

*The Morning Chronicle's*

LABOUR AND THE POOR

VOLUME III

THE METROPOLITAN DISTRICTS

HENRY MAYHEW

*Edited By*

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Cover Image:

The “Rookery,” St. Giles’s

From “Old & New London”

George Walter Thornbury & Edward Walford

Published 1878

Image courtesy of The British Library

*“Bond-street an’t no good now. Oxford-street, up by Old Cavendish-street, or Oxford-market, or Wells-street, are all favourite pitches for Punch. We don’t do much in the City. People has their heads all full of business there, and them as is greedy after the money an’t no friend of Punch’s.”*

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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 XXXVII.

It was my intention to devote the present Letter to the subject of Prison Labour; but, before doing so, it is necessary that certain statistics and accounts be obtained; these require some little time to prepare, and I am therefore compelled to postpone the inquiry for a few days. In the meantime I have turned my attention to the state of the metropolitan Toy-makers; for they, being a limited class, do not demand a long investigation, and are, consequently, well fitted to fill up the interval.

I shall, then, in this and the following Letter, seek to give as comprehensive a view as possible of the condition and earnings of the London manufacturer of toys. First, however, let me endeavour to impress the reader with some faint idea as to the variety of arts and sciences which are brought into operation in the construction of the playthings of the young. Some ten or a dozen years ago there was an elaborate article on the subject of toys in the *Westminster Review*, which at the time was currently attributed to an eminent writer on political economy. This, with Dr. Paris' celebrated little book, entitled "Philosophy in Sport made Science in Earnest," constitute, so far as I know, the only scientific treatises on the subject.

Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Culloch, in his *Commercial Directory*, thus speaks of Toys. "They include," he says, "every trifling article made expressly for the amusement of children. How frivolous soever these articles may appear in the estimation of superficial observers, their manufacture employs hundreds of hands, and gives bread to many families in London, Birmingham, &c. The greatness of the demand for them may be inferred from the fact that a manufacturer of glass beads and articles of that description has received a single order for £500 worth of dolls' eyes!" (Fourth Report, Artisans and Machinery, p. 314).

A toy is, then, a trifling object, constructed for the amusement of the young. Contemptible, however, as the child's plaything may appear—it is at least a purely æsthetical object—conferring upon us our first taste of mental enjoyment. In toys we shall find expressed almost every form and source of ideal pleasure. Thus, imitation—perhaps the first rude aim of all the fine arts—is largely drawn upon as a means of delight; and accordingly we have horses, dogs, and donkies—carts, windmills, and houses—dolls and theatres, and a long catalogue of other wooden, waxen, and *papier maché* configurations, which please merely from their fancied resemblance to the objects that they are intended to represent. Other toys, again, are made to yield an additional delight, not only by their similarity of form, but by their repetition of the same sounds, or their performance of the same acts, as some living creature. Hence composition dogs are made to bark, wooden cuckoos to cry, birds to sing, carved monkeys to climb up a pole, puppets to move their limbs, and dolls to open and shut their eyes. Some toys, on the other hand, are exercises of dexterity, appealing to that universal principle of human nature—the love of success. The delight which the grown man feels in overcoming any difficulty, or in excelling a rival, is thus made to contribute to the amusement and the manual or intellectual skill of the youth. This we observe in the different games more especially, as in marbles, draughts, chess, cards, cricket, cup and ball, and an infinity of others of a similar kind. Other toys, however—such as the more scientific ones—are amusing on account of the wonder they excite. Thus the magnetic swan and fish that swim after the loadstone in water, the magic-lantern with its unreal figures on the wall, the microscope, the balloon, the thaumatrope—all appeal to that pleasurable feeling which we experience on the perception of any circumstance which is out of the common order of events in nature. Jack-in-the-box, crackers, detonating-balls, leaping frogs, are toys of mere surprise. The kaleidoscope, accordions, and musical glasses, are, on the other hand, toys of visual and audible beauty, pleasing by the combination and succession of harmonious forms and sounds.

The sciences which are laid under contribution in the construction of toys are almost as multifarious as the arts which are employed in the manufacture of them. Optics gives its burning-glass, its microscope, its magic lantern, its stereoscope, its thaumatrope, its phantasmoscope, and a variety of others; electricity, its Leyden jars, galvanic batteries, electrotypes, &c.; chemistry, its balloons, fireworks, and

crackers; mechanics, its clock-work mice—its steam and other carriages; pneumatics contributes its kites and windmills; acoustics, its Jew-harps, musical-glasses, accordions, and all the long train of musical instruments; astronomy lends its orreries; in fine, there is scarcely a branch of knowledge which is not made to pay tribute to the amusement of the young. Nor are the arts and artists that are called into play in the manufacture of toys less numerous. There is the turner, to turn the handles of the skipping-ropes, the ninepins, the peg, the humming, and the whipping tops, the hoop-sticks; the basket-worker, to make dolls' cradles, and babies' rattles, and wickerwork carts and carriages; the tinman, to manufacture tin swords and shields, pea-shooters and carts, money-boxes, and miniature candlesticks; and the pewterer to cast the metal soldiers, and dolls' cups, and saucers, and fire-irons, and knives and forks, plates and dishes, chairs and tables, and all the leaden furniture of the baby-house; the modeller, to make the skin and composition animals; the glassblower, to make the dolls' eyes; the wig maker, to manufacture the dolls' curls; the tallowchandler, to mould miniature candles for the dolls' houses; the potter, to produce dolls' cups and saucers. Then there are image-men, conjurers, cutlers, cardmakers, opticians, cabinetmakers, firework-makers, and, indeed, almost every description of artisan—for there is scarcely a species of manufacture or handicraft that does not contribute something to the amusement of the young.

Such, then, are the characters of toys and toy-makers in general. Of the latter there are in Great Britain, 1,866 toy-makers and dealers. The distribution of these throughout the country is as follows:—

ENGLAND.		Worcester . . . . .	9
COUNTIES.		York, East Riding . . . . .	3
Berks . . . . .	1	City and Ainsty . . . . .	1
Bucks . . . . .	1	North Riding . . . . .	4
Cambridge . . . . .	2	West Riding . . . . .	23
Chester . . . . .	11		
Cornwall . . . . .	3	Total . . . . .	1,814
Cumberland . . . . .	2	WALES.	
Derby . . . . .	5	COUNTIES.	
Devon . . . . .	8	Carmarthen . . . . .	1
Dorset . . . . .	6	Carnarvon . . . . .	2
Durham . . . . .	2	Denbigh . . . . .	1
Essex . . . . .	9	Glamorgan . . . . .	1
Gloucester . . . . .	20		
Hertford . . . . .	3	Total . . . . .	5
Huntingdon . . . . .	1	ISLANDS IN THE BRITISH SEAS . . . . .	
Kent . . . . .	23	SCOTLAND.	
Lancaster . . . . .	35	COUNTIES.	
Leicester . . . . .	5	Aberdeen . . . . .	4
Lincoln . . . . .	5	Ayr . . . . .	3
Middlesex . . . . .	359	Clackmannan . . . . .	1
Monmouth . . . . .	6	Edinburgh . . . . .	13
Norfolk . . . . .	14	Fife . . . . .	2
Northumberland . . . . .	3	Forfar . . . . .	2
Nottingham . . . . .	4	Haddington . . . . .	2
Salop . . . . .	2	Lanark . . . . .	7
Somerset . . . . .	8	Perth . . . . .	2
Southampton . . . . .	10	Renfrew . . . . .	2
Stafford . . . . .	53	Ross and Cromarty . . . . .	5
Suffolk . . . . .	3		
Surrey . . . . .	93	Total . . . . .	43
Sussex . . . . .	21	Great Britain, grand	
Warwick . . . . .	942	total . . . . . 1,866	
Westmoreland . . . . .	2		
Wilts . . . . .	1		

Of this number there were—Males above 20, 1,174; females (ditto), 417; males under 20, 197; females (ditto), 78. Hence we see that there are more toy-makers in the county of Warwick than in any other part of England. After Warwick, the greater number is to be found in Middlesex and Surrey—the two metropolitan counties. In the metropolis there were 553 toy-makers, of whom 320 were males above 20, and 163 females beyond the same age; and 48 were males under 20, and 22 females below the same age.

Let me now endeavour to arrive at some rough estimate as to the total earnings of the toy-makers of Great Britain, as well as the

sum expended, in one year, in this country upon foreign and English toys:—

According to the Occupation Abstract, there were in the metropolis, in 1841, 407 toy-makers, and 146 toy-merchants and dealers. The number of toy-makers and dealers in Great Britain was 1,866; therefore we may calculate that about 1,373 of these individuals were toy-makers. Now, supposing that these earn each, upon an average, from 10s. to 15s. (say 12s. 6d.) per week, this would give the sum of £858 2s. 6d. for the weekly earnings of the collective toy-makers of Great Britain, or

per annum . . . . .	£44,622 10 0
The cost of material would be about the same as for labour—thus . .	£44,622 10 0
And the interest for capital another third . . . . .	44,622 10 0
Making together for the total cost of the toys produced annually in Great Britain . . . . .	£133,867 10 0
The amount of toys imported into Great Britain in the same year was valued by the Customs at . .	22,130 0 0
Hence the total value of the toys sold in one year in Great Britain will be . . . . .	£155,997 10 0

This sum, divided amongst the population of Great Britain under twenty years of age—which in the year above-mentioned amounted to 8,602,647 individuals—would give an average for each child, or young person, to spend in the year upon toys, of 4¼d.

I will now add an account of the different countries from which our foreign toys are imported. I am indebted for the information here given to the courtesy of a toy-dealer, in a large way, in High Holborn.

“The foreign toys,” he said, “are made chiefly in France, Germany, and Switzerland; but I ought to characterise those from France as more fancy goods than mere toys—for what may properly be called toys from France may be termed mechanical toys. None, in my opinion, can be compared to the French in the ingenuity of their toys: they surpass the skill of the English workman. I am convinced, indeed, that the English toy-maker can hardly so much as repair a broken French toy. Few watch-makers here can repair a clock-work mouse; they will generally charge 2s. 6d. for repairing a mechanical mouse



which I sell new for 3s. 6d. Such a mouse could not be made here, if it could be made at all, for less than 15s. I consider that the reduction of the duty on foreign toys is a decided benefit to the trade, and an advantage to the purchaser. They get toys cheaper so; but the cheaper they get them, the cheaper they want them. They're never satisfied. Those in this counter are German toys. Box toys are all German. Noah's arks, and boxes of cavalry soldiers, and of children's skittles, and of desserts, and of railroads (all sizes, up to 20s. a box), farm-yards, sheepfolds, and tea sets—and, in short, sets of almost everything. English toys are well made—such as rocking-horses and large things; but in smaller things the English workmen can't pretend to vie with the Germans. And those large things can't be imported, if they could be as well made in Germany, on account of the bulk. These box toys are the staple of the German trade. Nuremberg, Frankfort, and the vicinity of the Black Forest, are the principal places in Germany where these toys are made. Women, children, and poor people, with hardly food to eat, make them and take them to merchants, who export them, just as the people who work in garrets in the outskirts of London do with the toyshops here. They cut one another's throats for want of combination. I know the workmen do. I tell them so. They starve in trying to outdo one another in cheapness, which injures them, and is no benefit to the tradesman. The rosewood boxes which I used to sell at 15s., twenty years back, I now sell at 3s.—all owing to competition. The makers don't live, but starve by it. The French toys are ingeniously mechanical—moving figures of all sorts, often in glass cases; small china toys, tea and dinner services; fancy glass boxes—an immense trade done in them. The Swiss toys are the white wood toys—carved animals, and Swiss cottages and farms. I have often been told by travellers in Switzerland that they have bought toys of the Swiss peasants whom they saw at work in their cottages, in most parts of Switzerland; and they often tell me they have cost them more there than I should charge them, besides the bother of bringing them over. The Swiss make the wooden long figures, jointed, for the study of artists, sometimes 6 feet high. They are beautifully made. They can be placed and kept in a position that a living model cannot sustain sufficiently long for the artist's study or sketch. The cost of a six-foot lay-figure is about 9 guineas, and a very reasonable price. Barking dogs and musical toys are generally German. The English excel in the invention of games—round games for children; we excel greatly in dissected puzzles, geographical and such like. The foreign articles

of that kind are so slight as to be useless. What the English workmen do, they do well, solidly and enduringly—it hasn't the tinselly look of the foreign, but it's not flimsy, and is useful. Toys have their fashions and runs. A month's fashion is not a bad average. These elastic faces (German) called gutta percha, but made of some composition, had a great run; the inventor, when they first came out, could have got any price for any quantity. The inventions in the toy trade are generally the work of men in the business. Scientific men have sometimes suggested to me a new toy, but not frequently. I never adopted any of their suggestions; they were attended with too much bother. I have often suggested things to the makers. I sell more of magic-lanterns and conjuring tricks than all the other houses. There is a very great demand for them. In such things we beat the foreigners all to nothing. Their magic-lanterns are as rubbishy as ever magic was, but they're sold wonderfully low. We can't sell low to sell good—not English magic-lanterns. There is decidedly a greater demand for scientific toys. My customers say, 'Let me have something instructive as well as amusing.' Panics and such like crises affect my trade considerably; indeed the trade is a sort of pulse of the nation's prosperity; for when people haven't money they can't buy their children toys."

To the above statement I subjoin a table of the rates of duty upon foreign toys at the different alterations of the tariff, and it is followed by an account of the amount of duties levied at the Custom-house, as well as of the estimated value of the toys imported.

Rate of duty from 1787 to 1818 inclusive,	33 per cent.
Rate of duty from 1819 to 1825 inclusive,	50 per cent.
Rate of duty from 1826 to 1841 inclusive,	20 per cent.
Since . . . . . 1842 . . . . .	10 per cent.

Amount of Custom-house Duties on Toys imported, from  
1820 to 1848, and their estimated Value.

Year	Amount of Duty levied.	Value of Article imported.	Year	Amount of Duty levied.	Value of Article imported.
1820	£2,874	£ 5,748	1835	£4,284	£21,420
1821	2,819	5,638	1836	4,544	22,720
1822	3,569	7,138	1837	3,265	16,325
1823	4,361	8,722	1838	3,343	16,715
1824	4,744	9,488	1839	3,793	18,965
1825	5,197	10,394	1840	4,628	23,140
1826	1,949	9,740	1841	4,426	22,130
1827	2,303	11,515	1842	2,826	28,260
1828	2,944	14,720	1843	2,677	26,770
1829	3,152	15,760	1844	3,072	30,720
1830	3,578	17,890	1845	3,822	38,220
1831	3,769	18,845	1846	4,007	40,070
1832	3,479	17,395	1847	3,304	33,040
1833	3,826	19,130	1848	2,994	29,940
1834	4,819	24,095			

The London toy-makers are divided into several classes—such as the toy-turner, the Bristol or green wood toy-maker, the white wood toy-maker, the fancy toy-maker or modeller, and the doll-maker—of which there are two grand branches, viz., the makers of the wooden and of the sewed dolls. Then there are the tin toy-maker, the lead and pewter toy-maker, the basket toy-maker, the detonating firework maker, the drum and tambourine maker, the kite maker, and an infinity of others. The principal division, however, is into the toy-makers for the rich, and those for the poor. I shall deal in the present article with those who principally supply the children of the working classes with toys. These are not sold in the arcades and bazaars, but are chiefly vended in the street markets, from barrows and stalls. One toy stall keeper, I am told, clears 30s. a week by the sale of the cheap penny toys. Occasionally they are sold in the chandlers' and sweetmeat shops in the suburbs and the country, but the principal marts are the fairs and street markets. The toys sold by these people consist of either white or green wood—the latter being called Bristol toys. I shall give a specimen of each; and first of the *White Wood Toy-maker*. He lived at a cottage at the back of the Bethnal-green-road. In front was a little square patch of ground railed in. This was laid out in small flower beds, garnished with borders of white shells. Where the flowers should have been, however, lay the bodies of defunct swings. Under a rude shed stood a new velocipede—one worked with treadles

and hand levers, and brilliant with brass and bright colours. Beside this, reared high on end, was the body of a large unfinished locomotive, intended to carry as many as six, and to be moved in the same manner as the velocipede; but the works had yet to be affixed to it, so that in its present state it looked more like the seat of a huge swing than the body of a carriage. On one side of this was a small cart, originally made to carry the toy-maker himself (for he was a cripple), but now filled with gravel, intended for the pathway of the garden. Against the little cottage were small beams of timber, ready for use in the manufacture of penny carts or money-boxes, and on the ground lay the poles of an abandoned exhibition. These, with a sprinkling of old flower-pots, and a heap of paving-stones that had been dug up to convert the front yard into a garden, constituted the whole of the external appurtenances of the toymaker's house, and they were highly indicative not only of the ingenuity and enterprise of the occupant, but of the affliction that had deprived him of the power of using his limbs like the rest of mankind. The objects inside the house were equally suggestive of the character and occupation of the inmate. On a table in the centre of the room stood a yellow pie-dish filled with a thousand springs for penny mousetraps, and behind the door was a coil of wire that twanged as it closed after me. In the little square room adjoining the parlour, and which served the poor man for both bed-room and workshop, sat the toy-maker himself, making penny mouse-traps in the bed that he seldom or never quitted. On the counterpane in front was placed a small stool, and this served for his bench. He was half dressed, having only his coat and waistcoat over his night-gown. Close within his reach hung three small square bird-cages—one on one side his bed, and two on the other—and in them frolicked his favourite goldfinches, that seemed to bear their lifelong confinement as cheerfully as their master. Beside the bed stood a bench littered with tools of all kinds, boxes of wire hasps, and small pieces of cut wood ready to form the sides and triggers of the mouse-traps on which he was busied. The walls of the little room were hung with peep-shows and toys, the hoop of an old tambourine, tiny models of ships, and wooden swords that he had made for his boy in his over-time. Over the head of the toy-maker, on the top of the bedstead, were a heap of patterns in paper and wood of the various articles he made, and part of the works of a new locomotive carriage to be worked by hand, which he purposed getting up for himself when he could find leisure. The works, he told me in the course of

conversation, a man whom he had taught when a youth had promised to make for his cripple master for nothing. On the stool that stood on the bed was piled a small stack of the same oblong pieces of thin deal as those on the carpenter's bench beside him, and these he was busy in cutting by means of a gauge from larger pieces of the same material. His story was another of the many evidences of the sterling worth and independence of the working classes of this country. I have often, in the course of my investigations, had to record the virtue, the honest pride, and the innate nobility of the artisans of London. I have told of the heroism of the young stockmaker who sat for three weeks without rest, labouring to keep her father from the workhouse. I have registered the deep patience and pervading faith of the dying husband of the poor tape-seller. I have described the contentment of the half-starved chickweed and groundsel dealer. I have spoken of the benevolence of the man who made soldiers' trowsers at 4d. per pair; and, more recently, of the starving painter, who shared his bare room with the homeless shoebinder. Indeed, in no class have I seen such patience in sufferings, such generosity in poverty, such heroism, such charity, as I have found in the working classes of this country. Their virtues, I repeat, are the outpourings of their simple natures—their vices mainly arise from the uncertainty of their work, and their occasional want of employment, followed by the long labour when their trade again becomes brisk to make up for loss of time. But of all the many bright examples that I have given of the virtues of the English workpeople, none has excelled the one I have now to record. The man shall tell his story himself:—

“I am a *white-wood toy-maker in a small way*—that is, I make a variety of cheap articles—nothing beyond a penny—in sawed and planed pine wood. I manufacture penny and halfpenny money-boxes, penny and halfpenny toy bellows, penny carts, penny garden-rollers, penny and halfpenny dolls' tables, penny washhand-stands, chiefly for baby houses; penny dressers, with drawers, for the same purpose; penny wheelbarrows, penny bedsteads, penny crossbows, and the penny mousetraps, that I am about now. I make all the things I have named for warehouses—for what are called the cheap ‘Birmingham, Sheffield, and toy warehouses.’ I am paid all the same price for whatever I make, with the exception of the mousetraps. For the principal part of the penny articles that I make I get 7s. for twelve dozen—and for the halfpenny articles, 3s. 6d. for the same quantity. For the penny mousetraps, however, I am paid only £1 for thirty-six

dozen, whereas I get one guinea for an equal number of the rest. For the penny money-boxes, though, I have only 6s. for twelve dozen. You will please to look at that, sir” (he said, handing me his account-book with one of his employers for the last year); “you will see there that what I am saying is perfectly correct, for there’s the price put to every article, and it is but right that you should have proof of what I’m a telling you. I took of one master, for penny mousetraps alone, you perceive, £36 10s. from January to December, 1849. But that is not all earnings, you’ll understand. Out of that, I have to pay above one-half for material. I think altogether my receipts of the different masters I worked for last year came to about £120. I can’t lay my hands on the bills just now. Yes, it’s about £120, I know, for our income is about £1 to £1 2s. every week, and calculating rather more than one-half what I take to go for the expense of material, that will bring it just about to what I state. To earn the 22s. a week, you’ll understand, there are four of us engaged—myself, my wife, my daughter, and my son. My daughter is 18, and my son is 11. That is my boy, sir; he’s reading the *Family Friend* just now; it’s a little work I take in for my girl for her future benefit; there’s many useful receipts in it concerning cooking and household medicines, and good moral instruction in it besides. My girl is as fond of reading as I am, and always was. I should take in a number of periodicals myself, only I can’t afford to spend a penny on myself in that way; but I think it’s my duty to take in some good work or other for my girl. My boy goes to school every evening and twice on a Sunday. I am willing they should find as much pleasure from reading as I have. In my illness I found books often lull my pain—yes! I have, indeed, for many hours and days. For nine months I couldn’t handle a tool, and my only comfort was the love of my family and my books. I can’t afford them. I have no wish to incur any extraneous expense, while the weight of the labour here lies on my family more than it does on myself. Over and over again, when I have been in acute pain with my thigh, a scientific book, or a work on history, or a volume of travels would carry my thoughts far away, and I should be happy in all my misery; I shouldn’t know that I had a trouble, a care, or a pang to vex me. I always had a love of solid works. For an hour’s light reading I have often turned to works of imagination, such as Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’ and Shakespeare’s Plays; but I prefer science to poetry. I think every working man ought to be acquainted with the general sciences. If he is a mechanic, let his station be ever so simple, he will be sure to find

the benefit of it. It gives a man a greater insight into the world and creation, and it makes his labour a pleasure and a pride to him, when he can work with his head as well as his hands. I think I made about 106 gross of penny mouse-traps for the master whose account I have given you, and as many more for other employers in the course of last year. I calculate that I made more than thirty thousand mousetraps altogether, from January to December, '49. There are three or four other people in London making penny mousetraps besides myself. I reckon they may make among them near upon half as many as I do, and that would give about 45,000 or 50,000 penny mousetraps made in London in the course of the year. I myself brought out the penny mousetrap in its improved shape, and with the improved lever spring. I have made no calculation as to the number of mice in the country, or how soon we shall have caught them all if we go on at this rate; but I think my traps have little to do with that. They are bought more for toys than for use, though they are good for mice as well as children, let me tell you. The railway people say I send more traps down to Yarmouth than there are mice in the place; but you see farmers now set them round their fields and gardens when they sow their seed crops, to catch the field mice. Though we have so many dozen mousetraps about the house, I can assure you we are more troubled with mice here than most people. The four of us can make twenty-four dozen of the traps in a day, but that is a very close day's work; about eighteen dozen we can get through comfortably. For eighteen dozen we get about 10s. at the warehouse, and out of that I reckon our clear gains are near upon 4s., or a little less than a shilling a head. Take one with the other, we can earn about a penny an hour; and if it wasn't for my having been a tailor originally, and applying some of my old tools to the business, we shouldn't get on so quick as we do. With my shears I can cut 24 wires at a time, and with my thimble I thread the wires through the holes in the sides. I make the springs, cut the wires, and put them in the traps. My daughter planes the wood, gauges out the sides and bottom, bores the wire holes, and makes the doors as well. My wife nails the frames ready for wiring, and my son pulls the wires into the places after I have entered them. Then the wife springs them, after which the daughter puts in the doors, and so completes them. I can't form an idea as to how many penny and halfpenny money-boxes I made last year. I might have made altogether eight thousand—about five thousand halfpenny and three thousand penny ones. I'm satisfied there are a

great many more money-boxes made than I make. You see I make the most mouse traps of any one in London, but perhaps the least number of money-boxes. I should say that there were from 25 to 30 thousand penny and halfpenny white wood money-boxes made every year in this town. How many papered and tin penny money-boxes are made besides the white wood ones I can't exactly say, but they must be a great many more than the white wood—the papered ones particularly. The tinman, you see, won't make the tin ones if he can help it, the material is so expensive. I should say there must be at least 100,000 of the different sorts of cheap money-boxes manufactured in London in the course of the year. I'm very apt to think that the money-boxes don't save much more than they cost. May be, taking one box with the other, each of the cheap money boxes is the cause of one penny being saved by the children of the poor, and 100,000 pence is nearly £450—so that we money-box-makers may say that we are the means of saving some hundreds of pounds to the poor people every year, for all the articles that we manufacture are sold to their children only. Of penny garden rollers and carts, I don't think I make more than 1,000 of each. I calculate that there may be about 10,000 of each produced in the metropolis. Such articles are made entirely in London, I believe. If anything, there would be rather more penny carts made than garden rollers, because the idea of a carriage is more pleasing to a child. Let the little thing go where it will in town, it will see a real cart, but very few children in London ever saw a real garden-roller, and of those to whom our goods are sold very few ever saw a garden either I take it—pent up in the close courts they are, poor things! I am sure, of all the toys sold, dolls and carts and horses are the greatest number—the dolls are for the girls, and the carts and horses for the boys. The first toy is a doll for a girl, and a halfpenny horse and a farthing whip for a boy—mind, I am speaking of the children of poor people, who buy at the stalls in the street. The penny and halfpenny bellows now have no run. Six or seven years ago there was a great rage for them. Then I made about 12,000 in one year; but you see they were dangerous, and induced the children to play with the fire, so they soon went out of fashion. I was originally brought up to the tailoring business, but my master failed, and my sight kept growing weaker every year; so, as I found a good deal of trouble in getting employment at my own trade, I thought I would take to bird-cage making. I had been doing a little at it before, as a pastime. I was fond of birds, and fonder still of mechanics, so



I was always practising my hands at some craft or other. In my over-time at the tailoring trade I used to make dissected maps and puzzles—and so, when standing for employment, I used to manage to get through the slack of the year, or while waiting for orders from my master. I think it is solely due to my taste for mechanics, and my love of reading scientific books, that I am able to live as comfortably as I do in my affliction. After I took to bird-cage making I found the employment at it so casual that I could not support my family at it. My children were quite young then, for I have been ten years away from my regular trade at least. This led me to turn my mind to toy-making, for I found cheap toys were articles of more general sale. Then I got my children and my wife to help me, and we managed to get along somehow, for you see they were learning the business, and I myself wasn't much in a position to teach them, being almost as inexperienced at the trade as they were—and besides that we were continually changing the description of toy that we manufactured, so we had no time to perfect ourselves. One day we were all at work at garden rollers—the next, perhaps, we should be upon little carts—then, may be, we should have to go to dolls, tables, or wheelbarrows—so that, with the continual changing from one thing to another, we had a great difficulty in getting practised in anything. While we were all learning you may imagine that, not being so quick then as we are now, we found a great difficulty in making a living at the penny-toy business. Often we had merely dry bread for breakfast, tea, and supper; but we ate it with a light heart, for I knew repining wouldn't mend it, and I always taught myself and those about me to bear our trials with fortitude. At last I got to work regularly at the mouse-traps, and having less changing we learnt to turn them out of hand quicker, and to make more money at the business. That was about four years ago, and then I was laid up with a strumous abscess in the thigh; this caused necrosis, or decay of the thigh bone, to take place; and it was necessary that I should be confined to my bed until such time as a new thigh bone was formed, and the old decayed one had sloughed away. Before I lay up I stood to the bench until I was ready to drop, for I had no one who could plane the boards for me, and what could I do? If I didn't keep up I thought we must all starve. The pain was dreadful, and the anxiety of mind I suffered for my wife and children made it a thousand times worse. I couldn't bear the idea of going to the workhouse, and I kept on my feet till I could stand no longer. My daughter was only fifteen then, and I

saw no means of escape. It was my office to prepare the boards for my family, and without that they could do nothing. Well, sir, I saw nothing but ruin and starvation before us. I took to my bed, knowing that it would take four years before a new bone could be formed and I capable of getting about again. What was to become of us all in the meantime I could not tell. Then it was that my daughter, seeing the pain I suffered both in body and mind, came to me and told me not to grieve, for that she would do all the heavy work for me, and plane up the boards and cut out the work as I had done. But I thought it impossible for her to get through such hard work, even for my sake. I knew she could do almost anything that she set her mind to, but I little dreamt that she would be able to compass that. However, with the instinct of her affection—I can't call it anything else, for *she* learnt at once what it had taken me *months* to acquire—she planed and shaped the boards as well as I myself could have done it after years of practice. The first board she did was as cleanly done as she can do it now; and when you think of the difficulties she had to overcome—what a mere child she was—and had never handled a plane before—how she had the grain of the wood to find out—to learn the right handling of her tools, and a many little niceties of touch that workmen only can understand—it does seem to me as if some superior power had inspired her to aid me. I had often read of birds building nests of the most beautiful structure without ever having seen one built before, and my daughter's handiwork seemed to me exactly like that. It was a thing not acquired by practice, but done in an instant, without teaching or experience of any kind. She is the best creature I ever knew or heard tell of on earth—at least, she has been so to me all her life—aye! without a single exception. If it hadn't been for her devotion I must have gone to the workhouse, and perhaps never have been able to get away from it, and had my children brought up as paupers. Where she got the strength to do it, too, is as much a mystery to me as how she did it; for though she was then but a mere child, so to speak, she did the work of a grown man, and I can assure you the labour of working at the bench all day is heavy, even for the strongest workman, and my girl is not very strong now—indeed she was always delicate, from a baby. But she went through it, and would stand to the bench the whole of the day, and with such cheerful good humour that I cannot but see the hand of the Almighty in it all. I never knew her to complain of fatigue, or ever go to her work without a smile on her face. Her only anxiety

was to get it done, and afford me every comfort in my calamity that she could. For three years and two months now have I been confined to my bed; and for two years and a half of that time I have never left it, even to breathe the fresh, open air. Almost all that period I was suffering intense and continued pain from the formation of abscesses in my thigh, previous to the sloughing away of the decayed bone. I have taken out of the sores in my limb at least 200 pieces, some as small as needles, and some so large as to be an inch and a half long, and to require to be pulled out with tweezers from the wound. Often when I was getting a bit better, and able to go about in the cart outside there with the gravel in it (I made that on this bedstead, so as to be able to move about on it—the two front wheels I made myself, and the two back were old ones that I repaired here—I made the whole of the body, and my daughter planed up the boards for me)—well, often when I could just get about in that, have I gone out with a large piece of decayed bone protruding through my thigh, in hopes that the jolting would force it through the wound. The pain before the bone came away was often intense, especially when it had to work its way through the thick of the muscle. Night after night have I laid awake here. I didn't wish of course to distress the minds of my family any more than I could help—it wouldn't have been fair, so I bore all with patience. Since I have been here I have got through a great deal of work in my little way. In bed, as I sit with my little bench, I do my share to eight dozen of these traps a day—and last August I made a thaumastoscope for a young man that I had known since he was a lad of twelve years of age. He got out of work and couldn't find anything to turn his hand to; so I advised him to get up an exhibition—anything, I said, was better than starving. He had a wife and two children, and I can't bear to see any one want—let alone the young ones; so, cripple as I was, I set to work here in my bed and made him a large set of magic circles (I painted all the figures myself in this place, though I had never handled a brush before), and that has kept him in bread up to this time. I did it to cause him to exert himself, but now he's got a situation and is doing middling to what he has been. There's one thing though, a little money with care will go farther than a great deal without it. I shall never be able to get about again as I used, for you see the knee is set stiff, sir, and the thigh-bone is arched at the hip, so that the one leg is three inches shorter than the other. The bone broke spontaneously like a bit of rotten wood while I was rubbing my hand down the thigh one day,

and in growing together again it got arched. I am just able now to stir about with a crutch and stick. I can sometimes treat myself with a walk about the house and yard, but that's not often. Last Saturday night I *did* make a struggle to get out in the Bethnal-green-road, and there, as I was coming along, my stick tripped against a stone, and I fell and cut my hands and face. If I had not had my crutch, I might have fallen on my new bone and broken it again; but, as it was, the crutch threw me forward and saved me. My doctor tells me the new bone would bear a blow, but I shouldn't like to try it after all I have gone through. I shan't be about again till I get my carriage, and that I intend to construct so as to be driven with one hand, by means of a new ratchet lever motion."

He here showed me the model, in wood, of the apparatus he proposed using. It was exceedingly ingenious, and was so arranged that either with a backward or forward motion of the lever the ratchet, by means of deacons and escapement, was always in power, and the axle made to rotate forwards.

The daughter of the toymaker then said that she "couldn't describe how it was that she had learnt to plane and gauge the boards. It seemed to come to her natural like," she said. She thought it must have been her affection for her poor father that made her take to it so quick. "I felt it deeply," she added, "to see him take to his bed, and knew that I alone could save him from the workhouse. I never feel tired over it, because I know that it is to make him comfortable." It is but right I should add, that I was first taken to this man by the surgeon who attended him during his long suffering, and that gentleman not only fully corroborated all the man told me, but spoke in the highest possible terms of both father and daughter.

*A worker in green wood* is termed a "Bristol toymaker." The quality and nature of the *Bristol toys* are detailed in the following narrative given to me by one of the makers of those articles. In the room where I conversed with him two boys were at work, making the wheels of scratch-backs—toys used by frolicsome people at fairs, the fun consisting in suddenly "scratching" any one's back with the toy, which gives a sudden, whirring sound. One boy was an apprentice, a well-grown lad; the other was a little fellow, who had run away from a City institution at Norwood, to whom the toymaker gave employment, having known his mother. It was curious enough, and somewhat melancholy, to observe the boy working at that which constitute other boys' play. Toys were piled all over the workshop. It was not

very easy for a stranger to stir without the risk of upsetting a long line of omnibuses, or wrecking a perfect fleet of steam-boats. My informant, while giving his statement, was interrupted now and then by the delivery of orders, given, of course, in the usual way and tone of business, but sounding very grandiloquent—"A dozen large steamers," "Two dozen waggons;" and then a customer had room left in his sack for "half-a-dozen omnibuses with two horses." My informant said:—

"The Bristol toys are the common toys made for the children of the poor, and generally retailed at a penny. They were first made in Bristol, but they have been manufactured in London for the last 50 years. I believe there is still one maker in Bristol. Bristol toys are carts, horses, omnibuses, chaises, steamers, and such like—nearly all wheel-toys. We make scratch-backs too—that has a wheel in it. To make the toys we boil the wood—green and soft, though sometimes dry; alder, willow, birch, poplar, or ash are used. When the wood has been boiled, the toy is cut with a knife, and fixed together with glue, then painted. Trade is very bad at present, for when the labouring people are out of employ I feel it in my business. They cannot then buy toys for the children; unless they have decent earnings, children must go without—poor things! As all my goods go to the poor, and are a sort of luxury to the children, I can tell what's up with working and poor people by the state of my trade—a curious test, isn't it? but a sure one. When weaving is bad, Bristol toy-making is very bad. [He lived in the neighbourhood of Spitalfields.] When things are not so bad in Ireland, it's a rare time for my trade; they are so fond of them there. No cheap toys, at least in my way, are made in Ireland. When the big horses, the spotted fellows on wheels, that you must have seen, went out of fashion, it was a blow to my business. Steamers which have come up rather lately—though they have grand names painted on them, you perceive, Fire Flies and Dash Alongs, and such like—don't go off as the old horses did. Every child has seen a horse, but there's numbers never see a steamboat, and so care nothing about them; how can they? The men employed at journey work in the Bristol toy trade can earn 3s. and 3s. 6d. a day. But when work is slack, they just earn what happens to turn in in the way of work."

Of a description of toys differing little from those known as Bristol toys, I had the following account from a toymaker, who had been acquainted with the business many years. In addition to what he manufactured, he supplied his customers with a variety of low-priced

toys, and the way in which these were distributed in the two spacious rooms of his ground-floor was striking, from its heterogeneous admixture. There was a great heap on a large table or counter; guns were over-ridden by brewers' drays, and drums rested with Noah's arks. Cats over-strode soldiers, and lambs [they were "called lambs," my informant explained] strayed amongst green forests, with trees of uniform height. In the course of conversation with this toymaker, he expressed an opinion to me that fashion, or change, affected cheap toys less, speaking generally, than any other article. This may be accounted for by the necessity of supplying them at the lowest rate, and by the anxiety of a mother, who has a penny to spare, causing her to buy a toy for her child such as pleased her own childhood, regardless of its want of novelty. My informant said:—

"I make the *common toys*, such as are *sold to the poor*—carts and horses chiefly. I am a white-wood toy maker, and work only on toys. My toys are made out of the deal as it comes from the timber yard—not boiled, as the Bristol toy makers do. The carts are shaped, and then the parts are fitted together with glue; the horse is cut out with a knife. I always feel the benefit of poor people being in good earnings, for then there is a better demand for my toys. Trade is very slack now, but the weather is against us—for mine, being good-sized horses and carriages, are used for children in the open air; they're thought too big to drive about a room. Prices are cut down greatly in my trade. The introduction of French and foreign toys, at the reduced rate of duty, has affected me a wonderful sight. They can undersell us; we can't at all work with those countries. This lamb here can't be made in London for a penny, but it's brought from Germany and sold here retail at a penny. If people, even girls and boys, are paid anything abroad for making such toys, it must be next to nothing. How they who depend upon such work live at all, is a puzzle to me. This foreign accordion, here, costs me 5s. 6d. a dozen wholesale—why it couldn't be made in England for four times the price, though there's so much talk now about music. You hear the four keys are perfect; and all for 5½d. There has been no change in the fashion of the articles I make for many years—I wish there was, it might bring better employment. I employ only my own family; but journeymen, when in work—that's it, you see, sir, it's the want of work that's the evil—earn 3s. and 3s. 6d. a day."

Toy-turning is a branch of the art on which I may have more to say, as to its nicer applications, hereafter. As I have devoted this

letter to what a toymaker very well designates “popular toys,” I give at present the statement of a turner, whose general employment was on goods not of the highest price; in fact, his trade, as will be seen, was confined to “popular toys.” The process observed is that of other turners, and requires, therefore, no especial detail. He said:—

“I am a toy-turner. The principal articles made by the toy-turners, in my way, are humming and other tops, and skipping ropes. The humming tops are generally made of willow or alder: a block is hollowed by a tool made for the purpose, and the top is fitted to the hollowed block. We paint them ourselves, but we can't lay a picture on them, as it won't lay on account of the roundness—so the landscape, or whatever it is, is all done by a camel's-hair pencil. The French have not directly affected my trade (they may indirectly), nor the Germans either. It's heavy work, sir, making humming tops, and foreigners like light work best, I can tell you. Business is middling now; when the manufacturing districts are very prosperous, I feel an impulse given to my trade. When bread is very dear, children must do without toys, and then there's a slack. There is no great demand for toys in country villages, as I know from my experience in the north of England. They know nothing about humming tops. Immense numbers of skipping ropes and humming tops are shipped off to America. They won't go to high-priced goods, the Yankees; the best tops and ropes are sold at home. The home trade is far the best, though it's the custom, in many cities of the United States, to make presents of toys at Christmas time. Toy-turning is all piece-work. There may be twenty men working at toy-turning in my branch; they can average 20s. a week. It is a nice art; a humming top is turned according to the judgment of the workman, who must carry the pattern in his eye. Another branch of my business is the turning of boxes—puff-powder, tooth-powder, salve, and pill-boxes. There is a change in the painting of humming-tops, which is all the change I remember. Landscapes are now painted on them; before that, they were merely striped or flowered, but, as I have said, the globular shape prevents you giving a picture at a view. Pretty well off, do you ask, sir? Middling—middling—but *well* off, if compared with the poor Spitalfields weavers here—a man's heart may bleed to think of it.” I may add that my informant's wife, in a tone of kindly feeling, detailed to me some very distressing cases among the weavers. “Something must be done for them,” she said, or “they'll die out.”

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*The Morning Chronicle, Thursday, February 21, 1850.*

We have to acknowledge the receipt of a Post-office order for 1*l.* 10*s.*, for the Poor Modeller, from B. S., of H. We have also received 6*s.* from an Oxford M. A., for the same party.

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Mr. H., of Upper Thames-street, has forwarded us 1*l.* for the Lady and her Daughters.

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*The Morning Chronicle, Saturday, February 23, 1850.*

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING CHRONICLE.

SIR—I have read with deep interest, from time to time, the statements in your paper of the sufferings of various bodies of the working classes; still more interesting are the accounts of the patience and sympathy with each other exhibited by many of them. Plans for relieving this mass of evil appear to me somewhat delusive, and often impracticable; but I have hopes some well-devised measures for gradually though slowly preventing these evils arising, by lessening their causes, may be suggested.

This must in any case be a work of time and patience. Though any aid given by donation is but as a drop of water, I cannot refuse myself the pleasure of placing in your hands a trifle, part of it for the poor toymaker and his kind daughter mentioned in your paper of to-day. The rest to aid any other kind-hearted sufferer your Commissioner may think most deserving of it. Thanking you for your efforts in this good cause—

I remain, your obedient servant,

R. A. S.

University Club, Pall-mall East, Feb. 21.

[A cheque for 10*l.* was enclosed in the above.]

---

M. J. requests the Editor of *The Morning Chronicle* to add the enclosed sum of 3*l.* 10*s.* to the funds for the emigration of the distressed needlewomen.—Framlingham, Feb. 21.

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C. L. L. begs to enclose 1*l.*, which she will feel obliged by the Editor forwarding to the distressed modeller, whose case is mentioned in *The Morning Chronicle* of the 15th.—Feb. 20.

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We have to acknowledge the receipt of a sovereign from P. C., to be applied for the benefit of the unfortunate Needlewomen who are disqualified from benefiting by the proposed emigration plan.

---

G. P. encloses 1*l.* for the poor shoebinder whose case lately appeared in this paper.

---

W. J. has forwarded us a half-sovereign for the white-wood toy-maker, with a diseased thigh.

---

The Editor of *The Morning Chronicle* is requested to be kind enough to convey the enclosed 10*s.* to the "White-wood Toy-maker;" or if inconvenient, to devote it as he pleases.

CANTABRIGIENSIS.

University Club, Feb. 21, 1850.

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M. A. W. presents her compliments to the Editor of *The Morning Chronicle*, and requests he will give the enclosed 1*l.* to the poor widow (shoebinder) mentioned in the letter dated February 14, on "Labour and the Poor."

Thursday, Feb. 21.

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