain (or to fail to obtain) that which in New Zealand is secured to trade unionists free of charge. Sixty years ago 35 per cent. of the operatives in the cotton and woollen factories of England were women and children. Children of five years old and upward were working fifteen hours a day, round and round the looms from morning to night, covering from 20 to 25 miles a day. In the coal mines of England and Scotland one-half of the labor was done by women and children. Girls from ten to fifteen years of age, on their hands and knees dragging coal trucks through the dark cuttings of the mines, up to their ankles in water, and all day long the drip from the roof falling on them, crippling them with rheumatism. Men of 70 or 80 years of age can tell you these statements are true. Now, my brothers, do you think these evils cured themselves? Fourteen long years against a stubborn opposition did Earl Shaftesbury and his friends struggle, before they carried the Factory Act. Do you think these evils can never return? Only five years ago, in the cotton mills of Georgia and Alabama, U. S., child labor was going on just as bad as it was in England sixty years ago. Only the same noble fight that put them out can keep them out. Are you in that fight, my brother? And are you doing your share in it? Did you vote for the Labor Party last January 1st? Have you asked the executive of the Labor Party for an account of their stewardship at the two recent municipal elections? Or if they are taking any steps to organize the labor vote for the approaching Ontario elections. The 3,100 millionaires of the United States practically control the conditions under which the 20 millions of manual workers have to earn their living, but it is surely absurd to imagine that this small percentage of capitalists can corral, circumvent, hoodwink, manipulate, and in a general way bamboozle and reduce to life-long servitude the 20 million of toilers against their will. If the present conditions of labor are unsatisfactory. If the resources of the Dominion, are through an unjust system of taxation, finance and military extravagance being diverted away from the producers into the pockets of those who toil not, neither do they spin, it is with the free will and consent of these millions of ballot markers. Earl Shaftesbury was a grand—a heaven-sent man. But surely it is a nobler thing for twenty-nine millions to free themselves from the clutches of 3,000 than it is to be drifting helplessly, waiting for another phenomenon to come along. Selfish cruelty has always oppressed the manual laborer. Wat Tyler fought it 500 years ago. Jack Cade fought it, so did Cromwell, so did the Chartists and the Irish Land League. When we are dead and gone greedy cruelty will still be busy. When we have got rid of the capitalist we shall still have the "grafter" to deal with. Satan, the great enemy of humanity, is at the bottom of it. When Jesus came to preach the gospel to the poor He said think not that I am come to bring peace on the earth, but a sword. Peace alongside of the liquor trade, the cigarette, the merger, trust and combine is only "daubing on the wall with untempered mortar." Peace on New Zealand lines is permanent. Jesus said, "If any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am there shall also my servant be." It is to hard and continual fighting with sin that Jesus calls us but He sets us free from the slavery of the devil and the drudgery of the capitalist. So let us understand, my brothers, that we manual laborers are that much better off to-day than our grandfathers were, simply because some brave, noble hearts now in the grave, sacrificed their comfort, time and money to the cause of labor.

Are we enjoying the fruits of their labor and neglecting their work? In Bethnal Green, London, Eng., to-day, women are making blouses at two-pence farthing each. Shirts at one penny three farthings each (3½ cents). Do you say, "Well, so long as the woman is not my wife, daughter or sister it don't bother me any?" Hearken, my brother, seventy-five years ago Hood wrote that "Song of the Shirt," but "songs" won't close up sweatshops. The organized labor vote has completely stopped "sweating" in New Zealand. You know what was thought of the negro overseer who flogged his fellow blacks worse than a white overseer. You know what is thought of a unionist who, when promoted to a foreman's place, goes back on the union and works for the capitalist. But God Himself says "At the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man." Ask yourself my brother "Are you a brother to Pierpoint, Morgan, Rockefeller and Carnegie, or are you brother to the poor shirtmaker of Bethnal Green, and who do you mark your ballot for on election days? "Let those who have failed take courage,

Tho' the enemy seems to have won,
Tho' his ranks are strong if he be in the wrong.
The battle is not yet done
For surely as the morning follows
The darkest hour of night,
No question is ever settled
Until it is settled right."

"Oh, Man, bowed down with Labor,
Oh, Woman, young, yet old;
Oh, heart oppressed in the Toiler's breast,
And crushed by the power of gold:
Keep on with your weary battle
Against triumphant might;
No question is ever settled
Until it is settled right."

J. H. H.

UNION MEN'S RESPECT FOR HUMAN LIFE.

The Standard Oil Company has just declared a dividend of $8 a share, which means $8,000,000 to its stockholders this quarter, making in all $24,000,000 in the last six months that the Standard Oil Company has disbursed, and $205,000,000 since and including the year of 1897. It does not take much figuring to see how with such tremendous profits the Standard Oil people can buy up everything worth having in the United States. Wilshire's Magazine.

And the chief beneficiary is J. D. Rockefeller, that devout Christian who pays his coal miners in Las Animas county, Colorado, in money that he prints himself; who compels them to buy in his own stores, and who charges them 40 cents a gallon for the coal oil that pays the big dividends. It is the same Rockefeller who, as the principal member of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company purchased the governor, bribed the legislature, hired assassins to shoot and beat union men to death, supplied the money that was paid dynamiters for manufacturing "union" outrages and employed a brutal soldiery to inflict tortures on inoffensive men and heap agonizing upon defenceless women.

Does anybody doubt that the union men of the United States respect human life—even the life of him who would murder them? Let them remember that not a hand has yet been raised against the bloodstained Rockefeller.—Ex.

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