

Fabian Tract No. 130.

HOME WORK and SWEATING

The Causes and the Remedies.

By Miss B. L. HUTCHINS.

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HOME WORK AND SWEATING.

BETWEEN 1886 and 1889 the public became very much excited over the horrors of the "Sweating System." The revelations of hideous suffering, overwork and want brought home for a brief space to the minds of the middle and upper classes "how the poor live." Gradually the excitement died away : new topics absorbed the interest of the public ; and of Sweating and the Sweating System we heard little. In 1906, however, the *Daily News*, following the example of a philanthropic society at Berlin, arranged an exhibition of sweated industries. Workers were shewn, in a London hall, actually manufacturing match-boxes, blouses, etc., or carding hooks and eyes, and so forth ; and though for obvious reasons neither the long hours of work nor the insanitary conditions which too generally characterize similar employments, could be permitted or represented in an exhibition, full explanatory details of rates of pay, cost of materials, etc., were given to visitors, and each day there was a lecture by some person qualified to describe and illustrate not only the seen but the unseen side of sweating. The show attracted a vast deal of attention. Pity and sympathy were freely expressed ; but along with the pity was mingled a note of sheer bewilderment, and almost daily, when question-time followed the lecture, came the cry, "What can be done? what can we ourselves do, to stop it?" The present Tract is an attempt, not to revive the useless public excitement, but to set plainly before the workers themselves—and especially before the organized Trade Unionists, who can do most to bring about a reform—the actual facts as to Sweating, and the way in which it can be abolished.

What is meant by the Sweating System.

The phrase, the Sweating *System* is misleading. All experts agree that there is no one industrial system co-extensive with, or invariably present in, the Sweated Trades. Mr. Booth expresses this by saying that it is not with one but many sweating systems we have to deal : Mr. Schloss says that no sweating *system* whatever is discoverable ; and the House of Lords Committee, whilst reporting that the evils complained of could "scarcely be exaggerated," said that they had been unable to find any precise meaning attached to the phrase. An enquiry into sweating resolves itself, therefore, into an enquiry into the conditions under which the "sweated industries" are worked. Here at least a painful and striking uniformity is met with, and accepting it as a starting point, the Lords Committee defined Sweating as :—

- 1.—Unduly low rates of wages.
- 2.—Excessive hours of labor.
- 3.—Insanitary state of the workplaces.

Mr. Schloss has added the important point, taxing of working-power to an unreasonable extent, or getting sixpenny-worth of work out of fourpenny-worth of pay ("driving"). The broadest definition we can find for the term sweating, is, "grinding the faces of the poor." Professor Ashley* has given us a new and vivid phrase, "cheap and docile labor," which helps to explain the special characteristic of sweated industry. Sweated workers are sweated because either by reason of sex, age, infirmity or want of organization and support, they have to let their work go cheap. They are compelled by need to sell their labor to the first purchaser who will take it, and cannot make conditions. They must work at the rates of pay the employer thinks good enough for them, and the smallness of the pay automatically extends the hours of work.

Sweating is no new thing. It occurs usually as a symptom of one of two kinds of industrial change: either as the decay of a handicraft or as an extension or offshoot of the factory system. Handloom weaving is an instance of the former kind that will occur to us at once. Long before machinery was introduced we find the scattered weavers suffering from their lack of organization, subject to continual oppression by the factors who disposed of the stuff. Elizabeth's ministers were so impressed with the gravity of the evil that they drafted a bill to "avoid deceits done by Spinners of Woollen yarn and Weavers of Woollen cloth, and to increase their wages." (S. P. Dom. Eliz. Vol. 244.) In more recent times the handloom weavers vainly petitioned Parliament to revive the assessment of wages in their trade. In 1815 it was argued before Peel's Committee on the Employment of Children in Cotton Mills that it was unjust to limit the hours of children working in the mills while the handloom weavers, being grievously underpaid, often had to keep their children working far into the night to make up a living. In Germany and Austria and elsewhere the decaying handicraft, or Hausindustrie, is well known and widely spread. It is not only the competition of hand work with machinery that cuts down the rates of pay. The chain making at Cradley Heath shews that a handicraft can be grossly underpaid and sweated, although as yet no machine has been invented to do the work. But in England the sweated industry now more often takes the form of an auxiliary to the factory. Tailoring, clothing, shirts, blouses, ties, shoes, slippers and various trifles such as toys, crackers, match-boxes, instead of being made in the factory, are given out to be made or partly made in the workers' homes. This at first sight seems mysterious, for the economy and efficiency of factory industry (production on a large scale) has been demonstrated over and over again, in theory and in practice. How is it that blouses or match-boxes continue to be made in homes if they could be better and more cheaply made in a factory?

The Reason why Sweating Pays the Sweater.

Although, broadly speaking, the factory is the more economical method, yet the employment of home-workers offers an advantage,

* *The Tariff Problem*, 1903, p. 110.

in that very little capital is needed for starting or extending a business, and also because the sweating employer or contractor is able to shift some of the cost on to other people's shoulders. The manufacturer has to pay rent and rates for his factory; the sweater leaves the workers to pay rent for themselves. The manufacturer has to observe Factory Act requirements as to the cleaning, ventilation and sanitation of his factory; the sweater does not trouble about the condition of the workrooms to which he gives out work, as long as he gets the work done. The manufacturer may only employ women, children and young persons, for a certain period and within certain hours; the sweater's hands may work all night if they and he see fit. But there is another circumstance which gives the sweater an advantage, or apparent advantage, and that is in the complete lack of organization among these out-workers. It is true, no doubt, that factory women also are generally unorganized, but the mere fact of working and being paid together helps to maintain some sort of a standard, though often low enough. Out-workers are mostly very poor people, scattered about in their little homes, knowing nothing of one another; sometimes very shy and shrinking; they are often women who sorely need a few shillings to supplement the more or less irregular earnings of the head of the house, but are not entirely dependent on their own industry. If they ask for better pay or attempt to protest against a reduction of rates, there is one answer for them; others will be thankful to get the work. Some of these women get a little charity; many have poor relief; some have husbands who earn 16s. or 17s. a week when they are lucky enough to be in work at all. Some depend entirely on their wretched trade, and their case must be little better than prolonged starvation. All of them constitute however a force of "cheap and docile labor" which can be made profitable after a fashion, though it can obviously be applied to some industries only. Work that depends on delicate or costly machinery, or on skilled supervision and organization, is safe from any competition from the home. But the needlework trades and certain small objects that can be made with little skill, boxes, toys, crackers, etc., offer a field to the enterprise of the sweating employer, because the work can so easily be transferred from the factory or shop to the home. And the peculiarly unfortunate feature of this competition between the two industrial modes is that every improvement in the Factory Law or in its administration tends to drive work out of the factory into the home. If a local authority resolves to adopt a higher standard of requirements in regard to "suitable and sufficient" sanitary accommodation, the occupier of a workshop may decide to send away women and give them work to do at home; on the other hand, stricter inspection of out-workers will help to disgust their employer, who will think he would rather take on more indoor hands than be worried over the infectious diseases of people he knows very little about. The exact effect of the law in force in deciding the choice between outdoor and indoor employment is a point on which fuller information is much needed. But one thing is plain; the legal regulation of home work must be amended and extended in order to

do away with the unfair advantage obtained by the employer ; otherwise the benefit of the Factory Act to the worker will in certain industries involve the giving more work out to homes.

Wages.

The unfair advantage enjoyed by the sweater is of two kinds : first, the evasion of factory legislation, already mentioned ; second, the extreme lowness of the wages paid. Of the low wages so much has been heard lately that it is hardly necessary to labor the point further. We may take a few instances at random from the *Daily News Exhibition Handbook*.

- A. Trouser maker, widow with 4 children, works 10 or 12 hours a day, her best earnings (exceptional) are 10s. 6d. a week ; more often 3s. or 4s. ; receives parochial relief.
- B. Match-box maker, works 12 hours a day, earns on an average less than 5s. a week. Highest earnings 8s. 2d. for a full week including Sunday.
- C. Button carder. Two old people work together, earn 3s. 6d. per week.

Such instances could be multiplied *ad nauseam*. The Cradley Heath chain makers, after deducting cost of fuel, earn only 5s. to 6s. weekly for hard work, of a kind really skilled in its way, and not yet replaceable by machinery. The present writer has personally visited home workers in London, Birmingham and Cradley Heath, and has met with one, a skilled waistcoat maker, who was paid a living wage. The next most favourable instance was that of a remarkably quick, capable girl, making girls' frocks, lined throughout and trimmed, at 8d. each, deducting cost of cotton. She said she could make five or even six a day on occasion ; but "you have to move yourself to do it" ; and one could well believe it. This was an exceptionally quick worker ; what would have been the earnings of an average or slow worker ? In match-box making and similar wretched trades, about 1d. per hour seems to be what the piece rates yield. The lowest depths of all perhaps are reached by workers who sew hooks and eyes, buttons, etc., on cards. Carding hooks and eyes I have found paid at 14d. per gross cards in Birmingham. The employer was threatening to reduce the price to 10½d. for there were middlewomen who could farm the work out to "very poor people," and thus cut the recognized price of 14d. per gross. The average earnings of women in this work are only about 3s. 3d. weekly, even when they work long hours.* In all these small home industries the wages appear to tend steadily downwards, although in factory work women's wages have been rising for a considerable period.† The explanation is not far to seek ; whereas the factory industry, aided not only by machinery which can be seen, but by improvements in organization and supervision which are not seen (or not so easily), becomes more efficient and produces at a less cost, in home work there is no scope

* *Daily News Handbook*, p. 39.

† See G. H. Wood, F.S.S., in the *Journal of the Statistical Society*, June, 1902.

for these improvements, and employment is given to "cheap and docile labor" only. In so far as these women consent to take lower and lower rates, they can get work.

Sweating is not "cheap" to the community.

The sweater, as we have seen, may squeeze a profit out of such "cheap and docile labor," in so far as he can shift the cost of subsistence on to other people, or compel his employees to do with wages insufficient to keep them in health. How far is such labor really "cheap"? The cost to the community in physical deterioration and poor relief is impossible to estimate in *£ s. d.*, but obviously it must be considerable. In many cases the children are pressed into the service, and set to sew buttons or hooks on cards as soon as they come in from school. A home worker will tell you she can make so-and-so per week "with the children helping." If the children are too young to work, the result of the mother's home work is that they are neglected. A young married woman, perhaps with a recent baby and two or three little ones beside, tries to supplement her husband's irregular or scanty earnings by taking some work; finishing babies' boots, for instance. The boots thus made are usually hard, stiff, wretched little things, of a kind no baby should ever wear; meantime the worker, tired, dejected, underpaid and underfed, uses all her small strength to make a few pence over this wretched employment, and has little energy left to clean her room or care for her own children, who stray about unwashed, half-clothed, and neglected. It is impossible to imagine a more deplorable misdirection of energy. Let illness come, and the possible results are such as no one can contemplate without a shudder. A "notifiable" infectious disease may perhaps be discovered in good time, if the inspector is watchful, and stops the work before it is too late; but we are coming more and more to realize that most diseases are infectious, and that tuberculous disease is especially so. The germs of disease or vermin may and doubtless often are, carried from one poor little child to another in the shoes, clothing or toys made under these conditions. The deterioration of physique that must result in children brought up in these miserable surroundings and on insufficient food is so evident that it needs no emphasis.

What Has Been Done.

Successive enquiries and reports have brought these conditions before the public. The Commission on Children's Employment, 1863-7, advised the extension of the Factory Act to homes in which certain industries were carried on. But no government has had the courage to take such a step, each in turn having been daunted, partly no doubt by a vague dread of infringing "the sanctity of the home," but still more, probably, by the practical difficulties of administering such an Act. The law in regard to home work consists of a few very mild provisions. Lists of out-workers' names and addresses must be kept by employers or contractors in certain specified trades, and must be forwarded to the district or town council (in London

the Metropolitan Borough Council) and the names and addresses of out-workers residing outside the borough or district must be forwarded on by the authority to the authority of the district or borough in which the out-worker resides. Giving out work to be done in unwholesome premises, or to a house in which any person is suffering from an infectious disease, is punishable by fine, unless the contractor can plead ignorance, which of course in many cases he can. These regulations are not strong enough to fix the responsibility for the conditions under which the work is done on the shoulders of the employer, and there is good reason to suppose that even as they stand, the regulations are not well observed.*

In domestic workshops, viz., those workshops in which only the members of a family are employed, the hours of work are unregulated as regards women, and are regulated for children and young persons on an elastic system, by which the number of hours the child or young person may work is restricted, but the period of employment and meal-times need not be stated, save only that work must cease at night, viz., between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. Now all experience tends to show that a regulation of hours which does not include a statement of the period of employment is very nearly illusory. In these cases the inspector cannot do much more than check the employment of children and young persons at night. No regulation as to hours applies to out-workers, unless the out-worker is himself an employer of a child, young person, or woman, as sometimes happens, in which case the work place is a "workshop" and as such is under the Factory Act. But the solitary home-worker, and the worker whose employment is "irregular and does not furnish the whole or principal means of living of the family," may work any hours that seem to them good.

The hours of work of out-workers are, however, closely bound up with the question of wages. The employer does not directly compel them to work long hours, but he exercises compulsion indirectly through the miserable rates of pay. Out-workers would not work so many hours if they could get a decent remuneration without so doing. It is often urged by religious and benevolent persons who are shocked when these facts come to light, that the purchasers of wares so unjustly made are guilty, and ought to satisfy themselves that goods are not made by sweated labor. Can pressure be brought to bear by customers to ensure better wages?

Consumers' Leagues and Trade Union Labels.

Private consumers cannot exercise much influence. It is doubtful whether consumers' leagues, by issuing "white lists," can do much to favor the good employer, for the reason that trade is so complicated that it is practically impossible to trace the production

* The statistics contained in the Return presented to Parliament, No. 211 of 1906, shew that in a considerable number of districts little use has been made by the local authorities of their powers under the home work provisions of the Factory Act. In October, 1906, the Home Office issued a Memorandum to the Clerks of Town and Borough Councils urging the importance of thorough administration.

of any article through its stages. We may please ourselves with the notion that Messrs. Barkley or Whiterod, or whoever it is we prefer, is "all right," and provides seats or afternoon tea for his young people, which no doubt is all to the good as far as it goes. But who can trace the clothing, the jam, or the toys sold by Barkley and Whiterod, back to the dealer, and thence to the actual makers of the goods, who may be scattered all over England, or, indeed, the world? Consumers' leagues might however exercise a very good educational influence by agitation, by disseminating instruction among their members and the public, and even by raising the standard of public opinion on the two points of (*a*) paying bills regularly, (*b*) treating tradespeople with more consideration in the matter of giving orders for clothing, etc., with a reasonable time allowed for carrying them out. In both these ways the well-to-do classes, sometimes from hard callousness, but much more often from sheer ignorant thoughtlessness, help to tighten the pressure of competition on the tradesman, and through him on the workers, and here there is a real field for the educating influence of the consumers' league. Again, the committees of philanthropic societies and religious bodies should before all others see that their own hands are clean. It is not a pleasant thought that bibles are frequently stitched and folded at starvation rates of pay; and illegal overtime on church embroidery before festivals has been so frequent as to be specially mentioned by the Chief Lady Inspector. The committees also of working-men's clubs, co-operative societies, friendly societies and trade unions might scrupulously pass the "rat-shop" printer by, however cheaply he may offer to do the work. Some good, perhaps, might be done by the requirement of a label on goods for sale, stating that the goods were tenement made, in unhealthy conditions, or the reverse. This plan has been tried in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, it is said, with some success; but the extreme ease with which a label can be forged or destroyed makes the provision of doubtful value. It is better to face the fact that the customer is for the most part powerless to ascertain where or how his purchases have been produced; and though the "education of demand" may do a little to check sweating, much cannot be hoped from it. Much sweating, moreover, is carried on not for the supply of public authorities or even for the English customer, but for export. It becomes evident, then, that only the collective authority of the community acting through its organized representatives can take effective action.

Protection of Home Industries.

Protection of home industries is sometimes urged as a possible remedy for sweating. The evidence collected for the Berlin exhibition of sweated industries shewed however that sweating is quite as rampant in protected Germany as in free-trade England; and there are colonies of home-workers in Chicago and New York where even the very high tariff maintained in America does not make wages or conditions any better than in the worst parts of London. Regulation of sweating would do far more for trade than any import duty on

manufactured goods, as it would deprive the sweater of the unfair advantage he now gets by employing "cheap and docile labor" in unregulated workrooms, and more custom and a larger share of the export trade would then go to the traders who are carrying on business honestly under fair conditions.

Alien Immigration.

Restraint of immigration is often urged as a remedy for sweating, but the Aliens Act of 1905 achieved little or nothing, and it is unlikely that even a much more drastic Act would really check the evil. It must be remembered that the alien population is comparatively small, though, no doubt, in one or two districts it forms a high percentage. Sweating is quite equally rampant where the alien is a negligible quantity. There are practically no foreigners in the cutlery or nail and chain-making industries, yet there the sweater flourishes. Even in the tailoring trades, the competition of destitute foreigners is as nothing compared with the great mass of unskilled and unorganized female labor which crowds the market. The removal of all Jews from the sweated trades would be but a partial and temporary relief. The evil effect of the Jew's competition lies in the characteristics which render him a fit subject for the pestilential conditions of home work: he overcrowds whole districts; his standard of comfort is low; and his ingenuity has created or organized new industries to suit the circumstances. In the factory, English skilled labor has the preference: abolish the conditions that now specially favor the demoralizing competition of the Jew, and the difficulty will be got over without an impracticable policy of exclusion. The latest factory inspector's report from New Zealand (June, 1906) says that though there has been a considerable influx of labor into the colony of late years, no displacement or unemployment of their own people has ensued. Why? Because *the system of employment in the colony permits no undercutting in wages*, and "thus gives to those possessing knowledge of local conditions and requirements advantage over the visitor, unless the latter shows decidedly superior attainments."

How Wages have been Raised.

If we want to decide how to raise the wages of sweated workers we are fortunately not compelled to rely on theory alone, for in the colonies of Australasia two distinct methods of regulating wages have been in operation for ten or eleven years, and the results can be studied on the spot, or in reports issued on the subject. The two methods were initiated respectively by New Zealand in 1894 and by Victoria, Australia, in 1896. In New Zealand the machinery designed for the prevention and settlement of labor disputes is made use of to abolish sweating. "The colony was divided into districts, in each of which a local board of conciliation might, if petitioned for, be set up, composed of equal numbers of masters and men, with an impartial chairman. At the request of any party to an industrial dispute, the district board was to call the other parties before it, and

hear, examine and award. As soon as a dispute stood referred to a board, anything in the nature of striking or locking-out was forbidden. . . . A board's award, however, was not to be enforceable by law, but was only to be a friendly recommendation to the disputants. In case these, or any of them, refused to accept it, any party might appeal to the court of arbitration, or the conciliators themselves, if hopeless of effecting a settlement, might themselves send a case thither."* The court is presided over by a Judge of the Supreme Court, and it rests with the court to say whether the award is to have the force of law or to be merely in the nature of good advice. If it is to have legal force, it must be filed in the Supreme Court and then it has the weight of an ordinary submission to an award, and any party to it can, by leave of the judge, get an order exacting a penalty for breach of it. Decisions of the court are binding not only on the parties to the dispute, but on all employers and trade unions registered in the trade, and since 1900 decisions are equally binding on anyone entering the industry regulated by them.

For present purposes we are concerned with this New Zealand measure, not as a means of settling disputes, but for the regulation of sweating. The basis of the institution is trade unionism, and it might therefore seem as if it could effect little for unorganized workers, especially women. But in practice it has done much. If sweated workers want to have a revision of the conditions of their work, they have but to file a statement of claim in the office of the nearest conciliation board, and they are at once in the position of a union. Working women have invoked the aid of the law to good purpose. For instance, in Auckland, as lately as 1892, it had been found impossible to establish a tailoresses' union or a fair factory log, but under the Arbitration Act they gained an increase of wages estimated at fifteen per cent. The latest factory inspector's reports from New Zealand state that the Arbitration Act is working most satisfactorily. The wages of workers have been increased, and employment has become more regular.

Inspectors of awards have been recently appointed, and these inspectors are often able to settle disputes without having recourse to the courts at all, and in cases where employees have been sweated or unfairly paid, the payment of arrears can be claimed. The report for 1904-5 says that 295 informations of breach of contract were laid, of which 232 were won by the workpeople. Three hundred and twelve cases were settled without having recourse to the courts, and £1,463 of back wages secured for the workers, besides what was obtained at arbitration. In 1905-6, £788 of arrears were obtained for the workers by the inspector, plus £1,153 obtained under award of the court.

It will be seen that a great deal is done by agreement and adjustment. A noteworthy feature of the arbitration law is a provision for filing in the Supreme Courts contracts embodying working conditions agreed upon by employers and unions. These documents, called industrial agreements, are, when filed, binding for the period men-

* Reeves, *State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand*, Vol. ii., p. 102.

tioned in them, which must not exceed three years. Numbers of these agreements are voluntarily entered into, and the arbitration court sometimes orders the parties to a dispute to execute an industrial agreement.

In Victoria wages have been regulated by the plan of having special boards for each trade, consisting of equal numbers of members elected as representatives of employers and employed, with a chairman elected by the board. A board may be appointed to fix wages and piece rates for persons employed either inside or outside factories. It must also fix the hours for which the rate of wage is fixed, and the rate of pay for overtime; and in fixing wages must take into consideration the nature, kind and class of work, the age and sex of the workers, and any matter which may be prescribed by regulation.

This Act was passed in 1896 in order to stamp out the sweating which had been shewn to exist in Melbourne and elsewhere in Victoria. It has met on the whole with great success, and the inspector's reports state that sweating has been practically stamped out. South Australia followed Victoria, and passed a Wages Board Act in 1900. The main difference between the two methods is that in the case of New Zealand, the unit of administration is the district; in the case of Victoria it is the trade. In the former case the authority is *judicial*; in the second it is *elective*.

Suggestions.

I.—SANITARY REGULATION.

Short of regulating wages, we do not believe that any real or adequate control of the sweater can be maintained. But undoubtedly efficient sanitary inspection of homes used as workrooms may do some good indirectly, in that it protects the consumer from the very real danger of dirt and infection, and also in that it checks the giving out of work in some degree, and is likely to ensure more work being done in factories and workshops, "to which the employer has the right of access and control." Two competing suggestions are now before the public; these are known respectively as the Tennant Bill and the Women's Industrial Council's Bill, the latter usually introduced jointly by some friends or members of the Women's Industrial Council and of the Scottish Council for Women's Trades. Mr. Tennant's Bill aims at placing the responsibility for the conditions under which work is done in home workrooms on the giver-out of work; and would place the administration in the hands of the local sanitary authority, who already receives the out-workers' lists. The Women's Industrial Council Bill involves more of an innovation; it would place inspection of out-workers under the factory inspectors, and all out-workers would have to produce a certificate shewing that their workrooms had been inspected and found suitable for the work to be carried on, having regard to the health of the persons to be employed therein. This measure would involve a considerable increase in the inspecting staff, but as that is for other reasons highly necessary and desirable, it does not in itself constitute

an objection. In New Zealand and some other colonies any work-room where two or more persons are employed, the employer counting as one, constitutes a factory within the meaning of the Act. The employment of children by their parents does not constitute an exception. Those who have studied the history of factory legislation can see that this is by far the best method, and the only one that can check sweating in home work and prevent unfair competition with well-conducted industry. It would however be very difficult to pass such a measure all at once, in an old country like ours. The Women's Industrial Council's Bill or Mr. Tennant's Bill would form an intermediate stage, and help the transition to the more logical and comprehensive measure adopted in New Zealand.

II.—TRUCK AND PARTICULARS.

A recent legal decision has held out-workers to be outside the operation of the Truck Acts, and thus, Miss Squire says,* placed thousands of workpeople outside the protection they had hitherto successfully claimed. This anomaly will it is to be hoped be righted before long by legislation. A provision recommended by the International Conference for Labor Regulation, Geneva, 1906, was that "particulars" of work and wages (now required under our law to be given to the worker) should also be exposed in the employer's pay office. This might be very useful and perhaps would help towards the difficult work of organizing the trades in question.

III.—WAGE REGULATION.

While measures for better inspection of home work and for improved sanitary conditions should have all the support that can be given them, and the restricted hours of work in domestic workshops should be enforced as far as possible, and made binding on home workers wherever children are employed, yet these measures by themselves will almost certainly prove inadequate. The utmost cleanliness and the strictest enforcement of an Eight Hours Day will not provide food for the sweated worker's child or make six shillings a week into a decent wage for a woman.

The Wages Boards are supported by the high authority of Sir Charles Dilke, who has several times introduced a Bill on the lines of the Victorian measure. The advantage of the New Zealand plan however is that instead of confiding the regulation of wages to the representatives of sectional interests, an impartial and unbiassed authority of high legal knowledge and position is set up, who after hearing and weighing the evidence of those immediately concerned, can fix minimum rates binding on an industry within a given district, and the same authority also has power to decide disputes as to hours and conditions of employment (so far as these are not already regulated by the Factories Act), while the wages board is really an *ad hoc* body dealing with wages and nothing else. Without attempting to discuss every detail of the machinery that would have to be set in motion in England, we suggest that the Conciliation Act, 1896, might

* Factory Inspector's Report for 1905, p. 323.

be amended and extended so as to deal with sweated trades.* The Board of Trade might be empowered to appoint a commissioner to enquire into the conditions of home work in some special district, and if much sweating were discovered, the commissioner should form a board, consisting of himself and two persons thoroughly conversant with the trade, as representatives of employers and employed. Home-workers might then register as unions under the board, every care being taken to make the process as simple as possible. The board would then proceed to take evidence as to the rates of pay, in order to discover what piece rates yield a living wage per hour. Having drawn up a scale, which should be published in the district and made known as far as possible, every effort should be used to induce the employers to adopt the scale voluntarily as a minimum. The factory inspector might be charged with the duty of discovering how far the minimum rate was adopted, and of calling the attention of employers to the decision. If difficulties were made, and the standard rate was not adopted, recourse should be had to a Court of Arbitration, whose decisions should have the force of law, and be binding for the trade within the district concerned. The experience of New Zealand shews that the inspector can do a great deal to bring about amicable arrangements and fair agreements as to wages, without recourse to the Court, when it is known that he has that measure in reserve. A very difficult question would be the decision of the amount of the standard minimum wage, for which the assistance and advice of experts would have to be called in. It would have to be remembered that many sweated workers are working as supplementary earners only; therefore the most effectual method would be, not to require a living *weekly* wage, which would certainly be evaded wholesale, but a scale of piece rates which would yield a fair remuneration *per hour*. Supposing it was decided that 15s. should be the standard minimum weekly wage for women, the piece rates should be calculated so as to yield about 3½d. per hour, which would mean a very substantial increase to most home workers. Inspectors of awards, as in New Zealand, should be appointed to enforce the law. It would probably be wise not to attempt to fix a really living wage at once, but to try and effect a moderate rise first, and revise the rates after two or three years. If a system of this kind was tried first in one or two districts notorious for sweating, it might then gradually be extended and develop into a national minimum.

We believe that the New Zealand Arbitration Court offers great advantages in the superior judgment and detachment of mind that could be brought to bear by a skilled expert, who would have the opportunity of hearing evidence from different trades, as compared with the method of leaving the solution to the decision of those themselves concerned in any particular industry, and we also believe

* It may be noticed that the measures for regulating wages here suggested are not entirely identical with those advocated in Fabian Tract No. 128. The discrepancy is one of detail merely. The writer of the present Tract is entirely in sympathy with the principles laid down in "The Case for a Legal Minimum Wage," but doubts the advisability of employing the local authorities in the manner there suggested.

that the encouragement given to women's organizations by making it cheap and easy for any little group of workers to register as a union, might have most valuable results. Experience shews that efficiency in the administration of the Factory Act regulations approaches perfection most nearly where the workers are best organized, and themselves take an intelligent interest in the measures enacted for their good. Women have hitherto proved apathetic and weak-kneed as trade unionists, but they are improving year by year. It is noticeable that a commission appointed in Victoria to enquire into the working of the various labor laws of the Australasian colonies strongly commended the New Zealand regulations. It reported as follows:—
 "The New Zealand Conciliation and Arbitration Acts remain to-day the fairest, most complete, and most useful labor law on the statute books of the Australian States . . . protecting on the one hand the fair-minded employer from the dishonest competition of the sweater, who keeps down cost of production by paying miserably low wages, and on the other, the toiling thousands to whom a rise in wages of a few shillings a week when an industry can fairly bear it, often means the difference between griping poverty and comparative comfort. Its main provisions have stood the test of time; and while employers and workers alike keenly criticize each other's actions in connection with its operations in certain industrial centres, *in no part of the colony which we visited did we hear any general desire expressed for its repeal.*"

Special consideration would also have to be given to those industries which are decaying handicrafts rather than auxiliaries to the factory. These, as already said, are relatively inconsiderable in England, but nevertheless occupy quite a large proportion of the population in certain districts. In some Highland villages the poor people have two or three sheep of their own, shear the wool, spin it into yarn, and knit it into stockings, for which they receive about 1s. a pair from the dealer. No wage regulation could touch this form of sweating, and it is likely enough that in the chain-making, the specially sweated industry at Cradley, the employers would soon be sharp enough to arrange to sell the iron and buy the chain, instead of paying wages, so that they would avoid the minimum wage altogether. In cases like these it would be desirable for the Government to take measures to instruct the people as to co-operative association for buying their own material, and to organize them for self-help and mutual protection, by lending capital, and so forth. Measures of this kind have been adopted in Austria for the assistance of the ancient crafts and rural industries, with very good effect. It would of course be better still to take over the whole industry and carry it on in Government shops with fair wages and good conditions.

IV.—DIRECT EMPLOYMENT.

To those who follow the argument here supported,* that sweating, though apparently an inexpensive method of production, is ruinous

* It is developed with much more fulness in *Industrial Democracy*, by S. and B. Webb (Longmans, 1902, 12s.).

to the community through the physical and moral deterioration induced in the sweated and their workers, it will be at once evident that the abolition of sweating is an important incidental advantage of direct public employment. The establishment of the Army Clothing Factory has saved thousands of workers from sweating dens without any increase in the cost of production.* The enlargement of that factory so as to produce in it not only some but all the clothing required for the army, militia and volunteers, would rescue thousands more from their present fate. The workshops at Woolwich could be expanded so as to render unnecessary that contracting for saddlery work, chains and hardware, which now promotes sweating. A navy clothing factory might supersede all sweating of the garments of sailors, coastguards, and marines. The Government factories should produce also all the uniforms of the customs, police, prisons, post office, and other official staffs, as well as all the boots, shoes, saddlery, and accoutrements required.

And if local authorities followed suit—if the London County Council were given power to set up its own clothing factory, and to supply other local governing bodies—if it became the practice to manufacture all asylum, hospital, police, and fire brigade uniforms required by any Town or County Council or other public body, either in its own factory or in that of some other public body—if a similar course were pursued with regard to boots and shoes, saddlery, and general leather work, chains, furniture, and other commonly sweated wares, part, at least, of the evil would disappear. For it would be easy to ensure that the factories of the Government or the Town Council would be well-built, well-ventilated and well-equipped; that the hours of work would be regular and short; that the employment would be steady, and the wages at any rate as high as those paid in the best shops elsewhere.

V.—ANTI-SWEATING CLAUSES IN ALL PUBLIC CONTRACTS.

But however rapidly we press on the establishment of public factories for the supply of public wants, many public bodies will, for a long time to come, have to buy goods which are at present usually the product of sweating. The Government contracts all contain some clause which is intended to secure a fair wage for the workers, and to restrain the practice of sub-contracting. For instance, the form of tender for clothing to be delivered by the contractor to the War Office includes among the required conditions that no portion of the contract be transferred without the written permission of the Secretary of State; that all garments shall be cut out and made up in the contractor's own factory, and no work shall be done in the

* Even if there were some increase in cost of production, it would still be good policy for the country to pay a living wage. The private sweater can send his worn-out workers to the workhouse when he has done with them: the country has to maintain its bye-products of pauperism. (See *Common Sense of Municipal Trading*, by Bernard Shaw. Constable, 1904, 2s. 6d.) It is a fact less well-known than it should be, that municipal contractors have been found giving out workhouse clothing to be made up by women who were compelled to ask for out-relief from their own union to supplement their wretched earnings. One way or another—the country pays.

homes of the workpeople ; that the wages paid shall be those current in each trade for competent workmen in the district in which the work is carried out, and that the wages shall be paid to the workers direct, and not through any foreman or intermediary. So far back as 1891 the House of Commons passed a resolution that the Government's duty was to make every effort to secure the payment of fair or current wages for work done by workmen under Government contracts. But these provisions where out-workers are concerned are at present often neglected.

Though sub-letting and home work are expressly prohibited, there are hundreds of home-workers openly employed in Government work, and except in work where the workers are organized in trade unions there is no provision for ensuring a standard of wages. In 1906, the Minister for War, Mr. Haldane, had his attention drawn to the matter by some representatives of the Women's Industrial Council, and assured them that he would introduce some system of effective inspection. He also kindly assisted the committee of the Sweated Home Industries Exhibition by lending materials on which to employ the Government workers, who shewed the low prices at which they had to work for Government contractors. Municipal and other public authorities have the same difficulty, and probably will continue to have it if they employ middlemen. A case has been discovered where a contractor gave a worker a job to do for a municipal contract, and paid her the fair price insisted on by the municipality, but on condition that she should do other work for him at a rate lower than usual, so that her average wage is not protected by the fair wage clause. "The only satisfactory solution to prevent such evasions is the extension of direct employment without the medium of a private contractor by the Government and other public authorities."* The extension of employment under fair conditions will benefit the sweated workers not only directly, in so far as they themselves obtain employment under those conditions, but indirectly, as the payment of fair wages to the men employed would lessen the competition for work by married women. Nothing comes home more forcibly to the investigator of home work than this fact, that many of the women would not take work out at all if their husbands could obtain a decent remuneration. A great deal of sweated work by women is simply an indirect result of the under-payment or irregular employment of men.†

Conclusion.

There are those who will say that the measures of reform here sketched out will have the effect of throwing out of work those poor people who are not worth employing at the wages and under the

* Interim Report on Home Work, by Mrs. J. R. MacDonald ; Women's Industrial Council, 1906 ; p. 35.

† An ex-out-worker told the present writer she had given up taking work—her "old man said it wasn't worth it." Many "old men" would say the same if they could earn their own wages. See on this point Cadbury's *Women's Work and Wages*, which shews that men's wages for the less skilled kinds of work in Birmingham are often not more than 17s. or 18s.

conditions that would be required under an amended Factory Act, with a minimum wage and strictly sanitary conditions required for out-workers as well as indoor hands. M. Aftalion, in a recent interesting study,* declares that to regulate home work is to destroy it, and cites the example of Victoria, where the establishment of a minimum wage has driven almost all the work into factories. We believe, judging from the analagous case of factory regulation, that the unemployment which would result from a well thought out scheme of home work regulation would be much less than these critics expect. Some workers would go to the factory ; some, as already pointed out, would no longer need to take work out, if the head of the family were assured a living wage. Some workers, now underpaid, underfed, underwarmed, and badly clothed, would quickly respond to improved conditions and pay, and would in a short time become really more efficient. Moreover, we must remember that the payment of larger wages to a class of workers previously underpaid would in itself be a beneficial stimulus to trade, and lead to an increased demand for employment in the production of the food and clothing required. But let us admit that most probably there would be some workers unable to earn the minimum wage, and consequently thrown out of employment. These, we must remember, would be the workers either so unhealthy, so old, or so exhausted with a life of underpaid toil, that they would not be worth employing under the changed conditions and improved standard set. Here, surely, if ever, is the case for liberal poor relief. It would be far cheaper to the community in the end to pension off these victims of unregulated competition than to allow them to compete in the labor market, lower the rate of wages, and through their cheapness thrust the more capable out of work. For it must be remembered we are not here discussing those who are "unemployable" because of drink, extravagance or excess. The pathetic part of the sweated industries is that it is often the very virtues of these people that are their ruin. Miss Clementina Black, in her introduction to the cases investigated and tabulated by the Women's Industrial Council,† says "many of them are of the highest respectability and maintain a standard of conduct and cleanliness quite heroic. . . . The majority of these 44 women are industrious, even painfully industrious ; most are thoroughly respectable ; scarcely one is paid a living wage." They will sit up all night, and work for what is given them, and submit. Theirs is indeed "cheap and docile labor." They represent an out-of-date tradition and a superseded method, and only the wise and careful intervention of the State can save them and their children from a slow process of deterioration through want. "There is no person in this kingdom—or in any of the states that are called civilized—who does not partake of the proceeds of underpaid labor ; and the conditions of such labor are not growing better ; they are, if anything, growing worse, and underpayment is rather spreading than decreasing." †

* *Le Développement de la Fabrique, et le Travail à Domicile*. Paris : Larose ; 1906.

† Interim Report on Home Industries of Women, p. 44.

‡ *Ibid*, p. 45.

NOTE.—A few sentences of Fabian Tract No. 50 are incorporated above, by permission.

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