

**WOMEN'S INDUSTRIES IN  
LIVERPOOL: AN ENQUIRY INTO  
THE ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF  
LEGISLATION REGULATING THE  
LABOUR OF WOMEN**

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Regulating the Labour of Women by A. Harrison

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# WOMEN'S INDUSTRIES IN LIVERPOOL

AN ENQUIRY INTO THE ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF LEGISLATION REGULATING  
THE LABOUR OF WOMEN

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## PREFACE

The Preface which Miss HARRISON has asked me to contribute to her essay on the condition of women's work in Liverpool gives me the welcome opportunity of adding emphasis to two or three important points brought into prominence by her investigation. But before proceeding to these it is well to point out the circumstances under which this piece of work was undertaken.

Miss HARRISON was appointed to the post of Jevons Scholar in University College, Liverpool, in 1902, and the enquiries on which is based the account given in this essay were carried out during different visits to Liverpool in the Autumn of 1902 and the Spring of 1903. Her aim, as will be seen, was twofold: on the one hand, to examine the effects on the industrial position of women occasioned by the restrictions and regulations of the Factory Acts; on the other hand, to give a description of the general conditions of women's work in Liverpool. In respect of the former, she was working at a problem in Liverpool which at the very same time was receiving consideration in its more general aspects by a Committee of the British Association, and her conclusions should be compared with those contained in the Reports of that Committee, published among the Proceedings of the British Association.

Stated briefly, her conclusions may be summed up as follows:—She considers that, so far as Liverpool evidence goes, it would be inaccurate to assume that the Factory Acts have had any marked result on the wages of women's labour or on the willingness of employers to employ them, though in certain instances and directions some slight tendency in this direction may be

detected. But on this subject the reader should carefully follow her account and arguments. Both general conclusions and exceptions deserve notice, for the whole matter is one of great economic interest as well as of immediate importance.

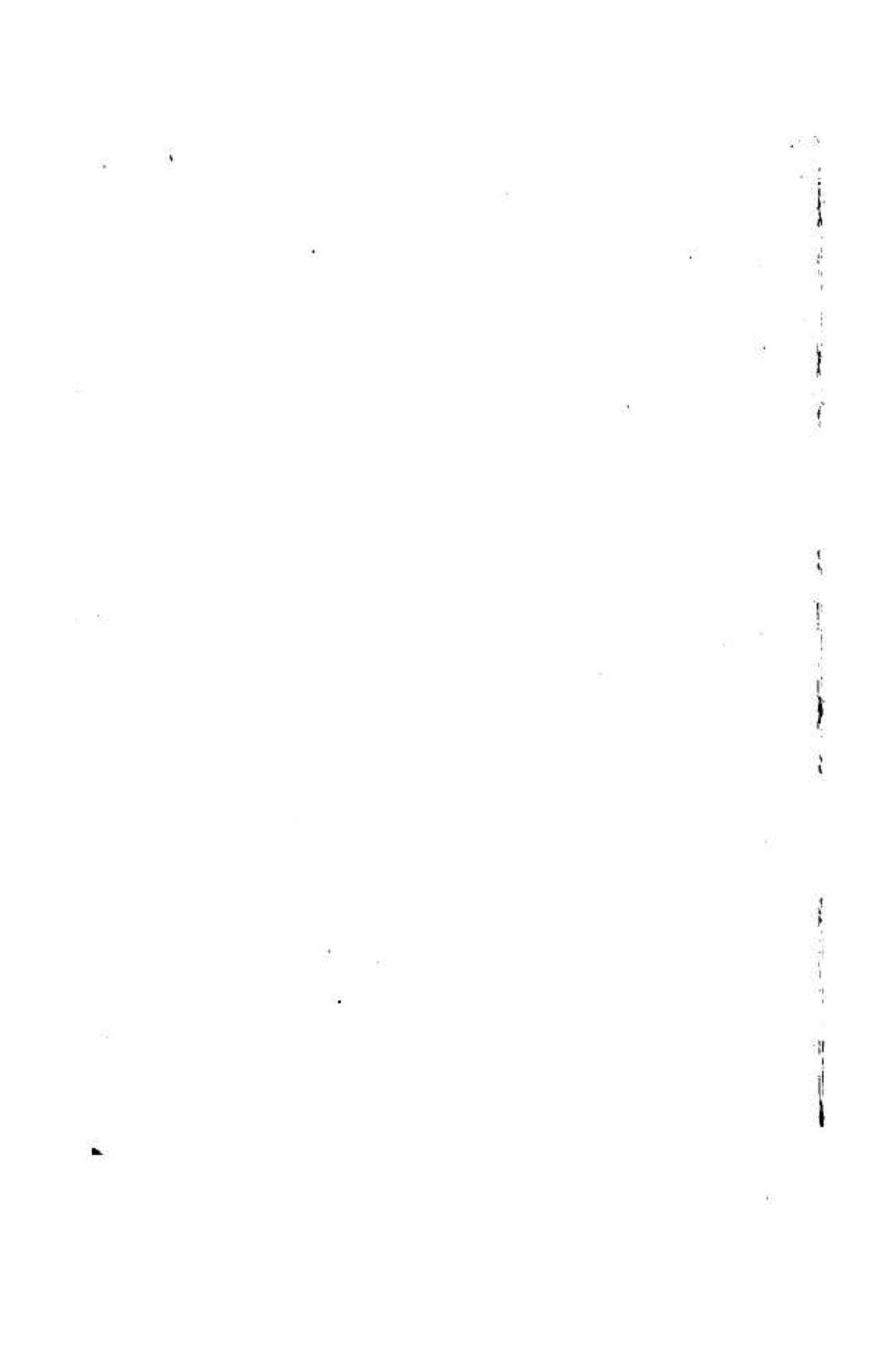
When we turn to the more general criticisms of the conditions holding for women's work in Liverpool, the questions raised are of equal interest. Thus she shows, for instance, how the general industrial characteristic of Liverpool, namely, its peculiar irregularity, manifests itself in women's work as well. Outside domestic service and dressmaking, occupations common to all great towns, there is no great staple employment for women. This is not only a fact of importance in itself; but, as Miss HARRISON indicates, it raises an interesting social question. Home discomfort and neglect are traced by many to the outside occupations of women and girls, but in Liverpool the percentage thus occupied is much smaller than in the other large towns of this district. The results of this difference would make an excellent subject for investigation. Again, Miss HARRISON adduces new evidence to show that the practical monopoly of skilled work by men in those industries, where both men and women are employed, is mainly due to the different results of marriage in the case of the two sexes.

This essay is an excellent example of the value of the study of a particular set of economic facts by a trained and careful observer. So far as the University of Liverpool is concerned it will, I trust, prove the first among many like studies published under its auspices, for it is in the scientific investigation of separate groups of facts, either in the present or the past, that the economic student will find his most fruitful field.

E. C. K. GONNER



The writer wishes to express her gratitude to Professor GONNER for much helpful criticism. Her thanks are also due to Miss B. L. HUTCHINS for her valuable aid during the course of the investigation. And she desires to record her indebtedness to the many employers in Liverpool who willingly gave her access to their works and furnished her with information essential to her work.



# FACTORY LEGISLATION AND WOMEN'S INDUSTRIES

## I. HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

THE legal protection of labour has been gradually evolved from small beginnings, and the legislation regulating women's labour did not, as is sometimes supposed, take shape as an expressly devised system of special protection for women. It has followed as an inevitable result of the regulation of the labour of other classes of workers, and what has happened is that women have been gradually included in the movement for improving industrial conditions generally.

The conditions under which industries were carried on in the latter part of the eighteenth, and the early part of the nineteenth century, are too well-known to need repetition here, and a detailed description of them is recorded in the Parliamentary Reports.<sup>1</sup> There can be no doubt that about the beginning of the nineteenth century the working classes had reached a very low point of want, degradation, and misery. This may be attributed partly to the bad harvests and scarcity of food, partly to the evil effects of the old Poor Law and the

1. See *Report of Committee on Parish Apprentices, Parliamentary Papers, 1814-15, V*; and *Report of Sir Robert Peel's Select Committee on the Employment of Children, Parliamentary Papers, 1816, III.*