



NAILS AND CHAINS.

BY THE REV. HAROLD RYLETT.

Illustrated by TOM HILL.

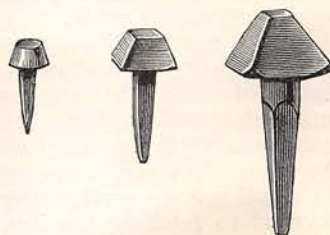


N the Black Country—a district embracing an area of some sixty or seventy square miles in South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire—there is a vast population, residing chiefly in small towns and large villages, and engaged in the most diverse occupations. In many of these women and young girls are employed to a very large extent, and in some instances their work is emphatically unfeminine. Conspicuous among such industries are the nail and chain trades, and it is with these I propose to deal.

Let us take the nail trade first. Nailers may be found at work on almost any day and at almost all hours, at Dudley, Old Hill, Gornal, Sedgely, Old Swinford, Bromsgrove, and many other places.

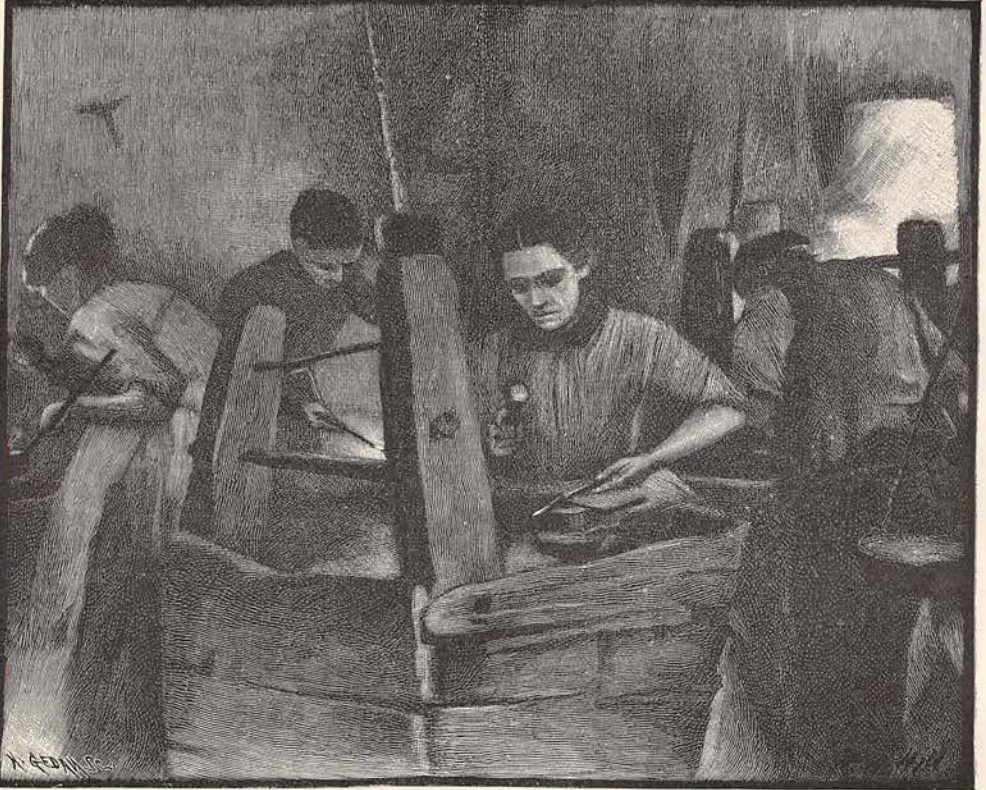
The best way to learn how the people work and live is to go and see them, and as for this purpose one place is as good as another, suppose we make our way to Old Hill about three or four miles from Dudley, on the road to Halesowen. Here, under the shadow cast by the stately parish church, is a row of small houses fronting the main street. At the rear of the end house is a thoroughly typical nail-shop. It is a small building, about nine feet square and as many high. In the centre is a small blacksmith's hearth, and grouped closely around it are four blocks or "stalls" at which, on the occasion of my visit, were four persons—one man and three women—hard at work making hob-nails. I found here three generations of the same family—grandfather and grandmother, daughter and granddaughter. The old people are bent and worn with age and toil. Their daughter, a woman of middle age, presents unmistakable evidence of a hard life; while her daughter, apparently between seventeen and eighteen, is a lissom and rather pleasant-looking girl.

Sticking in the fire, which is kept agoing by a puff or two from the bellows, given first by one and then by another of the group, are a number of short rods of iron about the thickness of a three-inch nail. The old lady who faces us snatches one of these rods from the fire, and with a few sharp blows forms a point. Placing the rod upon a chisel, she gives it another smart blow, which nearly severs it about half an inch from the point. The point is next inserted in a small tool fixed in the stall beside the tiny anvil, and by a rapid twist the severance is complete. Then by a touch of the foot upon a lever a heavy hammer comes sharply down and the head of the nail is formed. Finally, by touching a spring the nail is jerked from the tool, and there upon the stall it lies, a perfect hob-nail. The rod from which it was made is instantly returned to the fire, and the same process is repeated with another rod which has been heating in



HOB-NAILS.

the meanwhile. The dexterity and speed with which the operation is performed are amazing, for the iron is heated and the nail made in much less time than will be occupied in reading this description of the process. Some idea of what is demanded in the way of dexterity and speed may be formed from the fact that a strong and clever girl of sixteen or eighteen, working ten actual hours, on a size known as No. 16—so called because 1,000 nails weigh sixteen ounces—would make 2,500 nails—that is to say, 250 per hour, or rather more than four a minute. A larger size, such as was being made in this shop on the occasion of my visit, weighed 5 lbs. to the thousand. The girl working in the far corner, and “sticking close at it”—that is to say, working ten actual hours, can make 2,000



MAKING HOB-NAILS.

nails of this size in the day, and if she makes a bundle¹ in the week is regarded as having done a good week's work. In the case of such small nails as these, 12 lbs. is allowed for waste, so that out of a bundle of 60 lbs. a girl would be expected to make 48 lbs. of nails. For this she would receive 6s. 9d. if she obtained the list price. Another size, made also in this shop, but by the old man, weighs 16 lbs. to the 1,000. A strong man of, say, thirty years of age, working very hard, would make 2 lbs. or 250 nails in an hour. Of this size 52 lbs. are reckoned to the bundle of 60 lbs. The list price is 5s. per bundle, and two bundles would be regarded as a good week's work.

But it must not be supposed that a girl in the one case or a man in the other, would actually get the 6s. 9d. or the 10s. for the week's work. If the girl were working for herself she would have to pay her share of the firing, something for the repair of tools, and perhaps 6d. for her “stall.” These several charges would probably amount to at least 1s. a week the year round. And there would be similar deductions in the case of the man. Further, it must be borne in mind that, as a matter of fact, nailers seldom do a full week's work. Considerable time—often as much as one day a week—is devoted to fetching the iron from, and carrying the nails to, the warehouse of the

¹ A bundle means a bundle of rods weighing 60 lbs.

master for whom the people work. A man or a woman who worked five days a week the year round would be counted exceptionally fortunate.

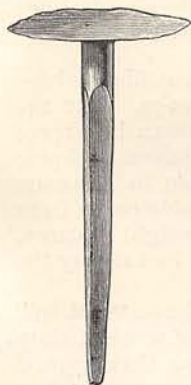
There is of course much more irregularity of work among the women than among the men, for the reason that the former have in most cases domestic duties to discharge. This is seen in the case we have been considering. I was able to obtain the earnings of the family for the week in which my visit was paid. The grandfather earned 8s. 0½d., the grandmother 4s. 1½d., the daughter 3s. 6d., and the granddaughter 3s. 3d.—in all, 18s. 11d. But this was not the entire income of the family, for it appears that here was an instance of what is common in these parts—an instance, namely, of as many persons as possible living together, and thus making ends meet. In the small house adjacent to the shop the old people live with their daughter and son-in-law and the six children of the latter. Of the children, the eldest is the girl of seventeen who works in the shop. Next comes a lad of sixteen, who works elsewhere; then comes a girl of fourteen, and three younger children. In all, ten persons, six at least of whom may be described as adults, reside in a house, the accommodation in which consists of one small room downstairs and two still smaller rooms above. To the income already given there has to be added 15s. earned by the father of the children, and 4s. 6d. earned by the lad. The total income was 38s., from which however 7s. must be deducted for rent, firing, and repair of tools. This family, though overcrowded, is certainly better off in the matter of income than multitudes of others, but as their week's earnings of 38s. represent a good average taking the year round, it will be seen that it is a comparatively small sum when it is remembered that it required six adult persons to earn it.

There are innumerable instances to be met with in the nail and chain districts in which the united income of the workers of the household does not amount to more than ten or eleven shillings. And instances are common of women and young girls working for themselves and earning not more than 4s. 6d. or 5s. per week. One young woman I know works from six in the morning until nine at

night whenever she can get work to do, but in a full week her net earnings are not more than 4s. 6d. Her work is even more tedious than that I have been describing, for she makes the small nail which is commonly used for nailing down carpets.



CARPET NAIL.



NO. 15 RAG-NAIL.

But much of the work on which females are engaged in the nail trade is far harder than that already mentioned. Here, for example, is a No. 15 rag-nail. To head this nail it is necessary to strike very hard indeed, and the work is so exhausting that none but the most robust females can engage in it. A strong woman working hard from seven in the morning until eight at night would make 13 lbs. of such nails, and earn 1s. 7d. Six days of such labour would mean that a woman would earn 9s. 6d. But, as a matter of fact, no one does work six days. Allowance has to be made for time occupied in fetching and carrying, for repair of tools and other things, so that, taking one week with another, a woman would count it a good week's work to make a bundle in a week, that is, 52 lbs., for which 6s.

would be paid. From this sum there would be the usual deductions for stalling and firing.

A much commoner kind of nail is what is known as the two-inch clasp. I found these being made at Kate's Hill, Dudley.

In a small shop measuring ten feet by nine feet, and ten feet high in the highest and less than six feet in the lowest part—the structure was in fact a little lean-to shed erected at the back of a dwelling-house—were five females at work, apparently tearing their hearts out in the making of these nails. Each person had two short rods in the hearth, which was in the centre of the shop. Each in turn gave the bellows a touch, and then snatched a heated rod from the fire and quickly beat it to a point—the nail having to be hammered well its entire length, save for about a quarter of an inch at the top, which was to form the head. Then came the partial severance, the insertion of the half-made nail into a tool known as the bore—which operation, it must be explained, involves the dropping of the hammer and the transfer of the iron from one hand to the other; then the rod is twisted off and thrown down, the hammer is resumed, and the head of the nail formed by one or



2-INCH CLASP.

two blows, the bore being meantime firmly held in the left hand. This done, the nail is turned out of the bore into a tin can, the bore and hammer are dropped upon the stall, the rod is picked up and returned to the fire with the right hand, while a puff is given to the bellows with the left, another rod is taken from the fire, and so the game goes on. I have entered into these minute and perhaps uninteresting details with a view to convey some idea of the amazing rapidity and vigour with which these women work, but in truth the thing must be seen to be adequately appreciated. It may assist the reader however if I mention that 125 two-inch clasp nails may be made in an hour, or about two a minute, and that 125 weigh 1 lb. No woman could go on making 1 lb. an hour of such nails; while 10 lbs. in twelve hours would be very good and very hard work. The rate of pay is 8½*d.* for 6¼ lbs., or almost 1¼*d.* per hour.

As I have before said, female nailers do not work with the steadiness and regularity characteristic of female workers in a cotton factory; and as the work done in this shop in the week preceding my visit is a very fair average, I cannot perhaps do better than state what was done.

No. 1 was a young married woman about thirty years of age, and the mother of three children. Her husband, a miner, brought home 12*s.* This woman from a circumstance incidental to married life was unable to stand at her stall for a long time together, and so she had earned but 1*s.* 9½*d.*, out of which she had to pay 5*d.* for her stall. The rent of her house was 3*s.*

No. 2, a strong young woman of perhaps twenty-five years of age, worked ten hours on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and five hours on Friday, and earned 3*s.*, out of which she had to pay 5*d.* for her stall.

No. 3, a particularly strong and remarkably healthy-looking girl, eighteen or nineteen years of age, worked exactly the same time and earned 3*s.* 3*d.*, but had nothing to pay for stallage, because the shop belonged to her mother.

No. 4, a girl of fourteen, had not worked so long and had earned but 1*s.* 5½*d.* She had nothing to pay for stallage, because she was a sister of No. 3, but as the nails she made were made for another woman, who herself took them to the warehouse, one penny was deducted for carriage.

No. 5, a married woman turned fifty years of age, is the wife of a collier, whose earnings are sometimes 9*s.* 6*d.* per week, sometimes 13*s.*, and sometimes 7*s.* For the last three weeks however the man had been too ill to work. This woman has three daughters married, one of them with six children. She has three children at home still to provide for, and of these one is a girl of sixteen who has been in domestic service, but is now "out of a place;" another is a girl of fourteen, unable to go from home; the remaining child goes to school. This woman, with all her weight of cares, earned 3*s.* 6*d.* in the week of which I am speaking, and out of this she had to pay the usual 5*d.* for her stall.

It will occur to some readers probably that all these people might have "put in" more time than they actually did, and that No. 2, for example, if she had worked sixty hours, might have earned say 7*s.* 6*d.* And indeed it is a common charge that a good deal of the poverty of the nailers is due to the fact that they do not always work when they might. I shall not for a moment contend that there are no idle nailers. I will only affirm that in this respect nailers are no worse than other people. But there are several reasons why female nailers cannot put in as much time as it is often supposed they might. In the first place, it is a physical impossibility; the labour is too exhausting, especially in warm weather, for such continuity of application as is possible in most other employments in which women are engaged. In the next place, work is not always to be had. Then again, the time occupied in fetching and carrying, waiting and weighing, has to be taken into account. One of the girls in this shop had to wait at the warehouse three hours for her iron. Then another of the girls was supplied with unsuitable iron. Asked why she did not return it, she replied, "They had not got any of the right sort." As a result she, assisted by another woman, had to carry a bundle weighing 60 lbs. a distance of two miles to another warehouse, and there get it exchanged for a bundle of the right sort. Then the return journey had to be made. Nor was there merely loss of time—a payment had to be made for the exchange. This is a very common thing, and is one of the cruellest acts of injustice that can be perpetrated upon these poor women. And when two women have carried a bundle of iron weighing 60 lbs. a distance of four miles, they may surely be excused if they

should feel disinclined to begin making nails the moment they get to the shop. And it is not always the case that two women assist each other in this way. It is quite a common thing to meet individual women in the nail districts carrying these bundles upon their heads without any assistance. Again, as accounting for the fact that women do not always work as many hours as perhaps they might, it must be remembered that there are at least some domestic duties to discharge, even among nailers.

It is impossible to enter into details in regard to the great variety of nails made by females. They make all sorts and sizes. For the smaller sizes the price is higher, for the larger sizes it is lower. What is known as the three-inch rose-head, weighing 28 lbs. to the thousand, is, I think, the largest made by women. Of these a vigorous and expert young woman could make perhaps 100 in an hour. To make 1000 would be a very good day's work indeed. But no instance of a woman keeping this up throughout the week has come under my notice. These nails are paid for at the rate of 2s. 6d. a bundle, and 54 lbs. weight of nails would have to be returned for every 60 lbs. weight of iron taken out. A woman would have to work hard and long to earn 5s. or 6s. nett in a week at this size of nail.

It is also impossible to do much more than remind the reader that nails are not exclusively made by women, but very largely by men. Men and boys however are generally engaged upon the heavier kinds of common nails and the superior nails, such as Brazils and horse-nails. Within a stone-throw of the shop just described I saw an old man of seventy making what are known as No. 14 Flemish nails. He works from six in the morning until eight at night, and earns 5s. 5d. per week. Rent, firing, and repair of tools absorb the entire amount, and this old man, who is an eminently respectable and much respected man, and his wife, who is unable to work, are supplied with food and clothing by a son of twenty, who works in a pit and brings home 11s. a week. There are numbers of instances of course in which younger and stronger men,



BRAZIL NAIL.

assisted by their families, earn more than this, but such cases as that just given are very numerous, and serve to show to what dire straits the hand-made nail trade is reduced. The Brazil nail is that which, next to the horse-nail, pays best. It is a peculiar nail, made for shoeing mules in Brazil, I am told, and a man working hard may earn perhaps £1 a week. One man I saw making these nails at the Lye was working in certainly the most pestilential place I ever saw in my life. He informed me that by working from six in the morning until nine at night for six days he could earn 16s. Another man, working under more favourable conditions at Dudley, told me he could earn about 18s. These Brazil nails are made in their peculiar shape in order to show that they are unfinished, and thus they pass the Custom House as unfinished goods. And as a fact they are unfinished, for the head has to be made star-shaped and the stem has to be straightened before the nail can be used. It must be clearly understood that in giving the amount of wages earned I am giving an average amount. If an expert man could be kept constantly supplied with iron he would be able, by working very hard for ten hours a day, to earn as much as 23s. a week. As a matter of fact however this is a wage that is very rarely earned.

The horse-nail makers are the aristocracy of the nail trade. But the introduction of machine-made horse-nails has taken this aristocracy down a peg. The standard horse-nail is the No. 12. It is a nail 2½ inches long, and one thousand weigh 12 lbs. The price paid is 2s. 6d. per thousand, or 12 lb. weight. All sizes smaller than this are 1¼d. per thousand or per pound less, and all larger sizes are 1½d. per thousand or per pound more, for a pound is always called a thousand, though in some instances the "thousand" does not mean ten hundred. In the case of "sixteens," for example, it means only four hundred. But these are trade technicalities which it would take a lifetime to learn and several generations to explain. The salient fact is that a good workman making "twelves," that is, the standard nail, could earn

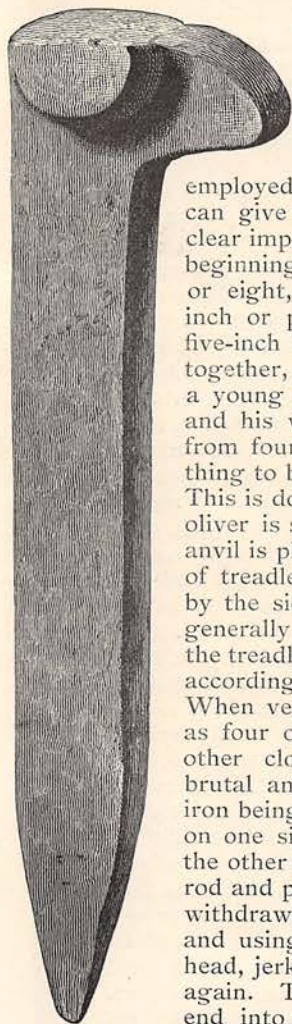


3-INCH ROSE HEAD.



NO. 12 HORSE NAIL.

perhaps £1 a week; making "sixteens," the largest regular size, and counting really 400 nails to 16 lbs., the same man could earn 27s. a week. But as a rule no one ever does earn such sums. The average is from 15s. to 17s. 6d. in the former case, and from 17s. 6d. to £1 in the latter. The making of a good horse-nail demands considerable skill, for the nail has to be well hammered and drawn from head to point with much regularity. The machine-made nail has practically beaten the hand-made nail out of the market, because it is more perfectly tapered and is already pointed, so that the blacksmiths have not to point it, as in the case of the hand-made nail.



5-INCH SPIKE NAIL.

In every deep there is a deeper depth, and we have not touched bottom in the nail trade until we have seen how spike nails are made. The iron is supplied in the usual way, that is to say, in bundles of rods of 56 lbs. weight, and the people either fetch the iron themselves or pay for its carriage. Now the making of spike nails is surely the cruellest occupation in which women and young girls are employed in this country, and though no description of the process can give an adequate idea of it, I will do what I can to convey a clear impression to the reader. A spike nail is simply a very large nail, beginning with the four-inch rose-head nail, and finishing with a seven, or eight, or even nine-inch dog-eared spike or railway brob half an inch or perhaps three-quarters of an inch thick. Let us take the five-inch dog-eared spike, half an inch thick. Two people work together, one on each side of the hearth, and generally a man and a young girl, sometimes a man and a boy, sometimes again a man and his wife. The common case is for a man and a young girl of from fourteen to eighteen years of age to work together. The first thing to be done is to cut the rods into the required five-inch lengths. This is done by means of the oliver, and while the iron is cold. The oliver is simply a sledge-hammer affixed to the block upon which the anvil is placed. It is worked by the right foot operating upon a sort of treadle. The man places the rod upon a chisel fixed in the block by the side of the anvil. The girl then gets close behind the man, generally holding him by the waist, and they both jump together upon the treadle which works the oliver, and with one, two, or three blows, according to the thickness of the iron, the required length is cut off. When very thick iron has been operated upon I have seen as many as four or five men and young women alternating clasping each other close and jumping together upon the oliver, and a more brutal and loathsome spectacle I never witnessed in my life. The iron being cut into the required lengths, the man takes up his position on one side of the hearth and the girl upon the other, the one to head, the other to point the spikes. The man takes a number of pieces of rod and plunges them in the fire. The moment the iron is heated he withdraws one piece, drops the cold end into the socket of a tool, and using hand-hammer and oliver in rapid succession, he forms the head, jerks out the iron, flings it across to his companion, and goes on again. The girl instantly takes what is thrown her, plunges the cold end into her side of the fire, helps to blow the bellows, and then, when her iron is heated, she snatches it from the fire, and using hand-hammer and oliver almost as rapidly as the man, draws the iron to a point, and the spike is finished. The work is terribly hard, for in addition to striking the spike with the hand-hammer as vigorously as any blacksmith would strike a horseshoe, the girl has to work her sledge-hammer with her foot. It is humiliating to see a girl thus occupied. But I have seen a girl of eighteen "heading" as well as "pointing." I shall never forget the sight. Suddenly turning into a well-known yard in Halesowen I saw this young woman with arms and bosom bare, grimy, profusely perspiring, and working like a tigress. It was simply revolting. Yet I was assured by an old and experienced man that though such sights were not as common now as formerly, they were still more frequently to be met with than they should be. The spike nail-makers work extremely hard and are very ill paid. There would be perhaps 300 or 340 such spikes as I have

described in a hundredweight, that is to say in two bundles, and four bundles would be a good day's work. At 2s. 11d. per cwt. 5s. 10d. would be earned by the two persons in a day. This, with all deductions, would mean that the man would earn about 15s. and the girl about 5s. in a week. Cases in which two people can earn more than this are not rare, but the figures I have given represent what I believe to be a very fair average indeed. The one ugly feature about spike nail-making is the employment of young girls and women, involving as it does the use of the oliver. It is nothing short of a scandal, and I am happy to know that the universal feeling among the women and girls themselves is that they ought not to be condemned to such unwomanly toil. They would hail with satisfaction a law prohibiting their employment in this way, and it is earnestly



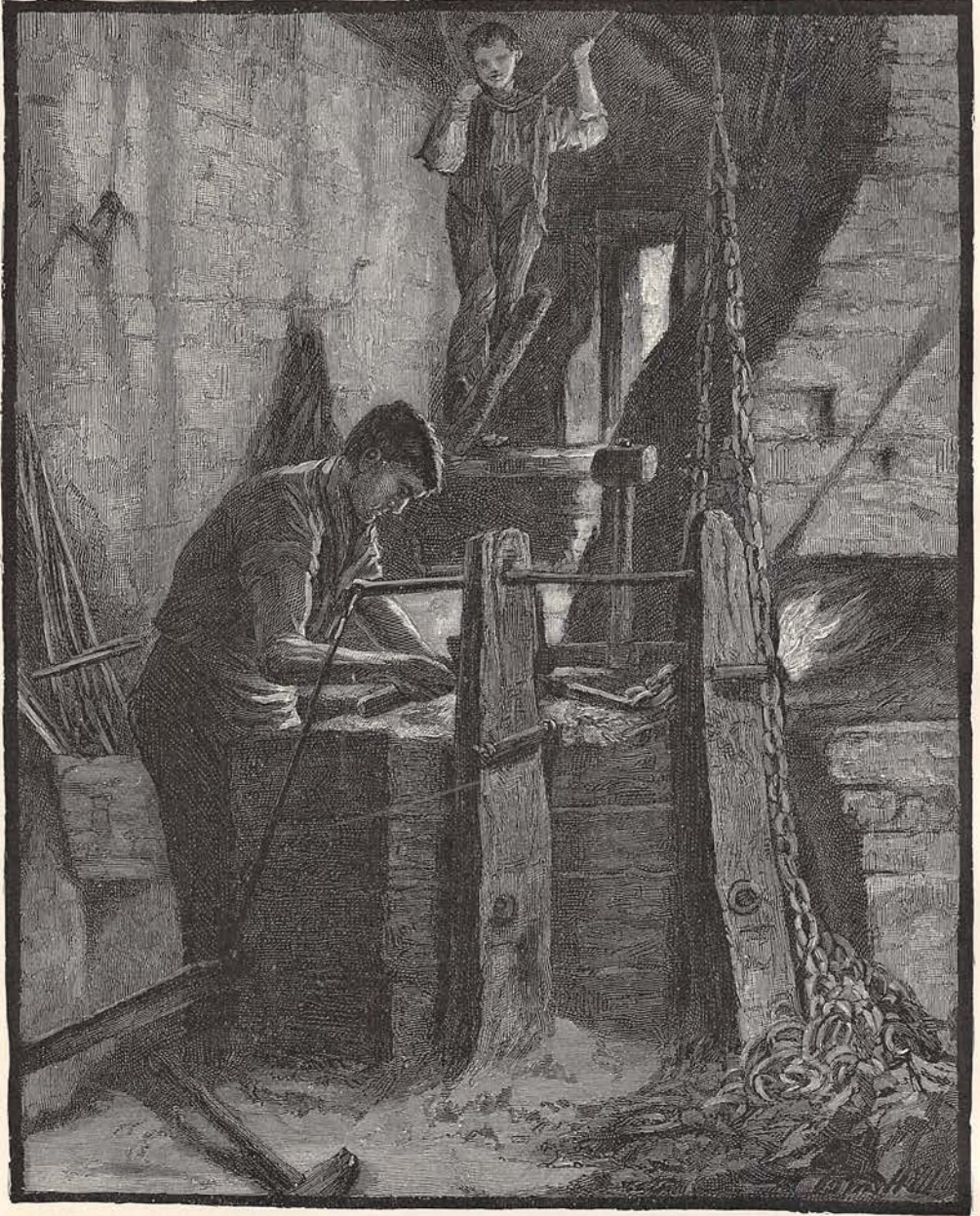
GIRL POINTING SPIKE NAILS.

to be hoped that the next session of Parliament will see the enactment of such a law.

If we turn now to the chain trade we shall find simply a change in the kind of work. In Cradley, Cradley Heath, The Lye, and one or two other places, women and young girls may be found making chains, under precisely similar conditions to those under which nailing is carried on. With the exception of the pointing of spike nails, I think chain-making is harder work for women than nailing, because every link has to be welded, and it is of course of the gravest importance that the weld should be complete and sound.

But the best way of getting a good general idea of chain-making is to drop into one of the shops and observe what is going on, just as we have done in the case of the nailers. Now, here in Cradley Heath it little matters down what entry you go. At the back of the houses, or in the case of large yards before the houses, are any number of shops. Close to what is known as the Five Ways we have a thoroughly typical shop. There, in the far corner, working, singly, at his own hearth, is an able-bodied man making the standard half-inch chain, and just behind and above him is a lad of perhaps twelve or thirteen blowing the bellows, and performing that operation with his foot.

The lad stands on the crossbeam on one foot, and holding on to the rafters overhead, works the handle of the bellows with his other foot. Blowing a strong pair of bellows all day long is hard work for a boy, yet in the majority of cases this work is



MAN CHAIN-MAKING AND BOY BLOWING.

done by young girls, who earn 3s. 6d. or 4s. a week, but where they blow two or three pairs of bellows at a time they can earn more. I myself have seen a young girl working in this way, while an elderly woman who had made chains since her childhood assured me that a while back it was quite common for girls to work in this fashion, but since so much attention had been called to the matter, the practice had been largely abandoned.

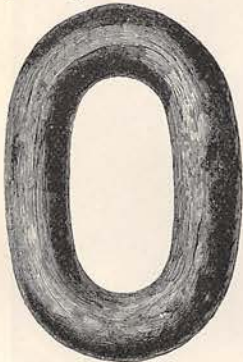
The half-inch chain which this man is making is not the largest made by a man single-handed, but it is the size which is taken as the standard for fixing price-lists.

Thus, what is known as the 4s. list means the list according to which half-inch chain has to be paid for at the rate of 4s. per cwt. There are 27 links in $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch chain to the yard, and there are 14 yards to the cwt., *i.e.* 378 links. A strong man may make six cwt. a week by working hard and long, and if he gets the list price he will earn 24s., out of which he will have to pay his blower 4s., and after that there will be the usual deductions for rent, firing, and repair of tools. Taking a rod into his hand and plunging it into the fire, the man waits until it is sufficiently heated, and then he hammers the end slightly to prepare it for the welding. Then he cuts off the required length, plunges the rod into the fire again, takes up the piece first cut off, reverses it and returns it to the fire; in due time withdraws it, hammers the fresh end, and by one or two heavy blows bends it until the ends meet and overlap each other. The link is once more returned to the fire, and while it there becomes white hot the man works again at the preparation of another link. By the time this is accomplished the first link is ready for welding. It is snatched from the fire, and with two or three blows the weld is made, and then the rounding of the weld takes place. The little anvil is shaped very much like a common flat iron turned up-side down, but with a narrower point. The point, moreover, contains an indentation half the size of the iron, the link is deftly placed upon this point, and then by a rapid movement of the foot down comes a sledge hammer in which is fixed a tool with the corresponding half-round indentation to that in the anvil. Half-a-dozen blows in rapid alternation from the hand-hammer and the "oliver," and the link is completed. The making of the next link includes the threading of the first just prior to the final heating for the weld, and then as the chain lengthens it is strung over a pulley so as to be out of the way of the worker as he proceeds.

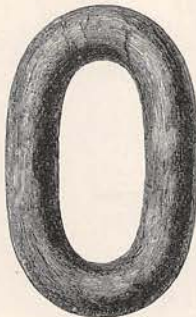


$\frac{1}{2}$ -INCH CHAIN.

Women of course do not make such heavy chains, and do not as a rule use the "oliver," but they do their own blowing. The largest size of chain made commonly by women and girls is being made in this same shop. It is what is known



BARE $\frac{3}{8}$ -INCH CHAIN.



NO. 1 CHAIN.

as bare $\frac{3}{8}$. Thirty-nine links make a yard, and six yards will weigh about 21 lbs. A strong young woman will make, working hard and fast a whole week, about 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt., and will thus earn in clear wages perhaps 10s. Another common size is No. 1, of which 45 links go to the yard, 6 yards weigh 15 lbs., and 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. would be a very good week's work, and a woman or a strong girl making this chain would earn perhaps 7s. 6d. per week. Still another size is yet smaller, viz. No. 4. Fifty-seven links make a yard, and weigh 9 lbs. An expert and industrious female can make $\frac{3}{4}$ cwt. in a long week, and earn 7s. 6d. There are many still smaller sizes, but I will mention only No. 8. Of this size 76 links make a yard, and 6 yards weigh 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. A very smart young woman can make 28 lbs. of such chain in a week, and earn 7s. The ordinary reader will not gather from any additional details of this kind how laborious, and how exacting without being interesting, the whole business is. There is not the slightest variety in the work. Every link has to be made in precisely the same way, and when one person has to perform exactly the same operation, say 3,000 times in the same week, it is apt to become very dreary work. As the curious stranger makes his way through the district, almost incredible stories are poured into his ears, but a little investigation suffices to show that the stories, incredible as they

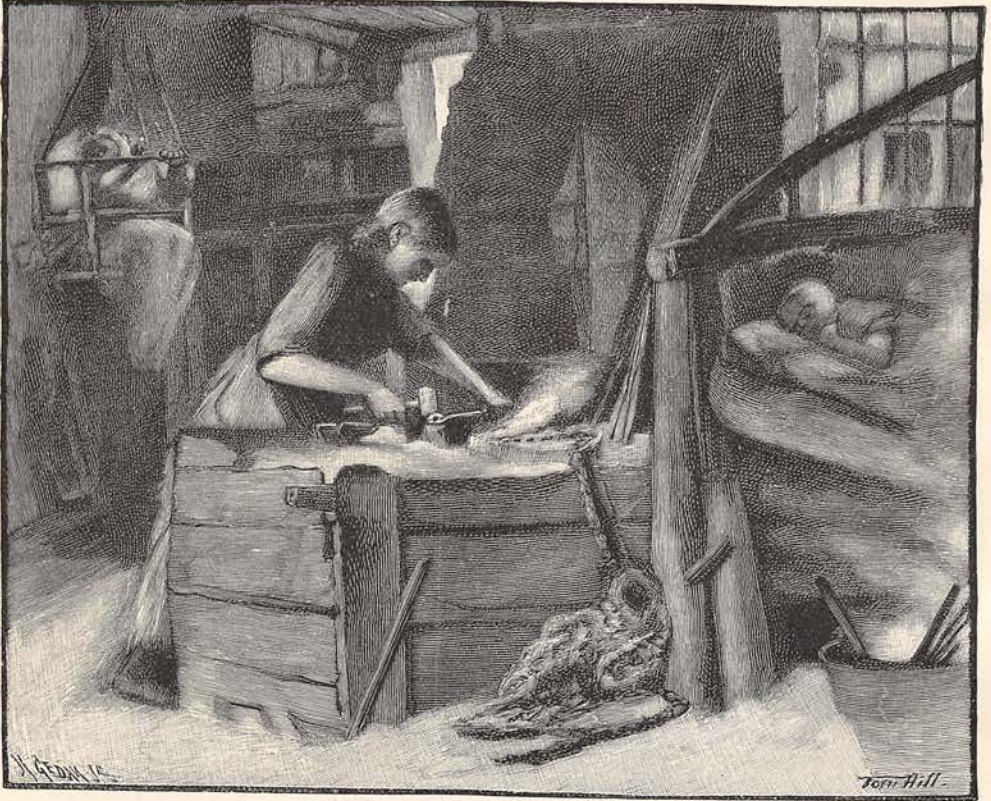
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NO. 8 CHAIN.

seem, have a good foundation in fact. It was an employer and not a worker who informed me that dog-chains made of iron $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch in thickness, and containing 36 links, would be paid for at the rate of a penny each. A woman would have to work very hard indeed to make two dozen a day, and even then her actual working hours would have to number twelve.

But here in the chain trade, as in the nail trade, it must be borne in mind that the women do not as a rule work full weeks. Large numbers of them work about half a week, and it is quite common to hear of women earning 2s. 6d., 3s., or 5s., by spending in the shop all the time they can spare from household duties; and when you inquire why they work at all, the answer invariably is, that the male breadwinners of the household, if there are any, are unable to get enough to live upon. Large numbers of the female chain-makers are wives or daughters of miners, and it frequently



WOMAN CHAIN MAKING.

happens that among the colliers work is very irregular. Cases of extreme misery are very common. You meet with the widow who is left with several children to provide for, the old couple who keep a house over their heads by working at chain-making, while body and soul are kept together by the labour of a son or daughter. One case which is well known to me is exceedingly hard. The husband has long been ill and unable to work, except now and then for brief periods, and the home such as it is has to be kept together by the labour of the wife, who in addition to having a sick husband upon her hands, has five children to provide for. The "dwelling-house" in this case is an old shed and not a house at all, and it is certainly unfit for human habitation. It consists of one apartment, and in that apartment there is one bed.

Generally, I am not prepared to say that the dwellings of the people are any worse than the dwellings of the labouring poor in most of our large towns; but the sanitary arrangements throughout the nail and chain districts are simply disgusting. The general health is good notwithstanding, though there are particular areas in which there is an abnormally high death-rate among children. But the puzzle is that the general health of the people should be so good while the sanitary arrangements are so

bad. It is quite a common thing to find an overflowing midden adjoining a nail or chain shop or within two yards of it, and open drains flowing for hundreds of yards past the houses and the shops in which the people live and work are of frequent occurrence. Tibbett's Gardens, Cradley Heath, may be said to be on the banks of an open sewer. As you pass through this salubrious region you have to jump this meandering drain several times in the course of your perambulation of the gardens. There are two wells in this yard—for the gardens, it need hardly be said, have long since disappeared, or are represented by a few square yards of scarlet-runner beans—and both of them require closing or cleansing. And what exists here exists all over the district. It is without exception the filthiest district I ever saw, and I have seen all the large towns of Great Britain and Ireland. Owing however to the attention concentrated upon this district, during the sittings of the Sweating Committee, certain "improvements" have been effected in one or two places—notably Anvil Yard, Cradley. All the office-houses belonging to the dwelling-houses stand in the centre of the yard in full view of the houses, and until recently were unscreened in the slightest degree. Now they are screened; but when I was there a short time ago the middens were overflowing as usual. But I think the worst yard I know of at the present moment is one known as Billingham's, near the Five Ways, Cradley Heath. Across the bottom of this yard an open sewer runs, and the stench from it is terrible.

Most of the houses in which the nailers and chain-makers live are small, and many are in a most dilapidated condition. Indeed, the entire district covered by the nail and chain trades presents a most melancholy appearance. Here you have a whole street in ruins; there you have another street where the houses appear to be on the very verge of toppling over. Now and then you come across a house several degrees out of the perpendicular, and only prevented from falling by a number of sturdy props. Yet the people do not appear to be greatly concerned.

And the shops are worse than the houses. It is not uncommon for the people to be compelled to "quit working" whenever there is a fall of rain. I suppose that the rents are so low that the property-owners find themselves unable to spend money in repairs, especially seeing that in multitudes of cases mere repair is impossible. The only thing that can be done is to rebuild, and this, in view of the decadence of the nail trade at all events, is out of the question.

That the poor people are robbed by the sweater and fogger is beyond question. Sometimes the sweater is a master; more often fogger and sweater are one. A master is simply a large employer, and a fogger is a small one. The only other difference is that a master is not always a sweater, while a fogger always is. The people are cheated in a thousand ways. But it is simply impossible to familiarize the general reader sufficiently with the technicalities of the trade to permit of a lucid exposition of the multifarious tricks by which the nailers and chain-makers are every day robbed of their just dues. One way I have already mentioned—viz. that of giving out unsuitable iron and compelling the worker to take it elsewhere and get it exchanged for suitable iron. Another way is by falsifying scales, and so paying the people for less work than they actually do. A very common way is by declaring that nails that are really No. 8 are in fact No. 9, and paying for No. 9 instead of No. 8, the price for No. 9 being less than for No. 8. Yet another way is by giving out iron of a wrong size. I was in a shop a short time ago, and the man, whom I know well, said, "That rascally master of mine has done me again." "How so?" I asked. "Why, you see that iron," he replied. "There are two more rods to the bundle than there should be, and I shall have to make so many the more links, but I shall only be paid for the quantity that the right size iron would make." While an exceedingly cruel form of sweating is to employ apprentices and compel them to do the same work as men. And so I might multiply instances of this kind, but it would be to no purpose. The best masters themselves admit the evil, and they admit further that the Truck Acts are evaded. A small master or fogger has a brother or a sister who keeps a small shop or perhaps a public-house, and those who get work from him are expected to deal at this shop or use this public-house. How to checkmate all this chicanery is a very difficult question. But it is clear to me that there is room for a good deal of improvement both in the matter of legislative regulation and voluntary organization on the part of the people themselves. The individualistic system of working in the small domestic shops is essentially bad. Those who work in the small

factories are better off than those who work singly, and I have known this to be the case in at least one instance when the owner of the small factory, or large shop, was known as a fogger. In one such large shop I saw a dozen girls working. They were certainly all strong, vigorous young women, but, working regularly and steadily, they were able to earn much better wages than similar girls working singly or in the small shops.

This has led me to believe that in the nail and chain trades there is fine scope for a well-conceived and well-supported scheme of Productive Co-operation. The work would have to be carried out on a large scale however, and unfortunately the difficulties in the way of such an enterprise appear to be insurmountable.

But the nail and chain-makers, notwithstanding their poverty, their overcrowding, and the general wretchedness of their surroundings, are in the main a law-abiding, sober, industrious, and even a religious people. Instances of actual immorality are



OFF TO THE FOGGERS.

rare, though there is much coarse talk in some of the shops, and in cases where any considerable number of both sexes are employed in the same shop it would certainly be better if there was more perfect supervision. Still, I am bound to say that the character of the people for morality will bear comparison with that of any other class of the community. The children as a rule, when their parents can find them suitable clothing, attend Sunday school, and adult classes and Bible classes abound, mostly carried on by Evangelical and Nonconformist bodies.

On the whole the people are remarkably cheerful. They sing at their work as merrily as possible. Indeed, quite a talent for singing has been developed among them. And it frequently happens in shops in which several people work that they will all sing together with great energy and much sweetness one or other of Moody and Sankey's hymns. In the long winter evenings, the ruddy glow of the fires, the roar of the bellows, the clink of the hammers and the cheerful and harmonious singing of the workers, combine to produce a most striking effect. One is irresistibly reminded of the singing of the negro melodies on the old slave plantations.

The people have their pleasures, too. Pigeon-flying is perhaps the most popular enjoyment, and a nail or chain shop without pigeon-cages and pigeons is a rarity. Indeed, for my part, I think the pigeon fancy is the one redeeming feature about a nail or chain shop. It could be wished that the people were able to find time to indulge their passion for pigeon-flying on any other day than Sunday, but as everybody knows in other parts of the country many worse things happen on that day.

The great complaints of the people are mainly that their wages are too low, and that they are robbed by the sweaters and foggers. As to the former, this is not the place to discuss a question of ways and means, but it does seem hard that in a rich country such as ours women should be compelled to eke out the small wages earned by their husbands by themselves working in the nail and chain shops. No proper home life is possible in such circumstances. When the mother of a family is compelled to go into the shop to make nails or chains she must needs take some of her children with her, and one of the most frequent sights to be met with is that of a mother making nails or chains with her children about her—one perched on the hearth, fearless of the sparks, another fixed in a box suspended from the roof, and perhaps another sleeping on the bellows. Would it not pay such a woman better to do without the pittance she can earn at nail or chain-making and spend more of her time in the house? I was once asked. The answer is, that the pittance this woman earns probably pays the rent, and the few shillings the husband may bring home suffices to keep body and soul together. It is a pity that it should be so, but the remedy is for statesmen to seek. Perhaps when Lord Dunraven's Sweating Report is published, a document which people in the Black Country are somewhat anxious to see, legislation may follow which will be the means of doing away with the evils I have endeavoured to explain.

