

Women in Coal Mines

No. 194. Mrs. Nancy Watson

I don't think it does the girls any good going in the pits, but some are well behaved that go. Girls go because they can get better wages than they can in the fields. The children get schooling here far better than most places. There are few places where people take such pains with the poor as Mrs. Stansfield does and all of them at the Manorhouse. They don't get such pains taken elsewhere.

No. 208. Mary Margerson, aged 16.

I work in a pit above the one where Fanny Drake works. We work from 6 in the morning till 5 at night. I don't stop for dinner. I get muck up generally all the time and I rest odd times. I hurry alone, to dip. I am quite sure I have nobody to help me. I work for Joseph Lister, who pays me. The pit is very wet. The water comes up nearly to my calves generally, till they let it off. It is often so for a week together. I find it very heavy work. I am very tired when I come home. I hurry both muck and coals. . . . I wear a petticoat and shift and stays. There is a cold wind in the pit. The man I work for wears nought, he is stark naked. I don't like being in the pit. . . .

Speech by Lord Ashley, 1842

But now mark the effect of the system on women: it causes a total ignorance of all domestic duties; they know nothing that they ought to know; they are rendered unfit for the duties of women by overwork, and become utterly demoralized. In the male the moral effects of the system are very sad, but in the female they are infinitely worse, not alone upon themselves, but upon their families, upon society, and I may add upon the country itself. It is bad enough if you corrupt the man but if you corrupt the woman, you poison the waters of life at the very fountain. Sir, it appears that they are wholly disqualified from even learning how to discharge the duties of wife and mother.

William Corbett, 1824

In the cotton spinning work, these creatures are kept in a heat of from 80-84 degrees. The door of the place wherein they work is locked. Except for half an hour at tea time, the people are not allowed to send for water to drink. In addition, there is the dust and what is called cotton-flyings or fuz, which the unfortunate creatures have to inhale. Men are rendered old and past labor at forty years of age, and the children made decrepit and deformed.