

The Morning Chronicle's

LABOUR AND THE POOR

VOLUME II

THE METROPOLITAN DISTRICTS

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Cover Image:

Refuge—Applying for Admittance

From “London: A Pilgrimage”

William Blanchard Jerrold & Gustave Doré

Published 1872

Image courtesy of The British Library

“There are four hundred and odd creatures utterly destitute—mothers with infants at their breasts—fathers with boys holding by their side—the friendless—the penniless—the shirtless—shoeless—breadless—homeless; in a word, the very poorest of this the very richest city of the world.”

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Preface

This work attempts to be a faithful reproduction of the “Labour and the Poor” letters as printed in *The Morning Chronicle*. Only obvious typographical errors and omissions have been corrected. Variations in the spelling and hyphenation of words have largely been retained. We hope any such inconsistencies prove to be of some historical interest to the reader.

As much as possible we have tried to recreate the original layout and styling of the text and all factual tables have been reproduced as closely to the originals as possible with only minimal alterations made where necessary to improve readability.

Not all letters were titled. Where missing we have added titles to the Table of Contents to assist navigation and explanation of content. The letters themselves are as per the originals.

A handful of illustrations have been added to each volume. These did not appear in the original text but hopefully provide added interest.

R. W.
K. B.



Introduction

In 1849 a leading London-based newspaper, *The Morning Chronicle*, undertook an investigation into the working and living conditions of the poor throughout England and Wales in the hope that their findings might lead to much needed change.

The reputed catalyst for their “Labour and the Poor” series was an article written by Henry Mayhew recording a journey into Bermondsey, one of the most deprived districts of London, which was printed in September 1849. Following this it was proposed that an in-depth investigation be carried out and “Special Correspondents”, the investigators, were selected and distributed around the country. The first article or “Letter” appeared on the 18th of October 1849 and the series would run for almost 2 years and 222 letters.

The well-known and respected writers and journalists recruited for the task included Henry Mayhew who was assigned to the Metropolitan districts, Angus Bethune Reach to the Manufacturing districts, Alexander Mackay and Shirley Brooks to the Rural districts and Charles Mackay to investigate the cities of Birmingham and Liverpool. The author of the letters from Wales is as yet unknown.

The “Labour and the Poor” letters were extremely popular at the time, being widely read throughout the nation and even abroad. The revelations in them caused quite a stir amongst the middle and upper classes of Victorian society. *Letters to the Editor* poured in with donations for specific cases of distress that appeared in the letters and also for the general alleviation of the suffering of the poor. A special fund was set up by *The Morning Chronicle* to collect and distribute these donations.

These *Letters to the Editor* have been included in this series, predominantly in the Metropolitan district volumes whose letters elicited the majority of responses. They provide a unique window into the thoughts and sentiments of the Victorian readership as they react to the incredible accounts of misery and desperation being unveiled.

The Morning Chronicle's extraordinary and unsurpassed "Labour and the Poor" investigation provides an unparalleled insight into the people of the period, their living and working conditions, their feelings, their language, their sufferings and their struggles for survival amidst the poverty and destitution of 19th century Britain. An investigation of such magnitude had never before been attempted and the undertaking was truly of epic proportions. Its impact at the time was profound. Its historical importance today is without question.



LABOUR AND THE POOR.



THE METROPOLITAN DISTRICTS.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]

LETTER XIX.

The transition from the Artisan to the Labourer is curious in many respects. In passing from the skilled operative of the West-end to the unskilled workman of the Eastern quarter of London, the moral and intellectual change is so great that it seems as if we were in a new land and among another race. The artisans are almost to a man red-hot politicians. They are sufficiently educated and thoughtful to have a sense of their importance in the State. It is true they may entertain exaggerated notions of their natural rank and position in the social scale, but at least they have read and reflected, and argued upon the subject, and their opinions are entitled to consideration. The political character and sentiments of the working classes appear to me to be a distinctive feature of the age, and they are a necessary consequence of the dawning intelligence of the mass. As their minds expand they are naturally led to take a more enlarged view of their calling, and to contemplate their labours in relation to the whole framework of society. They begin to view their class not as a mere isolated body of workmen, but as an integral portion of the nation, contributing their quota to the general welfare. If PROPERTY has its duties as well as its rights, LABOUR, on the other hand, they say, has its rights as well as its duties. The artisans of London seem to be generally well informed upon these subjects. That they express their opinions violently, and often savagely, it is my duty to acknowledge; but that they are the unenlightened and unthinking body of people that they are generally considered by those who never go among them, and who see them only as "the dangerous classes," it is my duty, also, to deny. So far as my experience has gone, I am bound to confess that I have found the skilled labourers of the metropolis the very reverse, both morally and intellectually, of what the popular prejudice imagines them.

The unskilled labourers are a different class of people. As yet they are as unpolitical as footmen. Instead of entertaining violently democratic opinions, they appear to have no political opinions whatever—or, if they do possess any, they rather lean towards the maintenance “of things as they are,” than towards the ascendancy of the working people. I have lately been investigating the state of the *coal-whippers*, and these reflections are forced upon me by the marked difference in the character and sentiments of the people from those of the operative tailors. Among the latter class there appeared to be a general bias towards the six points of the Charter; but the former were extremely proud of their having turned out to a man on the 10th of April, 1848, and become special constables for the maintenance of “law and order” on the day of the great Chartist “Demonstration.” As to which of these classes are the better members of the State, it is not for me to offer an opinion. I merely assert a social fact. The artisans of the metropolis are intelligent and dissatisfied with their political position; the labourers of London appear to be the reverse, and, in passing from one class to the other, the change is so curious and striking that the phenomenon deserves at least to be recorded in this place.

The Labourers, in point of numbers, rank second on the Occupation list of the metropolis. The Domestic Servants, as a body of people, have the first numerical position, being as many as 168,000, while the Labourers are less than one-third that number, or 50,000 strong. They, however, are nearly twice as many as the Boot and Shoe Makers, who stand next upon the list, and muster 28,000 individuals among them; and they *more* than twice as many as the Tailors and Breeches Makers, who are fourth in regard to their number, and count 23,500 persons. After these come the Milliners and Dress Makers, who are 20,000 in number.

According to the Criminal Returns of the Metropolis (for a copy of which I am indebted to the courtesy of a gentleman who expresses himself most anxious to do all in his power to aid the inquiry), the Labourers occupy a most unenviable pre-eminence in police history. One in every twenty-eight Labourers, according to these Returns, has a predisposition for “simple larceny;” the average for the whole population of London is one in every 266 individuals; so that the Labourers may be said to be more than nine times as dishonest as the generality of people resident in the metropolis. In drunkenness they occupy the same prominent position. One in every 22 individuals of the labouring class was charged with being intoxicated in the year 1848; whereas the

average number of drunkards in the whole population of London is one in every 113 individuals. Nor are they less pugnaciously inclined; one in every 26 having been charged with a “common assault” of a more or less aggravated form. The labourers of London are therefore nine times as dishonest, five times as drunken, and nine times as savage, as the rest of the community. Of the state of their education as a body of people, I have no similar means of judging at present; nor am I in a position to test their improvidence or their poverty in the same conclusive manner. Taking, however, the Government returns of the number of labourers located in the different unions throughout the country at the time of taking the last census, I find that one in every 140 of the class were paupers, while the average for all England and Wales was one in every 159 persons; so that while the Government returns show the labourers generally to be extraordinarily dishonest, drunken, and pugnacious, their vices cannot be ascribed to the poverty of their calling, for, compared with other occupations, their avocation appears to produce fewer paupers than the generality of employments.

Of the moral and prudential qualities of the coalwhippers and coal-porters, as a special portion of the labouring population, the crude, undigested, and essentially unscientific character of all the Government returns will not allow me to judge. Even the census affords us little or no opportunity of estimating the numbers of the class. The only information to be obtained from that document—whose insufficiency is a national disgrace to us, for there the trading and working classes are all jumbled together in the most perplexing confusion, and the occupations classified in a manner that would shame the merest tyro in logic—is the following:—

Of coal and colliery agents and factors there are	16	individuals in London.
Ditto, dealers and merchants	1,541	”
Ditto, labourers, heavers and porters	1,700	”
Ditto, meters	136	”
	<hr/>	
Total in the coal trade in London	3,393	”
Deduct from this the number of merchants from the London Post-office Directory . . .	565	”
	<hr/>	
Hence there are in the metropolis	2,828	coal labourers.

But this is far from an accurate result. There are at present in London upwards of 1,900 (say 2,000) registered coalwhippers, and as many more coal “backers” or porters. These altogether would give as many as 4,000 coal labourers. Besides there are 150 meters; so that altogether it may be safely said that the number engaged in the whipping and portage of coals in London, is 4,000 and odd.

The following statistics, carefully collected from official returns, will furnish our readers with some idea of the amazing increase in the importation of coal:—

“About 300 years ago (say about 1550), one or two ships were sufficient for the demand and supply of London. In 1615, about 200 were equal to its demand; in 1705, about 600 ships were engaged in the London coal trade; in 1805, 4,856 cargoes, containing about 1,350,000 tons; in 1820, 5,884 cargoes, containing 1,692,992 tons; in 1830, 7,108 cargoes, containing 2,079,275 tons; in 1840, 9,132 cargoes, containing 2,566,899 tons; in 1845, 2,695 ships were employed in carrying 11,987 cargoes, containing 3,403,320 tons; and during the past year (1848), 2,717 ships, making 12,267 voyages, and containing 3,418,340 tons. The increase in the importation during the last ten years—that is to say, from the year 1838 to 1848, when the respective importations were 2,518,085 tons, and 3,418,340 tons—is upwards of 90 per cent. Now, by taking 2,700 vessels as the actual number now employed, and by calculating such vessels to average 300 tons burden per ship, and giving to a vessel of that size a crew of eight men, it will appear that at the present time 21,600 seamen are employed in the carrying department of the London coal trade.”

Before visiting the district of Wapping, where the greater part of the coal labour is carried on, I applied to the Clerk and Registrar of the Coal Exchange for the statistics connected with the body of which he is an officer. Such statistics—as to the extent of their great traffic, the weekly returns of sales, in short, the ramifications of an inquiry embracing maritime, mercantile, mining, and labouring interests—are surely the weekly routine of the business of the Registrar’s office. I was promised a series of returns by the gentleman in question, but I did not receive, and could not obtain them. Another officer, the Secretary of the Meters’ office, when applied to, with the sanction of his co-officer, the Clerk and Registrar, required a written application, which should be attended to! I do not allude to these gentlemen with the slightest inclination unduly to censure them. The truth is, with questions affecting Labour and the Poor they have little sympathy.

The labourer, in their eyes, is but a machine; so many labourers are as so much horse-power. To deny, or withhold, or delay information required for the purposes of the present inquiry is, however, unavailing. The matter I have given, in fulness and in precision, without any aid from the gentlemen referred to—shows that it was more through courtesy than through necessity that I applied to them in the first instance.

Finding my time therefore only wasted in dancing attendance upon City coal officials, I made the best of my way down to the Coal-Whippers' Office, to glean my information among the men themselves. The following is the result of my inquiries:—

The coal vessels are principally moored in that part of the river called the Pool.

The Pool, rightly so called, extends from Ratcliff-cross, near the Regent's-canal, to Execution-dock, and is about a mile long, but the jurisdiction of the Coal Commissioners reaches from the arsenal at Woolwich to London-bridge. The Pool is divided into the Upper and Lower Pool: it is more commonly called the north and south-side, because the colliers are arranged on the Ratcliff and Shadwell side in the Lower Pool, and on the Redriff and Rotherhithe side in the Upper. The Lower Pool consists of seven tiers, which generally contain each from 14 to 20 ships; these are moored stern to stern, and lie from seven to ten abreast. The Upper Pool contains about ten tiers. The four tiers at Mill-hole are equally large with the tiers of the Lower Pool. Those of Church-hole, which are three in number, are somewhat smaller; and those of the fast tiers, which are also three in number, are single, and not double tiers, like the rest. The fleet often consists of from 200 to 300 ships. In the winter it is the largest—many of the colliers in the summer season going foreign voyages. An easterly wind prevents the vessels making their way to London; and, if continuing for any length of time, will throw the whole of the coal-whippers out of work. In the winter the coal-whipper is occupied about five days out of eight, and about three days out of eight in the summer; so that, taking it all the year round, he is only about half of his time employed. As soon as a collier arrives at Gravesend, the captain sends the ship's papers up to the factor at the Coal Exchange, informing him of the quality and quantity of coal in the ship. The captain then falls into some tier near Gravesend, and remains there until he is ordered nearer London by the harbour-master. When the coal is sold, and the ship supplied with the coal meter, the captain receives orders from the harbour-

master to come up into the Pool, and take his berth in a particular tier. The captain, when he has moored the ship into the Pool, as directed, applies at "the coalwhippers' office," and "the gang" next in rotation is sent to him.

There are upwards of 200 gangs of coalwhippers. The class—supernumeraries included—numbers about 2,000 individuals. The number of meters is 150; the consequence is, that more than one-fourth of the gangs are unprovided with meters to work with them. Hence there are upwards of fifty gangs (of nine men each) of coalwhippers—or, altogether, 450 men more than there is any real occasion for. The consequence is, that each coalwhipper is necessarily thrown out of employ one quarter of his time by the excess of hands. The cause of this extra number of hands being kept on the books is, that when there is a glut of vessels in the river, the coal merchants may not be delayed in having their cargoes delivered from want of whippers. When such a glut occurs, the merchant has it in his power to employ a private meter; so that the 450 to 500 men are kept on the year through, merely to meet the particular exigency, and to promote the merchants' convenience. Did any good arise from this system to the public, the evil might be overlooked; but since, owing to the combination of the coal-factors, no more coals can come into the market than are sufficient to meet the demand *without lowering the price*, it is clear that the extra 450 or 500 men are kept on and allowed to deprive their fellow-labourers of one quarter of their regular work as whippers, without any advantage to the public.

The coalwhippers, previously to the passing of the act of Parliament in 1843, were employed and paid by the publicans in the neighbourhood of the river, from Tower-hill to Limehouse. Under this system none but the most dissolute and intemperate obtained employment—in fact, the more intemperate they were the more readily they found work. The publicans were the relatives of the northern shipowners; they mostly had come to London penniless, and being placed in a tavern by their relatives, soon became shipowners themselves. There were at that time 70 taverns on the north side of the Thames, below bridge, employing coalwhippers, and all of the landlords making fortunes out of the earnings of the people. When a ship came to be "made up"—that is, for the hands to be hired—the men assembled round the bar in crowds, and began calling for drink, and outbidding each other in the extent of their orders, so as to induce the landlord to give them employment. If one called for beer, the

next would be sure to give an order for rum; for he who spent most at the public-house had the greatest chance of employment. After being "taken on," their first care was to put up a score at the public-house, so as to please their employer, the publican. In the morning, before going to their work, they would invariably call at the house for a quarter of gin or rum; and they were obliged to take off with them to the ship "a bottle" holding nine pots of beer—and that of the worst description, for it was the invariable practice among the publicans to supply the coalwhippers with the very worst article at the highest prices. When the men returned from their work they went back to the public-house, and there remained drinking the greater part of the night. He must have been a very steady man indeed, I am told, who could manage to return home sober to his wife and family. The consequence of this was, the men used to pass their days and chief part of their nights drinking in the public-house, and I am credibly informed that frequently, on the publican settling with them after clearing the ship, instead of having anything to receive, they were brought in several shillings in debt; this remained as a score for the next ship—in fact, it was only those who were in debt to the publican who were sure of employment on the next occasion. One publican had as many as fifteen ships; another had even more; and there was scarcely one of them without his two or three colliers. The children of the coalwhippers were almost reared in the tap-room, and a person who has had great experience in the trade tells me he knew as many as 500 youths who were transported, and as many more who met with an untimely death. At one house there were forty young robust men employed about seventeen years ago, and of these there are only two living at present. My informant tells me that he has frequently seen as many as 100 men at one time fighting pell-mell at King James's-stairs, and the publican standing by to see fair play. The average money spent in drink by each man was about 12s. to each ship. There were about 10,000 ships entered the Pool every year, and nine men were required to clear each ship. This made the annual expenditure of the coalwhippers in drink £54,000, or £27 a year per man. This is considered an extremely low average. The wives and families of the men at this time were in the greatest destitution: the daughters invariably became prostitutes, and the mothers ultimately went to swell the number of paupers at the union. This state of things continued till 1843, when, by the efforts of three of the coalwhippers, the Legislature was induced to pass an act forbidding the system, and appointing commissioners for the registration

and regulation of coalwhippers in the port of London, and so establishing an office where the men were in future employed and paid. Under this act every man then following the calling of a coalwhipper was to be registered. For this registration 4d. was to be paid; and every man desirous of entering upon the same business had to pay the same sum, and to have his name registered. The employment is open to any labouring man; but every new hand, after registering himself, must work for twenty-one days on half-pay before he is considered to be "broken in," and entitled to take rank and receive pay as a regular coalwhipper. All the coalwhippers are arranged in gangs of eight whippers, with a basket-man or foreman. These gangs are numbered from 1 up to 218, which is the highest number at the present time. The basket-men, or foremen, enter their names in a rotation-book kept in the office, and as their names stand in that book so do they take their turn to clear the next ship that is offered. On a ship being offered, a printed form of application, kept in the office, is filled up by the captain, in which he states the number of tons, the price, and time in which she is to be delivered. If the gang whose turn of work it is refuse the ship at the price offered, then it is offered to all the gangs, and if accepted by any other gang the next in rotation may claim it as their right, before all others. In connection with the office there is a long hall extending from the street to the water side, where the men wait to take their turn. There is also a room called the basket-men's room, where the foremen of the gang remain in attendance. There is likewise a floating pier called a *depôt*, which is used as a receptacle for the tackle with which the colliers are unloaded. This floating pier is fitted up with seats, where the men wait in the summer. The usual price at present for delivering the colliers is 8d. per ton, but in case of a less price being offered, and the gangs all refusing it, then the captain is at liberty to employ any hands he pleases. According to the act, however, the owner or purchaser of the coals is at liberty to employ his own servants, provided they have been in his service fourteen clear days previous, and so have become what the act terms *bonâ fide* servants. This is very often taken advantage of for the purpose of obtaining labourers at a less price. One lighter-man, who is employed by the gas companies to "lighter" their coals to their various destinations, makes a practice of employing parties whom he calls the *bonâ fide* servants of the gas companies to deliver the coals at 1d. per ton less than the regular price. Besides this, he takes one man's pay to himself, and so stops one-tenth of the whole proceeds, thereby realizing,

as he boasts, the sum of £300 per annum. Added to this, a relative of his keeps a beer-shop, where the "*bonâ fide* servants" spend the chief part of their earnings, thereby bringing back the old system which was the cause of so much misery and destitution to the workpeople. According to the custom of the trade, the rate at which a ship is to be delivered is 49 tons per day, and if the ship cannot be delivered at that rate, owing to the merchant failing to send craft to receive the coals, then the coalwhippers are entitled to receive pay at the rate of 49 tons per day for each day they are kept in the ship over and above the time allowed by the custom of the trade for the delivery of the coals. The merchants, however, if they should have failed to send craft, and so kept the men idle on the first days of the contract, can, by the by-laws of the commissioners, compel the coalwhippers to deliver the ship at the rate of 98 tons per day. This appears to be a gross injustice to the men, for if they can be compelled to make up for the merchant's loss of time at the rate of 98 tons per day, the merchants surely should be made to pay for the loss of time to the men at the same rate. The wrong done by this practice is rendered more apparent by the conduct of the merchants during the brisk and slack periods. When there is a slack the merchants are all anxious to get their vessels delivered as fast as they can, because coals are wanting, and are consequently at a high price; then the men are taxed beyond their power, and are frequently made to deliver from 150 to 200 tons per day, or to do four days' work in one. On the contrary, when there is a glut of ships, and the merchants are not particularly anxious about the delivery of their coals, the men are left to idle away their time upon the decks for the first two or three days of the contract, and then forced to the same extra exertion for the last two or three days, in order to make up for the lost time of the merchant, and so save him from being put to extra expense by his own neglect. The cause of the injustice of these by-laws may be fairly traced to the fact of there being several coal-merchants among the commissioners, who are entrusted with the formation of by-laws and regulations of the trade. The coal-factors are generally ship-owners, and occasionally pit-owners; and when a glut of ships come in they combine together to keep up the prices, especially in the winter time, for they keep back the cargoes, and only offer such a number of ships as will not influence the market. Since the passing of the act establishing the coalwhippers' office, and thus taking the employment and pay of the men out of the hands of the publicans, so visible has been the improvement in the whole character of the

labourers, that they have raised themselves in the respect of all who know them.

Within the last few years they have established a benefit society, and they expended in the year 1847, according to the last account, £646 odd in the relief of the sick and the burial of the dead. They have also established a superannuation fund, out of which they allow 5s. per week to each member who is incapacitated from old age or accident. They are, at the present time, paying such pensions to twenty members. At the time of the celebrated Chartist demonstration on the 10th of April, the coalwhippers were, I believe, the first class of persons who spontaneously offered their services as special constables.

Further than this, they have established a school with accommodation for 600 scholars, out of their small earnings. On one occasion, as much as £80 were collected among the men for the erection of this institution.

The men are liable to many accidents. Some fall off the plank into the hold of the vessel, and are killed; others are injured by large lumps of coal falling on them; and indeed, so frequent are these disasters, that the commissioners have directed that the indivisible fraction which remains, after dividing the earnings of the men into nine equal parts, should be applied to the relief of the injured; and although the fund raised by these insignificant means amounts in the course of the year to £30 or £40, the whole is absorbed by the calamities.

Furnished with this information, as to the general character and regulations of the calling, I then proceeded to visit one of the vessels in the river, so that I might see the nature of the labour performed. No one on board the vessel (the —, of Newcastle) was previously aware of my visit, or its object. I took the first ship which offered. I need not describe the vessel, as my business is with the London labourers in the coal trade. It is necessary, however, in order to show the nature of the labour of coal-whipping, that I should state that the average depth of coal in the hold of a collier, from ceiling to combing, is 16 feet, while there is an additional 7 feet higher to be lifted to the *basket-man's* "boom," which makes the height that the coals have to be raised by the whippers from 23 to 30 feet. The complement of a *gang of coal-whippers* is nine. In the hold are four men, who relieve each other in filling a basket—only one basket being in use—with coal. The labour of these four men is arduous; so exhausting is it in hot weather, that their usual attire is found to be cumbrous, and they have often to work merely in their trowsers or drawers. As fast as these four

men in the hold fill the basket, which holds $1\frac{1}{4}$ cwt., four *whippers* draw it up. This is effected in a peculiar, and to a person unused to the contemplation of the process, really an impressive manner. The four whippers stand on the deck, at the foot of what is called "a way." This way resembles a short rude ladder; it is formed of four broken oars lashed lengthways, from four to five feet in height (giving a step from oar to oar of more than a foot), while the upright spars to which they are attached are called "a derrick." At the top of this derrick is "a gin," which is a revolving wheel, to which the ropes holding the basket "filled" and "whipped" are attached. The process is thus one of manual labour with mechanical aid. The basket having been filled in the hold, the whippers, correctly guessing the time required for the filling—for they never look down into the hold—skip up the "way," holding the ropes attached to the basket and the gin, and pulling the ropes, at two skips, simultaneously as they ascend. They thus hoist the loaded basket some height out of the hold, and when hoisted so far, jump down, keeping exact time in their jump, from the topmost beam of "the way" on to the deck, so giving the momentum of their bodily weight to the motion communicated to the basket. While the basket is influenced by this motion and momentum, the basket-man, who is stationed on a plank flung across the hold, seizes the basket, runs on with it (the gin revolving) to "the boom," and shoots the contents into "the weighing-machine." The boom is formed of two upright poles, with a cross pole attached by way of step, on to which the basket-man vaults, and rapidly reversing the basket, empties it. This process is very quickly effected, for if the basket-man did not avail himself of the swing of the basket, the feat would be almost beyond a man's strength—or at least, he would soon be exhausted by it.

The "machine" is a large coalscuttle, or wooden box, attached to a scale, connected with $2\frac{1}{2}$ cwt.; when the weight is raised by two deposits in the machine, the coal-meter, who stands the whole time by the machine, which hangs over the side of the ship, discharges it, by pulling a rope connected with it, down a sliding wooden plane into the barge below. The machine holds $2\frac{1}{2}$ cwt., and so the meter registers the weight of coal unladen. This process is not only remarkable for its celerity, but for another characteristic. Sailors, when they have to "pull away" together, generally time their pulling to some rude chant; their "Yo, heave, yo" is thought not only to regulate, but to mitigate, the weight of their labour. The coalwhippers do their work in perfect silence; they do it, indeed, *like work*, and hard work, too. The basket-

man and the meter are equally silent, so that nothing is heard but the friction of the ropes, the discharge of the coal from the basket into the machine, and from the machine into the barge. The usual amount of work done by the whippers in a day (but not as an average—not one day with another) is to unload, or “whip,” 98 tons. To whip one ton, 16 basketfuls are required; so that to whip a single ton, these men jump up and down 144 feet; for a day’s work of 98 tons they jump up and down 13,088 feet—more in some instances, for in the largest ships the “way” has five steps, and ten men are employed. The coal whippers, therefore, raise $1\frac{1}{4}$ cwt. very nearly four miles high, or twice as high as a balloon ordinarily mounts in the air; and in addition to this the coal whippers themselves ascend very nearly $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile perpendicularly in the course of the day. On some days they whip upwards of 150 tons, 200 have been whipped, when double this labour must be gone through. The 98 tons take about seven hours. The basket-man’s work is the most critical, and accidents, from his falling into the hold, are not very unfrequent. The complement of men for the unlading of a vessel is, as I have said, nine; four in the hold, four whippers, and the basket-man. The meter forms a tenth, but he acts independently of the others. They seldom work by candlelight, and, whenever possible, avoid working in very bad weather, but the merchant, as I have shown, has great power in regulating their labour for his own convenience. The following statement was given to me by a coalwhipper on board this vessel:—“We should like better wages, but then we have enemies. Now suppose you, sir, are a coal merchant, and this gentleman here freights a ship of the captain—you understand me? The man who freights the ships that way is paid by the captain 9d. a ton for a gang of nine men, such as you’ve seen—nine coalwhippers. But these nine men, you understand me, are paid by the merchant (or buyer) only 8d. a ton, so that by every ton he clears a penny, without any labour or trouble whatsoever. I and my fellows is dissatisfied, but can’t help ourselves. This merchant, too, you understand me, finds there’s rather an opening in the act of Parliament about whippers. By employing a man, as his servant, on his premises for fourteen days, *he’s* entitled to work as a coalwhipper. We call such made whippers ‘*boneyfides*.’ There’s lots of them, and plenty more would be made if we was to turn rusty. I’ve heard, you understand me, of driving a coach through an act of Parliament, but here they drive a whole fleet through it.” The coalwhippers all present the same aspect—they are all black. In summer, when the men strip more to their work, perspiration causes

the coal dust to adhere to the skin, and blackness is more than ever the rule. All about the ship partakes of the grimness of the prevailing hue. The sails are black; the gilding on the figurehead of the vessel becomes blackened; and the very visitor feels his complexion soon grow sable. The dress of the whippers is of every description; some have fustian jackets, some have sailors' jackets, some loose great coats, some Guernsey frocks. Many of them work in strong shirts, which once were white, with a blue stripe. Loose cotton neckerchiefs are generally worn by the whippers. All have black hair and black whiskers, no matter what the original hue; to the more stubbly beards and moustachios the coal dust adheres freely between the bristles, and may even be seen, now and then, to glitter in the light amidst the hair. The barber, one of these men told me, charged nothing extra for shaving him, although the coal dust must be a formidable thing to the best-tempered razor. In approaching a coal ship in the river, the side has to be gained over barges lying alongside—the coal crackling under the visitor's feet. He must cross them to reach a ladder of very primitive construction, up which the deck is to be reached. It is a jest among the Yorkshire seamen that everything is black in a collier—'specially the soup! When the men are at work in whipping or filling, the only spot of white discernible on their hands is a portion of the nails.

There are no specific hours for the payment of these men; they are entitled to their money as soon as their work is reported to be completed. Nothing can be better than the way in which the whippers are now paid. The basket-man enters the office of the pay-clerk of the coal commission at one door, and hands over an adjoining counter an amount of money he has received from the captain. The pay-clerk ascertains that the amount is correct. He then divides the sum into nine portions, and, touching a spring to open a door, he cries out for "Gang such a number." The nine men who, with many others, are in attendance in rooms provided for them adjacent to the pay-office, appear immediately, and are paid off. I was present when nine whippers were paid for the discharge of 363½ tons. The following was the work done, and the remuneration received:—

	Day.	Tons.
Dec. 14	..... 1st	..... 35
„ 15	..... 2d	..... 56
	(Sunday intervenes.)	
„ 17	..... 3d	..... 84
„ 18	..... 4th	..... 98
„ 19	..... 5th	..... 90 $\frac{1}{2}$
		363 $\frac{1}{2}$

These 363 $\frac{1}{2}$ tons, at 8d. per ton, realised to each man, for five days' work, £1 6s. 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ d., 10s. of which had been paid to each as subsistence money during the progress of the work. In addition to the sum so paid to each, there was deducted a farthing in every shilling as office fees, to defray the various expenses of the office. From this farthing reduction, moreover, the basket-man is paid 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in the pound as commission for bringing the money from the captain. Out of the sum to be divided on the occasion I specify, there was an indivisible fraction of 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. This, as it cannot be shared among nine men, goes to what is called "The Fraction Fund," which is established for the relief of persons suffering from accidents on board coal-ships. These indivisible fractions realise between £30 and £40 yearly.

Connected with the calling of the *whippers*, I may mention the existence of the *purlmen*. These are men who carry kegs of malt liquor in boats, and retail it afloat, having a license from the Watermen's Company to do so. In each boat is a small iron grating containing a fire, so that any customer can have the "chill off," should he require that luxury. The purlman rings a bell to announce his visit to the men on board. There are several purlmen who keep rowing all day about the coal fleet; they are not allowed to sell spirits. In a fog, the glaring of the fire in the purlmen's boats, discernible on the river, has a curious effect, nothing but the fire being visible.

I was now desirous of obtaining some information from the men collectively. Accordingly I entered the basket-men's waiting-room, where a large number of them were "biding their turn," and no sooner had I made my appearance in the hall, and my object become known to the men than a rush was made from without, and the door was obliged to be bolted to prevent the overcrowding of the room. As it was, the place was crammed so full that the light was completely blocked by the men piled up on the seats and lockers, and standing before the windows. The room was thus rendered so dark that I was

obliged to have the gas lighted in order to see to take my notes, I myself was obliged to mount the opposite locker to take the statistics of the meeting.

There were 86 present. To show how many had no employment whatever last week, 45 hands were held up. 1 had no employment for a fortnight; 24 no work for 8 days. The earnings they represented to be these last week: 8 received 20s.; 16 between 15s. and 20s.; 17 between 10s. and 15s.; 10 between 5s. and 10s.; 1 received under 5s.; 12 received nothing. The average of employment as to time is this: None are employed for 30 weeks during the year; all for 25 weeks or upwards, realizing 12s., perhaps, yearly per week—so many of the men said; but the office returns show 15s. 1½d. as the average for the last nine months. Waterage costs the whippers an average of 6d. a week the year through: waterage means the conveyance from the vessels to the shore. Fourteen of the men had wives or daughters, who work at slop needlework, the husbands being unable to maintain the family by their own labour. A coalwhipper stated that there were more of the wives of the coalwhippers idle, because they couldn't get work, than were at work. *All* the wives and daughters would have worked if they could have got it. "Why, your honour," one man said, "we are better off in this office than under the old system. We were then compulsory drunkards, and often in debt to a publican after clearing the ship." The men employed generally spent from 12s. to 15s. a week. Those unemployed had abundant credit at the publican's. One man said, "I worked for a publican, who was also a butcher; one week I had to pay 9s. for drink, and 11s. for meat, and he said I hadn't spent sufficient. I was one of his constant men." At the time a ship was cleared, the whipper had often nothing to take home. "Nothing but sorrow," said one. The publican swept all; and some publicans would advance 2s. 6d. towards the next job, to allow a man to live. Many of the whippers now do not drink at all. The average of the drinking among the men, when at hard work, does not exceed three half-pints a day. The grievances that once afflicted the coalwhipper are still felt by the ballast-men. The men all stated the fact as to the 9d. allowed, and the 8d. per ton paid for whipping. They all represented that a lighterman, engaged by the gas companies, was doing them great injury by employing a number of *bona fides*, and taking the best ships away from the regular office, and giving them to the *bona fides*, who "whip" the vessel at a lower rate of wages—about 6d. a ton. He is connected with a beer-shop, and the men are expected to buy his beer. If this man gets

on with his system (all the men concurred in stating), the bad state of things prevailing under the publicans' management might be brought back. Sixteen years ago each whipper received 11¼d. per ton, prices steady, and the men in union. "If it wasn't for this office," one man said, "not one man who worked sixteen years ago would be alive now." The union was broken up about twelve years ago, and prices fell and fluctuated down as low as 6d., and even 5½d.—sometimes rising and falling 1¼d. a week. The prices continued fluctuating until the present office was established in 1844. The shipowners and merchants agreed at the commencement of the office to give the whippers 9d. a ton, and in three months reduced it to 8d. The publicans, it was stated, formed themselves into a compact body for the purpose of breaking down the present system, and they introduced hundreds of fresh hands to undersell the regular workers. In 1847 wages rose again to 9d., the whippers appealing to the trade, urging the high price of provisions, and their appeal being allowed. This 9d. a ton continued until the 1st June last. At that time the *bonafides* were generally introduced and greatly increased, and getting three times the work the regular men did, they (the regular men) consented again to lower the prices. The *bonafides* are no better off than the regular hands; for, though they have much more work, they have less per ton, and have to spend more in drink. The coalwhippers represented themselves as benefited by the cheapness of provisions. With dear provisions, they couldn't, at their present earnings, live at all. The removal of the backing system had greatly benefited the whippers. On being asked how many had things in pawn, there was a general laugh, and a cry of "All of us." It is common to pawn a coat on Monday and take it out on Saturday night, paying a month's interest. One man said, "I have now in pawn seven articles, all wearing apparel, my wife's or my own, from 15s. down to 9d." Four had in pawn goods to the amount of £5 and upwards, five to £4, six to £3, thirteen to £2, thirteen to £1; under £1, nineteen; five had nothing in pawn. When asked if all made a practice of pawning their coats during the week, there was a general assent. Some could not redeem them in time to attend church or chapel on a Sunday. One man said that if all his effects were burnt in his absence he would lose no wearing apparel. "Our children under the old system were totally neglected (they said); the public-house absorbed everything." Under that system as many as 500 of the children of coalwhippers were transported; now that has entirely ceased; those charged with crime now were reared under the old system. "The Legislature never did a better

thing than to emancipate us (said the man); they have the blessings and prayers of ourselves, our wives, and children.”

After the meeting I was furnished with the following accounts, of which I have calculated the averages:—

ACCOUNT OF BASKET-MAN.—FIRST QUARTER, FROM
JANUARY 2, 1849, TO MARCH 28.

Employed	50 days	
Delivered	2,570¼ tons	
Amount earned, at 9d. per ton	£10 15 2½	
Deduct expenses of office	4s. 6d.	} 0 12 10
Ditto waterage	8s. 4d.	
		<hr/> £10 2 4½
Average weekly earnings, about		<hr/> 0 16 6

SECOND QUARTER—APRIL 7 TO JUNE 30.

Employed	44 days	
Delivered	2,609 tons	
Amount earned, at 9d. per ton	£10 10 8	
Deduct waterage	7s. 4d.	} 0 11 8
Office expenses	4s. 4d.	
		<hr/> £9 19 0
Average weekly earnings		<hr/> 0 15 3½

THIRD QUARTER—JULY 4 TO SEPTEMBER 24.

Employed	42 days	
Delivered	2,485 tons	
Amount earned, at 8d. per ton	£9 4 4¾	
Deduct waterage	7s. 0d.	} 0 10 10¼
Office dues	3s. 10¼d.	
		<hr/> £8 13 6½
Average weekly earnings		<hr/> 0 14 2

FOURTH QUARTER—OCTOBER 4 TO DECEMBER 20.

Employed	49 days	
Delivered	2,858½ tons	
Amount earned, at 8d. per ton	£9 16 4¾	
Deduct waterage	8s. 2d.	} 0 12 3¾
Office expenses	4s. 1¾d.	
		<hr/> £9 4 1
Average weekly earnings		<hr/> 0 14 1¾

First quarter	£10 2 4½
Second quarter	9 19 0
Third quarter	8 13 6½
Fourth quarter	9 4 1
	<hr/>
	£37 19 0
	<hr/>
Average weekly earnings	0 14 6
	<hr/>
Employed—First quarter	50 days
Second quarter	44 "
Third quarter	42 "
Fourth quarter	49 "
	<hr/>
	185 days
	<hr/>
Idle	180 days
	<hr/>

SECOND ACCOUNT, 1848.—COALWHIPPER.

Employed	193 days
Delivered	11,573¾ tons
Amount earned, at 9d. per ton	£46 15 10¾
Deduct waterage	1 12 2
	<hr/>
Gross earnings	£45 3 8¾
	<hr/>
Average weekly	0 17 4½
	<hr/>

1849.

Employed	168 days
Delivered	9,874½ tons
Amount earned	£37 19 0
Deduct waterage	1 8 0
	<hr/>
Gross earnings	£36 11 0
	<hr/>
Average weekly earnings	0 14 0½

The above accounts are rather above than under the average.

I then proceeded to take the statement of some of the different classes of the men. The first was a coalwhipper whom the men had selected as one knowing more about their calling than the generality. He told me as follows:—

“I am about forty, and am a married man with a family of six children. I worked under the old system, and that to my sorrow. If I had been paid in money, according to the work I then did, I could have averaged 30s. a week. Instead of receiving that amount in money I was compelled to spend in drink 15s. to 18s. a week (when work was

good), and the publican even then gave me the residue very grudgingly, and often kept me from eleven to twelve on Saturday night before he would pay me. The consequences of this system were that I had a miserable home to go to. I would often have faced Newgate as soon. My health did not suffer, because I didn't drink the liquor I was forced to pay for. I gave most of it away. The liquors were beer, rum, and gin; all prepared the night before, adulterated shamefully for our consumption, as we durstn't refuse it, and durstn't even grumble. The condition of my poor wife and children was then most wretched. Now the thing is materially altered, thank God; my wife and children can go to chapel at certain times, when work is pretty good and our things are not in pawn. By the strictest economy I can do middling well—very well when compared with what things were. When the new system first came into operation I felt almost in a new world. I felt myself a free man. I wasn't compelled to drink. My home assumed a better aspect, and keeps it still. Last Monday night I received 19s. 7d. for my work (five days) in the previous week. I shall now (Thursday) have to wait until Monday next before I can get to work at my business. Sometimes I get a job in idle times at the docks or otherwise, and wish I could get more. I may make one week with another, by odd jobs, 1s. a week. Perhaps for months I can't get a job. All that time I have no choice but to be idle. One week with another, the year through (at 8d. per ton), I may earn 14s. The great evil is the uncertainty of the work. We have all to take our 'rotation.' This uncertainty has this effect upon many of the men—they are compelled to live on credit. One day a man may receive 19s., and be idle for eight days after. Consequently, we go to the dealer where we have credit. The chandler supplies me with bread, to be paid for next pay day, charging me a halfpenny a loaf more. A man with a wife and family of six children, as I have, will consume sixteen or seventeen quartern loaves a week, consequently he has to pay 8d. a week extra on account of the irregularity or uncertainty. My 'rotation' would come much oftener but for the backing system and the *bona fides*. I also pay the butcher from ½d. to 1d. per lb. extra for credit when my family requires meat—sometimes a bit of mutton, sometimes a bit of beef. I leave that to the wife, who does it with economy. I this way pay the butcher 6d. a week extra. The additional cost to me of the other articles, cheese, butter, soap, &c., which I get on credit, will be 6d. a week. Altogether that will be £3 18s. a year. My rent for a little house, with two nice little rooms, is 3s. per week, so that the extra charge for credit would just

pay my rent. Many coalwhippers deal with tally-men for their wearing apparel, and have to pay enormous prices. I have had dealings with a tally-man, and suffered for it, but, for all that, I must make application for a supply of blankets from him for my family this winter. I paid him 45s. for wearing apparel—a shawl for my wife, some dresses for the children, a blanket, and other things. Their intrinsic value was 30s. Many of us, indeed most of us, if not all of us, are always putting things in and out of the pawnshops. I know I have myself paid more than 10s. a year for interest to the pawnbroker. I know some of my fellow-workmen who pay nearly £5 a year. I once put in a coat that cost me £3 12s. I could only get 30s. on it. I was never able to redeem it, and lost it. The articles lost by the coal-whippers, pledged at the pawnshop, are three out of four. There are 2,000 coal-whippers, and I am sure that each has 50s. in pawn, making £5,000 in a year. Interest may be paid on one-half this amount, £2,500. The other half of the property, at least, is lost. As the pawnbroker only advances one-third of the value, the loss in the forfeiture of the property is £7,500, and in interest £2,500, making a total of £10,000 lost every year, greatly through the uncertainty of labour. A coalwhipper's life is one of debt and struggles—it is a round of relieving, paying, and credit. We very rarely have a halfpenny in the pocket when we meet our credit. If any system could possibly be discovered which would render our work and our earnings more certain, and our payments more frequent, it would benefit us as much as we have been benefited by the establishment of the office." I visited this man's cottage, and found it neat and tidy; his children looked healthy. The walls of the lower room were covered with some cheap prints; a few old books—well worn, as if well used—were to be seen; and everything evinced a man who was struggling bravely to rear a large family well on small means. I took the family at a disadvantage, moreover, as washing was going on.

Hearing that accidents were frequent among the class, I was anxious to see a person who had suffered by the danger of the calling. A man was brought to me with his hand bound up in his handkerchief. The sleeve of his coat was ripped open, and dangled down beside his injured arm. He walked lame, and on my inquiring whether his leg was hurt, he began pulling up his trowsers, and unlacing his boot, to show me that it had not been properly set. He had evidently once been a strong muscular man, but little now remained as evidence of his physical power but the size of his bones. He furnished me with the following statement:—"I was a coalwhipper. I had a wife and two

children. Four months ago, coming off my day's work, my foot slipped, and I fell and broke my leg. I was taken to the hospital, and remained there ten weeks. At the time of my accident I had no money at all by me, but was in debt to the amount of 10s. to my landlord. I had a little furniture and a few clothes of myself and wife. While I was in the hospital I did not receive anything from our benefit society, because I had not been able to keep up my subscription. My wife and children lived, while I was in the hospital, by pawning my things, and going from door to door, to every one she knowed, to give her a bit. The men who worked in the same gang as myself made up 4s. 6d. for me, and that, with two loaves of bread that they had from the relieving-officer, was all they got. While I was in the hospital the landlord seized for rent the few things that my wife had not pawned, and turned her and my two little children into the street—one was a boy three years old, and the other a baby just turned ten months. My wife went to her mother, and she kept her and my little ones for three weeks, till she could do so no longer. My mother, poor old woman, was most as bad off as we were. My mother only works on the ground—out in the country at gardening. She makes about 7s. a week in the summer, and in the winter she has only 9d. a day to live upon; but she had at least a shelter for her child, and she willingly shared that with her daughter and her daughter's children. She pawned all the clothes she had, to keep them from starving—but at last everything was gone from the poor old woman, and then I got my brother to take my family in. My brother worked at garden work, the same as my mother-in-law did. He made about 15s. a week in the summer, and about half that in the winter time. He had a wife and two children of his own, and found it hard enough to keep them, as times go. But still he took us all in, and shared what he had with us, rather than let us go to the workhouse. When I was told not to leave the hospital, which I was forced to do upon my crutches, for my leg was very bad still, my brother took me in too. He had only one room, but he got in a bundle of straw for me, and we lived and slept there for seven weeks. He got credit for more than £1 of bread, and tea, and sugar for us; and now he can't pay, and the man threatens to summon him for it. After I left my brother's, I came to live in the neighbourhood of Wapping, for I thought I might manage to do a day's work at coalwhipping, and I couldn't bear to live upon his little earnings any longer—he could scarcely keep himself then. At last I got a ship to deliver, but I was too weak to do the work, and in pulling at the ropes, my hand got sore, and festered,

for want of nourishment. [He took the handkerchief off, and showed that it was covered with plaster. It was almost white from deficient circulation.] After this I was obliged to lay up again, and that's the only job of work I have been able to do for this last four months. My wife can't do anything; she is a delicate sickly little woman as well, and has the two little children to mind, and to look after me likewise. I had one pennyworth of bread this morning. We altogether had half-a-quarter loaf among the four of us, but no tea nor coffee. Yesterday we had some bread, and tea, and butter, but wherever my wife got it from I don't know. I was three days, but a short time back, without a taste of food (here he burst out crying). I had nothing but water that passed my lips. I had merely a little at home, and that my wife and children had. I would rather starve myself than let them do so. Indeed, I've done it over and over again. I never begged. I'd die in the streets first. I never told nobody of my life. The foreman of my gang was the only one besides God that knew of my misery; and his wife came to me and brought me money and brought me food; and himself, too, many a time. ('I had a wife and five children of my own to maintain, and it grieved me to my heart,' said the man who sat by, 'to see them want, and I unable to do more for them.') If any accident occurs to any of us who are not upon the society, they must be as bad off as I am. If I only had a little nourishment to strengthen me, I could do my work again; but, poor as I am, I can't get food to give me strength enough to do it; and not being totally incapacitated from ever resuming my labour, I cannot get any assistance from the Superannuation Fund of our men." I told the man I wished to see him at his own home, and he and the foreman who had brought him to me, and who gave him a most excellent character, led me into a small house in a court near the Shadwell entrance to the London Docks. When I reached the place I found the room almost bare of furniture. A baby lay sprawling on its back on a few rags beside the handful of fire. A little shoeless boy, with only a light washed-out frock to cover him, ran shyly into a corner of the room as we entered. There was only one chair in the room, and that had been borrowed downstairs. Over the chimney-piece hung to dry a few ragged infants' chemises that had been newly washed. In front of the fire on a stool sat the thinly clad wife; and in the corner of the apartment stood a few old tubs. On a line above these were two tattered men's-shirts hanging to dry, and a bed was thrown on some boxes. On a shelf stood a physic bottle that the man had got from the parish doctor; and in the empty cupboard

was a slice of bread—all the food they said they had in the world, and they knew nowhere on earth to look for more.

I next wished to see one of the improvident men, and was taken to the lodging of one, who made the following statement:—

“I have been a coalwhipper for twenty years. I worked under the old publicans’ system, when the men were compelled to drink. In those days 18s. didn’t keep me in drink. I have now been a teetotaller for five years. I have the bit of grub now more regular than I had. I earn less than 13s. a week. I have four children, and have buried four. My rent is 1s. 6d.” “To-night (interrupted the wife), if he won’t part with his coat or boots, he must go without his supper.” “My wife (the man continued) works at bespoke work—staymaking; but gets very little work, and so earns very little, perhaps 1s. 6d. a week.” This family resided in a wretched part of Wapping, called, appropriately enough, “The Ruins.” Some houses have been pulled down, and so an open place is formed at the end of a narrow, airless alley. The wet stood on the pavement of the alley, and the cottage, in which the whipper I visited lived, seemed, with another, to have escaped when the other houses were pulled down. The man is very tall, and almost touched the ceiling of his room when he stood upright in it. The ceiling was as wet as a newly washed floor. The grate was fireless, the children barefoot, the bedstead (for there was a bedstead) was bedless, and all showed cheerless poverty. The dwelling was in strong contrast with that of the provident whipper whom I have described.

I conclude with the statement of a coal-backer, or coal-porter— a class to which the term coal-heaver is usually given by those who are unversed in the mysteries of the calling. The man wore the approved fan-tail, and well-tarred short smock-frock, black velveteen knee-breeches, dirty white stockings, and lace-up boots.

“I am a coal-backer,” he said, “I have been so these 22 years. By a coal-backer, I mean a man who is engaged in carrying coals on his back from ships and craft to the waggons. We get 2¼d. for every fifth part of a ton, or 11¼d. per ton among five men. We carry the coals in sacks of 2 cwt., the sack usually weighs from 14 lbs. to 20 lbs., so that our load is mostly 238 lbs. We have to carry the load from the hold of the ship over four barges to the waggon. The hold of a ship is from 16 to 20 feet deep. We carry the coals this height up a ladder, and the ship is generally from 60 to 80 feet from the waggon. This distance we have to travel over planks with the sacks on our backs. Each man will ascend this height and travel this distance about 90

times in a day, hence he will lift himself, with 2 cwt. of coals on his back, 1,460 feet, or upwards of a quarter of a mile high, which is three times the height of St. Paul's, in 12 hours. And besides this, he will travel 6,300 feet, or $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles, carrying the same weight as he goes. The labour is very hard. There are few men who can continue at it." My informant said it was too much for him, he had been obliged to give it up eight months back—he had overstrained himself at it, and been obliged to lay up for many months. "I am forty-five years of age," he continued, "and have as many as eight children. None of these bring me in a 6d. My eldest boy did a little while back, but his master failed and he lost his situation. My wife made slop shirts at a penny each, and could not do more than three a day. How we have lived through all my illness I cannot say. I occasionally get a little job, such as mending the hats of my fellow-workmen; this would sometimes bring me in about 2s. in the week, and then the parish allowed four quartern loaves of bread and 2s. 6d. a week for myself, wife, and eight children. Since I overstrained myself I have not done more than two days' work altogether. Sometimes my mates would give me an odd seven tons to do for them, for I was not able to manage more. Such accidents as overstraining are very common among the coal-backers. The labour of carrying such a heavy weight from the ship's hold is so excessive that after a man turns forty he is considered to be past his work, and to be very liable to such accidents. It is usually reckoned that the strongest men cannot last more than twenty years at the business. Many of the heartiest of the men are knocked up through the bursting of blood vessels and other casualties; and even the strongest cannot continue at the labour for three days together. After the second day's work they are obliged to hire some unemployed mate to do the work for them. The coal-backers work in gangs of five men, consisting of two shovelmens and three backers, and are employed to deliver the ship by the wharfinger. Each gang is paid $11\frac{1}{4}$ d. per ton, which is at the rate of $2\frac{1}{4}$ d. per ton for each of the five men. The gang will do from 30 to 40 tons in the course of the day. The length of the day depends upon the amount of work to be done according to the wharfinger's orders. The coal-backers are generally at work at five o'clock in the morning, winter and summer. In the winter time, they have to work by the light of large fires in hanging cauldrons, which they call bells. Their day's work seldom ends before seven o'clock in the evening. They are paid every night; and a man, after a hard day's work, will receive 6s. Strong hearty men, who are able to follow up the

work, can earn from 25s. to 30s. per week. But the business is a very fluctuating one. In the summer time there is little or nothing to do. The earnings during the slack season are about one-half of what they are during the brisk. Upon an average their earnings are £1 per week all the year round. The class of coal-backers are supposed to consist of about 1,500 men. They have no provident or benefit society. Between 17 and 18 years ago, each gang used to have 1s. 0½d. per ton; and about a twelvemonth afterwards it fell to the present price of 11¼d. per ton. About six weeks back the merchants made an attempt to take off the odd farthing—the reason assigned was the cheapness of provisions. They nearly carried it; but the backers formed a committee among themselves, and opposed the reduction so strongly, that the idea was abandoned. The backers are paid extra for sifting, at the rate of 2d. per sack. For this office they usually employ a lad, paying him at the rate of 10s. per week. Upon this they will usually clear about from 2s. to 4s. per week. The most injurious part of the backer's work is carrying from the ship's hold. This is what they object to most of all, and consider they get the worst paid for. They do a great injury to the coalwhippers, and the backers say it would be as great a benefit to themselves as to the coalwhippers if the system was done away with. By bringing the ships up alongside the wharf the merchant saves the expense of whipping and lightering, together with the cost of barges, &c. Many of the backers are paid at the public-house; the wharfinger gives them a note to receive their daily earnings of the publican, who has the money from the merchant. Often the backers are kept waiting an hour at the public-house for their money, and they have credit through the day for any drink they may choose to call for. While waiting, they mostly have two or three pots of beer before they are paid, and the drinking once commenced, many of them return home drunk, with only half their earnings in their pockets. There is scarcely a man among the whole class of backers but heartily wishes the system of payment at the public-house may be entirely abolished. The coal-backers are mostly an intemperate class of men. This arises chiefly from the extreme labour and the over-exertion of the men, the violent perspiration, and the intense thirst produced thereby. Immediately a pause occurs in their work they fly to the public-house for beer. One coal-backer made a regular habit of drinking sixteen half-pints of beer, with a pennyworth of gin in each, before breakfast every morning. The sum spent in drink by the 'moderate' men varies from 9s. to 12s. per week, and the immoderate men, on the average,

spend 15s. per week. Hence, assuming the class of coal-backers to be 2,000 in number, and to spend only 10s. a week in drink each man, the sum that would be annually expended in malt liquor and spirits by the class would amount to no less than £52,000. The wives and children of the coal-backers are generally in great distress. Sometimes no more than one quarter of the men's earnings are taken home at night. When I was *moderate* inclined I used in general to have a glass of rum the first thing when I came out of a morning, just to keep the cold out—that might be as early as five o'clock in the morning, and about seven o'clock I should want half-a-pint of beer with gin in it, or a pint without. After my work I should be warm and feel myself dry; then I should continue to work till breakfast time; then I should have another half-pint with gin in it, and so I should keep on through the day, having either some beer or gin every two hours. I reckon that unless a man spent about 1s. 6d. to 2s. in drink, he would not be able to continue his labour through the day. In the evening he is tired with his work, and being kept at the public-house for his pay, he begins drinking there, and soon feels unwilling to move, and he seldom does so until all his wages are gone." My informant tells me that he thinks the class would be much improved if the system of paying the men at the public-house was done away, and the men paid weekly instead of daily. The hard drinking he thinks a necessity of the hard labour. He has heard, he says, of coal-backers being teetotallers, but none were able to keep the pledge beyond two months. If they drink water and coffee, it will rather increase than quench their thirst. Nothing seems to quench the thirst of a hard-working man so well as ale.

The only difference between the pay of the basket-man and the whipper is the 1½d. in the pound which the former receives for carrying the money from the captain of the ship to the clerk of the pay-office. He has also, for this sum, to keep a correct account of the work done by the men every day, and to find security for his honesty to the amount of £10. To obtain this, they usually pay 2s. 6d. a year to the Guarantee Society, and they prefer doing this to seeking the security of some baker or publican in the neighbourhood, knowing that if they did so they would be expected to become customers of the parties.

The Morning Chronicle, Friday, December 21, 1849.

The sums referred to in the following communications shall be distributed in accordance with the wishes of the respective donors:—

“C. J.” encloses £2 for the use of the poor needlewoman whose case she saw copied from *The Morning Chronicle*, and about whom “C. J.” wrote last week.

Feversham, Dec. 18.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING CHRONICLE.

SIR—May I request of you to have the enclosed sovereign equally divided between the two poor females who were, I believe, the first to summon enough moral courage to appear before your “Special Correspondent” for the metropolis, in order to relate their respective accounts of the bodily and mental suffering endured, before adopting (as a last resource) a pursuit the consequences of which they shuddered to contemplate. But insufficient remuneration for long days and nights of incessant toil (when such could be procured) drove them to the dreadful alternative, in order to obtain a little more food and raiment. I think their case is recorded in the sixth letter on “Labour and the Poor.” One of them was at that time, she said (through the kindness of a gentleman), filling a situation as a servant, and had a son in the workhouse; the other, if I mistake not, was a stock-maker. Although there is reason to hope that your Correspondent has already been the herald of some consolation and comfort to them, I am sure he will be but too happy to find that not only this, but all cases of suffering humanity which have come under his notice, are being further considered at the approaching festive season.

Wishing you and your “Special Correspondents” Godspeed in the noble and benevolent work which they are so zealously pursuing,

I am, sir, your very obedient, humble servant,

Dec. 20.

D. W.

Mrs. G. sees, by *The Morning Chronicle*, that a Christmas dinner is proposed to be given to the distressed poor, and encloses a trifle (10s.) towards that desirable object.

We have also to acknowledge the receipt of 6s. for the sick Tailor, whose waistcoat was to be raffled for, from "H. C."

The Morning Chronicle, Saturday, December 22, 1849.

We beg to acknowledge the receipt of 10*l.* 10s. from Messrs. Groucock and Co., Bow-churchyard.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING CHRONICLE.

SIR—Be so good as to forward the enclosed 2*l.* to the sick coal-whipper described in this day's *Morning Chronicle*.

Yours, &c.,

Knightsbridge, Dec. 21.

F. P.

An anonymous constant reader and admirer of the Letters on Labour, published by *The Morning Chronicle*, requests to be allowed to offer the enclosed sovereign as a mite towards the alleviation of the misery of any one of the sufferers in the metropolis. Should it be the intention of that benefactor of humanity to whom the public owes the most invaluable information as to the realities of the social state of the labouring classes, to extend his researches into the unspeakable misery of the *Skin-dressers*, a large class of sufferers in this metropolis, his anonymous admirer would propose to devote this small gift to one of their number.

C. T., 21st Dec., 1849.

B.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING CHRONICLE.

SIR—Will you apply the enclosed 10s. to the use of the poor coal-whipper who has broken his leg, and who evinces so heroic a disposition under his misfortunes; and thus oblige one who ardently admires your labours in this work of good, and sincerely hopes it may be the dawn of better times for those whose claims you so ably advocate.

Dec. 21, 1849.

We have to acknowledge the receipt of 10s.—a mite from "J. L. A."

The Morning Chronicle, Monday, December 24, 1849.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING CHRONICLE.

SIR—Will you have the goodness to hand over the enclosed sovereign to your Special Correspondent, to be applied for the benefit of the Coal-backer who broke his leg, or in any other manner most eligible in the view of your Correspondent.

I am, sir, your obedient servant,

S. N.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING CHRONICLE.

SIR—I shall feel obliged if your Metropolitan Correspondent will bestow the enclosed half-sovereign among two or three out of the many hard-working and distressed females that have been reported in your paper of late, in order that they may be enabled to have a dinner on Christmas Day.

Dec. 22.

C. T. L.

“F. B.” wishes to have the enclosed 10s. given to the Coal-whipper with a broken leg and injured hand, and who is mentioned in *The Morning Chronicle* of Friday, the 21st instant, as being in great distress.—Dec. 22.

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