

**Chimney sweepers' boys. The resolutions and petition to Parliament ... of the inhabitants of Sheffield ... To which is added an address ... / by Samuel Roberts.**

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# CHIMNEY SWEEPERS' Boys.

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THE  
RESOLUTIONS  
AND  
Petition to Parliament,  
RESPECTING CHILDREN EMPLOYED BY CHIMNEY  
SWEEPERS, AS  
CLIMBING BOYS,

*Agreed upon at a Public Meeting of the Inhabitants of  
Sheffield,*

HELD AT THE CUTLERS' HALL,  
ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16, 1817.

To which is added

## An Address

ON THE OCCASION,  
BY SAMUEL ROBERTS.

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SHEFFIELD :

*Printed by Montgomery and Smith, Iris-Office.*

1817

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Per Dozen, two shillings.—Per Hundred, fourteen shillings.

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# INTRODUCTION.



IN the year 1807, a Public Meeting was held at Sheffield, for the purpose of considering the propriety and practicability of ameliorating the condition of Climbing Boys, and finally superseding the necessity of employing such, by encouraging Machine Sweeping. The attempt being thought desirable, a subscription was made and a Committee appointed to manage the concern.

To effect the objects of the Meeting, the Committee procured the best Machines that were then known, and in some degree improved them.—They also agreed with a man, who appeared well qualified for the purpose, to work them. During the first year, in spite of prejudice and inexperience, he swept more than twelve hundred Chimnies with the Machines. He, however, soon found, that it was easier for him to send Boys up the Chimnies, than to work the Machine himself. He might have several of the former employed at the same time,—he could only work one of the latter,—he therefore became (as all others will, so long as Climbing Boys are allowed,) a regular Chimney Sweeper in the old way. He continued indeed to use the Machine, but only where it was insisted upon; and then in such a way as often to produce disgust.

Not more successful were the Committee in their attempt to ameliorate the condition of the Climbing Boys. They called a Meeting of all the Master Chimney Sweepers in the Trade, and with much difficulty, got them to agree, before the Magistrates, to certain regulations respecting the Boys, which, if abided by, would have served to render their condition in some degree less deplorable. It soon however became manifest, that each of them had no other object in view than to bind the rest, whilst he was endeavouring (by secretly infringing the agreement) to obtain an exclusive advantage for himself. This agreement, therefore of course produced nothing but contention. In fact, it soon was evident that any attempt to bind the Masters by voluntary contracts, was totally out of the question.

Equally unavailing have been the vigilance and exertions of the Committee to enforce, so as to produce any lastingly beneficial effect, the enactments of the law. Many of those enactments are so lax and ill defined, that the Masters set them at defiance. Numbers of them employ their own offspring as Climbing Boys.—With these they are out of the reach of the regulations of the Act, as no provision is therein made respecting such. The objects aggrieved know so little of their rights, and are so unlikely to meet with listeners to their complaints, much less defenders of their cause, that, except in cases of very flagrant cruelty and injustice, the Masters may, and they do, violate the Laws without any great risk.

One of the most explicit and easily enforced clauses in the Act, prohibits any Master from having more than six Apprentices at any one time, yet so totally regardless are they of this prohibition, that the

writer of this Address has heard a Magistrate declare on the Bench, that he well knew a Master Chimney Sweeper in London, who had upwards of One Hundred Apprentices.

The Law does not allow of a Boy to be bound before he is eight years of age—yet the Masters employ them as Climbers very commonly between six and seven, though they may probably not often be bound till they are older. The Law enacts that they shall not cry the Streets before seven, nor after twelve o'clock in winter; it is however well known, that they are often out at that season, before five, and are kept out (seeking work for the next day), till late in the evening.

By Law the Masters are bound to provide them annually with one new Sunday, and one new working dress;—not one in a hundred, it seems probable, does so. They are also strictly prohibited from borrowing or lending Apprentices, yet it appears to be a very common practice amongst them to do so; even here, one-fourth of the Masters have not a single Apprentice of their own!—Whatever work therefore they undertake must be done by borrowed Apprentices.

The endeavours to ameliorate the condition by improving the morals of the Boys, has unfortunately proved almost equally abortive; and, whilst they are kept in the same degraded and oppressed situation, such endeavours, there is no doubt, must always prove so. All opportunities of instruction which the Committee recommended and procured for the Boys were neglected—probably derided. The advice which they gave them, they either could not comprehend, or did not attend to. It was generally received with inattention, if not impatience.—The Books with which they furnished them, did not seem to produce any lasting good effect—probably they were soon gambled away.

To procure for the Climbing Boys one happy day in the year, by giving them an annual entertainment on Easter Monday, when the Committee always dine with them, has been the only part of their attempt in which their friends here have fully succeeded.—To this happy day the pleasing expectations of the poor children are turned long before it arrives, it shines like a solitary bright star, enlivening the unvaried darkness that otherwise surrounds them.—To this feast they come limping and hobbling (for not one that ever came could walk with that freedom and elasticity with which other children move,) with countenances clear from sorrow, and as clear as they can be got from soot;—and, (perhaps excepting the admonitory part,) they enjoy and profit by whatever is set before them.

This, and this only, of the efforts of the Committee appears to do much immediate good.—They have, however, gained some knowledge by experience—that knowledge may, with the blessing of God, be eventually more beneficial to the objects of their attention, than if they had in a greater degree succeeded in their first design.—They have learnt to know, (what Dr. Buchan, in his advice to mothers, had long before told the public,) that “nothing less than a Law prohibiting the practice altogether can avail.—Lay the axe “he says,” at once to the root of the tree.—The evil admits of no other remedy.”—“Surely” he continues, “there is humanity enough in both Houses of Parliament to take up the subject, without any other appeal to their feelings than a bare representation of facts.”

*A most full and hearty concurrence in this opinion, is the result of all the experience the Committee have had. This conviction they have long entertained;—they have long too been waiting for a favourable opportunity of enforcing it upon others, and of assisting in urging the subject upon the consideration of Parliament. That opportunity now seems to present itself. In consequence of the subject having been warmly and strenuously taken up by the Lord Mayor of London, and by a very numerous and highly respectable Public Meeting in that City,—the attention of the friends of humanity throughout the kingdom has been turned in some measure, towards it. It is likewise understood to be the intention of some Members of Parliament, to press the notice of the subject upon the attention of the Legislature. This, therefore, appeared to the Committee in Sheffield, an opportunity which it would be negligent, if not criminal, in them to suffer to pass unimproved—a Public Meeting has been called, at which the Resolutions and Petition to Parliament annexed, were agreed to.*

*In conformity with one of these Resolutions, the accompanying Address has likewise been printed, in hope, that by being extensively disseminated throughout the country, it may help to convince a great majority of the people, not only that the present mode of cleaning Chimnies is impolitic and inhuman, but that it is also totally unnecessary,—and thereby arouse them to simultaneous endeavours to procure its gradual but total abolition.*

*Sheffield, May 1, 1817.*

AT a Meeting of the inhabitants of Sheffield and the Neighbourhood, convened by the Master Cutler, in compliance with a very respectable requisition, and held at the Cutlers' Hall, on Wednesday, April 16, 1817.

T. A. WARD, Esq.

MASTER CUTLER, IN THE CHAIR.

*The following Resolutions were passed unanimously.*

**T**HAT the employment of Climbing Boys to sweep Chimnies is a cruel and unnatural practice, and ought to be abolished.

II. That this practice, which is of comparatively modern date, and only partially adopted in this island, is as unnecessary as it is inhuman, Machines being now in use, whereby the work may generally be performed as well as by Climbing Boys.

III. That from the interested hostility of the Master Chimney Sweepers, and the ignorant prejudice of servants and others, against the use of the Machine, we are convinced, by ten years' experience in this town, that it can never be fully and beneficially introduced, so long as the employment of Climbing Boys shall be tolerated by the Legislature.

IV. That it is therefore our duty to petition Parliament to pass an act entirely prohibiting Master Chimney Sweepers from taking any more apprentices to be used as Climbing Boys, and also from using their own offspring, or any other children not apprentices, for that purpose.

V. That the Petition to the Honourable the House of Commons, now read be adopted by this Meeting; that the three Corporate Bodies of this Town be requested to sanction the same with their public seals; and that the inhabitants at large be solicited to add their Signatures.

VI. That the two Representatives of this County, the Right Hon. Lord Milton and the Right Hon. Lord Lascelles, be respectfully requested to present the said Petition to the House of Commons and that our late Representative, Wm. Wilberforce, Esq. be also respectfully requested to support the same.

VII. That the Remarks made at this Meeting by Mr. Roberts be published, under the direction of the Committee for superseding the employment of Climbing Boys, &c. and disseminated as widely as may be deemed expedient, especially to Members of Parliament, and in large Towns.

VIII. That these Resolutions be published in the two Sheffield Newspapers, and otherwise, as the aforementioned Committee may think proper.

T. A. WARD, MASTER CUTLER.

XI. That the best Thanks of this Meeting be given to the Master Cutler for his conduct in the Chair.

# *Petition*

TO THE

HONOURABLE THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

&c. &c.

**We**, &c. humbly represent to your Honourable House.—That during the last century the practice of cleaning chimnies by means of Young Children being sent up them, has become almost general in this country.

That your Petitioners are of opinion that the said practice is inimical to the prosperity of the State, being destructive of the morals, the health, and often the lives of the Children so employed ;—compelling them in their tender age to the performance of a daily task which is cruel and unnatural, and which at the same time prevents them from obtaining that learning, and enjoying that relaxation, which are essential to their afterwards becoming useful and respectable members of the community.

That your Petitioners are of opinion, that if the poor children apprenticed as Climbing Boys, had the same chance for life as other children have, there would not be employment for more than one in twenty of them at their own trades when grown too big to get up chimnies; and that they therefore must either learn other trades, or what is more probable, become pests and burdens to society.

That your Petitioners are decidedly of opinion, that there is no occasion whatever to employ children as Climbing Boys, because the practice, even in this country, is but of modern date,—because they are at this time very little, if at all, employed in another part of the united kingdom, in which the houses are frequently much higher, and consequently the chimnies much more difficult to sweep by mechanical means than in England, —and because that in this town one man, with a comparatively imperfect machine, in the course of twelve months swept nearly thirteen hundred chimnies, in spite

of a considerable degree of prejudice which then prevailed with many, against the use of Machines.

The chimnies of the poor, your Petitioners are of opinion may be swept with machines, even cheaper than by Climbing Boys, as they are generally very easy to clean, and may be done at the convenience of the sweeper, when he is not employed at larger houses.

That though your Petitioners are thus fully convinced, both by the experience of themselves, and others, that the cleansing of all chimnies may be readily and effectually performed by mechanical means, they are nevertheless persuaded that Climbing Boys will never be generally discarded without a Parliamentary enactment, entirely prohibiting the use of them. This persuasion rests on the experience of ten years, which has shewn them that whoever undertakes to sweep chimnies with machines, will soon (if permitted by law) lay them aside and take Climbing Boys. The Machine he must work himself, the Boy being only his assistant, by taking apprentices, (regardless of the law which restricts the number to six,) he can have an unlimited number.— These he can send in all directions to take their own way; satisfied if they do but bring back every day a certain sum of money and a certain quantity of soot. *He* may all the time be enjoying himself at his ease. On this account the master will never use the Machine but where it is positively required, and in those instances he will so use it, as to disgust the servants, and thereby prevent its being again required.

That your Petitioners are well convinced that so long as Climbing Boys are allowed by law, all chance of improvements being made in the construction and working of Machines is precluded. Such improvements can only be looked for from the ingenuity of those who are anxious to use them, and who will therefore endeavour to render them as perfect as possible.

That your Petitioners are decidedly of opinion, that all attempts materially and permanently to improve the condition of Climbing Boys will prove unavailing.— During ten years, a Committee from among your Petitioners have been endeavouring in vain, to accom-

plish this. The nature of the trade, and the circumstances of the children seem effectually to preclude it.—

That your Petitioners are fully convinced, that if *none* but mechanical methods were permitted, these would afford a regular, reputable, and profitable employment both for apprentices and Adults. The former, if not put out too young, would be likely to be as well treated, as well taught, and as healthy, as the children apprenticed to other trades. When out of their time, they would have learnt an employment which they would continue through life.

That your Petitioners believe, that if a law were enacted, prohibiting the binding of any more apprentices to Chimney Sweepers to be employed as Climbing Boys, and the use of their own offspring or any children as such, this cruel and unnatural practice would be relinquished, without much inconvenience to the public or loss to the present Master Chimney Sweepers. The Boys already apprenticed would serve to continue the trade several years till the Masters had procured the machines and become expert in the use of them; in the management of which the Boys would be also instructed, before the expiration of their apprenticeship.

That your Petitioners, therefore, do most earnestly implore your Honourable House, to take this subject into your early and serious consideration.

A. 5.

THE FOLLOWING

# ADDRESS

IN SUBSTANCE, WAS DELIVERED BY  
MR. SAMUEL ROBERTS,

*At the aforesaid Meeting, and it is now published, at the express desire of the Persons then present, for the information of their Townspeople, their Countrymen at large, and especially the Members of the British Legislature.*

MR. CHAIRMAN,

AFTER having, for more than ten years, laboured with other members of the Committee, in the cause of the poor oppressed class of our fellow creatures, whom we are now assembled to serve; after having, during that period, passed from sanguine hopes, to fears and almost despondency,—I cannot again feel those hopes thus revived, without sensations of gratitude and delight. They now stand, Sir, on a surer and a firmer foundation; experience has shewn, that we before ignorantly attempted to improve the fruit of a corrupt tree; we have now learnt, that the tree itself must be effectually rooted up, and a better planted in its place, or no real good fruit can possibly be produced.

To know what is wanted, and the way in which it should be sought, is at least the first, and perhaps the most important step towards the attainment of an object like that, which we contemplate. Let us then, Sir, heartily and unanimously set to work, and by God's blessing, we shall soon rid the land of this worse than barren tree, which has now for more than a hundred years sorely cumbered the ground.

How often, Sir, do we assert, with pride and confidence, that a slave cannot breathe the pure air which blows on this land of freedom; that his shackles drop off, the moment he sets foot upon this hallowed soil—Vain boast! There is a class of our own children in the streets, who are slaves! The offspring of the free born

Briton are slaves; slaves in their native land,—where all besides are free! There is a *caste* amongst us, whose very name is a bye-word and a reproach, a caste branded and shut out from the society of their fellow creatures. Their appearance is disgusting, and even the infant from the breast is taught to shrink from them, with horror and affright. What, Sir, is slavery? Is it not to be taken away from parents and from home by fraud or violence? Is it not to be bought and sold? Is it not to be subject to the almost uncontrouled will of a tyrannical master? Is it not to be in a land, where there is a protecting law, and yet to be out of the guardianship of that law? Assuredly it is! Then, Sir, are the poor helpless children employed as Chimney Sweepers' Climbing Boys, the worst—the most oppressed of slaves! The West India slavery, (excepting only the middle passage,) has not a feature comparably horrid and disgustingly repulsive with the slavery of these poor creatures!

Many of them are stolen, most of them are bought,—numbers are taken when quite infants, to distant places, where they have not a relative to own them, nor a friend to protect them! There is not, I am persuaded, on the face of the Globe, generally speaking, a class of slave-owners more unfeeling, more tyrannical, than the owners of these poor children. In no species of slavery, I will venture to say, are so many lives, in proportion to their numbers, sacrificed at so early a period of life as in this! No class of slaves in any country, would, I am persuaded, find more difficulty in obtaining the protection of the laws of that country, than these poor infants now find here!

An attempt has been recently made, in a case almost equally disgraceful to this country with that before us, (the State Lottery,) to distinguish between what is in its *nature* evil, and what is only in its *consequences* evil. *This*, however, is in its very nature evil; for whatever may be said, in mitigation of any other species of slavery;—the slave owners themselves acknowledge this to be *inevitably* attended with the utmost cruelty. They admit, that a child cannot *possibly* become one of these slaves, without a degree of bodily suffering, which many negroes in the West Indies, never, in the

course of their lives, experience,—a degree of suffering under which many sink,—many die. In a recent instance, in this Town, when a Master Chimney Sweeper was brought before the Magistrates, for so ill using one boy, that he died, and another so as to endanger his life, the defence set up by the Master was, not that the boy had not been cruelly used, (the wounds on every part of his body too clearly proved that he had;) No! he boldly asserted, that such sufferings were inseparable from the trade,—and that no child could become a Climbing Boy, without going through this painful and dangerous ordeal. He therefore argued, that he had been no way to blame, though he did not attempt to deny that the former boy had died in the course of this necessary hardening. Fearful that this single assertion might not, on such an occasion, he thought conclusive, he brought another Master Chimney Sweeper with him, who asserted the same thing, and by way of establishing the fact beyond controversy, the latter exhibited his *own son*, whose scars sufficiently proved that *he* had not been exempted from this common lot of Climbing Boys, only, that he had in consequence of either more care, or a stronger constitution, survived the seasoning. Now, Sir, whatever defence this might seem to afford to the Master, it will, I presume, afford none to those who unnecessarily encourage such a trade.

The feeling mind revolts at the sight of animals taught to perform any acts not natural to them,—such as dogs dancing, &c. &c. because we well know, that they must have been severely tortured in learning these things. We, however, without remorse, employ poor children in the performance of a task much more revolting to *their* nature, and which we are thus assured they cannot be taught, but by such tortures as greatly endanger and frequently abridge their existence, though it will hardly be asserted in extenuation, that their performances are *amusing*. They are certainly not *necessary*!

It may be said, Sir, that there are laws to protect the Climbing Boys from oppression! There are, it is true, laws intended so to do. So there are to protect the slaves in the West Indies, but where the objects to

be protected, have scarcely any chance of appealing to those laws, they are but little benefited by their existence in the Statute Book. I will venture to say, that out of a thousand instances in which the Masters of these children, in their treatment of them, violate the laws, not one is brought to answer for the offence. Out of a hundred children who lose their lives in consequence of the nature of this vile trade, the case of not one, I am persuaded, is properly investigated.

Not only ought the trade to be stopped entirely, but every Master Chimney Sweeper ought to be compelled to give a strict account of every boy that he ever had, so far as, how he came by him, and how he disposed of him! This (if practicable) would, I am confident, bring to light such facts as would astonish, and strike with horror, many who have yet thought little upon the subject.

It may be said, why not enact *other* regulations which *will* prevent oppression? For this plain reason, Sir, because it is *impossible*. The nature of the trade, and the circumstances of the persons concerned in it, (both Masters and Boys,) preclude all chance of so doing. This experience, as well as reflection, has clearly shewn. But why, I would in turn ask, attempt to amend that which is admitted to be, *in its very nature*, as well as in its consequences, evil, when it is much easier to do away with it altogether?

It may be said, Sir, that many of the boys express themselves fully satisfied with their situations, and seem not to desire any change. This, in some instances may be, and is the case, because they have never known any thing better. I, however, have heard them express very different sentiments. I have seen them in agonies at the bare idea of being compelled to return to their Masters. How is their very frequent running away to be accounted for, but from the ill usage which they experience, and their dislike to the trade? But, the very circumstance of some of these poor wretches expressing themselves satisfied, in a state of such misery and degradation, serves more forcibly than almost any thing else, to prove their lamentable ignorance, and desperate condition, at the same time it most strongly evinces the

necessity of endeavouring the more strenuously to advance them in the scale of human nature.

When, Sir, the Christian Missionaries visited the poor, ignorant, afflicted, heathen *Greenlanders*, and described to them, the comforts which they might attain here, and the blessedness in Heaven hereafter, by embracing the gospel, and living according to its precepts, some of them replied, that they were very well contented with their lot; that, excepting in a season of peculiar severity, (when it was a true a great number of them perished for want,) they had plenty of seals' flesh and fish to live upon,—they had good warm skins to cover them,—they had plenty of train oil and blubber,—they had nothing to do but hunt and fish, and during the long nights, they could sit idle most of their time in their winter houses, which were kept warm by being well filled with smoke;—moreover, that when any of these good things failed them, their sorcerers, by their incantations, could soon supply their deficiency. They, therefore, desired the Missionaries to be so good as to let them alone; they were satisfied as they were; they wanted neither to learn to read nor to work, and as to those *spiritual feelings* and enjoyments, which the Missionaries described, as forming the happiness of Christians, they neither comprehended nor desired them:—such things might do very well for Europeans, who had known nothing better; but the *Greenlanders* had too many *substantial* enjoyments, to need to resort to those *visionary* ones, for which *they* had not even a name. The Missionaries, Sir, notwithstanding those cogent reasons, and the contentedness expressed by the poor *Greenlanders*, thought it right to persevere in attempting to convince them that higher felicities were within their reach,—and eventually, they succeeded in an astonishing degree.

Thus, Sir, in like manner, may the poor uninformed oppressed Climbing Boys declare, that *they* are well contented with *their* condition. They may assert, that they are at times very much their own masters;—that they can wander where they please, providing they bring home every day a certain sum of money, and a certain quantity of soot;—that they are not plagued with being sent to Church or Sunday Schools;—that they can

divert themselves on the Sabbath day, with playing at pinch, or any other game;—they can swear as much as they please without being punished for it, and therefore they are very well satisfied with their lot. Now, Sir, will any gentleman here present, or any gentleman not present, assert, that because these poor creatures are thus from ignorance and the love of wickedness, satisfied with their condition, that *we* ought to let them remain in it? *We* know, if *they* do not, that if they die in this state of depravity, they must be miserable, and that if they should survive and continue in it, they must not only be wretched themselves, but become pests to that society to which they belong. It is, therefore, I presume, our duty, notwithstanding any expressions of contentedness of theirs, to endeavour to rescue them from a situation which will probably be destructive of the health and safety, both of their bodies and their souls.

Let us, Sir, consider the very small number, comparatively speaking, which there are in England and Ireland together, of Climbing Boys, probably not ten thousand. Then let us recollect the frequent cases of which *we hear* of these poor creatures, perishing before they are fourteen years of age, from cruelty and from accidents, in the prosecution of their calling! Let us imagine, if we can, what numbers besides there must be of victims perishing in like manner, of whom we do *not hear*; and add to these the still greater proportion, which (though they may not perish) are struggling with diseases incident to their trade, pining with hunger, afflicted with sores, and sinking under hardships too heavy for their young and tender frames to sustain, till their bodies become deformed, and their limbs crippled and distorted. Then let us say, if this be a trade, to which children should be put, even though they may say that they do not dislike it? Is it proper, Sir, that those who are amongst the most depraved of human creatures in a civilized country, should have the uncontrolled command over the unprotected infant children of the State,—children, to whom they are bound by no ties of consanguinity or natural affection?—yet such is in fact the case, generally speaking, with the Chimney Sweepers and their boys;—and it seems impossible, by human

laws effectually to prevent it, so long as they are permitted to take and to use them, in this objectionable way, at all. This is not conjecture, but a truth established by too many painful facts, though it is probable, that the shocking cases which become known to the public, are not a tenth, nay perhaps, not an hundredth part of those which actually occur.

We have heard of and known instances, Sir, and that not rarely but frequently occurring, when the Master Chimney Sweeper, to accommodate the servants of the house, who were too idle to put out the fire and re-kindle it, has only covered it with a slate. Over this the poor climbing boy was compelled to scramble, and climb up the hot chimney, filled with sulphureous smoke, rendered still more suffocating and pernicious by being forced back again by the slate upon the top of the fire. We have heard, Sir, of an old hag (for she was not worthy to be called by *that name*, which implies every thing that is lovely, tender, amiable and affectionate in human nature,) living apparently in affluence and respectability, who used, with her own hands, to beat and torture these poor Climbing Boys whom she employed, till she herself as well as they could scarcely stand. We have heard of her, when on the bed of sickness, and as it proved on the bed of death, sending for a poor infant up stairs, (whom she knew to have been lately stolen from very respectable parents,) and beating him *herself*, because she suspected that her servants had too much humanity to do it effectually. They had not been able to compel him to execute a task, which his terror and inexperience prevented him from accomplishing. Nay, Sir, we have heard of her, (just before her death) requiring him to be brought up again, and beaten in her presence, (for she was then unable to lift up any thing more than her feeble voice to give the brutal orders, and her dim eyes to behold the horrid scene,) till the child died in consequence of the cruelties which he underwent. She herself escaped the punishment which might have been justly awarded to her here, by being called away to render an account of her evil deeds before the Judge of all the earth.

We have heard, Sir, nay *I* have known instances of these poor infants lying by the way side, covered with

sores, unable if willing to return to their cruel master, in a distant parish, from whom they had fled; unable to procure admission, though attempts were made to introduce them into an infirmary, because their wretchedness and afflictions were too horrid, and too hopeless, even for reception into that refuge of pain and sickness, the last earthly hope of the afflicted poor. One only resource then was left, the neighbouring Workhouse. *That* they gained, and there they experienced every necessary care and attention, till a few weeks removed them into a world where tyrants and tyrannical trades are alike unknown.

We have heard of their clothes being steeped in water, and with these on their backs, the children have been forced up chimnies when on fire, like a bundle of wet rags to extinguish the flames. Some under such circumstances have escaped with their *lives* though almost suffocated, their limbs only being scorched. Others have miserably perished, and their bodies, when at length extricated from the horrid furnace in which they had been slowly roasted, presented spectacles which would have convinced *most* ladies and *some* gentlemen who think the practice should be perpetuated, that it would be as well, if it could be as *conveniently* done, to discontinue it. We have heard, Sir, of them being squeezed into flues so straight, that nothing but a cat, or a *sweeping machine*, could pass through, and when there they have stuck so fast that it was impossible to move either upwards or downwards, even though the flames of *dry* and the smoke of *wet* straw have been applied to compel them so to do. In this dreadful situation, this torturing position, have they remained for hours, life momentarily ebbing away; unable to make themselves heard, though *they* could hear the discourse of those who were within a few yards of them, perhaps talking with indifference about them, perhaps laughing at the supposed ludicrousness of their dilemma, cursing their obstinacy, or devising diverting methods of obliging them to come down. Some of these poor creatures, when apertures have at length been made in various parts of the chimney, have been taken out alive. The *bodies* of others have been found, but their souls had escaped and ascended without them, to *Him* who neither overlooks, nor reviles, nor oppresses, even a *poor Climbing*

**Boy.** We have heard of them being wedged fast in the earthenware pipes, on the tops of the chimnies, and in struggling to get free loosening the pipe, and being precipitated in it from the height of three or four stories, upon the pavement, and literally dashed to pieces.

Hundreds of instances resembling those which have been described, we have known or ascertained. Thousands, no doubt, of such have happened beyond our sphere of information, and if the vile practice be not abolished tens of thousands more will again occur.

If there be, Sir, within the compass of the wide world one class of human beings, which, more than any other calls aloud to us to "*come and help them*," it is the poor Chimney-Sweeper-Boys, crying in our streets, knocking at our doors, entering our houses, and exhausting their little lamp of life in contributing to our accommodation.

We send forth Missionaries to endeavour, at the risk of their lives and the certain loss of all that we consider as comforts, to christianize the heathen of the torrid and the frigid zones, yet we suffer these poor black children of our native land, to live and die in worse than heathen darkness.

During more than twenty years, Sir, did we struggle to rid this nation of one of the most disgraceful traffics that can possibly exist—the traffic in human lives. By the blessing of God, the poor African was at length freed from the terror of being enslaved by Englishmen, and we washed our hands of this foul pollution. Yet, strange inconsistency! we still permit *this* abominable traffic, this oppression of the innocent and the defenceless to disgrace our native land, our very homes. The children of our own poor are bought and sold to slavery, are doomed to oppression, and hopeless bondage,—often to premature death.

We establish Schools, where the children of the poorest of the poor may receive instruction,—where all who come may learn and learn for nothing. In these the poor Climbing Boy has no share, all besides are improving, he alone of all remains untaught. Such as their predecessors were in ignorance and wickedness, almost one hundred years ago, such, to this hour, are the present

generation of Chimney Sweepers' Apprentices. Thousands and hundreds of thousands of pounds do we contribute to spread the pure, the sacred Word of Life and Light and Truth in every cottage and in every land.—  
*"Its sound is gone forth into all the earth, and its words unto the ends of the world.* But where is the poor Climbing Boy *at home* that is the better for all this?—Bring in twenty of them from our streets, examine them, and see if the way of life they have ever known or heard of. Not two amongst them can read a verse intelligibly; not one of them perhaps has a Bible in his possession,—probably few of them have ever seen one!

No man, therefore, Sir, who professes to be a christian, who ventures to name the name of Christ, will surely *now* hesitate to step forward with alacrity to deliver the oppressed, and to loosen the bands of the fatherless and him that hath none to help him. We know that in this instance it *can* be done, because it has formerly been done in this kingdom. We know that it can be done, because it is *now* done in another part of the United Kingdom, where it is more difficult to do it than it is here! We know that it can be done, because in this town within a single year, one man has swept upwards of twelve hundred chimnies with a *Sweeping Machine*, in spite of all the prejudice which existed against it,—and under the disadvantages of that inexperience to which a first attempt was of course subject. That man, however, soon found that by employing Climbing Boys, *his* share of the labour would be much lessened. He therefore, as all others will do while the law tolerates the practice, used *them* in preference, and only the machine where it was insisted upon. All Societies therefore, formed for the purpose of encouraging Machine-sweeping will prove, till Parliament remove this incorrigible evil, in reality Societies for increasing the number of Climbing Boys. So long as children are allowed to be thus employed, all inducement to improve Machine-sweeping is banished. Improvements in these can only be looked for from those who, from self interest, are anxious to render the art as perfect as possible. This cannot be expected of them while a method of doing their work by proxy is sanctioned, which is incomparably easier and not less profit-

able to them. Our experience here then fully proves two things,—FIRST, *that it is even now very possible to do without Climbing Boys*, and SECONDLY, *that so long as Climbing Boys are allowed to be employed, no other method will be generally practised.*

We know that Machine-sweeping will deprive no man of his trade or his bread. It will increase the demand for manly labour. It will take the burden from the shoulders that are unable to sustain it, and lay it upon those who are not only able to bear it, but to whom it would prove every way beneficial.

If we are possessed of common humanity,—if we are possessed even of any regard for our own comfortable feelings, we shall seek by every means in our power to put away this vile abomination from amongst us.—It is every day with a loud voice upbraiding us with our inhumanity.—It presents itself to our sight at every turn in such dreadful woe and misery, as none but the most careless or the most hardened can disregard.—It is sounded in our ears from before cock-crowing in the morning till the hour of rest in the evening, in the shrillest notes of infantine distress.—We hear it when we lie in bed,—mingled with the roaring of the storm, and floating on the rayless air. It is screamed forth from every corner of our streets, and is proclaimed, from the rocking chimnies, higher than from the house tops.—Yet though we thus see it and hear it, we regard it not!—How is this to be explained?—Every woe but this, is listened to with compassion, and relieved (if admitting of relief) with promptitude!—What is the cause of so strange an insensibility in this instance beyond all other?—It is only to be explained, I conceive, on the ground of our having from our earliest years been accustomed to it.—We are all the children, if not the *slaves* of habit.—We never remember the time when the sun did not daily arise from the east, to enlighten and enliven the earth.—We therefore are not filled with admiration at a sight, which would strike us with indescribable astonishment, had we never beheld it before. We never remember the time, when the shrill cries of these wretched little ones did not daily assail our ears,—or the spectacle of their forlorn and deplorable figures did not pass before our eyes.—We

therefore hear them, and look upon them without pity and without surprise.

If for the first time, one of these poor infants were brought to our door, during the pelting of the pitiless storm, so covered with dirt as scarcely to be recognized for any thing human,—his frame enfeebled and his limbs distorted,—half naked,—without shoes or stockings,—a soot bag for a coat,—his eyes inflamed,—his head swelled and sores on almost every part of his body.—If we were then assured that this unfriended creature had been stolen a lovely, graceful, lively child from the arms of respectable and affectionate parents—carried to a distant country amongst strangers, where by hunger, hard-work and ill-usage he had been transformed into the object of misery and disgust which we then saw :—if we were further told, that this poor deformed, diseased little sufferer was, in this sad condition, from day to day, in all seasons and almost at all hours, employed in climbing up the rough insides of chimnies,—choaked with soot, up which we should before have thought it impossible even for a cat to scramble,—his flesh lacerated by the sharp protuberances by the way,—we should at first be incredulous, and when convinced of the fact,—we should be shocked beyond measure, and shrink with horror at the assurance, that such practices were tolerated, and even encouraged in any country, more particularly in one, which was considered as standing pre-eminently distinguished among the christianized nations of the earth.

Sir, I call upon you as a parent ;—I call upon all present, who are parents, to imagine, if they are able to imagine, what would be their feelings and conduct at this meeting, if assured that the child, which had been stolen from *them*, was amongst the number of those wretched Children whose cause we are now met to advocate. Let them try, Sir, to conceive (unfortunately it is not a case altogether imaginary,) let them try, Sir, I say, to conceive that *they* had been, in some mysterious manner, deprived of their offspring,—deprived of it at that interesting and endearing age, when it had just learnt to leap in its mother's arms at the glad sight of its father,—when it could run to meet and to welcome him with a shout of exultation,—when it was just become proud of being able to climb the offered knee,—

to meet half way the expected kiss, and in heart-fluttering accents lisp a parents' name.—Then, Sir, let such a father declare (if words can declare,) *what*, in a case like this, would be the dreadful sufferings that would rend his bosom. Year after year, would hope deferred make the heart sick,—Bitter would be his bread,—his rest disturbed,—his days would be joyless,—and his nights unblest with peace. Let him then, Sir, imagine that when many a heavy year had slowly rolled away, and almost closed the rankling wound, it was again torn open by the information, that his son, after passing through many kinds of misery, had been sold to wandering Chimney Sweepers, taken no one knew whither, no one knew by whom.

Would such a father, Sir, *then* hear the cries of one of these poor little ones with indifference? Would *he* ever pass by one of them without scrutinizing its countenance? Would he suffer this meeting to be held and not attend it? Would he attend it, without pouring forth his feelings in such strains of natural eloquence as would melt the hearts of every one who heard him, that would call forth reprobation and animated exertion from every individual amongst us?

Shall we then wait, Sir, for a call like this! Do we not know, that such occurrences are *not* unfrequent,—that they are inseparable from the trade! Surely, Sir, we can feel for fathers in a case like this.—Thank God—this deplorable lot is not yet that of any of us!—How soon it may be, if the trade be continued, God only knows!—Is it not then, Sir, our interest, as well as our duty, to endeavour to do away with a practice so fraught with almost every species of misery and wretchedness? We *now*, however, not only witness this practice without horror, but we encourage it in preference to using Machines.—The most sentimental lady, who would weep for an hour over a tale of fictitious woe,—such as never did, nor ever could happen,—will hear the screams of one of these wretched children from the top of her chimney before the dawn of day,—hear the rattling of his brush, and the efforts of his bare limbs against the rough walls, not only without tears—but with something approaching to pleasure; wrapped in the sense of her own happy security, perhaps she may moralize for a few

moments, and if very tenderly affected even compose a stanza on the occasion,—then turn herself over and sleep the sounder for having been so delectably disturbed. —Such is the force of habit !

I must not conclude, without again recurring to the *practicability* of sweeping all chimnies without using Climbing Boys,—the impossibility of this is the only plea that can be urged in favour of persevering in the present atrocious method. On what foundation does this plea stand? *That cannot be done, which is still done in a neighbouring country, where it is even more difficult to do than it is here!*—*It can be done, Sir!* and *it can be done better and more easily* than if we were to continue to substitute poor children for rags and brushes!—It is, Sir, a libel upon the ingenuity of Englishmen to doubt, that, when stimulated and induced to it, they cannot invent and work Machines to accomplish more than a little child can do! But so long as a man is allowed to sit like an idle drone at home, and send forth swarms of these little industrious bees in all directions, to collect honey for him, though often at the expence of their lives, he will not be in a hurry to discover any way of collecting it for himself!—Deprive him, however, of these agents, let him either work himself or starve, and he will soon find out the speediest and the best methods of doing the business.

The complaint which is now so prevalent, that the use of Machines lessens the demand for human labour cannot be made in this case. The contrary is the fact. It will only decrease the demand for the labour of those poor early unfortunates, whom the best interests of the State and the feelings of humanity equally require not to be oppressed with tasks, which must deprive them of the instruction and relaxation, essential to their becoming hereafter useful and respectable members of the community.

It may be said, that chimnies are now more difficult to sweep with Machines than they formerly were. Let those who assert this, go and examine the large old houses, which have been built from one to three hundred years. They will find, I am persuaded, the reverse to be the case,—even the old wide kitchen chimnies were then almost always encumbered with smoke jacks. The

fact is, there now wants nothing but the will to abandon this cruel practice. I do not say that all chimnies will be swept cheaper than they are now,—but I do think that to the rich they will not be much more expensive (if at all) and the circumstance of having men of respectable characters to do the work, will be worth some trifling additional expence,—as to the poor, they I am persuaded will get their chimnies swept even for the soot, because these may be in general done with the Machine in a few minutes, and the sweeper can thus employ himself at hours when he is not likely to be engaged in larger houses.

Let it however be understood, that it is not proposed to do away with Climbing Boys all at once, but only to prohibit the masters from taking any more children to be thus barbarously employed. Those who are already apprenticed will have to serve out their time, so that it will be six years before the whole system could be abolished. This would give time for the present masters to become expert in the use of Machines, and those chimnies which are difficult to sweep with the present Machines, might be continued to be swept by the Boys, till other more effective inventions were by ingenuity and experience produced to answer every desirable purpose. This would prevent any inconvenience to the public, or any great loss to the masters.—It would in the mean time, be a tie upon the latter to behave well to the boys, as they would be afraid of losing them because they could not replace them, and they would know that the eyes of the public were perpetually upon them—all these reasons, Sir, convince me, and I trust will convince all who hear them, that the cause which we have espoused must ultimately triumph!

The public does not often think long on any subject, without in the end thinking right. The difficulty is to get them to think at all upon *this*.—If we can do that, we must (by God's blessing) succeed. Prejudice alone is against us—all the arguments are for us—truth, mercy and justice are on our side—only persevere and prejudice itself will give way!—“Let us not, Sir, be weary in well doing, and in *due season*, we shall reap *if we faint not*.”