

## **Document A: Dr. Ward**

Question: Give the committee information on your knowledge of the health of workers in cotton-factories.

Answer: I have had frequent opportunities of seeing people coming out from the factories and occasionally attending as patients. Last summer I visited three cotton factories with Dr. Clough of Preston and Mr. Barker of Manchester and we could not remain ten minutes in the factory without gasping for breath. How it is possible for those who are doomed to remain there twelve or fifteen hours to endure it? If we take into account the heated temperature of the air, and the contamination of the air, it is a matter of astonishment to my mind, how the work people can bear the confinement for so great a length of time.

Question: What was your opinion of the relative state of health between cotton-factory children and children in other employments?

Answer: The state of the health of the cotton-factory children is much worse than that of children employed in other manufactories.

Question: Have you any further information to give to the committee?

Answer: Cotton factories are highly unfavourable, both to the health and morals of those employed in them. They are really nurseries of disease and vice.

Question: Have you observed that children in the factories have particular accidents?

Answer: When I was a surgeon in the infirmary, accidents were very often admitted to the infirmary, through the children's hands and arms having being caught in the machinery; in many instances the muscles, and the skin is stripped down to the bone, and in some instances a finger or two might be lost. Last summer I visited Lever Street School. The number of children at that time in the school, who were employed in factories, was 106. The number of children who had received injuries from the machinery amounted to very nearly one half. There were forty-seven injured in this way

Source: House of Lords Committee (Interviewer) & Michael, W. (Interviewee). (1819). Excerpt from Minutes of Evidence taken before the Lords Committees appointed to enquire into the State and Condition of the Children employed in the Cotton Manufactories of the United Kingdom. House of Lords Sessional Papers (1806-1859).

## **Document B: Dr. Holme**

Question: How long have you practised as a physician in Manchester?

Answer: Twenty-four years.

Question: Have you, in Manchester, occasion to visit any public establishments?

Answer: I am physician to the principal medical establishments. The medical establishments with which I am connected, and have been for twenty-four years are, the Manchester Infirmary, Dispensary, Lunatic Hospital and Asylum, and the House of Recovery.

Question: Has that given you opportunities of observing the state of the children who are ordinarily employed in the cotton-factories.

Answer: It has.

Question: In what state of health did you find the persons employed?

Answer: They were in good health generally. I can give you particulars, if desired, of Mr. Pooley's factory. He employs 401 persons; and, of the persons examined in 1796, 22 were found to be of delicate appearances, 2 were entered as sickly, 3 in bad health, one subject to convulsions, 8 cases of scrofula: in good health, 363.

Question: Am I to understand you, from your investigations in 1796, you formed rather a favourable opinion of the health of persons employed in cotton-factories.

Answer: Yes.

Question: Have you had any occasion to change that opinion since?

Answer: None whatever. They are as healthy as any other part of the working classes of the community.

Question: If children were overworked for a long period, would it, in your opinion as a medical man, affect their health so as to be visible in some way?

Answer: Unquestionably; if a child was overworked a single day, it would incapacitate him in a great measure for performing his work the next day; and if the practice was continued for a longer period, it would in a certain time destroy his health altogether.

Question: Then you are to be understood, that, from the general health among the children in the cotton-factories, you should form an opinion that they were not worked beyond their physical powers?

Answer: Certainly not.

Question: The result of your observation did not indicate any check of growth arising from their employment.

Answer: It did not.

Question: Would you permit a child of eight years old, for instance, to be kept standing for twelve hours a day?

Answer: I did not come here to answer what I would do if I had children of my own.

Question: Would it be injurious to a child, in your judgement as a medical man, if at the time he got his meals he was still kept engaged in the employment he was about?

Answer: These are questions which I find a great difficulty in answering.

Question: Who applied to you to undertake the examining of these children in Mr. Pooley's factory?

Answer: Mr. Pooley.

Question: Suppose I put this question to you. If children were employed twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen hours out of twenty-four, should you think that conducive to the health of a delicate child?

Answer: My conclusion would be this: the children I saw were all in health; if they were employed during those ten, twelve, or fourteen hours, and had the appearance of health, I should still say it was not injurious to their health.

Source: House of Lords Committee (Interviewer) & Holmes, E. (Interviewee). (1818). Excerpt from Minutes of Evidence taken before the Lords Committees to who was referred The Bill entitled 'Act to amend and extend an Act made in the Forty-second Year of His present Majesty, for the Preservation of the Health and

Morals of Apprentices, and others, employed in Cotton and other Mills, and Cotton and other Factories.' House of Lords Sessional Papers (1806-1859).

### **Document C: John Birley**

I was born in Hare Street, Bethnal Green, London, in the year 1805. My father died when I was two years old, leaving two children, myself and Sarah my sister. My mother kept us both till I was about five years old, and then she took badly and was taken to the London Hospital. My sister and I were taken to the Bethnal Green Workhouse. My mother died and we stayed in the workhouse. We had good food, good beds and given liberty two or three times a week. We were taught to read and in every respect were treated kindly.

The same year my mother died, I being between six and seven years of age, there came a man looking for a number of parish apprentices. We were all ordered to come into the board room, about forty of us. There were, I dare say, about twenty gentlemen seated at a table, with pens and paper before them. Our names were called out one by one. We were all standing before them in a row. My name was called and I stepped out in the middle of the room. They said, "Well John, you are a fine lad, would you like to go into the country?" I said "Yes sir".

We had often talked over amongst ourselves how we should like to be taken into the country, Mr. Nicholls the old master, used to tell us what fine sport we should have amongst the hills, what time we should have for play and pleasure. He said we should have plenty of roast beef and get plenty of money, and come back gentlemen to see our friends.

The committee picked out about twenty of us, all boys. In a day or two after this, two coaches came up to the workhouse door. We were got ready. They gave us a shilling piece to take our attention, and we set off. I can remember a crowd of women standing by the coaches, at the workhouse door, crying "shame on them, to send poor little children away from home in that fashion." Some of them were weeping. I heard one say, "I would run away if I was them." They drove us to the Paddington Canal, where there was a boat provided to take us.

We got to Buxton at four o'clock on Saturday afternoon. A covered cart was waiting for us there. We all got in, and drove off to the apprentice house at Litton Mill, about six miles from Buxton. The cart stopped, and we marched up to the house, where we saw the master, who came to examine us and gave orders where we were put. They brought us some supper. We were very hungry, but could not eat it. It was Derbyshire oatcake, which we had never seen before. It tasted as sour as vinegar.

Our regular time was from five in the morning till nine or ten at night; and on Saturday, till eleven, and often twelve o'clock at night, and then we were sent to clean the machinery on the Sunday. No time was allowed for breakfast and no sitting for dinner and no time for tea. We went to the mill at five o'clock and worked till about eight or nine when they brought us our breakfast, which consisted of water-porridge, with oatcake in it and onions to flavour it. Dinner consisted of Derbyshire oatcakes cut into four pieces, and ranged into two stacks. One was buttered and the other treacled. By the side of the oatcake were cans of milk. We drank the milk and with the oatcake in our hand, we went back to work without sitting down.

We then worked till nine or ten at night when the water-wheel stopped. We stopped working, and went to the apprentice house, about three hundred yards from the mill. It was a large stone house, surrounded by a wall, two to three yards high, with one door, which was kept locked. It was capable of lodging about one hundred and fifty apprentices. Supper was the same as breakfast - onion porridge and dry oatcake. We all ate in the same room and all went up a common staircase to our bed-chamber; all the boys slept in one chamber, all the girls in another. We slept three in one bed. The girls' bedroom was of the same sort as ours. There were no fastenings to the two rooms; and no one to watch over us in the night, or to see what we did.

Mr. Needham, the master, had five sons: Frank, Charles, Samuel, Robert and John. The sons and a man named Swann, the overlooker, used to go up and down the mill with hazzle sticks. Frank once beat me till he frightened himself. He thought he had killed me. He had struck me on the temples and knocked me dateless. He once knocked me down and threatened me with a stick. To save my head I raised my arm, which he then hit with all his might. My elbow was broken. I bear the marks, and suffer pain from it to this day, and always shall as long as I live.

I was determined to let the gentleman of the Bethnal Green parish know the treatment we had, and I wrote a letter with John Oats and put it into the Tydeswell Post Office. It was broken open and given to old Needham. He beat us with a knob-stick till we could scarcely crawl. Sometime after this three gentlemen came down from London. But before we were examined we were washed and cleaned up and ordered to tell them we liked working at the mill and were well treated. Needham and his sons were in the room at the time. They asked us questions about our treatment, which we answered as we had been told, not daring to do any other, knowing what would happen if we told them the truth.

Source: *The Ashton Chronicle* (19th May, 1849).

### **Document D: Edward Baines**

Above all, it is alleged that the children who labour in mills are victims of frightful oppression and killing toil, - that they are often cruelly beaten by the spinners of overlookers, - that their feeble limbs become distorted by continual standing and stooping, and they grow up cripples, if indeed they are not hurried into premature graves, - that in many mills they are compelled to work thirteen, fourteen, or fifteen hours per day, that they have not time either for play or for education, and that avaricious taskmasters, and idle, unnatural parents, feed on the marrow of these poor innocents. To such representations it is appropriate finish to call the factories, as often has been done, hells on earth.

Views such as these have been repeatedly given of factory labour, with an amplification of detail and a strength of language, which have induced many to think they must be true. A year or two ago, the subject became a powerful agitation among the working classes of the manufacturing districts, being made so chiefly by a few individuals, who were mainly, though not altogether, influenced by humane motives, but whose imagination and feelings were much stronger than their judgments. The individuals maintained, with apparent reason, that no child ought to work more than ten hours per day, and that the mills, which then worked eleven, twelve, and in some cases even longer, should be prevented by law from working more than ten hours. A cause in itself good, was injured by the outrageous violence and unreasonable demands of its promoters, who continually presented the most hideous caricatures of the effects of factory labour, reviled the mill-owners as monsters, and showed themselves perfectly blind to the effect which so great a restriction on industry must produce on our foreign trade, and on the earnings of workmen. The latter, with few exceptions, united in the clamorous demand for a "ten hours bill"; not because they believed that the children were oppressed, but because they ignorantly imagined their own labor would be shortened by such a bill from twelve hours to ten, without any reduction being made in their wages. This ridiculous delusion was inculcated by the leaders of the outcry, who treated our foreign trade as of no importance, and as rather an injury than a benefit to their country, - thus evincing inconceivable ignorance and folly, and proving themselves utterly unfit to legislate for the vast manufacturing interests of Britain. For a while, however, declamation prevailed. A Committee of the House of Commons was appointed to inquire

into the effects of factory labour on children; and a mass of *ex parte* evidence was received, which was full of the grossest exaggerations and misstatements.

The investigations made by the Factory Commissioners, who the next year examined many of the mills, and questioned the workmen, and still more those of the Factory Inspectors appointed the same year, who have visited nearly every mill in the country, have amply proved that views above mentioned, of the nature and effects of labour in mills, contain but a very small portion of truth. That there have been instances of abuse and cruelty in some of the manufacturing establishments, is doubtless true; that the labour is not so healthful as labour in husbandry, must be at once admitted; and some children have unquestionably suffered from working beyond their strength. But abuse is the exception, not the rule. Factory labour is far less injurious than many of the most common employments of civilized life. It is much less irksome than that of the weaver, less arduous than that of the smith, less prejudicial to the lungs, the spine, and the limbs, than those of the shoemaker and tailor. Colliers, miners, forgemen, cutlers, machine-makers, masons, bakers, corn-millers, painters, plumbers, letter-press printers, potters, and many other classes of artisan and labourers, have employments which in one way or another are more inimical to health and longevity than the labour of cotton mills. Some classes of professional men, students, clerks in counting-houses, shopkeepers, milliners are subject to great, and in many cases to much greater, confinement and exhaustion than the mills operatives.

The human frame is liable to an endless variety of diseases. Many of the children who are born into the world, and attain the age of ten or twelve years, are so weakly, that under any circumstances they would die early. Such children would sink under factory labour, as they would under any other kind of labour, or even without labour. But it is no reasonable ground of objection to this or to any other employment, that is unsuited to delicate and infirm persons. If we would abandon every occupation which may accelerate the natural tendency to disease or decay, the most indispensable occupations of civilized men must be given up. The works of medical writers show us that there is no trade or occupation which might not be injurious to persons subject to one kind of weakness or another. A man who hesitated in his choice of trade till he found one which was free from all objection, would starve before he decided how he should live. Labour is the condition of subsistence; but there are many constitutions which cannot sustain labour; this the, is an evil of our destiny as men, and is not ground of complaint against necessary occupations. Food cannot be obtained without toil, but toil is a less evil than hunger: clothing cannot be made without exertion and application, but these are to be endured rather than nakedness. A physician might, if so disposed, get up a case against any employment of civilized or savage life, sufficient to excite public sympathy and abhorrence; but so long as men cannot live without working, they must work in spite of inconvenience.

These obvious truths, so nearly approaching to truisms, would not have been presented to my readers, if they had not been absolutely forgotten by many of the declaimers on factory labour, who have thought it sufficient to collect a few instances of deformity and injury out of nearly half a million of work people in the cotton, woolen, flax, and silk mills of Great Britain, and have then leaped to the conclusion, that their labour was dreadfully pernicious. I do not deny that such instances have occurred, but I

confidently deny that they have been in such numbers as to warrant the conclusion drawn from them.

In opposing one error, I shall endeavor not to fall into opposite error. I am far from contending that the labour mill is of the most agreeable and healthful kind; or that there have not been abuses in them, which required exposure and correction; or that legislative interference was not justifiable, to protect children of tender years from being overworked. It must be admitted that the hours of labour in cotton mills are long, being twelve hours a day on five days a week, and nine hours on Saturday: but the labour is light, and requires very little muscular exertion. Attention and gentle exercise are needed; the greater number of operatives are employed in clearing the cotton from the cards, - shifting the cans at the drawing frames - removing and replacing bobbins at the roving frames, thrustles, and mules - piecing the threads which break at those machines - sweeping up the waste cotton - adjusting the cloth in the power looms - winding, warping, and dressing the warp. The severest labour in mills is that of the women who clean the cotton by beating it with wands, but this is only in the fine spinning mills, machines being used for the purpose where the lower numbers are spun. The work of the spinners who are adult males requires moderate exertion and great care. It is not to represent the work of piecers, doffers as continually straining the faculties. None of the species of work in which the children and young persons are engaged in mills require constant attention; most of them admit even of the attention being remitted every few minutes and where the eye must be kept on the watch, habit makes the task of observation perfectly easy. It is scarcely possible for any employment to be lighter. The position of the body is not injurious: the general attitude is erect, but the children walk about, and have opportunity of frequently sitting if they are so disposed. On visiting mills, I have generally remarked the coolness and equanimity of the work-people, even of the children, whose manner seldom, as far as my observation goes, indicates anxious care and is more frequently sportive than gloomy. The noise and whirl of the machinery, which are unpleasant and confusing to a spectator unaccustomed to the scene produce not the slightest effect on the operatives habituated to it.

The only thing that makes factory life trying even to delicate children is, that they are confined for long hours, and deprived of fresh air: this makes them pale, and reduces their vigour, but it rarely brings on disease. The minute fibres of cotton which float in the rooms, and are called fly, are admitted, even by medical men, not to be injurious to young persons: it might have been supposed that they would have impeded respiration, or irritated the bronchial membrane, but extensive observation proves that they do so in very few cases. Workmen of more advanced years occasionally suffer from this cause: a “spinners’ phthisis” has been described by medical men, and it is attributed to the irritation produced by the dust and cotton inhaled: but it is admitted that the case are scarcely, if at all, more numerous than other employments.

Baines, E. (1835). *History of the Cotton Manufacture in Great Britain*. Retrieved from [http://books.google.com/books/about/History\\_of\\_the\\_cotton\\_manufacture\\_in\\_Gre.html?id=XXkBAAAAQAAJ](http://books.google.com/books/about/History_of_the_cotton_manufacture_in_Gre.html?id=XXkBAAAAQAAJ). pp. 452-457.