FACTORIES AND WORKSHOPS.

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

CHIEF INSPECTOR

OF

FACTORIES AND WORKSHOPS

For the Year 1808.

PART II.—REPORTS.

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The opinion of the workers, expressed to Miss Squire, that they were inhaling and coughing up silkworms thus received some support, and there is striking testimony from a keen medical observer in Italy over two centuries ago to the hazards that can be wrought by this ever-recurring tendency of a manufacturer to make his profits out of cheapened materials. In his De Morbis Artificiis (published 1670, translated into English 1705), Ramazzini wrote:

"Worst of all is the condition of those who comb the silk cakes that remain after the making of the silk in order to cut them into small pieces by being less damaged than the whole silk. For when the bams of the silkworms after being steeped in hot water are opened and unravelled by our women, and wound upon rods in small threads there are still some greater threads or filaments behind, which hang and form for the bodies of silkworms mixed with them; and of these they make a sort of cakes which they dry in the sun and give out to workmen to have drawn out into threads with small combs. Now the poor people that comb these cakes are usually troubled with a rheumatism cough, and a great difficulty of breathing, the lack of which makes them live to old age for the scarcity of air. The noticing that gives rise to this is owing to the eyes and nostrils of the silkworms that are mixed with the cakes.

"If a whole family in this city that got a good estate by the silk trades, and dyed madder by consumptions, the physicians imputing the cause of their insanity to the trade they were continually employed in.

"I usually recommend to the work of women a milk diet above all other things, there being nothing that more effectually corrects the corrosive and innoxious curiosity. But as long as they find their affection grows upon them: they must look out for another trade; for 'tis a sound profit that's accomplished with the destruction of health.'"

Would that our workers in dangerous industries could avoid the evils that beset them by following this last recommendation.

Miss Deane reports on the abundant evidence she has had of the evil effects of dust:

"In the majority of cases the evil is very insidious, and the general symptoms produced by dust on the various respiratory organs are to the lay mind so similar to those produced by other causes that it is not always easy to trace the connection. The increasing 'stony' throat, the irritation of the bronchial passages, the frequent 'colds' with the chest, the dry cough, and hoarse voice, and morning cough from it, are all symptoms of phthisis mediastinal which might be easily accounted for in other ways. One or two not cases of phthisis medically certified to be seriously arrested, if not induced, by work in rope factories, which came under my notice have been so striking that I may consider them the survivors of their mates—those who are found in every unhealthy industry, and who, like the Cossack poisons, appear to thrive on their unhealthy calling.

"In less obvious unhealthy conditions the only convincing proof of actual injury, viz., reliable comparative statistics of mortality, or of health standards, is practically unattainable in the case of any given factory, at any rate with the time and opportunity as present at our disposal."

Although, in accordance with regulations, questions relating to fencing of dangerous machinery are referred by H.M. Women Inspectors to H.M. Inspectors in charge of districts (99 cases of dangerous machinery having been so referred in 1898), considerable attention has, as hitherto, been given to various illustrations of the need of increasing security for workers at their employment. Often valuable suggestions can be gathered from study of the registers of accidents which occupiers are bound to keep in workshops as well as factories, and some cases of neglect to keep these useful records, for example, in arsenical works and laundries, we made the subject of proceedings.

In one case, with a view to obtaining penal compensation for a poor old woman needlessly injured in a laundry, I proceeded against the occupier, not only for failure to register and report the accident, but for failure to place such a barrier as would from the position of the machinery, which was over the well—some from near the incident. Greatly careless management had neglected not only this simple precaution, but had allowed pegs to be hung for outdoor garments immediately behind the moving part of the machine. It was the accidental setting in motion of the machine, when the old woman was behind it at the dinner hour for her shawl to go home, that caused the injury which disabled her for further following her occupation.

My attention has been called, by repeated reports from the Inspectors, to cases of injured workers being pressed to remain at work during the first three days after an injury which would not be severe if it was carefully attended to. Miss Squire especially reported serious consequences as following a comparatively slight accident at a tin cutting works. One girl, she said, had lost a finger by an operation some time after the accident which caused the present injury, and it was the opinion of the surgeon that, if the girl had rested and been cared for, she would not have suffered a loss which many are apt to forget is far more serious to a broad-warrior, who has only her hands to depend upon, than to others. I pressed, both in metallic capsule works and in skin-making works, are responsible for many of these minor accidents, which are often of grave consequence to the sufferer. I was much struck by the frequency of these.