

**The homemaker and the outlook : a descriptive study of tailoresses and boxmakers / by V. de Vesselitsky.**

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Vesselitsky, V. de.

**Publication/Creation**

London : G. Bell, 1916.

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**THE HOMEWORKER  
AND HER OUTLOOK**

**V. DE VESSELITSKY**

**THE RATAN TATA FOUNDATION**  
(UNIVERSITY OF LONDON)



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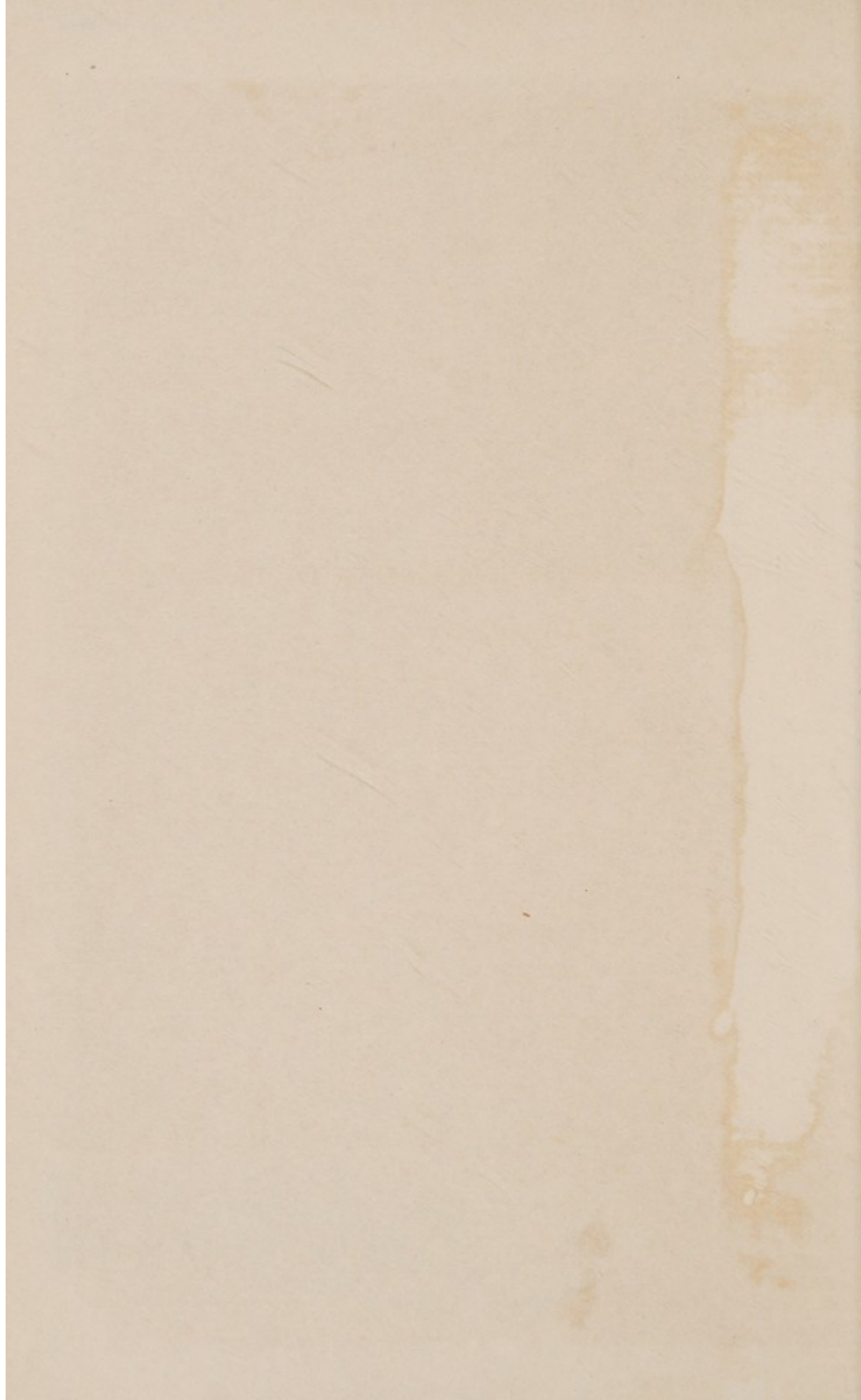
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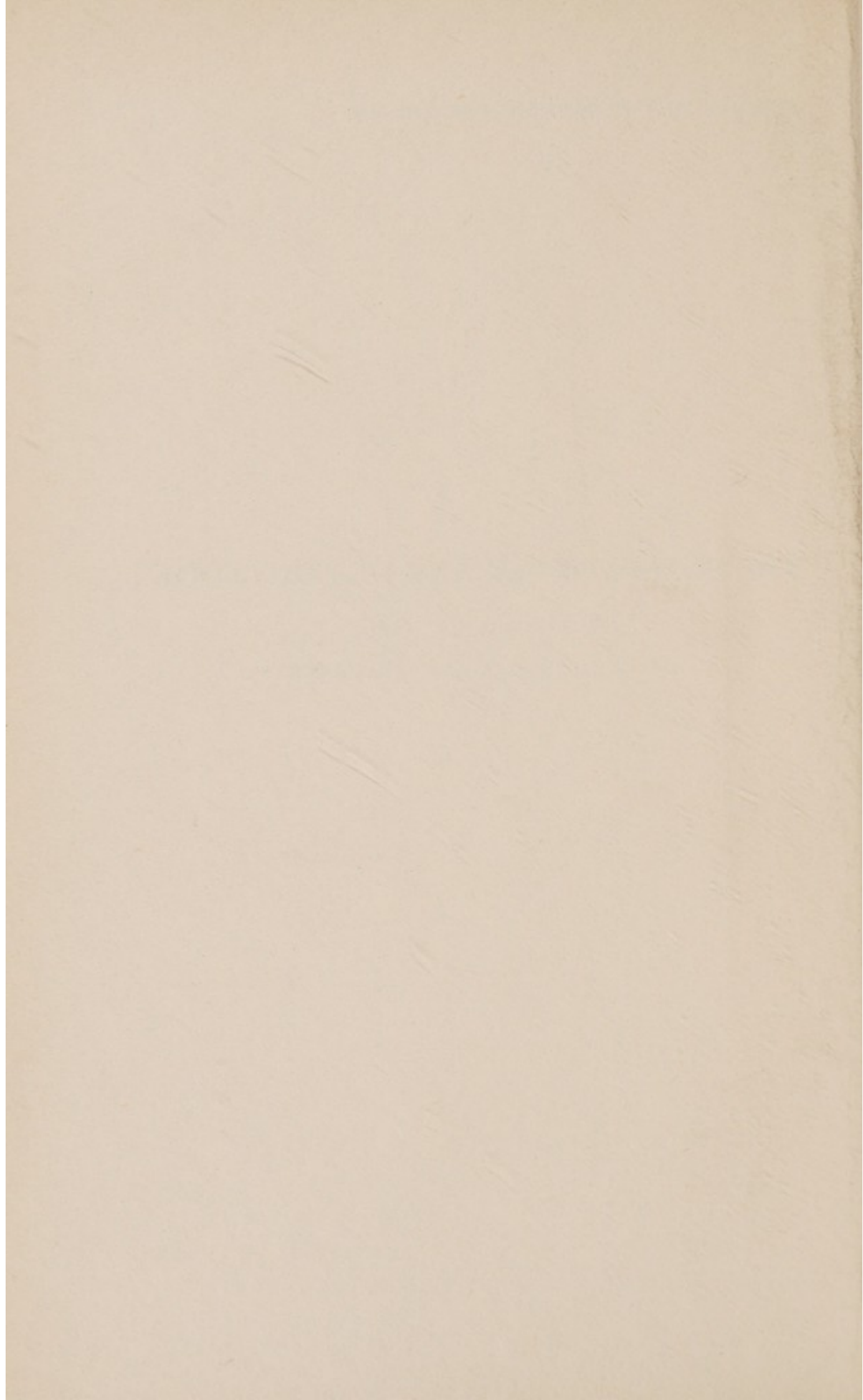
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STUDIES IN THE MINIMUM WAGE—IV

THE HOMEWORKER AND HER OUTLOOK :

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY  
OF TAILORESSES AND BOXMAKERS



THE RATAN TATA FOUNDATION (UNIVERSITY OF LONDON)  
STUDIES IN THE MINIMUM WAGE—IV

# THE HOMEWORKER AND THE OUTLOOK

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF  
TAILORESSES AND BOXMAKERS

BY

V. DE VESSELITSKY

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY R. H. TAWNEY

LONDON :  
G. BELL & SONS LTD.

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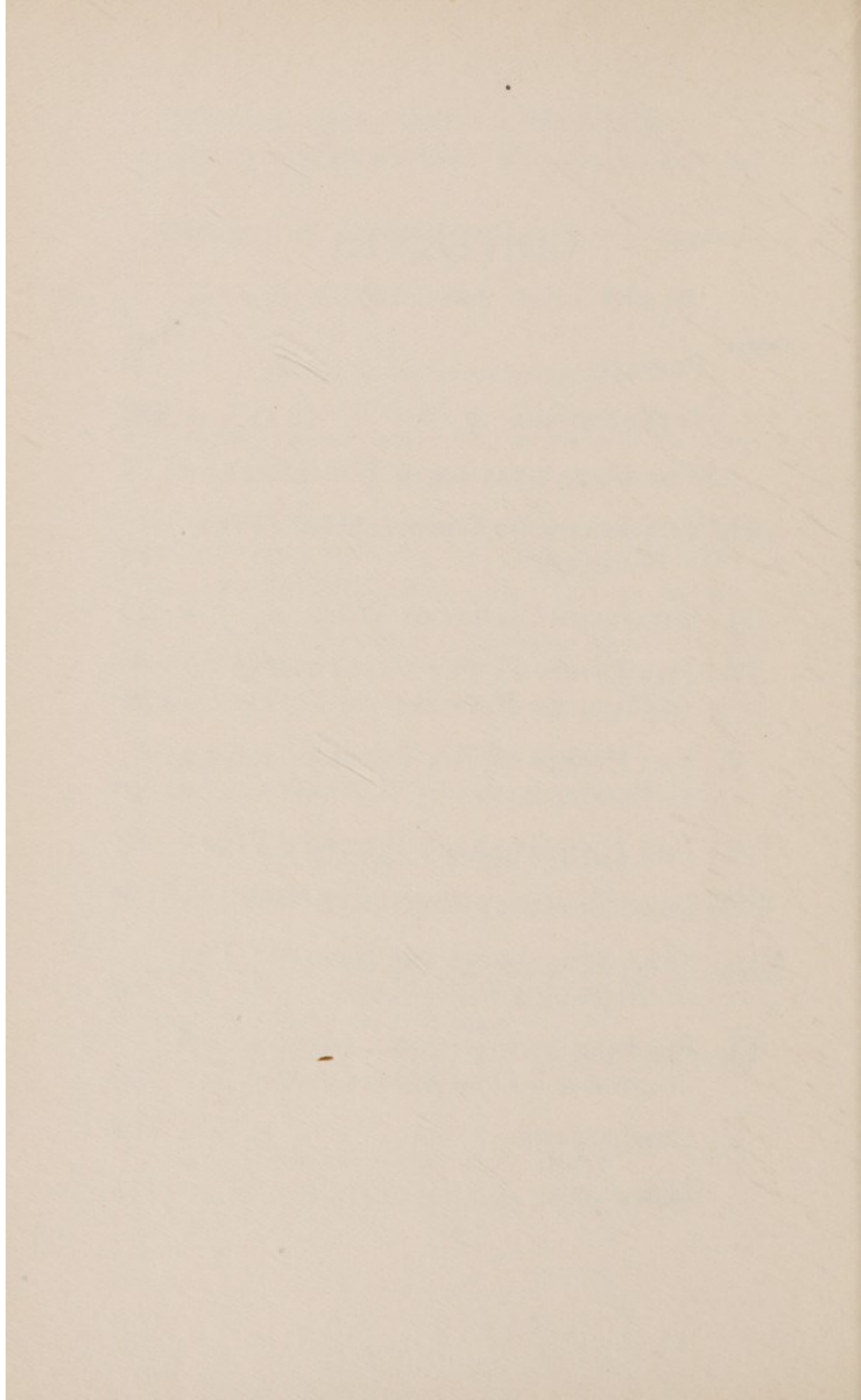
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## PREFACE

The inquiry on which this Report is based began in May, 1913, and lasted until the autumn of 1914. During this time 877 tailoresses and 330 box-makers were visited, many of them more than once. Soon after the outbreak of the war a large number of tailoresses were revisited, and we have been constantly in touch with a small proportion of them. The tailoresses were living principally in the borough of Stepney, the boxmakers in Bethnal Green, Hackney, and parts of the adjoining districts.

The time which has elapsed since the Report was written has naturally brought many changes into the lives of our homeworkers ; some claim to have had an exceptionally good year, while others have suffered from loss of employment, and others again have ceased to work at home in order to seek better work inside the factory. The prohibition of homework in the manufacture of army clothing—relaxed at the beginning of the war, but reimposed some months later—has been a severe blow to those who, either because of their own slowness or because of their numerous impediments, have been prevented

from entering a factory. The favourable effect of the war upon the employment of men has, however, enabled these women to sustain their loss with greater equanimity than they could have done in times of peace.

I am indebted to employers and to workers for the information which they have supplied. Without the very genuine interest which the former seemed to take in the working of the minimum wage, parts of this study could not have been written. Of the latter there are several hundreds whom I should like to thank for the patience with which they have explained their difficulties to us. Sometimes it happened that the output of patience was greatest on the part of the inquirer, and I should like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all the visitors who have helped in the inquiry, especially to Miss L. Mudie, Miss M. Giles and Miss V. Mackintosh, who succeeded in extracting information even from the most unwilling.

I also want to thank Mr. Tawney and Miss Bulkley for the kind assistance which they have given me in preparing this book for the press. In the general process of reconstruction and remodelling which it had to undergo much that I had originally intended to say has been omitted ; the responsibility for such ideas as have been retained, especially for the suggestions made in the last chapters, is, however, mine alone. It was only the hope of being able to express the point of view of those whose thoughts are rarely

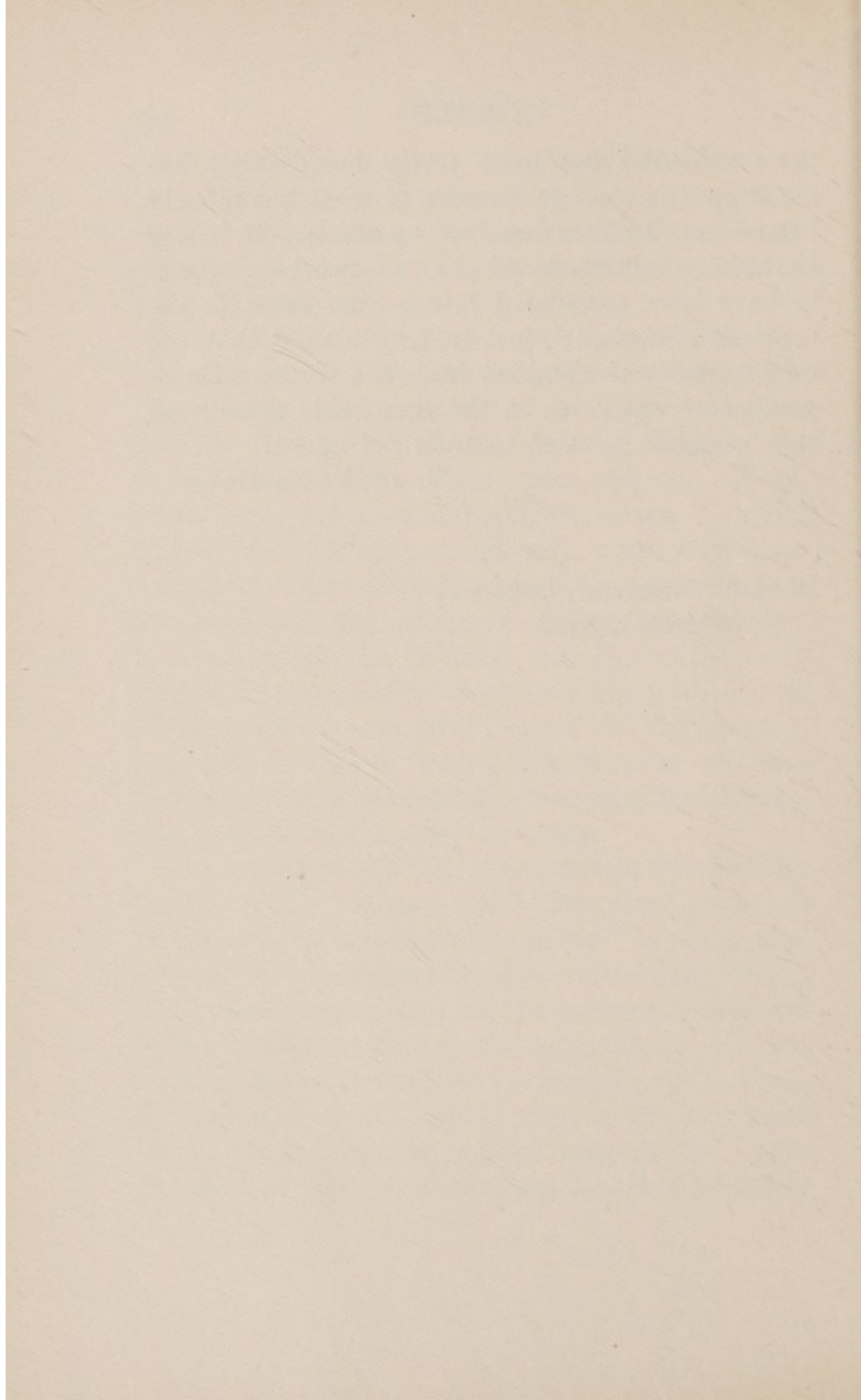
expressed—and yet more rarely heard—that has given me the courage to write of what has already been so much better described by others. If, in any instance, the interests of the homeworkers appear to have been considered rather than those of the trade as a whole, it must be remembered that the information was obtained from the workers themselves and was given in the firm belief that in no case would it be used to their detriment.

V. DE VESSELITSKY.

Ratcliff Settlement, London.

*February, 1916.*





## INTRODUCTION

THE object of the following study is to supplement the previous Reports<sup>1</sup> of the Ratan Tata Foundation on the working of the experiment in minimum wage legislation which is contained in the Trade Boards Act of 1909, by examining its effects upon two groups of workers, the homeworkers in the London tailoring and boxmaking industries.

That homework is specially subject to the group of evils known as "sweating" was for a long time almost an axiom. When the Lords Committee reported on "the sweating system" in 1890, it was on the condition of the homeworkers that their attention was particularly concentrated, and the Committee of the House of Commons whose Report prepared the way for the legislation of 1909 was officially designated a Select Committee on Homework. At the present day we can no longer accept the view that the evils of underpayment and excessive labour are peculiar to homework as distinct from factory employment, and that workers employed in their homes need protection in the matter of wages while the workers employed in

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in the Minimum Wage, Nos. 1, 2 and 3 (The Establishment of Minimum Rates in the Chainmaking Industry, in the Tailoring Industry, and in the Boxmaking Industry).*

factories and workshops do not. If "sweated" workers are workers who are unable by toil so exhausting as to be inhuman to earn wages adequate to maintain themselves, then large numbers not only of homeworkers, but of factory workers, not only of women, but of men, are sweated, and the Trade Boards Act, which sets up Boards to fix minimum rates for all the workers in certain industries, is a recognition of the impossibility of treating either homeworkers or women in isolation from other persons employed in the same industries. It is true, however, that homeworkers present a peculiarly urgent and difficult problem. On the one hand they tend, at any rate in the two industries discussed in the following pages, to be a residuum, a class which—if the paradox may be allowed—consists of exceptions, the aged, the infirm, the unusually unfortunate or helpless. On the other hand the conditions of their employment are such as to try to the utmost the skill and persistence of the administrative authorities whose duty it is to protect them. Constantly changing their addresses, without any organization, easily intimidated, ignorant of the terms and meaning of the Trade Boards Act, hitherto, at any rate, they have shunned rather than demanded protection. The idea that, until their independence is greatly increased, they can be relied upon to call the attention of the authorities to breaches of the law is Utopian. Nothing but systematic inspection,

followed by the prosecution of offending employers, can secure the homeworker her legal rights. The authorities must, in fact, do all the work themselves and can at present expect no assistance, as they can in the better organized sections of the tailoring industry, from the class whom it is their duty to protect. It is, therefore, a matter of extreme urgency that the number of Investigating Officers should be largely increased in the near future.

The information collected by Miss de Vesselitsky has been partially utilized in two of the Minimum Wage Studies which have already been issued by the Ratan Tata Foundation.<sup>1</sup> While a certain amount of repetition was unavoidable in order to make the present monograph complete in itself, the greater part of the book is new. The picture which it offers of the homeworker and of the effect upon her of the Trade Boards Act has the great advantage of being drawn at first hand by a sympathetic observer who has been brought into constant and personal relations with the subject of her study. In these days, when the externals of social life are constantly being summarized in official and other publications, there is a real danger lest, absorbed in the "bloodless bullet" of statistics, men should forget that "social problems" are problems concerning human beings. Though her first chapter necessarily deals with the general economic features of homework, Miss de Vesselitsky is primarily

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in the Minimum Wage, Nos. 2 and 3.*

concerned with the homemaker. The causes which lead so many families in East London to depend upon homework, the different types of women who engage in it, their outlook upon the trade and upon legislation intended to improve their condition, their attitude to their employers, to their fellow-workers and to inspectors, a comprehension of these matters is vital not only to an understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty but to any attempt to diminish it by the intervention of the State. And since those who suffer most speak least about their sufferings, a worker like Miss de Vesselitsky, whose personal experience enables her to describe them from the inside, deserves our gratitude.

R. H. TAWNEY.

# The Homeworker and Her Outlook

## CHAPTER I

### THE ORGANIZATION OF HOMEWORK

THE number of homeworkers in the tailoring and boxmaking industries who fall within the scope of the Trade Boards cannot be stated with precision. In both industries they consist exclusively of women; a credible guess estimates them in the former as between 15,000 and 22,000, while in the latter they number approximately 2,000, that is roughly in the one case 11 to 16 per cent., in the other 7 per cent., of the total number of women workers in the two trades. The problem which they present is, therefore, of some magnitude; and if the minimum rates fixed by the Boards were inoperative or only partially operative in the case of homeworkers, no inconsiderable portion of the workers would be affected by the failure of the system. It is also special in kind. For one thing, though many workers in factories and workshops suffer as severely from underpayment as do the homeworkers,

it is among homeworkers that the most uniform and unrelieved poverty, the most complete incapacity for self-protection are to be found. For another thing, since the homeworkers are often, as it were, on the fringe of employment, the hold which they have on the industry is precarious, and it is in connection with them that the question of the effect of the minimum rates on the elderly and badly-trained worker is likely to be raised in the acutest form. In the third place, the administrative difficulties in enforcing compliance with the minimum rates are greater in the case of homeworkers than elsewhere. Their large number, their constant changes of address, the difficulty of ascertaining how long they work in order to earn a given sum, and therefore of deciding on the adequacy of the employer's piece-rates, these and other features of homework make the task of the Trade Board Authorities, at no time an easy one, unusually perplexing. Since many trades to which the Trade Boards Act is likely to be extended in the future rely upon homework to a greater or less extent, the experience derived from the application of the minimum rates to the two industries discussed in this monograph should be of some service when the extension, amendment or more effective enforcement of the Trade Boards Act comes up for consideration.

The reasons which lead many employers in the tailoring and boxmaking industries to favour homework need no elaborate explanation. Its attraction

is that it relieves them of certain expenses which they would otherwise have to incur. The tailoring trade especially is liable to great seasonal fluctuations ; if no homeworkers were employed, factories and workshops would be required which during part of the year would be idle ; the existence of homeworkers offers the employers the opportunity of expansion in busy seasons without the dead charges inseparable from a factory. Again, the employer of homeworkers escapes certain other expenses which fall on the factory occupier—rent, rates, lighting and heating. In practice he throws on to the homeworkers the cost of providing not only the premises where work is carried on, but part of the machinery in the tailoring trade, and part of the materials both in the tailoring and boxmaking trades, such as thread, cotton and soap in the former, glue, paste and string in the latter. Nor is the effect of homework on the wages of in-workers without significance. When the employer has the alternative of getting work done on his own premises or of giving it out to be done at home, he can and does play off one set of workers against the other. In particular he often uses the threat of giving out work to women who are anxious to obtain it at any price, in order to induce factory workers to accept a reduction or to withdraw the demand for an advance.

But in spite of these immediate advantages, homework, in both the tailoring and boxmaking



industries, is confined to certain localities. In the tailoring trade the homeworkers are to be found mainly in the south, south-east and south-west of England, while the boxmaker is rarely to be found working at home except in London and Birmingham. The reason for this apparently capricious geographical distribution of home workers is simple, but it is of some importance. In some parts of the country women are competing keenly for work because their husbands' wages are very low, or because their husbands' employment is irregular; in other parts, where the conditions of male employment are better, they only work if—as in the cotton trade—they can themselves earn fairly good wages. Thus in Yorkshire and Lancashire homework is far less prevalent than it is in the South of England, for women have the choice between employment at home and employment in the textile factories. There is much homework in the tailoring trade in East Anglia, because there are few alternative employments for women, and because the wages of the men in that district are often extremely low. There is much homework of all kinds in East London, because thousands of men are casually employed, especially about the London docks. Homework, in fact, tends to spring up in those districts where the bad conditions of male labour make it almost indispensable for the wife to supplement the husband's earnings. When such causes create a huge supply of women who are anxious to get work on almost any terms, employers

follow the line of least resistance and rely on homeworkers, even though the work done may be somewhat inferior to that produced in workshops and factories. For it is to be remarked that the balance is not entirely in favour of homework. In the tailoring trade in particular many employers have pointed out that it is a very doubtful economy. Uniformity of production cannot be secured when garments are being made up by scores of different workers, using different kinds of machinery and working under different conditions. Cheapness depends largely on a nice accuracy in the sub-division of processes, and such sub-division can be carried further when all work is done in a factory than when a large part of the work is given out. These considerations, however, are in the nature of an afterthought which occurs as the result of experience in those districts where there is no large supply of women willing to work at home.

The organization by means of which work is distributed among homeworkers and collected when finished varies considerably from place to place and from firm to firm. In the tailoring industry, in the rural districts, wholesale houses sometimes send out vans which carry materials to the homes of the women workers who make them up; sometimes they employ salaried agents with an office in the locality; sometimes the homeworker must trudge to a central office some miles distant from her home, without any certainty that she will obtain

work when she arrives. The most general system, however, at any rate in London and most large towns, is for the link between the ultimate employers and the homeworkers to consist of a body of middlemen or middlewomen, who take out work in bulk from the wholesaler, divide it among numerous homeworkers, and make their living out of the difference between the price which they pay the homemaker, and the price which they are paid themselves.

“Middleman” or “sub-contractor” is, however, a very ambiguous word. At one end of the scale is the Jewish master tailor who, though often described as a middleman, is usually not a middleman at all, but a specialist who, in virtue of his peculiar skill, makes certain kinds of clothing, principally coats, in a small workshop, and makes them better and more cheaply than they can be made in factories. Such sub-contractors rarely give out work to homeworkers. At the other end of the scale is the middleman who is a middleman and nothing else, a mere agent through whose hands materials pass on the way to the homemaker, and to whom the finished article is returned for transmission to the wholesaler. Between these two extremes are a variety of types combining workshop production with the employment of homeworkers in different degrees.<sup>1</sup> There are some

<sup>1</sup> For some figures as to the number of homeworkers employed by the large manufacturers, the Jewish small masters and the non-

middlemen who appear to be master-tailors, who advertise in their windows "clothes made to measure," or "we are actually our own makers," but whose business in fact consists of taking in garments already cut out and in returning them to the factory after they have been machined, finished and pressed by homeworkers. There are other middlemen who pass themselves off as homeworkers, but who depend largely on giving out to their less fortunate neighbours part of the clothing which they take and ostensibly make up themselves. "Them as takes out work as I does, and then is mean enough to get it done by others, them's the real sweaters," explained an elderly homemaker, anxious to exonerate her own firm. "You'll never get to the bottom of who gives out work and who don't," said another. A worker who complained that, if the minimum rates were enforced, her middleman would have to shut up shop, and who was asked what she would do in the event of such a calamity, replied, "I'd 'ave to go straight to the fountain 'ead." This, she explained, would mean being given more work. "But what's the use of earning more," she asked, "when you 'as to lie awake fretting about its getting done in time?" Such feelings, a dread of responsibility, check some workers from becoming middlemen. Others, like a widow who was invited to double her profits by

Jewish sub-contractors, see *Studies in the Minimum Wage*, No. 2, p. 188.

taking out work in larger quantities and giving part of it to her neighbours, "would rather work harder themselves and not have anyone else on their conscience." But in spite of the timidity, the scruples, the reluctance to incur responsibility, which make such workers an easy prey to their less sensitive or more enterprising neighbours, there is a constant movement between the different sections of workers in the tailoring trade which makes it quite impossible to draw a sharp line between them. Directly one penetrates behind the apparent organization of the industry one finds a medley of cross-relationships and personal connections which make attempts at systematic classification almost illusory. The make-believe homeworker is employed by a make-believe clothier contracting for a wholesaler who supplies stock goods to a City firm, which by measuring its customers makes them believe that the clothes have been made to their measure. In a world where every class merges into every other, and where there are constant chances of petty profit-making, the more energetic or brutal characters have endless opportunities of exploiting the gentler or less persistent; thus in a time of good trade the small middleman may become by good luck rather than by any special merit a considerable capitalist.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We were told of one case where a slum dweller, smart in appearance and chronically unemployed, wandered into a City firm and by mistake found himself entrusted with two pairs of trousers on condition that they should be returned without fail on the following morning. The man of smart appearance, who

And since there is no constant solidarity of interests between the wage-earners, there is no trade unionism, and the weaker homeworkers are ground out as in a mill.

In the boxmaking industry the actual worker is far easier to discover, for the middleman, in the sense in which we have been using it, is almost unknown. It is true that the homeworker herself will often refer to her employer as a "middleman," but on inquiry it turns out that this term is merely applied to those firms which make boxes for sale in contradistinction to the "non-competitive" firms, which, whilst being mainly engaged in producing other goods—chocolates, soap, cigarettes, hats or what not—have also a department for making boxes for their own use. The so-called "middleman" is, in fact, the occupier of a factory or workshop in which the cardboard is cut and scored by male workers and is then given to women, either indoor workers or homeworkers, to make.<sup>1</sup>

was totally ignorant of tailoring—in fact, had never held shears or scissors in his hand—carried away the garments in the hope that perhaps his wife would know what to do with them. She sat up all night trying to find out and evidently succeeded, for the breeches were returned on the following day a whole hour before the time appointed. This made such a good impression upon the City firm that more breeches were forthcoming, and in time the services of other workers had to be enlisted. This venture developed into a prosperous workshop, which the man of smart appearance used to patrol; the happy couple soon left their alley to move into a main thoroughfare, and in ten years' time were able to retire from business and live as capitalists upon their savings.

<sup>1</sup> In a few cases, a very small proportion of the total number,

A few firms send their vans to deliver the cardboard and fetch back the completed boxes from their homeworkers. The van may call two or three times a week, but occasionally it is sent only once a week, in which case the storing of the boxes is a difficult problem for the homeworker. Moreover this favour is only conceded to the women who live within a given radius and can do a given amount of work—usually seven or eight shillings' worth a week. Those who live outside the radius, or who cannot get through so much work, as well as all those who work for firms which make no provision whatever for collecting the boxes—the most usual case—are obliged to go to the factory themselves to fetch and take back their work. For this purpose the baby's pram may be requisitioned or an invalid husband may be persuaded to carry the boxes in a sack over his shoulder. This question of transportation, both in the tailoring and in the boxmaking, is a serious one. The visits to the factory or workshop cause much waste of time, especially in the tailoring industry, where the worker may have to call twice or even three times a day. One woman who was unable to take the journey herself and hired a boy to go in her stead found at the end of the week that as the net result of her venture she was actually twopence out of pocket!

no women indoor workers are employed, the cardboard, after having been cut and scored in the workshop by one or two men employed, or perhaps by the master himself, being all given out to homeworkers to be made up.

The absence of middlemen in the boxmaking industry leads occasionally to unexpected results. A large employer may not find it worth his while to give out work in small quantities, whereas the homemaker, who is not entirely dependent on her earnings, and who has home duties to attend to, may not desire to do more than a certain amount of work. Such a worker therefore, unless she can induce another boxmaker to share her work with her "as a favour," is limited in her choice of employers to those who suit her convenience in this respect. We found that more than one of the boxmakers whom we visited had deliberately left a good employer and gone to another firm, where, though the work was not so well-paid, it could be obtained in smaller quantities.



## CHAPTER II

### THE ECONOMIC CONDITION OF HOMEWORKERS

HOMework appears at first sight to be a jungle which defies analysis. Every type of family circumstances and economic condition and personal idiosyncrasy is included in it. There is the labourer's wife trying to eke out her husband's income with her own, while innumerable children are falling into the fireplace, pulling the dog to pieces, sitting on the cat, swallowing pins, tumbling downstairs, or playing waggon with the "best stock" trousers, all to the tune of "you wait till I catch you!" There is the wife of the mortuary attendant, reduced to tailoring because her husband has become "such a 'earty eater that he eats her out of 'ouse and 'ome"; there is the wife of the nightwatchman who loses his job when burglaries grow scarce; the wife of the builder who loses his unemployment benefit because he *will* do an occasional day's work; the wife of the skilled artisan who "can always get a job but don't always care to take it," and the innumerable wives whose husbands have no other

peculiarity than that they are persistently unlucky ; while the wife of the well-to-do barman (no slackness there) takes in trousers " only because of the old lady in the back room," who turns out to be an invalid mother.

Even when not driven by actual need, these women nevertheless seem to possess an infinite capacity for producing some motive because of which it is necessary that they should out-do and underbid their neighbours. Though almost any classification does some violence to the facts, we propose in this chapter to set out certain elementary aspects of homework which throw some light on the question, " who exactly are the homeworkers in the tailoring and boxmaking industries in London ? " With this in his mind the reader will be in a better position to judge of their general economic condition, and to appreciate the evidence which we shall give later as to the effect upon them of the minimum rates established by the Trade Boards.

In the first place it is to be noticed that the vast majority of homeworkers are either married women or widows. Out of a group of 330 boxmakers, 258 were married and 53 were widows, while out of 877 tailoresses, 610 were married and 171 widows. Among the tailoresses, especially, elderly women predominate. In boxmaking the average age is lower, only 33 per cent. being over 45 years, but of the tailoresses no less than 42.7 per cent, were over 45, while only 22.8 per cent. were under 35.

It is often suggested, both by writers on these subjects and employers, that among homeworkers are to be found a large number of women who need not work and who do so merely in order to have a little money to spend on luxuries; indeed, one employer, when prosecuted for paying less than the minimum rates fixed by the Tailoring Board, actually informed the magistrate that his employees (four of whom were widows, while the fifth maintained her husband) worked only "as a pastime." Now it is, of course, perfectly true that there are *some* homeworkers who are not driven to work by absolute necessity, and who take comparatively little interest in the prices which they are paid. "Thank God," answered one woman to the question whether she could support herself, "I ain't got to, but I pities them as has." Yet such workers are the exception. To the majority their work is a matter of sheer necessity. Of the boxmakers visited a certain number admitted that they were not obliged to work, but that they chose to do so in order to live better. Some aspired to extra fine clothing, others had discovered the advantages of an additional room; some wanted pocket money for themselves, and others a holiday for an overworked husband; others again merely wished to feel that they could "help in." Though from the remarks of a few it would seem that their greatest need was "to pass the time like," yet the largest group consisted of mothers who explained that their husbands'

earnings, however good they appeared, would never be sufficient for the upkeep of the children. "'E don't care what the children wears, but I ain't a going to let 'em go about looking like a puppet show for all that.'" But all these cases of various needs and aspirations numbered only 102 out of 291 questioned. The remainder were obliged to work because the husband's earnings were irregular, or else because his wages, though regular, were too small to maintain the family<sup>1</sup>; while not a few—widows, separated wives, wives with disabled husbands or husbands who were out of a job or who were "bad for work"—were the main support of the household. Among the tailoresses the proportion of those who were not wholly or partially dependent on their own earnings was even smaller. Unfortunately, both in tailoring and boxmaking, it appears that the proportion of those dependent on their own efforts is greater among the aged and infirm, whereas those best able to support themselves are least often obliged to.

<sup>1</sup> Although many a wife is driven to homework by the low earnings of her husband, yet we could not help noticing how singularly well some of the households fared upon an income that was low but *regular*. On the other hand much poverty seemed to prevail, not only among casual labourers, but also in the homes of the steady wage-earner, nominally in regular employment, but so often "put off" on account of slackness that his average wage is not greatly in excess of that of the "casual." In households such as these, where the standard of living is higher, poverty is all the more keenly felt, and wives are tempted to overwork themselves in a hopeless attempt to make ends meet. [This form of distress has disappeared at present (1915), owing to the increased demand for labour occasioned by the war.]

Nor, again, does it appear to be the case that it is the "worker for pocket money" who keeps down the rates. The view often expressed to us, that "it's them married women who have killed the trade," is true, though not in the sense in which it is usually meant. It is, as a rule, not the married woman with a tolerably comfortable home, against whom the reproach of unfair competition is so often levelled, who keeps down prices. It is far more often the wife who is driven by the low earnings of her husband to work in order to support her children, who is willing to accept the lowest rate. This fact, though tragic, is, after all, only too natural. The woman who has some other source of livelihood often takes in homework in order to supplement it, or because she feels she must do something. But since she is not entirely dependent upon it, she is able to pick and choose, and will refuse work if the prices offered are too unreasonable. The homeworker who will have work at any price is the solitary widow, or the wife of an invalid husband or of a casual labourer, who toils from morning to night for the sake of her children, fears nothing so much as that she may lose the precarious income which homework supplies, acquiesces in any conditions that her employer cares to offer, and dreads the visit of the Trade Board's Investigating Officer lest it should lead to her work being withheld. Whether they are the victims of low pay and irregular employment, or whether their exertions are the result of a

husband's intemperance, selfishness or indifference, the fact remains that it is these unfortunate wives, weighted with cares and responsibilities, who keep down the price of labour and offer the greatest facilities for exploitation. This assertion may, perhaps, be questioned, for, on the often quoted (though dubious) analogy of the alleged effect of out-relief in keeping down the price of labour, one might expect to see the worker who is not dependent on her earnings for her livelihood accepting the lowest pay, while those who are obliged to support themselves and others would need to earn the highest wages. Our inquiry goes to prove, however, that the very reverse is the case, and that good pay is secured in inverse ratio to the worker's needs. Out of 353 married tailoresses who were visited, 150 were "pocket-money" earners, 121 had to work in order to supplement the husband's and children's earnings, 82 were the chief breadwinners for their households. Of the first named, 76, or 50 per cent., managed to secure well-paid work and another 30 per cent. obtained fairly good prices; but of those who had to support their families by their earnings only a fourth obtained good pay, while no less than half had to accept the least remunerative work.

Of the widows, who represent, broadly speaking, the older generation, it is not surprising to find that a considerable number—40 out of 119—were also earning "bad money." For, although the needs of children may be on the whole the predominant

cause of sweating, yet the homeworker's age and infirmities also contribute largely to the ease with which she is exploited. It must not be imagined, indeed, that these invalids, or semi-invalids, produce anything like inferior work; on the contrary, one sees them putting buttonholes suitable for "bespoke" into the lowest class of "stock." They know (though, as a rule, the employer is not anxious to enlighten them) that by their care they double or treble the day's work; but the love of doing a thing well and the contempt of "them new sloppy ways" will still outweigh the dictates of personal interests and of common sense. It stands to reason that the aged worker cannot achieve weekly earnings equal to those of the young, but the point that struck us the most in our inquiry was that, whereas their work is usually better (being relics of a time when better work prevailed), the price paid for it is lower, and that the proper piece-rate is withheld from them simply because they dare not claim it. For what goes furthest to lowering a worker's value is not so much her slowness and incapacity as her industry and excessive need. Seeing that in quality no less than quantity the supply exceeds the demand, one must conclude that the aged worker keeps down prices not only by her helplessness but also by her care and her pathetic zeal.

But if poverty and infirmities are causes of underpayment, they are no less its results. The poorest, the aged and the infirm, not daring to claim a higher

ECONOMIC CONDITION OF HOMEWORKERS 19

rate of payment, must necessarily strive to increase their earnings, and can only do so by longer hours of work, rising earlier and working later at night in direct proportion as their productiveness decreases. In the case of married women the connection between the husband's income and the wife's capacity to earn is shown in the following table :

TABLE I (TAILORING).

*Connection between amount of husband's income and wife's earning capacity.*

	Wife able to earn as much as 3¼d. an hour.	Wife not able to earn 3¼d. an hour.	Total.
Husband doing well and children earning ..	6	6	12
Husband only earning and doing well ..	43	17	60
Husband's pay low but regular .. ..	24	13	37
Husband doing badly..	28	34	62
Husband infirm ..	8	22	30
Condition of husband's work not specified:			
Artisan .. ..	17	7	24
Labourer or Carman	27	36	63
Total .. ..	153	135	288



It will be seen that in the group "husband doing well and children earning," which consists mostly of women over 45, the proportion of those able to earn 3¼d. an hour—the minimum time-rate fixed by the Tailoring Trade Board<sup>1</sup>—is exactly the same as of those unable to do so, the women's age being compensated by favourable conditions of the household. Where the husband only is earning and is doing well (this group comprising on the whole somewhat younger women), 43 out of 60 can earn the minimum. On the other hand, where the husband is said to be doing badly, or is infirm, only 36 out of 92 can earn it. In those cases where it is not specified how the husband is doing, 17 out of 24 artisans' wives can earn the minimum, whereas in the case of labourers' or carmen's wives (where the husband's earnings are probably lower or more irregular) only 27 out of 63 are able to do so.

To sum up, it would be inaccurate to ascribe homework on the part of the wife as entirely due to the husband's low pay or irregular employment. It would be nearer the truth to say that, though the majority of homeworkers *must* work because of the low earnings of their husbands, yet there are some who are able to work because of their husband's good pay and regular employment. Such women, though they need their own earnings least, are, in practice, able to earn more than the women to whom homework is absolutely indispensable. Better food

<sup>1</sup> See *post*, p. 37.

contributes even more to their speed than youth and early training. The wife of the disabled labourer trying to support her family by working overtime, naturally breaks down, and many a woman relates that she has never been able to regain her health since her attempt to bridge over a period of unemployment. The artisan's wife says : " I earned my 20s. a week, but I was killing myself at it ! " Yet she smiles with pride as she says it. The casual's wife blurts out : " I've 'ad to sit at it from four in the morning till midnight, and I've been queer ever since."

## CHAPTER III

### DIFFERENT CLASSES OF WORK

WE shall discuss in the next chapter what effect the fixing of minimum rates by the Trade Boards in the tailoring and boxmaking industries has had on the earnings of homeworkers. But in order to understand the difficulties in the way of the establishment of minimum rates it is necessary to describe in some detail the different types of workers and the kinds of work on which they are engaged.

Of the two industries, boxmaking was certainly more suitable than tailoring for an experiment in the fixing of minimum rates. Indeed it is a question whether some other trade should not have been dealt with before tailoring, which presents quite exceptional obstacles to the enforcement of a minimum wage, partly because the sweated workers, though numerous, are not easily unearthed, and when finally traced are either too decrepit or too poverty-stricken to dare to be dissatisfied, partly because of the existence of a class of tailoresses who, though to all outward appearance homeworkers,

yet give out work in a small way themselves and not only sympathize with underpayment but do all they can to misguide the inquirer and frustrate all efforts at investigation. So inextricably are the classes of worker and employer mingled that it is a task of the greatest difficulty to fix the responsibility for the payment of the minimum rate on the person who is in reality responsible.

### I.—TAILORING

The same regulations could scarcely be expected to apply to three such different human products as the "right-out" worker, the machinist, and the finisher.

The so-called "right-out" worker is, so far as her relation to the employer is concerned, practically in the same position as the middleman, the chief difference between them being that the latter takes out the work in larger quantities. But the middleman, after receiving the cut-out cloth from the factory, hands it on to other persons to be machined, finished and pressed, whereas the "right-out" worker—theoretically, at any rate—completes all these processes herself. Theoretically we say, for the temptation to pass on garments to one's neighbour often proves irresistible. In fact, it appeared that, wherever excessive satisfaction was felt, it was safe to suppose that the burden of work was being borne by others. Of the first

180 tailoresses who were visited, 46 admitted to being employers themselves, others were strongly under suspicion, and some who escaped suspicion by their superior wit are doubtless still smiling at our credulity. The remark, "you'll never get to the bottom of who gives out work and who don't," was amply confirmed by experience. Though undermined by the competition and underbidding of middlemen, there still exists this small margin of homeworkers to whom tailoring is a profitable occupation. Even at common work, one of our tailoresses, in receipt of the low rate of 6½d. to 7d. for a pair of trousers (which takes her one hour and twenty minutes when she does it all herself), is earning at the rate of 5d. an hour. When favoured with an extra quantity of work, she gives out the finishing (including buttonholes and pressing out of seams) at 3d. a pair; this, according to her own showing, is not quite a fair proportion of the price she receives, but it nevertheless compares most favourably with what would be paid by a sub-contractor (and in some cases even by a factory). For another worker somewhat similarly situated, also receiving from 6½d. to 7d. from the wholesaler or factory, who is trying to make her living out of the profits of organization, cannot possibly afford to pay more than 2d. a pair for exactly the same amount of finishing.

It is quite natural that those used to earning 5d. or 6d. an hour when they do the work themselves,

and more than that sum perhaps when they give out part of the work to others, should be irritated at the thought of a flat rate of  $3\frac{1}{4}$ d. an hour; the right-out worker feeling as much entitled to differ in her value from the poor creatures whom she employs as a University professor expects to differ from a town crier, despite the greater vocal exertion of the latter. In fact, the answer constantly received from them, "we ain't under any minimum rate," was nearly always given with irritation, and when the saintly disposition of the worker triumphed over her indignation she would patiently point out that for her kind of work the minimum of  $3\frac{1}{4}$ d. an hour was ridiculously low.

The number of "right-out" workers is comparatively small; in fact, only 8 per cent. of the tailor-esses visited were right-out workers. For if there are women who shrink from the responsibility involved, there are also many large employers who do not care for the trouble of giving out work directly to the homeworkers, but prefer to hand it over in bulk to middlemen. If facilities could be given for the right-out worker to receive work from "the fountain-head" in sufficiently small quantities (so that she would not be tempted to pass on some of it to her neighbours) the evils of homework in the tailoring trade would be greatly diminished.

The machinist, though not in the same independent position as the right-out worker, has perhaps least to fear from the competition of the workshop.

Machinists are for the most part strong, self-reliant young women, and the greater number of them are, or, if necessary, could be, self-supporting. Those whom we visited seemed only too often to be afflicted with a rage for work, even in cases where family circumstances seemed least to warrant its existence. "Life is all work," they would murmur, scarcely raising their eyes to say it, while the noise of the machine drowned all explanations of the Trade Boards Act with a monotonous whirr, whirr, whirr, whose burden seemed to be, "Acts may come, whirr, Acts may go, whirr, but I whirr on for ever." All except the aged, the infirm, the novices, or those working for an exceptionally bad employer, appeared to be earning the minimum—in fact, many workers classed as infirm and aged were able to support themselves by their earnings—and a good machinist with a tolerably good employer can earn a gross wage of 7d. or 8d. an hour. Their expenses, to be sure, are much heavier than those of finishers; either they have to pay for their machines by instalments, or if they own them they are entitled to interest on their capital, while in either case there will be disbursements for repairs. Taking these considerations and the superior class of worker into account, one can readily understand why the machinist, as well as the right-out worker, complains of the low standard of payment which appears to have been sanctioned by the establishment of a minimum rate of  $3\frac{1}{4}$ d. an hour.

If the right-out workers and the machinists are difficult to help because they are doing a superior class of work to which the present minimum is not applicable, those in the third, and, unfortunately, far the largest, category—the finishers—are equally difficult to assist, since their age, their numerous infirmities, their lack of training, and above all their fear, render it almost impossible for them to profit by the legislation which has been framed for their benefit. Though coat finishing (especially overcoats) requires some bodily strength, trouser finishing seems adapted to any variety and degree of infirmity, and is therefore greatly in demand. It is chiefly among the finishers that one meets with the two extreme types, *i.e.*, the few to whom tailoring is merely a pastime, and the many who cling to the work as to their last and only hope in life.

It may be well to say a word about the kind of garments on which homeworkers are most usually engaged. Coat-making is generally reserved for men, but when it is done by women working at home, the machinist practically makes the coat, which is then passed on to the buttonhole maker, and lastly to the finisher. The right-out worker would naturally perform all three operations herself, as well as pressing, and would add the middleman's profits to her earnings. In the commoner grades of work buttonholes are done by machinery in the factory, and it is generally better-class work,



requiring handmade holes, which falls to the right-out coat-maker's share. Waistcoats are more generally given to homeworkers than coats; here again the machinist practically makes the waistcoat, but in many cases finds it more profitable to give the buttonholes out to her neighbours. These handmade buttonholes seem still to retain their prestige, especially in the branch of tailoring known as "bespoke." The majority of workers, however, are employed in trouser-making, which is generally looked upon as a more plebeian occupation. Juvenile clothing, consisting of jackets and knickers, comes a step lower in the social scale.

The line between the machinist and the finisher is by no means a rigid one, for no two firms keep to the same division of labour. Pockets, for instance, can be put in, and buttons sewn on, either by machine or by hand; buttonholes may be made throughout by machine, or sewn by machine and then finished by hand, or made entirely by hand. In superior grades of work pockets and some of the seams even will fall to the finisher's share.

Broadly speaking, the work is divided into "bespoke" and "stock" work. In the case of the "bespoke" work the orders generally go from the tailor to the small master, who either executes them in a workshop of his own, or passes on a part of them to others, but they still sometimes find their way direct into the hands of the genuine homeworkers, who then complete the garments right out.

Such workers as these were earning from 20s. to 30s. a week before the introduction of the minimum rates, but the growth of the Jewish workshop has greatly reduced their number. In the workshops where this bespoke work is done the same subdivision takes place as in the factory, and the finishing when given out to homeworkers is generally underpaid ; it is to the low rate of payment of these finishers, most of whom are highly skilled workers, and none of whom were found to have benefited by the Trade Boards Act, that we would draw special attention. When the finishing is done inside the factory the payment is comparatively good, for the same worker prepares the work for the machinist and also does the finishing after the garment has been machined. In the case of a pair of trousers for instance, the first process, basting, takes not much more than fifteen minutes, the finishing about two hours ; for the two processes the worker receives, say, 1s. But when the finishing is given out to a homeworker it is not practicable for her to baste it, and this is done inside the factory. The payment for the finishing alone would then be only 6d. If the homeworkers complain of this low rate of payment, they are given the option of earning 1s. a pair in the employer's workshop ; but most of them, though able to do the basting as well, are nevertheless unable to avail themselves of the opportunity to work in, and continue to offer their highly skilled services at the rate of about 3d. an

hour. Thus the organization of the trade has become such that, even in the highest grade of work, finishers can scarcely reach the minimum.

“ Stock ” work is, broadly speaking, subdivided into “ best stock ” and “ common stock.” “ Slop ” work, generally meant to indicate an inferior grade of stock, was found to be a somewhat elusive term, varying in its meaning according to the purpose of the person who used it. The “ shipping trade ” also contains many shades and variations, but it consists very largely of inferior goods destined for the wear of natives in South Africa ; these garments possess the unpleasant peculiarity of being made of such material as to offer greater resistance to incursions made upon it by the worker’s needle, while to this must also be added the still more unpleasant peculiarity of a lower rate of payment. Again and again workers have explained that goods of inferior quality (especially those intended for shipping) often take longer than the better kind, which is also better paid. Some employers allow the work to be slopped, doubtless on the ground that the recriminations of the Kaffirs will not be heard. As one worker put it : “ Them Jews ’ave killed the trade, but I likes working for them all the same ; they don’t care ’ow badly I slops it.” Jews seem, in fact, to have made themselves conspicuous in the lowest slop as well as in bespoke work. It is a melancholy reflection that in this branch of the trade competition seems to be in the direction, not of excelling, but rather of

each striving to do a little worse than the other. Those workers who are used to a better class of garment and cannot work badly enough earn only a meagre pittance. "I never change my stitch," they say, "best kind, worst kind, I does it all the same," or, "I can't do it no other wise than as I knows 'ow." We shall have to return to this point in discussing the possibility of fixing minimum piece-rates. The necessity of stocking the world with what the slum dweller herself looks down upon as "rubbishy stuff" adds very much to the problem of underpayment, the very word "shipping" being used as a sufficient argument that, however great the suffering involved, it is justifiable on the ground that the trade is entitled to special consideration.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.—BOXMAKING

Boxmaking, as has already been said, lends itself far better than tailoring to the fixing of a minimum rate. The boxmaker conforms more closely to

<sup>1</sup> The fact that clothing intended for export, provided it can be sufficiently slopped, becomes profitable even to the worker, partly accounts for the dismay of apparently long-suffering workers at the prices offered for military work on the outbreak of war. These prices at first sight would not appear to compare unfavourably with those they had hitherto received; but the fear of what would happen on the day of battle if buttons, for example, were sewn on in the usual way, caused a great deal more time to be spent in making the same earnings as in the days preceding the war. After several weeks of forced abstinence from work—and often also from food—the military garments, however badly paid, were clutched at by eager hands, ready to make up by quantity of work for the low rate of payment.

one's expectations, says the things one expects to hear, is younger, better trained, and neither so distractingly superior nor so abjectly infirm as some of her sisters in the tailoring line. Further, boxes, owing to their bulk, are more difficult to distribute to one's neighbours, and for this reason the worker-sweater is not as frequent as in tailoring. Occasionally one finds the wrong person handling the boxes; children, for instance, are kept home from school and young girls after a long day's work are pressed into service as well. Plausible reasons never lack by which the presence of an unregistered worker can be explained. One Old Age Pensioner, who looks on while another woman does her boxes, asserted that she sometimes helped, but as her victim was addicted to fits, and therefore could not be employed in a factory, she was doing her a kindness in keeping her occupied. It goes without saying that in such a case, where the price paid for the boxes has to cover the middlewoman's profits as well, the actual worker will not be receiving the minimum wage.

Nor is there anything in boxmaking to correspond to the machinist, as all the machine work is done in the factory, mostly by men. But there are grades and categories of boxmakers as well as of tailoresses. At the top of the scale will be found the fancy boxmakers, most of whom must have been earning about 3d. an hour (and some of them more) before the introduction of the minimum rate. These, like the

machinists in tailoring, complain that the minimum has been fixed too low, and some even report that their payments have been lowered in consequence. Plain cardboard box-makers would seem to come next, and are generally a class of worker superior to the common matchbox-maker. The rates of payment for shoe boxes—children's shoes especially—and the peculiar variety called "meats," are still shockingly low. Vesta matchbox-makers seem to form a connecting link between cardboard and common matchbox-makers, which last category is the lowest form of boxmaking. Of the box-makers whom we visited about a fifth were engaged on matchboxes, nearly two-fifths on fancy boxes, and rather more than two-fifths on plain cardboard boxes.

Fancy boxmaking means a nice home, well-dressed children, and the husband in constant work. A special place is usually assigned to the mother which she calls her workshop, since no husband will both go to work and tolerate glue on the dining-table. The unlucky casual, the casual from misfortune, not only swallows the glue but assists in boxmaking, whereas the "habitual casual," the casual from inclination, merely graces the home by his presence and in matters of work preserves an attitude of strict neutrality. Cabinet-making seems with such to be a mild form of leisure or a continuous form of unemployment, rather than an occupation.

The common matchbox-makers were found to be earning on an average not more than 4s. to 5s. a week, even when assisted by other members of the household ; in fact, the most unlikely persons have been found at work upon the boxes without being able by their exertions to bring the earnings to more than 6s. a week.

Whether it be that matchbox-making produces a bad husband, or whether unlucky husbands have a predilection for matchbox-makers, or whether the latter are perchance inclined to minimize their husbands' value, we are not prepared to state ; but the impression remains that too often in these families the husband's earnings have the tendency to be intermittent, and merely " come in handy " with the wife's steadier income to fall back upon. It goes without saying that in these cases the appearance of the home was found to harmonize with the low earnings of its inmates. Indeed there can be no doubt that among the matchbox-makers genuinely sweated workers were successfully unearthed, and the condition in which they were found to live constituted a clear case for State intervention. Whether their lot can be materially improved in the face of foreign competition remains to be seen, and it is hoped that some provision will be made for those who, in the process of being benefited, are in danger of being exterminated. When visited (that is before the war) the dominant note amongst matchbox-makers was one of hope and of gratitude for benefits

received, mingled with a lively expectation of further benefits to accrue from an extension of State intervention.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE EFFECT OF THE TRADE BOARD ON RATES OF PAYMENT

THE condition of the homemaker, her long hours of work and pitifully low earnings, have for some time past aroused the sympathies of the public, until at last accumulated evidence as to the existence of sweating and its evil results led in 1907 to the appointment of a Committee to consider the question of Homework. This Committee, which reported the following year, recommended that legislation should be introduced to establish minimum rates of payment for homeworkers, and that for this purpose Wages Boards should be set up with power to fix minimum time and piece rates. The experiment should be limited at first to certain trades in which the earnings had proved to be exceptionally low, but might, after inquiry had been made, be extended to other trades as well. As a result of this Report the Trade Boards Act of 1909 was passed, which was in the main based upon the recommendations of the Committee. It was not, however, limited in its application to home-

workers, but applied to factory workers as well. It provided that Trade Boards should be set up in certain scheduled trades, consisting of representatives of employers and of workers, together with a few "appointed members," the business of the latter being to reconcile conflicting interests, and to prevent such conflicts from ending in a deadlock. These Trade Boards were to fix minimum time-rates for the workers in their respective trades and might, if they thought fit, fix minimum piece-rates as well. The first four trades actually selected for the experiment were tailoring, cardboard boxmaking, chainmaking and machine-made lace and net finishing. In 1913 four other trades were added, shirtmaking, confectionery, hollow-ware, and tin boxmaking. The minimum time-rates fixed for women workers by the first four Trade Boards were  $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. per hour (now  $2\frac{3}{4}$ d.) in chainmaking,  $2\frac{3}{4}$ d. in lacemaking, 3d. (now<sup>1</sup>  $3\frac{1}{4}$ d.) in boxmaking,  $3\frac{1}{4}$ d. (now<sup>2</sup>  $3\frac{1}{2}$ d.) in tailoring. It will be seen that only one rate is fixed for each trade. No attempt is made to fix different rates for the various processes in which the workers are engaged. In tailoring, for instance, no higher rate is fixed for machining and pressing than for finishing, though the two former processes require more strength and more experience than the latter. The Act was designed to protect the workers at the lowest end of the trade, those who

<sup>1</sup> Since December 6th, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> Since July 19th, 1915.

were the most unskilled and least able to protect themselves.

For chainmaking and lace-finishing it was found possible to fix minimum piece-rates as well as minimum time-rates, but boxmaking, and particularly tailoring, have offered greater difficulties. In the tailoring trade, indeed, the difficulties were so great that the attempt to fix piece-rates was abandoned as hopeless, nor in boxmaking was it found possible to fix *general* piece-rates. Special minimum piece-rates, however, were fixed for three London firms engaged in matchbox-making. Moreover, a list of suggested prices has been drawn up for certain samples of boxes made by homeworkers in London and Birmingham ; these prices have not been fixed by the Trade Board and are therefore not directly enforceable, but they are useful as a guide for Inspectors in their task of determining whether the piece-rates paid are adequate. Our boxmakers were mostly visited before this piece-list had been drawn up and their rates had therefore not been affected by it ; this fact must be borne in mind in considering the evidence as to the result of the Trade Board's determinations on their earnings.

As far as indoor workers are concerned the Trade Boards Act has undoubtedly had a most beneficial effect.<sup>1</sup> The homeworker, however, whose pitiable condition furnished the incentive to legislation, has been more difficult to reach. In fact, the opinion

<sup>1</sup> See *Studies in the Minimum Wage*, Nos. 2 and 3.

has sometimes been expressed that, however great the benefits which indoor hands might derive from the establishment of legally obligatory minimum rates, it could do nothing to improve the condition of the homeworkers. The pessimists are of two kinds: those who, while admitting that a rise in the rate of payment is possible, yet think that its advantage will be counterbalanced by a corresponding diminution in the amount of homework, and those who look upon homework as offering such incomparable opportunities for evading the payment of a minimum wage as to paralyse the best-intentioned efforts of organized intervention.

Though we are far from sharing this pessimism, it must, nevertheless, be admitted that the effect of the Trade Boards Act upon homeworkers has not been as great as upon other classes of workers. Several homeworkers, when pressed for their opinion of the Act, have confirmed the words of the thoughtful boxmaker who at length burst out with, "Well, Miss, I've given this 'ere Minimum Wage a deal of thought, and I really doesn't think as it's done much 'arm."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> According to the opinions expressed to us by homeworkers, it would seem to be the learners and the younger indoor hands (whose wages used to range from 5s. to 10s. a week) who have derived the greatest benefit from the Act. The learners who could be had at 1s. a week constituted a great source of profit to the employer, and small tailors and middlemen state that, whereas "the 3¼d. business" doesn't worry them at all, the new regulations concerning their apprentices have imposed very serious expenses upon them. A skilled tailoress, who had been in receipt of 5s. a week as a learner, related that the first week

The following Table shows the effect of the Trade Board on the homeworkers' rates of payment :

TABLE II.<sup>1</sup>

*Effect of the Trade Board on Earnings of Homeworkers.*

	Tailoresses.	Boxmakers.
Piece-rates raised ..	134	143
Some piece-rates raised ..	—	46
No change <sup>2</sup> .. ..	414	94
Piece-rates lowered ..	6	7
Unable to tell .. ..	—	43
Total .. ..	554	333

It will be seen that about a quarter of our tailoresses and considerably more than half of our boxmakers

she was put on to piece-rates she was able to earn 25s. ; this was, of course, before the introduction of the minimum rate, as the regulations concerning learners now render such exploitation impossible. In boxmaking, which seems to be an hereditary occupation, great enthusiasm for the Act could usually be accounted for by the fact that the household included girl learners, in which case the mother is glad to branch off from her work—which never amounted to much at its best—in order to expatiate upon the incomparable advantages within the reach of her offspring.

<sup>1</sup> Tables II and III have already appeared in *Studies in the Minimum Wage, Nos. 2 and 3*. The figures in Table II have been slightly amended.

<sup>2</sup> In a few cases, both in tailoring and boxmaking, the employer raised his piece-rates when the minimum rates were fixed, but later lowered them again. About a third of the tailoresses and more than half of the boxmakers whose rates had not been altered were already earning the minimum rate.

have had their piece-rates raised in consequence of the Trade Boards Act. Indeed in boxmaking the proportion of those whose piece-rates have been raised is really greater than appears in the Table. For of those who were unable to tell what had been the effect of the fixing of minimum rates, thirty-seven were new hands or had changed their employers, and they may well have come into "higher" rates, although they are not aware of the change. The numbers include sixty-one boxmakers, all of whom had had their rates raised.<sup>1</sup> Both among tailoresses and boxmakers the new piece-rates have not always been paid, in great part because the workers have not dared to claim them. Among boxmakers working for the same employer, and apparently doing the same work, some reported a rise while others emphatically denied it. Indeed, the worker's own "jawing" has often proved a necessary condition of the payment of the minimum rates. Some workers good-humouredly relate that the extra amount is paid whenever they put in an appearance themselves, but is systematically withheld when the children are sent. It goes without saying that it is mostly the older generation, the infirm, and the wives dependent on their earnings,

<sup>1</sup> The special minimum piece-rates fixed by the Trade Board for common match and tack boxes were  $2\frac{1}{2}$ d.,  $2\frac{3}{4}$ d. 3d. and  $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. ; these represented in one firm an increase of 20 to 33 per cent. on the old rates. For vesta boxes the rates fixed varied from 4d. to 8d., representing in the same firm an increase of from 8 to 39 per cent.

who have not felt at liberty to demand the new piece-rates.

Many a tailoress stated that her employer, a poor woman like herself, would gladly increase her payments, if only she could in turn obtain more from the firms which employed her. Other sub-contractors who had gone so far as to raise the workers' piece-rates in anticipation of a general rise in the prices to be obtained from wholesalers were doomed to bitter disappointment; for, though some wholesalers at first raised their prices, others, giving out similar work, declined to do so. This led eventually, partly through competition and partly owing to their better organization, to practically all the wholesalers refusing to pay higher prices to their sub-contractors (save for work on which the output was urgent).<sup>1</sup>

In boxmaking, too, it would appear that piece-rates were raised when the Act first came into force on the supposition that better prices for orders could be obtained; some employers, after timing their workers, seem to have conscientiously fixed the piece-rates in such a way as to comply with the Trade Board's requirements, but being unable to obtain higher

<sup>1</sup> Since the war the sub-contractors have been in an even worse position. The great demand for labour caused skilled workers to be at a premium, and in order to retain their services sub-contractors were compelled to pay higher rates, but at their own expense. Being practically unorganized, and compelled to keep up their connection with wholesalers, upon whom in peace times they depend for orders, they found it inexpedient to demand from them the higher prices which the higher wage rates justified.

prices for their orders were reluctantly driven into once more lowering the rates to their former level. In some cases, however, a compromise was effected, the piece-rates finally settling down into something half-way between those which could be regarded as adequate to yield the minimum time-rate and the prices previously obtaining. To meet their increased expenses the firms had to resort to various expedients, the simplest of which seems to have been to deduct something from the price of the best paying work in order to add it to the least remunerative, a policy in which good workers often acquiesce on the ground that "we all 'as to 'elp the other." There is a tendency, however, to reduce the number of these "unremunerative" workers—that is, of the unlucky ones employed upon unremunerative work—and to supplant them by machinery.

Having seen how many of the boxmakers and how few of the tailoresses have profited by the new regulations, our next concern is to ascertain how far the rise which has taken place has been efficacious in raising the hourly earnings to the level fixed by the Trade Boards. In the following Table we give the numbers of homeworkers who were, and who were not, able to earn the minimum time-rate :



TABLE III<sup>1</sup>.  
*Number of Homeworkers able to earn the minimum.*

	TAILORESSES.			BOXMAKERS.			
	Able to earn the minimum (3d. per hour <sup>2</sup> ).	Not able to earn minimum.	Total.	Able to earn minimum (3d. per hour <sup>2</sup> ).	Able to earn minimum on some work.	Not able to earn minimum.	Total.
<i>Under 45.</i>							
Able-bodied	{ Trained 96	25	121	86	22	43	151
	{ Untrained 13	34	47	11	2	11	24
	{ Doubtful 21	23	44	—	—	—	—
Delicate or Infirm	{ Trained 1	6	7	6	3	16	25
	{ Untrained 2	3	5	2	—	2	4
	{ Doubtful 2	9	11	—	—	—	—
Total ..	135	100	235	105	27	72	204
<i>Over 45.</i>							
Able-bodied	{ Trained 47	37	84	25	10	20	55
	{ Untrained —	13	13	1	1	6	8
	{ Doubtful 4	16	20	—	—	—	—
Delicate or Infirm	{ Trained 6	54	60	4	1	25	30
	{ Untrained 1	11	12	—	—	3	3
	{ Doubtful 1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Total ..	59	131	190	30	12	54	96
Total, all ages	194	231	425	135	39	126	300

<sup>1</sup> See note on p. 40. <sup>2</sup> In both trades our inquiry was made before the revised rates (in tailoring 3½d., in boxmaking 3d.) had come into operation.

It will be seen that 54.4 per cent. of the tailoresses and 42 per cent. of the homeworkers are unable to earn the minimum rate fixed by their respective Trade Boards. The figures, being based on answers given by the homeworkers, may be criticized on the ground that statements of homeworkers as to their earnings are notoriously unreliable. We took pains, however, to check them, and we believe they may be regarded as substantially accurate. If so, they cannot be considered with complacency. It is true, of course, that a considerable proportion of homeworkers would not be considered as "ordinary" workers<sup>1</sup>, and it is not surprising to find a large number of aged, infirm and untrained workers earning less than the minimum. But this explanation cannot account for the fact that of the able-bodied and trained workers under 45, who must presumably be held to be at least equal to "ordinary" workers, 25 out of 121 in the case of the tailoresses and 43 out of 151 in the case of the boxmakers, are not earning the minimum. Among the common matchbox-makers we found that barely one-fifth (6 out of 33) could earn it. These women are on the whole older than other boxmakers, and they may therefore contain a large proportion of slow workers. But, even allowing

<sup>1</sup> Under the Trade Boards Act, if minimum piece-rates are not fixed by the Trade Board, the employer must pay such piece-rates as will yield the minimum time-rate to the "ordinary worker." The employer is fulfilling his legal obligations, even though a worker may be earning less than the minimum time-rate, provided that the piece-rates she is paid are sufficiently high to enable the ordinary worker to earn the minimum. For a further discussion of this point see *post*, pp. 102-105.

for this fact, their low rate of earning is remarkable when it is remembered that all these women have experienced a very considerable rise in their piece-rates.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to compare the number of trained and untrained workers in the two trades. It has already been remarked that the tailoresses are on the whole of a more advanced age than the box-makers. It will be seen that the proportion of untrained workers is also greater among the tailoresses. Boxmakers who had not actually been trained in the factory would generally state that they were "born into the trade"; frequently they would refer to the time when, seated on a high stool, with their little fingers all sticky with glue, they already "helped to keep the home going." Tailoring seems to be an easier trade for the woman with no previous industrial skill to fall back upon when forced to supplement the family income by her work. This lack of training, however, is not as significant as at first sight it would appear, since, when it comes to a question of speed, training, far from being an asset, often becomes a hindrance. For a trained worker has learnt tailoring, not slopping, and the better trained, the more she has to forget; whereas those who are ignorant of the trade naturally take more kindly to "them new sloppy ways" which in the case of slop work will alone ensure the earning of 3¼d. an hour. Some of the tailoresses are not earning

<sup>1</sup> The increase has usually been from 2d. to 2½d. a gross.

the minimum because, while being paid the price of slop, yet they dare not "slop" it; the superior work which they put in takes the form of an offering or bribe to the employer, by way of persuading him to keep them in preference to others. Some do not slop because they do not know how, others because they dare not, and others simply because they will not. "I ain't agoing to spoil my work not for any Mr. . . ." (meaning their employer), they cry out defiantly.

To sum up now the main results of the fixing of the minimum rates, as far as homeworkers' earnings are concerned. In the tailoring industry only 25 per cent. of the homeworkers who were visited had had their piece-rates raised as a result of the Trade Boards Act. Among the remainder there were a considerable number of superior skilled workers who were already earning more than  $3\frac{1}{4}$ d. an hour before the minimum rates were thought of, but at the other end of the scale we found a large mass of genuinely sweated workers. The latter, unfortunately, are difficult to discover, and when found are frequently too ignorant, too hopeless and too crushed to dare to claim a higher rate. It would appear that it is just this class of homeworkers, who most need the protection of the Trade Board, whom the Act as it stands at present finds it most difficult to reach. This is not to lay any blame upon the administration. In considering the comparatively slight result which has accrued to the homeworkers, it must be borne in

mind that the tailoring trade presents exceptional difficulties in the way of minimum wage legislation.

In boxmaking a much greater proportion have benefited by the fixing of a minimum wage, but even in this trade the rates have not in all cases been raised sufficiently, and to the question whether the worker could earn 3d. an hour the answer was frequently received, "I earns it on some, but not on others; I 'as to take the bad with the good." In no case, indeed, did all the piece-rates appear to have been fixed, as legally they should have been, so as to yield the minimum, but each worker tries to get for herself and monopolize as far as she can, the special kind upon which good earnings are possible. The unlucky ones, too timid or too needy to make complaints, naturally come in for a greater proportion of the less profitable boxes, and the indignation of those unable to earn more than 2d. an hour is thus diverted from their employer to their more fortunate neighbours. Every firm whose workers are represented in our Tables needs to have its piece-rates rearranged. But this, as a worker put it, "will take a bit of doing," since the price paid for making a gross of boxes depends upon the price of the order, no less than upon the time involved in its production. Some employers are said to have instructed their best workers to time themselves on the various kinds of work and then fixed the piece-rates according to the speed attained by the quickest. Generally speaking 3d. an hour is not yet a mini-

mum, but rather an average time-rate; and some of the fancy boxmakers relate that when they in turn demanded an increase it was denied to them on the ground that 3d. an hour was all they were entitled to. A small number even state that they have had their prices lowered when it was found that they earned more than the minimum.

However far it is from being as yet complete, in boxmaking the future success of the Act seems assured. "Of course 3d. a day more is a help to poor ones like me," an Old Age Pensioner exclaimed almost with indignation. It was especially among the common matchbox-makers, whose prices had been raised from 2d. to 2½d. a gross, that the satisfaction was greatest, for even in homes where the utmost misery prevailed the rejoicings had not yet died away, and visitors are fairly overwhelmed with the unmerited gratitude heaped upon their heads. Though not yet fully carried out, the results of the Act among boxmakers can only lead one to desire to see it extended to other similar trades.

## CHAPTER V

### THE EFFECT OF THE TRADE BOARD ON EMPLOYMENT

As it has often been prophesied that an increase in rates of payment, far from benefiting the workers, might, owing to loss of work, mean a reduction in their actual earnings, it is necessary to consider whether there has been a diminution of work for which minimum rates can be held responsible.

This question is very difficult to determine, for other causes besides the Trade Boards Act have been at work. Even before this Act there was a tendency to concentrate the work within the factory and to give less out to homeworkers,<sup>1</sup> while the result of the Insurance Act, which came into force

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, the evidence given by a large employer in London before the Committee on Outworkers in 1912. Outwork, he thought, was decreasing largely in his own firm (tailoring). Asked if that was the effect of the Trade Boards Act, he replied: "No, I think it is the effect of modern conditions; factories are being built and manufacturers are generally recognizing that factory work is better than outwork from their point of view." (Report of Committee appointed to consider the application of the National Insurance Act to Outworkers, 1912. Qs. 5645, 5646.)

about the same time as minimum rates were fixed, undoubtedly accelerated this development. Some of the boxmaking firms, for instance, seem at first to have decided that their outdoor hands were not worth keeping on unless they could earn 10s. a week. The slower workers who could not by their utmost exertions turn out this amount were discharged, unless by their prayers and entreaties they could induce the employer to retain them.<sup>1</sup> The adoption of the "unit method," however, by which an insurance contribution was to be payable for each "unit of work" done by the homemaker (in the boxmaking trade 12s. worth), irrespective of the length of time it might take her to complete this amount, rendered it practically immaterial to the employer whether the work was performed by a few quick workers or a larger number of slow ones. Consequently many a woman who was dismissed "over the 10s. a week business," as she expresses it, and who refers to this period as one of desolation and despair, has been taken on again and is happy once more over her average of 4s. to 6s. a week. But though some workers who were

<sup>1</sup> In one or two cases an elderly woman was allowed to continue working for a firm on condition that she "worked on the same card" as her daughter. And one of the principal employers, yielding to the tears of his workers, allowed them to earn below the fateful sum of 10s. on condition that each worker, however little she took in, paid her 3d. a week for insurance. This was, of course, contrary to the provisions of the Insurance Act, which laid down that the worker could only be called upon to contribute as much as 3d. (the employer contributing the same sum) if she earned over 2s. a day.



dismissed on account of the Insurance Act have recovered their work, a number will have been permanently displaced. The Trade Boards Act also at first resulted in a certain number of dismissals, employers making an effort to get rid of their slower workers; however, as it soon appeared that the number of quick workers was strictly limited, the dismissed workers often found employment again, either with their own or another firm. It may be remarked that, apart from the necessity of paying insurance, slowness is not such a disadvantage among the homeworkers as it is among the indoor hands. Since the homemaker is not occupying factory or workshop space there is not so much inducement for the employer to dispense with her services. It is constancy rather than quickness which is most in demand, the tendency being for the majority of homeworkers to adapt their earnings to those of their husbands rather than to the requirements of the trade. A slow worker, who will consult her employer's interests by never refusing work, is of more value to him than a quicker worker who, if her husband has secured a job, will leave the employer in the lurch, no matter how busy he may be. As the workers themselves put it, "I studies 'im and 'e studies me; that's 'ow we gets on." Apart from the direct result of the Insurance and Trade Boards Acts, both these Acts have had an indirect influence on the employment of homeworkers by inciting the employer to a reorganization

of his work in the striving for a greater efficiency, and since homework is not the most economical form of production, but has been continued largely through custom and tradition, the reorganization is likely to lead to a greater concentration of work inside the factory.

The extent to which this concentration of work has taken place—from whatever cause—may be partially seen from the fact that the number of homeworkers employed by certain London firms which made returns to the Trade Board declined from 1,664 on March 31st, 1912, to 1,179 on March 31st, 1914<sup>1</sup>—and this at a time of good trade, for the number of indoor workers employed by these same firms increased fairly steadily during the same period. It would seem to be especially the makers of common matchboxes who have suffered loss of employment. Here the decline of the trade as a homework industry, —which was to be observed long before the advent of the Trade Boards—has undoubtedly been hastened by it. But in the case of the cardboard boxmakers the fixing of minimum rates does not appear to have entailed such hardship. Of all the boxmakers who had been working at the trade for some years and who were, therefore, in a position to know what had taken place, the majority stated that they were obtaining the same amount of work as before the rates were fixed, while a small number were even

<sup>1</sup> The actual numbers of homeworkers for the five half-yearly periods were 1,664, 1,290, 1,104, 1,275 and 1,179; the numbers of indoor workers were 6,282, 6,236, 6,282, 6,568 and 6,744.

getting more. Only about 20 or 22 per cent. said that they were getting less work.

So far we have only spoken of the boxmakers' difficulty in obtaining work. The converse of this problem is the employers' difficulty in obtaining workers. It is somewhat amusing to note that employers, famous for underpayment, lament the difficulty of getting, and especially of keeping, their workers, and apparently do so without detecting the obvious connection between cause and effect. Their complaints confirm one in the belief that, as far as boxmaking goes, the Trade Boards Act has not been in vain.

In tailoring it is even less easy to say what has been the result on the employment of homeworkers of the fixing of a minimum wage. The figures for two London boroughs are as follows :

## BETHNAL GREEN.

## HACKNEY.

	Home-workers in the Tailoring trade.	Home-workers in all other trades.	Home-workers in the Tailoring trade.	Home-workers in all other trades.
1907	462	1,542	219	3,980
1908	475	2,049	248	3,314
1909	481	2,130	227	3,036
1910	960	2,475	245	2,929
1911	607	2,140	228	2,843
1912	527	1,955	209	2,350
1913	543	1,805	161	2,290

In Stepney, according to the returns made by ninety-six tailoring firms, the numbers of homeworkers employed by them were :

Jan., 1910	..	..	..	1,217
Jan., 1912	..	..	..	1,283
July, 1912	..	..	..	1,276
Jan., 1913	..	..	..	1,311
July, 1913	..	..	..	1,191

Without laying too much stress on these figures, for the employment of homeworkers, especially in the tailoring trade, is always liable to fluctuations, it may be remarked that they do not suggest any great decrease in the numbers employed. And such decrease as is shown is not as great as would appear. Formerly contractors registered as workers, but owing to the desire of employers to economize on insurance stamps, names that have appeared on the workers' list are now relegated to a special column for contractors.

While workers have, of course, been busy travelling from one employer to another, and employers in their attempt to get rid of the slowest workers have been busy in exchanging their employees, we nevertheless found very little—if any—permanent loss of employment. The most careful inquiry was not able to reveal more than 10 tailoresses (out of about 600) whose cessation of work could be ascribed with certainty to the Trade Boards Act. The Act has caused frequent disputes culminating in dismissal;

but the outraged tailoress has as often as not bettered herself by the change, and what seemed an overwhelming calamity has proved a blessing in disguise.

It would seem, however, that a considerable number of workers who are still retained in employment are receiving less work than formerly. Out of 395 tailoresses who gave answers on this point, 19 were receiving more work, 196 were getting the same amount, 24 had given up work, while no less than 156 were receiving less.

[It is worthy of remark that the proportion who are receiving less work is smaller in the case of those whose rates have been raised than it is in the case of those who have experienced no change in this respect. Out of 107 of the former only 33 per cent. had suffered a diminution of employment, while out of 288 of the latter 42 per cent. were receiving less work than formerly. At first sight it would seem as if the inducement for the employer to curtail the employment of homeworkers would have been greater in the cases where he had been obliged to raise their rates. The homeworkers' own explanation is that the employer, instead of raising the piece-rates either for them or for the indoor workers, has speeded up the latter to such an extent that they can earn the minimum time-rate on inadequate piece-rates; the amount of work produced in the factory is increased by this speeding up, and as a consequence there is less for the homeworker.]

Whereas in boxmaking employers have tried to reduce the number of their workers, the policy in tailoring seems to be to retain as many as possible, and to keep them all partially employed. During the slack season, and when the old hands are daily clamouring for work, the employers advertise for fresh workers, to whom "steady employment" is offered. Workers are thus drawn away from other trades, and married women and invalids, who have hitherto had no thought of tailoring, are likewise enrolled. Canvassing from house to house goes on during the months preceding the busy season—some workers seem to make a point of not moving in the matter unless personally solicited. The result is that a large margin of casual labour is created which is in a chronic state of under-employment. Unable to comfort themselves with the thought that seasonal slackness is inevitable, tailoresses naturally exercise their ingenuity in trying to account for their present distress, and many curious reasons have been evolved, most of which are without direct reference to the results of the minimum wage. Labour troubles abroad were cited by those engaged in the shipping trade, the dock strike by specialists in "broadfalls," while those working for the employer "what's never been no nigger driver" put all the blame upon his ruthless competitors. Foreign competition caused both by imported goods and imported middlemen is often commented upon; Irish underselling is lamented, and "them Jews"

come in for much abuse, both for reducing opportunities of employment and for having brought about a deterioration in the character of the trade. The Insurance Act is said to have "played old gooseberry" with the work, and it goes without saying that the Insurance and Trade Boards Acts form a hopeless maze in the brains of many homeworkers. Among those who are suffering from under-employment only a limited number had grasped the significance of the Trade Boards Act, and these generally ascribed their lack of work to the increased amount of work exacted from the indoor hands. While they are convinced that no fewer garments are produced, the unequal division of labour arouses indignation. Why, they ask, should some be speeded up and driven to produce so much more than they want to, while others, with a keen desire to work, have to go away empty-handed?

Another development which has affected the position of the homeworkers is the increasing popularity of the system of sub-contracting. It was stated that parts of the work which had formerly been given out into the hands of the homeworker now fall into those of the sub-contractor instead. The growth of the sub-contractor is no new phenomenon. It was to be seen long before the Trade Boards Act. "Outworking" (*i.e.*, sub-contracting), said a Trade Union Secretary in 1912, "is very prevalent and is on the increase. . . . The whole of the tailoring trade . . . as far as the London

district is concerned . . . has drifted into the hands of the sub-contractor or middleman."<sup>1</sup> The reason ascribed for this development was the desire of the employer to escape the payment of Trade Union wages and generally to cheapen the cost of labour. The fixing of a minimum wage has, it is to be feared, acted as a further inducement to a certain type of employer to make greater use of the services of the middleman. There are two methods of production which are open to the ultimate employer, besides the carrying out of the work on his own premises. Either he can give it out direct to homeworkers (in which case he will in most cases give it to the "right-out workers," for the large employer will not care for the trouble of sub-dividing the work among machinists, finishers and pressers); or he can give it out in larger quantities to sub-contractors. The first method is almost as convenient as the second, but it is only by adopting the latter that the ultimate employer can escape all responsibility and continue to pay too low a price for the work without incurring the slightest risk of prosecution. It is the right-out workers who complain most of the intervention of the middleman,

<sup>1</sup> Evidence of G. Rowleron, Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Tailors, before the Committee on Outworkers, 1912, Qs. 1,306, 1,317, 1,332, 1,333, 1,343. The witness was speaking of the male workers, the journeymen tailors working at home, but the same would apply to the "right-out" women workers too. The sub-contractor is, of course, as we have already mentioned, not necessarily a middleman. It may be the contractor who is the middleman, while the sub-contractor may be a producer.



for they have lost work thereby. The machinists and finishers will continue to secure employment from the middleman, though often at reduced rates.

To sum up, neither in tailoring nor in boxmaking has the fixing of minimum rates had any detrimental effect upon the industry as a whole. We have reason to believe that the total number of boxmakers has remained approximately the same, and, as the output of these workers has in many cases been increased, the fact that the same number are employed would point to an increase in the total amount of work produced. Homework, however, has diminished since minimum rates have come into force, but it would be impossible to state for certain how much of this reduction is due to the Insurance Act and for how much of it the Trade Boards Act alone can be held responsible.

A stricter enforcement of the latter would still further affect the position of the homeworkers, though not necessarily to their disadvantage; for while, on the one hand, the necessity of raising the payments to homeworkers would weight the scale against them, a tightening of the administration within the factory would tell in their favour. At present the employer can evade the Act in various ways; he may, for instance, speed up his indoor hands to earn the minimum on inadequate piece-rates, or he may pay learners' rates to workers who are in reality not learners but entitled to the full minimum; the prevention of these and similar

methods of evasion might render the retention of the homemaker's services still relatively profitable, even though her rate of payment had to be increased. We believe that the Trade Boards Act would indeed lead to a dismissal of slower workers were it not that the supply of quick workers is strictly limited. If a larger number of the latter were available for indoor work, homework would more quickly be driven out of existence.<sup>1</sup>

We must guard against taking for granted that the raising of the earnings of homeworkers must inevitably entail loss of employment. For the low rates paid are not based so much on what the employer can afford as on what he is accustomed to pay. No one, in fact, except perhaps a philanthropist, thinks that he can afford to pay more than he is obliged to. If the employer was unable to pay the minimum rates to homeworkers, he would in many cases discover that it was still profitable for him to employ them. As an employer said himself: "It is absurd for any decent firm<sup>2</sup> to say

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the evidence given by the representative of the National Federation of Merchant Tailors before the Committee on Outworkers in 1912 (Qs. 1,102—1,106). "In the busy seasons we cannot get the workshops filled. . . . We should prefer to have the whole thing made indoors, but we cannot get the labour, so we have to resort to the outdoor worker." This shortage, which was felt in the better class work, was of indoor hands only; a sufficient supply of skilled labour could generally be obtained from outworkers.

<sup>2</sup> This assertion naturally does not apply to the sub-contractor when, as sometimes happens, he is a sweated worker himself. Unfortunately, the large firms who are best able to raise their payments to homeworkers are also those who are in a position

that it cannot pay  $3\frac{1}{4}$ d. an hour to its women workers. The difference between paying them the proper amount and underpaying them is after all so slight when one compares it to one's other expenses ! If any are not paying the minimum, it must be because they don't want to."

We are, however, afraid that a number of employers will *not* want to raise their rates, but will find it easier to dismiss their homeworkers. Taking a broad outlook this result is not to be deplored, if the change is brought about gradually, for from the point of view of the trades concerned homework is not a necessity, nor is it the most efficient method of production. But from the narrower standpoint of the homeworker the reduction in the quantity of homework remains a calamity. Some women, no doubt, when homework declines can cease from work altogether, without serious detriment to the economic position of the household ; others—a few—will be earning a better wage in a factory ; but we cannot forget the large number of those for whom homework is the only possible means of self-support. Incredible though it may seem, there are women whose scanty earnings enable them to maintain not only themselves and their children but an invalid husband as well, and not only to keep the

to play off one form of production against another. Homeworkers *must* submit to the rates of pay offered them, lest a greater proportion of the work be handed over to the middleman, who in turn accepts it at any price in order to prevent its being done in the factory.

home in good condition, but also to nurse the invalid. To substitute outdoor relief or charitable assistance for the work of their own hands would not meet the difficulty, even though such help were forthcoming ; it is the thought that they are the breadwinners which keeps such women going.

On the whole, homes in which women work compare rather favourably with those in which they remain inactive, and naturally are a great improvement upon those which the mothers are forced to desert for the advantages of the factory. Philanthropists who (quite rightly) argue that a wife and mother has ample scope for exercising her energy in looking after the family and home, and then go on to prove that this home would be benefited if the work done in it were abolished, should make a closer study of the condition of children whose mothers have been driven into the workshop. Moreover, the fact that homework deprives the children of too much of their mother's care is hardly an argument for depriving them of it altogether. In addition to the younger women whose presence in the home is indispensable, there are the older and slower workers who are unable to earn the weekly minimum and therefore, as a rule, find it difficult to obtain work in the factory. To these homework is so often a blessing that if the ordinary system of homework were abolished it would have to be reinstated as a form of charitable relief. And where this is done the charity consists not so much in furnishing the money as in allowing

them the luxury of feeling that they have earned it.

A great deal has been said in favour of the suppression of homework by those who have taken an interest in the workers' welfare. It must, however, be borne in mind that homework, resting as it does upon a vital need, cannot be swept away until something has been done to remove its causes; the chief of which are the underpayment, and more especially the casual employment, of male workers. In our eagerness to heal a symptom as soon as it has been diagnosed as unhealthy, our greatest danger may be our success; for effects are too often as easy to cure as causes are difficult to discern; and no sooner would homework be suppressed than the same disease would break out again, fresh symptoms springing up in the place of the old.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE HOMEWORKER'S POINT OF VIEW

THOUGH to a certain extent the workers' own opinions have been scattered throughout these pages, yet the study of the effect of the Trade Boards Act upon homeworkers would be incomplete were we not to devote an additional chapter to their own point of view regarding the conditions with which they are familiar, as well as the efforts which have been expended upon their improvement.

Tailoresses and the better class of boxmakers are unanimous in deploring the fall in prices which the last twenty years or so have brought about, and defeat the efforts of the inquirer to detect a rise in wages by a reference to better days when 25s. to 30s. could so easily be earned. One of the strongest impressions received during our inquiry is that of a gradual reduction both in the quality of the work and in the prices which it obtains. Some workers, who would otherwise resent that meddling Trade Boards Act, welcome it because, without it, they believe that prices would still be pursuing a down-

ward course, with the vanishing point as their goal. Remarks such as "Something must be done," "We need someone to look after us," "It needs people like you to look into things, and we'll back up you in everything you do," were frequently heard among the more appreciative, for the fact that the decline in prices has been arrested is in itself sufficient cause for gratitude.

That downward course is attributed by tailoresses to the introduction of foreign middlemen, and by boxmakers to machinery, whereas in both trades, foreign competition and the decline in men's work which creates that insidious competitor, the married woman, are freely commented upon. Some women make the obvious suggestion that if the workers would only speak up they would get what they want; whereas others again are quite hopeless of anything being done in the face of foreign competition. "Not much good this 'ere visiting," a boxmaker explained, "the work ain't worth more." Some believe that, as boxes are not necessary to sustain life, a rise in prices would result in the public learning to do without them. Others do not welcome efforts made on their behalf because, in their opinion, "it ain't no good messing with women's wages," while men they deem a lazy lot and urge that they should be taught their duty. Indeed one woman's sentiments seemed to be summed up in the verdict: "The more women earn the more men will drink!"

To our surprise we found that the workers' opinions of the Act did not necessarily coincide with their experience of it. Some are partisans of State intervention, while others abhor it on general principles, and will not be converted though their incomes are doubled. A tailoress who gives out buttonholes to her neighbours, and who is therefore molested rather than benefited by the new regulations, will pat the visitor on the back saying: "It's a good thing you are after, go on, things need looking into," while a poor creature who admits to taking 2s. a week more than before still feels: "And if I does get more, 'tain't no one's business!" In fact, "things need looking into" and "'tain't no one's business," are the two watchwords typifying these two contrasting attitudes.

In the following table we attempt to summarize the workers' opinions of the Act:



TABLE IV.

*Workers' Opinions of the Act.*

Opinions.	TAILORESSES.				BOXMAKERS.			
	Rates raised.	Rates lowered.	Rates not changed.	Total.	Rates raised.	Rates lowered.	Rates not changed.	Total.
Approve ..	64	1	86	151	137	2	42	181
Disapprove ..	31	4	69	104	23	—	8	31
Act not enforced	12	1	69	82	3	1	16	20
Not interested..	21	—	71	92	17	1	15	33
Never heard of the Act ..	6	—	119	125	4	1	11	16
Total .. ..	134	6	414	554	184	5	92	281

Of those who approve a certain number qualified this approval in a greater or lesser degree ; some think that the Act, though it undoubtedly does good, has not gone far enough, while among the tailoresses especially the demand was made that piece-rates ought to be fixed. Of those who disapprove of the Act (including a few who have distinctly benefited by it<sup>1</sup>), some do so on more or less general principles, others because the middleman or middlewoman who employs them—" a poor woman just as you sees

<sup>1</sup> Thirty-one tailoresses and twenty-three boxmakers had had their piece-rates raised, but twelve of the former and ten of the latter had subsequently experienced a diminution of work or had lost their work altogether, and so had not ultimately benefited.

me"—has been made to bear the whole burden of "higher" rates unaided by the big firms which fatten at her expense, while others object because the minimum has been fixed too low. A considerable number take no interest in the Act at all, or insist upon ignoring its existence—though even among these are found a few whose piece-rates have been raised in consequence of it. The proportion of those who had never heard of it is much greater in tailoring, while those who approve are far more numerous in boxmaking. The benefit which boxmakers have derived from the Act is so much greater as to require special emphasis, and may be ascribed to the fact that they are neither too superior on the one hand, nor too untrained or decrepit on the other, for its regulations to be easily applied to them. Fifteen per cent. (82 out of 554) of the tailoresses, and about seven per cent. (20 out of 281) of the boxmakers cannot see "as it's made no difference." Their opinion of the Act is summed up in the words of one of them, "It's good enough, but where is it?" or "It sounds all right, but 'tain't made no difference." Others would like to see it enforced, but candidly, "don't think it will act." There are all degrees of scepticism, from the worker who asserts that "all Acts are rot" to those who patiently explain that "no system is any good unless people are kept up to it."

As a rule, even the boxmaker who has benefited by the Act will begin by denying its existence ;

till after patiently submitting to a long explanatory discourse, she will suddenly exclaim as though seized with a new idea : “ *I see what you mean, we ’as to earn 3d. an hour. I didn’t know it was the 3d. an hour business you was after !*” Having thus reached common ground the patient becomes more voluble. “ *We ’as to say we earns it ’cause it’s in our books. I’ll show you.*” And a grimy notebook is produced with a printed slip engaging the workers to return the boxes immediately if unable to earn 3d. an hour on them. Then the conversation will run on these lines : “ *’Tain’t bothered me ’cause I’m natural quick, but I’m sorry for them other poor devils* ” ; or else, “ *It’s in our books, but ’tain’t one in a hundred what earns it.*” In the latter case the boxmaker ends by begging the intruder not to give her away because her young man has been queer for some time and what would become of the children ? Some of the work, we are told, is done slowly by slow workers—why should it be cut off ? The superior boxmaker who propounded this riddle was thinking of the loss of good workers to the trade no less than of the loss of the work to the worker. The effect of speeding up on work and worker alike is often discussed, and a frequent criticism of the Act is that by causing additional speeding up it has failed to prevent sweating, while it has led to loss of employment for the homeworker. Of the boxmakers who had suffered a diminution of work, some explained that

the "guvnor" had been "awful busy" during the last year, but that, having to pay a "minium" or "premium" wage "to them as works in," and these latter having to earn this "premium" by producing more boxes, he naturally had less to give out to the unfortunate "likes of them what 'as to set at 'ome." Sometimes the results of a minimum rate were briefly condensed in the words: "We ain't getting it." The fact that a few chosen indoor hands are breaking the rule is no proof to the contrary, for "Some workers 'd earn 3d. an hour at any rates." Where no change in prices has taken place, and instead workers are asked to work quicker, the remarks run to the effect that: "It's very kind of them ladies to take all that trouble, but one can never make the minimum except by killing oneself."

As was shown in the Table, ignorance of the Act was far more prevalent among tailoresses; very few of them had been favoured with a visit from a Trade Board Inspector, and they were at first inclined to look upon his appearance as an occasion for merriment. Even when prices which were raised for the benefit of the Trade Board were lowered again, tailoresses seemed determined not to make a tragedy of it, but rather to think it incumbent upon them to revive the dejected spirits of their well-wishers.

But the tailoress who is not indifferent to the action of the Trade Board is the former indoor worker who has been turned out (as she thinks) by

its orders, while the employer stands by, a monument of sympathy and regret, but unable to stay the hand of the oppressor. Hardly less bitter is the worker who is very anxious to "work in," but has been taken aside by the kindly foreman to be told that, as she is probably not quick enough to earn the minimum, it would be to her interest not to hazard a dismissal and to content herself with homework. However prudent the worker herself, some member of the family usually lets it out that Mrs. So-and-So only sits at home because she is not quick enough to work in. Indeed the minimum is really a high standard to which only comparatively few workers can attain. "Minimum rates" is quite too big a term for the ordinary homeworker, and before it settled down definitely into the "Minimum Wage" it went by the name of "Menial Wage," but more often the "Premium Wage," since the latter corresponds better with the homeworkers' experience of it. But that this "Premium Wage" could be an attempt to raise their rate of payment has never occurred to them. Even the tailoress in receipt of better pay does not necessarily connect it with the minimum rate, but takes especial pleasure in ascribing it to some other event.

Tailoresses who used to "work in," or whose friends have lost employment through the Act (it is generally someone else to whom this has happened), complain of the slave-driving inside the factory, which is breaking down the health and nerve

of the younger generation. Minimum rates, they tell us, are causing more suffering than all the sweating that has gone before. Their criticisms naturally do not apply to the principle of a minimum, of which they heartily approve, but to the attempts of the employer to evade it. For this purpose he has to speed up his workers, so that he may appear to be paying  $3\frac{1}{4}$ d. an hour, when in reality his piece-rates are so fixed as to render it almost impossible, or possible only to a rare type of worker, to earn this sum. This speeding up is a very sore point with the average tailoress: "We none of us works for pleasure, and 'tain't likely we're going to take longer over it than we 'as to, but it makes one feel that queer to be always in a 'urry!" or "Some's quick, and some's slow, and why should the slow ones be a starving just 'cause God didn't make 'em quick?" There were many who regretted that a uniform wage could not be paid; then they would only be driven when the "guvnor's" eye was upon them; the rest of the time they would, though not dawdling, be able to enjoy their work; now it means hurrying all the time. Let everyone doing the same work be paid alike, they argue. If some turn out more than others, what of it? "It's them what's old and slow what needs the money most anyhow." When the impracticability of this scheme was explained to them, they remarked that, if payment by piece-rate must prevail, then legally obligatory piece-rates were needed. "Where we are paid a

weekly wage there let the Trade Board fix a time-rate ; but where we are paid by the piece they must fix a piece-rate." But of all the remarks made by our tailoresses none occurs so frequently as the demand that the "fountain heads" should be "tackled," and the system of underbidding put an end to ; their own beloved middleman being the victim of greedy firms, no less than of the outrageous competition of other sub-contractors. Though it is sometimes quite obvious that arguments of this kind have not originated in the brain of the worker who expounds them, they nevertheless are of interest as showing that the middleman himself, under the pressure of competition, is calling upon the law to protect him.

Another point thrust upon our notice by the workers themselves, no less than by those who employ them, is the need of legislation for other trades in order to bring them up to the lead of tailoring. Employers, in addition to arguing that it is unfair to penalize one industry while leaving other industries untouched, explain that, although tailoresses should undoubtedly get more money for their work, and though the tailoring trade might well afford to increase its payments, yet the low payments which prevail in similar industries would inevitably tend to pull prices down again from the artificial heights to which they had been raised. There is, they argue, a danger that large numbers of workers might be tempted to desert other trades in

order to throng the ranks of the tailoresses, and that, as this influx of workers into the trade would inevitably lead to unemployment, the tailoress might in the end become a victim to the well-meaning efforts expended on her behalf. The workers, too, not infrequently inquired why, "if what you ladies is after is to do us good," something could not be done for "them poor devils of . . ."; and forthwith proceeded to an account of the hardships endured by some near relative or friend who was "killing herself" at long hours and low pay in some other trade, whereas "*we* was already getting more 'an them before this 'ere Menial Wage had started."

But lest so many suggestions should imply a more critical attitude than the homeworkers actually display, we must turn to the lowest class of boxmaker, who resents even the suggestion of any criticism upon so beneficent an Act. The matchbox-maker whose income has been raised by 1s. a week looks upon one as a not altogether harmless lunatic for so much as inquiring into its results. Even the worker who considers that "all Acts are rot," and "don't hold with none of 'em," will have a soft word to say for the mysterious power so busily at work to better her condition. Though all other legislation be iniquity, here at least, she feels, she has found a friend. There is no reason to suppose that the same feeling of gratitude will not be shared by all the workers within the scheduled trades as soon as



the Trade Board regulations have been readjusted so as to suit their varying needs. Some suggestions as to rendering them more efficacious are made in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER VII

### DIFFICULTIES OF ADMINISTRATION

THE readiness with which some firms have agreed to raise their piece-rates would incline one to think that, given a stricter administration of the Act, a far greater number would have followed their example. Unfortunately the pressure exerted by the Trade Board Authorities has not been so great as to induce a general rise in rates, and therefore some of the firms which had promptly complied with its requirements—probably in expectation that others would be obliged to follow suit—have now begun to lower their prices.

The results of an Act and the results of its “not acting” are always difficult to disentangle. In our study of homework it is chiefly with the latter that we are concerned and, if pressed for a verdict upon the results of the Act itself, we should feel inclined to answer that judgment upon it must be suspended until such time as it has been more rigorously enforced.

Even in boxmaking, where the efforts of the inspectors have been followed by singular success, some further effort will have to be made before all the piece-rates are so readjusted as to yield the legal minimum; while in the meantime employers who have succeeded in evading the Trade Board's determination are expanding their trade at the expense of their more scrupulous neighbours.

The truth is that the existing staff is far too small to enforce successfully the Trade Board's determinations. In those sections of the tailoring industry where Trade Unionism is comparatively strong—for example, among the factory workers of Leeds—the inadequacy of the official machinery is largely compensated by the vigilance of the workers' organizations. But homeworkers are quite unorganized.<sup>1</sup> They often do not know their legal rights under the Trade Boards Act. If they do know them, they dare not call attention to them by complaint, for fear of dismissal. Precisely because they need protection most, they are least capable of taking any steps to

<sup>1</sup> An organization, entitled the Homeworkers' League, was started towards the end of 1913 under the auspices of the Anti-Sweating League, with the object of advancing and safeguarding the interests of homeworkers generally. Membership was open to all homeworkers, in whatever trade they were engaged, and the subscription was fixed at the low sum of 1d. a month. To some extent the League was used by the women for complaints, especially with regard to rates of payment and insurance; these were reported to the authorities, and not a few grievances were remedied in this way. The membership, however, has never exceeded 300.

protect themselves. How can workers agitate for redress when the continuance of their livelihood depends upon their being willing to suffer every injustice in silence? Nothing can help them but a strict administration of the law, a constant vigilance on the part of the Trade Board Authorities, which will not wait to be asked for assistance but which will pierce behind the disclaimers of middlemen and employers, and even of the workers themselves.

What we are faced with at present are the consequences, not so much of the Act itself, as of its partial enforcement. When, for instance, firms which, in compliance with the Trade Board's determination, had increased the workers' wages, have subsequently been obliged to lower them again because other firms had been able successfully to ignore it, the workers' disappointment must obviously be ascribed not so much to defects in the Act as to defects in its administration. Or where a timid, law-abiding employer, by his observance of the Act, is rendered incapable of competing with stronger, law-despising rivals, his bankruptcy, and the consequent discharge of his workers, is again not so much due to the Act as to its partial enforcement.

It may be that the present policy of the Trade Board authorities is dictated by the feeling that more rapid and thorough action would threaten the existence of all the smaller firms and bring corres-

ponding suffering upon the worker, but if so such a view is singularly inept. In reality, firms not infrequently go bankrupt because the Trade Boards Act participates too much of the nature of a moral law and is not put into execution with sufficient stringency. Were the Trade Board's regulations strictly enforced, the disappearance of some firms would doubtless follow, but this would not diminish the demand for garments and would check the constant underbidding among middlemen to which the lowering of prices is almost universally ascribed. If cases of bankruptcy occurred, it would at any rate be the fittest—rather than the least honest—who would have the best chance of surviving.

As it is, the already existing evils of competition are in danger of being aggravated by a new factor, the competitor who evades the Trade Board's determination and whose hand is immeasurably strengthened by the moral pressure brought to bear on his rivals. In this struggle between the honest and the timid on the one hand and the unscrupulous on the other, the weight of the Trade Board tends unconsciously to bear rather on the side of the latter; and the Act, as it stands at present, becomes a power only when dealing with the weaker, the more timid, the ignorant or incapable, who can easily be frightened into compliance. The result must be the strengthening of the hand of the least scrupulous, when laws partially binding

are allowed to exist without adequate provision for their enforcement. One is indeed driven to the conclusion that dexterity in the art of evading all such obligations as can be evaded and yet escaping prosecution is among a certain class of employer a recognized element in business ability. Workers who say, "Employers will never pay the minimum unless they are forced to," are not afflicted with any morbid distrust; it is more likely that they just put themselves in the employer's place and think how intolerably stupid he would be to pay an additional farthing so long as there was the slightest loophole of escape. Given this possibility of escape, the business mind is bound to set itself to work to discover some fresh mode of evasion. What is true of the Trade Boards Act becomes true of every law, given a sufficient reduction of the police force, for when one has to do with business relations, where the spirit of hard dealing is unloosed and sanctioned by custom, nothing short of compulsion is likely to succeed. What the police with an armed force in the background are to crimes of physical violence, a staff of Government inspectors should become to that far more widespread and desolating force which is too often cloaked under the euphemistic title of business enterprise.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These remarks apply not only to business relations but to every circumstance in life where a contract is made between the strong and the weak. As far as tailoring and boxmaking are concerned it has been our good fortune to meet with employers whose actions were not wholly governed by business motives,

Modes of evasion, either dishonest or bordering on dishonesty, have in several cases been detected, and as the culprits nevertheless seemed to be paying the current prices, or even more, it is probable that there is an indefinitely large number of similar evasions which no investigations have been able to reach. But there is another system of evasions, safer and far more efficacious. The most favourably situated, as far as these are concerned, are the employers in control of a workshop and of homeworkers as well, who are thus able to play off one against the other.

First there is the very simple procedure of giving the best paying work to the indoor hands so as to bring their weekly earnings up to the desired minimum, and giving out the inferior grades—or in boxmaking those requiring the most glue—into homes where inspectors are not likely to penetrate.<sup>1</sup> “Best stock,” for instance, will be done in the factory and the common stock and slop given out to be done at home, to the loss of the trained homeworker who is too conservative to change her stitch. Or a bespoke workshop may consist of learners and a few skilled tailors

but who took a sincere interest in the welfare of their workers. It is for the sake of these employers as well as for that of the workers themselves that laws such as the Trade Boards Act should be rigorously enforced.

<sup>1</sup> It was found, for example, that a bespoke tailor, acting as middleman, dared not risk his reputation by the presence in his shop of military trousers, but gave them out exclusively to homeworkers.

and tailoresses who, by each getting a chance of basting, etc., will have books showing minimum entries of 13s. 6½d. each, while the majority of homeworkers, who are given only the unprofitable finishing, will be earning an average of 3d. an hour or less.

But this arrangement is not always feasible, nor does it always suffice. When dealing chiefly with the lower grades of work it becomes necessary for the employer to concentrate in his workshop a chosen band of exceptionally quick workers, capable of proving by their speed that whatever piece-rates he may choose to pay will yield the minimum. Look, for instance, at a firm employing 10 indoor and 100 outdoor finishers. The former are chosen so as to be able to earn the minimum time-rate on the already existing piece-rates, and their chief value consists in suggesting that minimum rates are paid when they are really being evaded. For the 100 finishers earning at an average of perhaps 1½d. or 2d. an hour will not be visited at all, or else the attack is so slow as to defeat its own ends, and arrive at no other result than the dismissal of a few workers. For homeworkers as a rule are not inspected unless a complaint has been made, and then the employer can nearly always point to some defect in that particular worker which will disqualify her from earning the so-called minimum.

Once his workshop is thus put in order an em-



ployer need not trouble much about homeworkers. He knows now, if he did not know at first, that the chances of detection are far too remote to need much consideration. In the case of indoor workers the inspector has but to examine the wage books in order to discover whether the respective weekly minima are being observed, but the weekly wage of the homeworker means nothing, and to ascertain at what rate she is being paid it becomes necessary to time her. Though to do this in the case of some dozen workers is a somewhat lengthy process, yet the hours spent in timing homeworkers are nothing to those expended in trying to discover them. For the typical sweated worker finds it difficult to pay rent, and is perpetually on the move. An irate landlady discourses upon their debts and gives a whole catalogue of their shortcomings, but the new address is invariably withheld; or perhaps a sympathetic neighbour discloses the information that the family left a week ago, at which date they were starving, but no details are given which might lead to their discovery. If, after an enormous expenditure of time, the sweated worker is at last laid hands upon, she will put every obstacle in the way of allowing herself to be timed, and, as a rule, it is rather the quick workers, proud of their speed, who lend themselves to the process.

It is difficult to persuade these terrified creatures that to give a truthful account to an inspector can

be desirable either from an ethical or an economic standpoint. Nor would it be an exaggeration to say that in exact proportion as an inquiry is needed it becomes difficult to conduct. Such is human nature that complaints are less a sign of need than a symptom of comparative well-being, and the stage at which the worker has the courage to complain is the stage at which it becomes less urgent that these complaints should be heeded. For those who suffer most have no voice with which to cry, and their grievances will never be heard. In the case of a woman worker loyalty to her employer, anxiety as to her children, or simply the mental attitude that looks upon a burden as something which *must* be carried—which is never to be lifted from her, or thrown aside—will always and inevitably deter her. It is needless to insist any further on the small success likely to result from the efforts of a staff of inspectors who are limited chiefly to investigating complaints, as is necessarily the case with the present inadequate numbers.

To do justice to the Trade Boards Act a larger staff is necessary. There need be no fear of unlimited expense, for no sooner have the benefits of supervision begun to make themselves felt than the same forces that have hitherto obstructed the way will be ranged in its favour. Once the ground has been taken by storm a smaller force suffices to retain it, and intervention on behalf of the helpless, if successful, itself removes some of the

causes which makes it necessary. Only the first trenches need to be carried, and after that the workers, helpless no longer, will be able to do the rest.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR REFORM : THE FIXING OF PIECE-RATES

APART from the need for an increased inspectorate there are certain questions of a more controversial character, connected partly with the form assumed by the determinations of the Tailoring and Box-making Boards, partly with the actual drafting of the Trade Boards Act. In the first place there is the fact that, unlike the Chainmaking and Lacemaking Boards, neither of these two Boards has found it possible to fix general minimum piece-rates. The Box Board has, indeed, taken a step in the direction of doing so, by agreeing on the piece-prices of certain classes of boxes, which, though not legally obligatory, are of some service as offering an indication to employers and Investigating Officers as to what may be regarded as reasonable rates, with the result that in several sections of the trade piece-rates were considerably raised. But most of the workers visited during the autumn of 1914 seemed totally

unaware of any such adjustment, and were still complaining that, whereas it was possible to earn more than the minimum on some kinds of boxes, on others again one earned much less; indeed, several of the more intelligent suggested that piece-rates should be revised, with an air of propounding a novel and unheard-of theory. The Committee of the Tailoring Trade Board which met for the same purpose was obliged to disband without any agreement concerning legal piece-rates being reached, and the task has, for the present, at any rate, been abandoned.<sup>1</sup>

Our experience proves that there are employers dealing with every grade of work from slop to bespoke whose piece-rates are so arranged that even the aged, unless absolutely infirm, are able to earn the minimum. Employers of this description would probably be glad to come forward with

<sup>1</sup> It may be remarked that the Select Committee on Homework of 1908 never contemplated that minimum piece-rates would not be fixed. "The fact that payment for homework must be at piece-rates," they report, "relieves your Committee of the very grave difficulty that would attend any attempt to adjust a time-rate of payment to the capacity of the slow, the infirm, the inefficient, and the aged. . . . The earnings of those who are slow and inefficient cannot be raised by giving a rate of payment above that which is made to the average worker. . . . What can be secured is that a minimum rate *per article* or *per process* shall be paid to all workers for the same amount, character and quality of the work." Accordingly they recommended that minimum piece-rates should be fixed for all work that was of a standard size or pattern. In addition a minimum time-rate should be fixed, so as to ensure that, where the work could not be standardized, the piece-rates paid would yield to the average homeworker the equivalent minimum time-rate. (Report of the Select Committee on Homework, 1908, p. xvi.)

a view to enforcing their rate of payment upon troublesome competitors. It would not be difficult to find the best paying employer in each branch of the trade, and grades of work for which no well paying employer could be found or which proved too elusive might still be carried on in the workshop at so much an hour. If it were not possible to fix legal piece-rates for every kind of tailoring, it could yet become illegal to pay according to any other than the legal piece-rate, and the employer who had not sent in his piece-rates for verification and approval would be debarred from piece-rates as a mode of payment.

The first step towards a legal adjustment would naturally be to fix the piece-rates "at the fountain head," *i.e.*, the rates to be paid by wholesalers to sub-contractors (or to "right-out" workers if the services of a sub-contractor were not utilized). The garment once branded with a special mark to indicate its rank and value would then be passed on to the sub-contractor. Such a system would altogether do away with the underbidding of middlemen and put an end to the main evils of the sub-contract system.

The piece-rate for each garment taken right out being decided upon, according to its shape, size, the amount of work upon it and the quality of the work, the next step would be to determine the piece-rate for the finisher, machinist and presser, according to the method of distribution—according,

that is, to the way in which the work would be divided among machinists, finishers and pressers.

To fix the respective piece-rates for these workers so that they obtained a due proportion of the "right-out" price, it would be necessary to measure accurately the time taken on each process necessary for the completion of the garment. This being done, something like the following schedule could be set forth for each class and grade of work<sup>1</sup> :—

<sup>1</sup> To make the point clearer the following detailed schedule may be of use. We do not give these as the rates which ought to be paid, but as an example of how the system could be worked. The rates have, however, been drawn up after carefully timing some of the homeworkers engaged on the various classes of work, and, though we should not like to say that they are the lowest which should be paid if the worker is to earn at least 3¼d. an hour, we feel that they are not far from the correct amounts. [NOTE.—Since this schedule was drawn up, the minimum rate has been raised to 3½d. The prices ought, therefore, to be proportionately increased :—

#### RATES OF PAY FOR FINISHERS.

##### CLASS A.

Lowest Class Stock. Retail price 1s. 11d. to 4s. a pair.

*Grade No. 1.* Retail price, say 1s. 11d. to 2s. 6d. a pair.

Turning up bottoms, sewing on buttons, seat-lining and a few tackings .. ..	¾d.
Band linings, if put in by hand .. ..	½d.
Buttonholes, if put in by hand .. ..	½d.
If the seams are pressed out by the finisher	¼d. more.

Minimum payments to finishers for bottoms, buttons, seat-lining, tackings and pressing, 1d. per pair; with bandlinings and handmade holes, 2d. per pair, but it would not generally pay to have them put in by hand on this grade of work.

If other items than those mentioned above are left to the finisher, the minimum would naturally be higher than we have stated.

MEN'S TROUSERS (FLIES).

Serges, Flannels, Worsteds, Tweeds, etc.

Class B. Common Stock.

*Grade No. 1.*

1. Sale price (retail) 4s. a pair (price paid to wholesaler usually 3s.).
2. Minimum price to be paid for making, after garment is cut out (*i.e.*, the price to be paid to sub-contractor or right-out worker), say 9d. a pair.
3. Minimum payments to machinists, say 3d. to 3½d. a pair, according to the amount of work done by machinery.
4. Minimum payments to finishers from 2½d. a pair, if buttonholes have been partly put in by machinery, or from 3d. a pair with handmade holes.

*Grade No. 2.* Retail price say 2s. 6d. to 3s. 3d.

¼d. per pair more than stated above.

*Grade No. 3.* Retail price say 3s. 3d. to 4s.

Another ¼d. more, *i.e.*, 2½d. altogether, or 1½d. without band-lining and handmade holes.

CLASS B.

Common Stock. Retail price from 4s. a pair.

*Grade No. 1.*

Turning up bottoms and sewing			
on buttons .. ..	..	from ¾d.	upwards.
Bandlining and back curtain ..	..	1d.	..
Tacking and seatlining .. ..	..	½d.	
Handmade buttonholes.. ..	..	¾d.,	or barring button-
			holes and making
			one, ¼d.

Minimum payments to finishers, from 2½d. upwards, or from 3d. upwards if buttonholes are put in entirely by hand.

Pockets in this class of work would seldom be left to the finishers, but if the finisher is to press out the seams she would



As the right-out price of the garment would be known, the worker would have a better idea of what share of the whole she was entitled to, for the mark

be entitled to  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. more, bringing up the minimum to 3d. and  $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. respectively.

## CLASS C.

Medium Class Stock. Retail price from 5s. 11d. a pair.

*Grade No. 1.*

Bottoms	.. ..	.. from	$\frac{3}{4}$ d. upwards
Fly and hip pocket tacks	.. ..		$\frac{1}{3}$ d.
Buttons	.. ..	.. ,,	$\frac{1}{3}$ d. ,,
Bandlining and back curtain	.. ..	.. ,,	$1\frac{1}{4}$ d. ,,
Seatlining and hip stays	.. ..		$\frac{1}{3}$ d.
Buttonholes by hand	.. ..		1d., or barring holes and making one, $\frac{1}{4}$ d.
Two pockets by hand	.. ..		$\frac{3}{4}$ d., or pocket tackings only, $\frac{1}{4}$ d.

Minimum payments to finishers, from  $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. upwards without handmade buttonholes and pockets, or from  $4\frac{3}{4}$ d. upwards with handmade holes and pockets. Pressing out of seams  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. extra.

## CLASS D.

Best Stock. Retail price from 7s. 6d. a pair.

*Grade No. 1.*

Bottoms	.. ..	.. from	1d. upwards.
Buttons	.. ..		$\frac{1}{2}$ d.
Fly and tackings	.. ..		$\frac{1}{2}$ d.
Bandlining	.. ..	.. ,,	$1\frac{1}{2}$ d. ,,
Seatlining and hip stays	.. ..		$\frac{1}{2}$ d.
Handmade buttonholes	.. ..		$1\frac{1}{2}$ d., or barring holes, $\frac{1}{4}$ d.
Two pockets by hand	.. ..		1d., or felling pockets $\frac{1}{3}$ d.

Minimum payments to finishers, from  $4\frac{1}{2}$ d. upwards without handmade buttonholes and pockets, and from  $6\frac{1}{2}$ d. upwards with handmade buttonholes and two pockets put in entirely by hand.

Pressing out seams and bottoms,  $\frac{3}{4}$ d. extra.

Bottoms can have various peculiarities ; they are either plain or bound, permanent, herringboned, etc. ; bandlinings also are of various kinds, but with each of these items the minimum given in this schedule is for the plainest kind.

stamped on the garment would have to correspond to the category of work for which her own piece-rates had been fixed. For instance, if a garment were marked Class C, No. 2, the price for felling the bottoms, putting in various linings and sewing on a set of buttons would have to correspond to the price fixed for these processes of work in the class of work marked C, No. 2.

A point which must be borne in mind is that the tailoress herself very seldom adapts the quality of her work to the particular grade which she happens to be engaged upon; in fact, the good work for which she is better paid hardly takes her longer than the commoner kinds. Therefore the infinitesimal distinctions made by an expert are quite unnecessary from the workers' point of view, and a subtle and scientific classification is not essential for the purpose of enforcing the payment of a minimum wage. The scheme allows, however, for as many subdivisions as would be required. If, for instance, the rate to be paid to the sub-contractor for making was, in Class B, 9d. to 1s.—these figures are only hypothetical—B No. 1 would represent a rate of 9d., B No. 2 might be 10d., B No. 3, 11d., and so on.

The price which it is important to fix, and which can be fixed irrespective of the different ways in which the work is sub-divided among machinists and finishers, is the rate paid to the sub-contractor. To make the point clearer we may quote some actual figures supplied to us by a tailor who had himself

been both a retailer and a sub-contractor. The prices quoted<sup>1</sup> are those which were current before the minimum wage was fixed.

#### TROUSERS.

##### A.—LOWEST CLASS STOCK.

1. Retail sale price, 1s. 11d. to 4s. a pair.
2. Price paid to wholesaler, 1s. 8d. to 3s. a pair.
3. Price paid to sub-contractor for making, 4d. to 6d.
4. Payment to machinists, 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. to 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. a pair.
5. Payment to finishers, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a pair (including hand-made holes and pressing out seams).

##### B.—COMMON STOCK.

1. Retail sale price from 4s. a pair.
2. Price paid to wholesaler, from 3s.
3. Price paid to sub-contractor for making, 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. to 8d.
4. Payment to machinists, about 3d. a pair.

##### C.—MIDDLE CLASS STOCK.

1. Retail sale price, from 5s. 11d. a pair.
2. Price paid to wholesaler, from 3s. 7d. a pair.
3. Price paid to sub-contractor for making, 8d. to 10d. a pair.
4. Payment to machinists, about 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a pair.

##### D.—BEST STOCK.

1. Retail sale price, from 7s. 6d. a pair upwards.
2. Price paid to wholesaler, from 4s. 8d. a pair.
3. Price paid to sub-contractor for making, from 10d. a pair.

<sup>1</sup> The payments quoted for machinists and finishers are the rates paid to indoor workers.

4. Payment to machinists, 3½d. to 4d. a pair.
5. Payment to finishers, 4½d. a pair.

In all classes of work except the first the machinist could, according to our informant, earn as much as 3¼d. an hour, but the finishers were hardly ever able to do so. It was impossible, however, for the sub-contractor to pay more. In the lowest class work, for instance, even taking the highest price for making up, viz., 6d. a pair, the sub-contractor's expenses were as follows :

			s.	d.	
Machining..	..	..	2	3	a dozen.
Finishing	..	..	1	6	„
Final pressing	..	..	0	4	„
Cartage ..	..	..	0	3	„
			<hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/>		
Total	..	..	4	4	„
			<hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/>		

And to this must be added the "viewing" and "parting," the brushing and packing up, so that, after establishment charges have been paid, there is practically no profit on this class of work. Sometimes sub-contractors take it on to oblige the wholesaler, hoping to recoup themselves on the higher grades of work ; others again make a profit by paying lower prices to their workers than those quoted. Even on the work in Class B, the sub-contractor can only make a gross profit of 1s. a dozen. Indeed, it is only in the higher grades of "best stock," *i.e.*, when the price obtained by the sub-contractor is

over 1s., that he could afford to pay higher rates to his finishers. It may be objected that the figures we have given as to the prices paid to the sub-contractor by the wholesaler are exceptionally low. This is not the case.<sup>1</sup> In an interesting article in a recent issue of the *Toynbee Record*,<sup>2</sup> it is shown that, in the military work given out by the War Office in December, 1914, the contractors' profits per garment were out of all proportion to the profits of the sub-contractor, and if all the price-lists could be examined it would doubtless be found that the same was the case with other work. In the khaki work the price paid by the War Office to contractors for trousers was 8s. 9d. per pair. The contractors' expenses for materials and cutting amounted to 6s. 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. The amount paid to the sub-contractor for making up the garments was 10d. The total expenses of the contractor thus amounted to 7s. 0 $\frac{3}{4}$ d., leaving him a gross profit of 1s. 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. The sub-contractor, who was paid 10d. for making, paid out 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in wages and made a gross profit of 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. only.<sup>3</sup> In the case of jackets the contractor's gross profit was 2s. 7d. and the sub-contractor's 7d.; for great-coats the profits were 7s. 1d. and 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

<sup>1</sup> In the first prosecution undertaken by the Tailoring Trade Board in London, it was demonstrated that the sub-contractor, if she had paid her homeworkers the minimum wage, would herself have made only 4s. 4d. a week.

<sup>2</sup> *Toynbee Record*, January, 1915, p. 41, "Military Tailoring in East London," by E. F. Hitchcock.

<sup>3</sup> The sub-contractors have larger establishment charges than the contractors, for they do all the making-up of the clothing. Only the cutting-out is done on the premises of the contractor.

respectively. The writer of the article suggests that the War Office should fix minimum rates which contractors should be obliged to pay to sub-contractors and should also stipulate the amount on each garment which must be paid in wages, thus following the practice adopted by the London County Council in its contracts for uniforms.

It will be seen that, though the price paid for making the whole garment might be sufficient to yield the minimum time-rate to the homemaker who completes the whole work herself, it is not sufficient to yield more than the barest margin of profit for the sub-contractor who takes out work at the same price. Since it is far easier for the middleman to underpay his workers than to obtain a higher rate of payment from the wholesaler, it is not strange that the workers should be found to be underpaid. But, as he relieves the wholesaler of much trouble and expense, he should be entitled to some reasonable remuneration which is not at the expense of the payments made to the workers themselves.<sup>1</sup> If the piece-rates to be paid by the wholesaler or factory were fixed, they should be an obligatory minimum whether paid to a homemaker or to a sub-contractor, so long as the work is given

<sup>1</sup> A scrupulous employer will, of course, calculate the expenses of production and pay the sub-contractor such a price as will enable him to remunerate his workers fairly. But others will take advantage of the stress of competition in order to avoid remunerating the sub-contractor to the full extent to which it is profitable to employ him, and will give him so low a price that it is impossible for him to pay his workers the minimum rate.

out in small amounts. But when the sub-contractor takes whole sections of the work off the factory owner's hands, he should be entitled to receive a certain percentage in addition.

## CHAPTER IX

### FURTHER SUGGESTIONS : AMENDMENTS OF THE TRADE BOARDS ACT

IF it is not found practicable to fix piece-rates, in the way we have suggested in the previous chapter, it is vital that certain amendments should be made in the Trade Boards Act itself. They are most urgent on account of the tailoring trade. The greater success of the Act in boxmaking is principally due to the greater ease with which responsibility can be traced to the employer ; while in tailoring we are still asking ourselves who *is* the person responsible for the sweating against whom public opinion has been aroused.

According to the Act, the only party responsible for the evils of underpayment is the person who comes into immediate contact with the worker ; and the fact that this person, as often happens, is a sweated worker herself does not relieve her of the responsibility. Such, at least, has been the current interpretation ; the words themselves run as follows :



“ Any shopkeeper, dealer or trader, who by way of trade makes any arrangement, expressed or implied, with any worker in pursuance of which the worker performs any work for which a minimum rate of wages has been fixed under this Act, shall be deemed for the purposes of the Act to be the employer of the worker.”<sup>1</sup>

The original employer, shopkeeper, dealer or trader who by way of trade makes any arrangement by which workers perform work for which a minimum rate of wages has been fixed is, in reality, not only the employer of the sub-contractor with whom he may be found to deal, but also of all the workers employed by the sub-contractor. The wages paid by the sub-contractor depend upon the price paid by the original employer, yet the latter escapes all responsibility. The homemaker employed by the sub-contractor often in her turn gives out button-holing or finishing to her neighbours. She is, perhaps, poverty-stricken herself, and during periods of depression has to fall back upon charitable relief for her maintenance. Her choice of workers will be somewhat restricted and her prices not calculated to attract any but invalids, or inefficient semi-invalids. The results are cases of sensational sweating. While some investigators may satisfy themselves with the assurance that these sweated workers are sub-ordinary, others will push things so far as to prove that the piece-rate paid is sufficient

<sup>1</sup> Trade Boards Act, 1909, section 9.

to yield the minimum to none but extraordinary or exceptionally quick workers. If, as a consequence, the homemaker who has given out the finishing were prosecuted, she would, of course, plead her poverty and get off with a nominal fine. Criticism in such a case might be directed against the sub-contractor; but the sub-contractor may herself be a widow, perhaps in straitened circumstances, and afflicted with years. In any case, the profits of the original employer will never so much as be questioned.

And yet, from the wholesaler downwards, prices will probably have been so fixed as to produce underpayment at the end of the line, even though the only person legally responsible for that underpayment—and, incidentally, the one who derives least profit from it—is the last. There is little to be gained by prosecuting a homemaker who falls back upon charitable relief, or a sub-contractor who returns to charring when tailoring is made unprofitable to her, while another charwoman perhaps slips unnoticed into her place. One cannot be for ever chasing women such as these in and out of the trade; nor is prosecution at all likely to frighten them into greater efficiency. Further, whether individual sub-contractors are punished or acquitted, action taken against them will not greatly affect the question of wages. The tendency of late seems to be for the larger firms to abdicate the now perilous position of direct employer, to deal less and less

with individual homeworkers and to pass more of their work through the hands of the sub-contractor.

If piece-rates were fixed at the "fountain-head," as suggested in the preceding chapter, there would, of course, be no need of fixing any further responsibility upon the employer. If, however, the suggestion of fixing piece-rates is not carried out, it would be necessary, in order to prevent those who profit by underpayment from escaping its responsibilities, to amend the Trade Boards Act so as to enable the Trade Board to proceed against the original employer as well as against the sub-contractor.<sup>1</sup>

The greatest difficulty, perhaps, in enforcing the payment of a minimum rate lies in the elusive description of the person mentioned in the Trade Boards Act as an "ordinary" worker. It is not every worker who is entitled to claim the minimum, but the employer must fix his piece-rates so that they yield not less than the minimum time-rate to the ordinary worker. The Trade Boards make allowance for a certain percentage of slow workers—20 per cent. in the tailoring trade, 15 per cent. in the boxmaking—but this percentage is only laid

<sup>1</sup> The Act might be amended as follows: "Any shopkeeper, dealer or trader who by way of trade makes any arrangement expressed or implied with any worker or contractor in pursuance of which workers perform any work for which a minimum rate of wages has been fixed by this Act, shall be deemed for the purpose of this Act to be the employer of the workers engaged in performing that work," etc., as in the text.

down as a rough criterion, not a hard and fast rule. The employer may have a larger proportion of sub-ordinary workers and may pay them less than the minimum time-rate, and still be within the law; on the other hand he may be infringing the law though the percentage earning below the minimum is within the prescribed limit, for all his workers may be ordinary. In theory the employer must prove that his piece-rates are so fixed as to yield in the circumstances of the case the minimum time-rate to the ordinary worker; that is, he must prove that the worker able to earn, say, only 2d. an hour is paid a piece-rate which enables other workers who are "ordinary" to earn 3d. or 3½d. per hour, as the case may be, on the same work and working under similar circumstances. What happens in practice is this. Where employers have really cared to ascertain whether their piece-rates were sufficient to yield the minimum, they have timed their indoor workers, fixed the piece-rates according to the rate of speed attained by these, and then allowed the homeworkers a trifle over to cover the expense of materials. In the case of another type of employer, however, homeworkers are persistently under the impression that their piece-rates are lower than those paid inside the workshop, and that this is done chiefly because homework defies inspection. Our experience proved that, where the majority of homeworkers were in receipt of a piece-rate adequate to yield them, in the circumstances of the

case, the minimum time-rate, indoor machinists working for the same employer earned more than double the amount ; and conversely, where indoor workers earned the minimum or only a trifle over, the earnings of homeworkers were pitifully low. The employer can satisfy the Trade Board inspector as far as his indoor workers are concerned and trusts to being able to evade the Board's determination in the case of his homeworkers by alleging that any particular homeworkers who may be found to be earning less than the minimum are not ordinary workers.

It is difficult at present to say exactly what is the interpretation of the word "ordinary." In deciding a worker's claim to be so treated, age, health and training will of course be taken into consideration. It may be said that a large number of homeworkers are not ordinary ; but homeworkers who are young, trained and able-bodied are presumably ordinary workers. Even among these, a considerable proportion were found to be earning less than the minimum, so easy is it at present to evade the Trade Board's determination. If the full benefits of the minimum wage are to be obtained by homeworkers—and it was mainly on their account that the Trade Boards Act was passed—it must be applicable to all, except the aged, the infirm and the obviously incapable. For these certificates of exemption could be granted, as they are now in the case of indoor workers who are infirm or physically

disabled.<sup>1</sup> So long as the minimum wage is only applicable to that vague abstraction, the "ordinary" worker, a loophole of evasion is given which will be taken advantage of by the unscrupulous and unprogressive employer and the whole system will remain to a large extent inoperative.

The amendment could not, however, be carried out unless it were found possible to raise the rates paid to sub-contractors, where these are insufficient to enable them to pay their homeworkers the minimum time-rate. And, whether the rates paid to sub-contractors are raised or not, the amendment would have disastrous consequences for the homeworkers unless steps were at the same time taken to avoid rendering their employment so unprofitable as to cause a sudden decrease in their numbers. Since no provisions of the Trade Board can compel the employment of a homeworker after it has become more profitable to do without her, the only alternative would be to fix a higher minimum rate for the kind of work by which it would be found advantageous to supplant her. Many homeworkers even now are under the impression that they are being retained out of pity, and state that their further employment is merely due to a flood of tears and

<sup>1</sup> To bring about this change Section 8 would have to read: "An employer shall be deemed to pay wages at less than the minimum rate, etc., (b) in cases where a special minimum piece-rate has not been fixed, unless he shows that the piece-rate of wages paid is sufficient to yield to each worker, unless he be granted a permit of exemption, at least the same amount of money as the minimum time-rate."

supplications. To fix a higher minimum rate for machine work in the factory would not inconvenience the greater number of employers whose indoor machinists are already earning about 30s. a week. In fact, it would affect those only who are at present underpaying their homeworkers, those whom we have already referred to, who escape the regulations of the Trade Boards Act on the ground that their machinists are earning the minimum and are not entitled to more, whereas the finishers' failure to earn the minimum is explained by the allegation that they are not ordinary workers.

The suggestion of fixing a higher time-rate for machinists would require very careful consideration, especially as it would be difficult to extend it to homeworkers. In the case of the latter, slowness of an aged machine adds greatly to the slowness of an aged worker, and machines would really require cards of exemption as well as the workers themselves!<sup>1</sup> Unless, however, some such suggestion can be carried into effect, it would seem kinder to the homeworkers to leave the clause referring to the ordinary worker as it stands at present, and not to increase the number of inspectors. In fact, the suggestions as to the need of better inspection and the extension

<sup>1</sup> This licence allowed to machines must, however, in no case be extended to those used in a workshop. Machinists working for certain firms have stated that it was worth their while to purchase a machine on the hire system and work it at home, as the machines provided for them in the factory were so decrepit as to keep down their earnings.

of the benefit of a minimum rate to all those who are not actually disabled, are only made on the supposition that something would, at the same time, be done to safeguard the interests of homeworkers against further and too rapid encroachments of the factory system.

Homeworkers, it must be remembered, dread nothing so much as loss of employment. Yet the same women who will connive with the employer to deceive the Trade Board have been seen to spring into sudden defiance of this employer as soon as their husbands' earnings are assured. It is therefore quite conceivable that in other districts homework, not being a vital necessity, could more easily be dispensed with, whereas in the parts from which our figures are drawn the continuance of homework is urgently needed.



## CHAPTER X

### CONCLUSIONS

IT was impossible to visit large numbers of homeworkers without being struck by their peculiar inability, not only to hold out for a higher rate of payment, but to offer any serious resistance to a lowering of their earnings. Ignorance and lack of intelligent interest in the subjects that affect them most vitally were not restricted to any one class or kind of worker, but were common both to the more independent and to the more helpless among them. An even greater factor than ignorance in the women's powerlessness to hold their own is the fear lest higher demands should imperil the homework upon which their home life depends. To many of them the Trade Boards Act has been an awakening, and has filled them with hope of better things. Being fully persuaded in their own minds that in themselves they are incapable of redressing their wrongs, the majority have gladly welcomed the intervention of the State, and the fact that this intervention has

not fully realized their hopes does not detract from its need, nor from their faith in its power of assistance.

In tailoring, the workers' satisfaction was often tempered with indignation at the fact that their increased payments were made at the expense of poor people like themselves, instead of affecting the larger firms who had profited most by their underpayment. On the other hand, tailoresses who had been so fortunate as to obtain their work direct from the firms and were in the habit of doing the whole of the garment themselves explained that it was the interposition of unnecessary middlemen which had ruined the trade, and that, if it were not for these, there would be no occasion for underpayment. It appeared on the whole that payments made by factories and wholesalers to the "right-out worker" were sufficient to yield the minimum time-rate required by the Trade Board, but that where the work was sub-divided between machinists and finishers, and organized by a sub-contractor, these same payments often became inadequate. This is the more surprising in face of the obvious economies effected by the sub-divisional system. These advantages were more than counterbalanced by the sub-contractor's profits.

Employers who were glad to raise their piece-rates in expectation that others would be forced to do the same, and whose payments to sub-contractors allow of the latter fixing their piece-rates so as to yield the minimum to all their workers, are rather

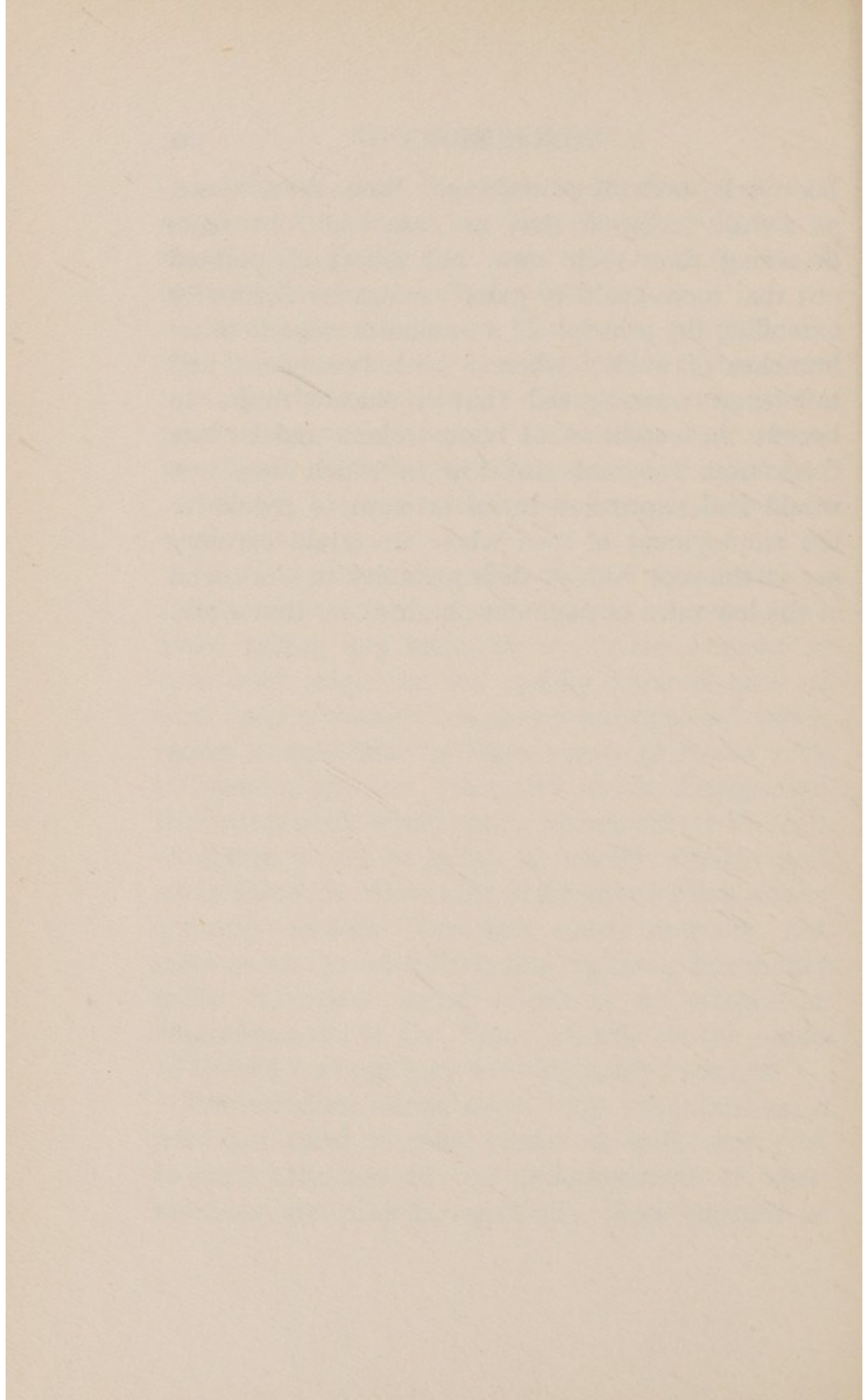
less tolerant than the workers themselves of the way in which the Act has been evaded, and some of these would gladly give their services in the cause of seeing it more rigorously enforced.

Homeworkers have, on the whole, profited less than indoor workers by the introduction of minimum rates, partly because of the difficulties of inspection, partly because the average homeworker is not what the Trade Boards Act describes as "ordinary," and lastly, because of their own fear of losing their employment.

This fear is not altogether devoid of foundation, and for the workers' sake it would be necessary to avoid taking any steps by which the amount of homework might be too rapidly reduced until at least such a time as the causes are removed which render it imperative for these women to obtain work at home at any cost. A policy which, disregarding their utter need, would render homework too difficult to obtain would be guilty of cruelty towards precisely those for whose sake State intervention was so urgently needed. This fact must, however, not serve as an excuse for relaxing vigilance, but should rather stimulate social reformers to adapt the determinations of the Trade Boards to the needs of those for whom they were originally intended.

Homeworkers often asked why minimum rates were not fixed in other trades as well, and tried to draw attention to the underpayment of their relatives and friends, especially those engaged in

bootwork and brushmaking. Boxmakers were, as a rule, satisfied that no case could be more deserving than their own, but tailoresses pointed out that more could be gained—even for them—by extending the principle of a minimum wage to other branches of work; whereas both boxmakers and tailoresses were agreed that a sincere desire to benefit the condition of homeworkers and to free them from the incessant fear in which they live would find expression in an attempt to regularize the employment of men whose uncertain earnings are at the root both of their necessity to work, and of the low rates of payment obtained for that work.



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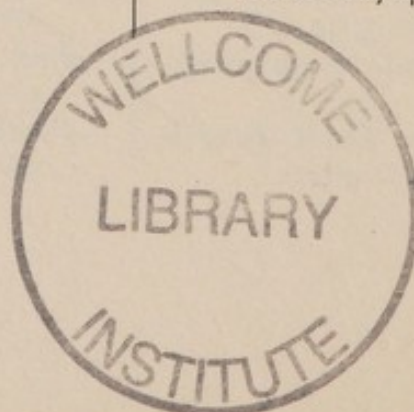
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