

## The Story of the C.W.S.

little of the old personal relations between man and man, and nothing at all of the social forces to come.

"There were slaves in those days as well as the negro," wrote Justin McCarthy, of 1830, in his *Epoch of Reform*. To guess the depth of the slavery one must regard some classic facts of the period through the dismal atmosphere of its philosopher, Malthus, who taught that benevolence was proper to the Deity, but in short-sighted man would lead to the grossest errors. In 1833 the Chief Constable of Huddersfield collected statistics, according to which the typical factory village of Slaithwaite, near Huddersfield, then contained 363 families, or 1,896 individuals, whose total earnings were £202. 18s. 9d. weekly, or 2s. 2d. per head. Twopence per day, reckoned over six months of full work, was the average in a smaller village. Handloom weavers' wages in Bolton, which had been 25s. weekly in 1800, were 5s. 6d. in 1830. In 1839 a census of 31,632 factory labourers discovered only 3,024 adult men, and, of the rest, 18,416 were under eighteen years of age.<sup>1</sup> Factory hours were from 5 or 6 a.m. to 8.30 or 9 p.m. Women in the coal pits, almost naked were employed to drag trucks through low, wet galleries. Children worked underground from five years old, so hungry that occasionally they were known to eat the colliers' candles. Cholera broke out at Sunderland in 1831, and spread rapidly to the Midlands. In Bilston, with 14,492 people, there were 3,568 cases in seven weeks, 742 of which were fatal.<sup>2</sup> Readers of the *Old Curiosity Shop* know the horror that the Black Country inspired in Dickens; but, far from the flames and fumes, the rural districts were filled with paupers. The poor rate for the Buckinghamshire parish of Cholesbury rose from £10. 11s. in 1801 to £367 in 1832.<sup>3</sup> Meat, meanwhile, averaged twice its present price.

The *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator* of 1832 tells how the editor, going home at two o'clock of a March morning, found a seven-year-old child sitting innocently by the gates of a factory. Her mother had no timepiece; and on the previous day the child had been beaten for being late. Individual memories of days little later than these have been communicated to the writer by old co-operators. One has told how his mother contracted rheumatism while working at her handloom. The holes in the earth floor of her cottage, underneath the treadles, could not be kept free from water, into which her feet splashed at every downward movement.

<sup>1</sup>Prof. Cheyney: *Industrial and Social History of England*, p. 237.

<sup>2</sup>Dr. Cunningham: *Growth of English Industry and Commerce*, Vol. III., p. 808.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.* p. 767.