WIKEMAN'S WANDERINGS

THE "PIT BROW LASSES" OF ENGLAND AND WALES.

Is Woman Women Workers at British Pit Mouths—Their Leader, Struggles and Victory—Our Noble Women Labors for Delinquency Women.

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WIGAN, England, July 29.—The "Pit Brow Lasses" of England and Wales are about 4,000 in number. They are the girls and women of all ages who are employed about the "shows" or mouths of British pits and iron mines.

In former times women were employed "down pits" in the English mines, and it is scarcely fifty years since in Scotland a female labor in the underground galleries was put an end to, almost solely by the efforts of the late Lord Ashley. Whenever the opportunity presented labor in women was also imposed a year later. But previous to that time, even since English times, and in the more primitive days of the Saxons, women were utilized in a manner revolting and horrible beyond description. The pay-bills of female labor in mines was likewise a scandalous reputation. In Lancashire, Yorkshire and Wales it was so generally so. Here thousands of girls had lived a slaughterous life in mine. Their dress was as drawers and "hatchelers" for the colliers who cut or dug the coal.

These female workers were chiefly girls from twelve to twenty years of age, and their work of drawing, or "tentering" as it is called in Yorkshire, then consisted in drawing the coal in the mines on sledges or in carts or wagons from the "stall" where the collier was at work to the shaft of the pit. Often the miners would be resting the small, as to now frequently is, a space not two feet in height, and from one to two miles from the only outlet to the world above. Through pools, black as ink, for few to permit of their standing upright, and up and down steep inclines the girls compelled to crawl, pulling the load of coal after them or "hatchelling"—that is, pushing—them from behind. Twenty, two or three children were harnessed together to the load and one or more head trunks. Leather belts were put around their waists, and then the little ones were fastened together by a chain passing between their legs from one belt to another, when the children crawled, scramble and tugged along on their hands and too after the manner of four footed animals.

The inhuman treatment of women in mine mines is only known to their owner. The consequence of but the knowing of this wrong brought instant legal punishment under the gravest penalties.

But there was a large number of women left in other pits who were employed in any manner of labor that would contain life. A few were already working with men and boys on the pit banks. Gradually most all of this work, such as dumping the trucks from the "cage" in which they are "brought to surface" from the bottom of the shaft, or overturning the coal and getting out the slate and stone, loading the coal wagons with the coal ready for the market, and carting the coal from the mine where it is transformed into coke—now to the lot of women. Theoretically the collier exposed to all the public house and to members of the union. Practically, to secretly supported it, for his brother might have been killed in a explosion, and the wife or daughter at the pit brow took on the fight for bread where dad's left stacked it, and his own arm or leg might be picked off some day in the machinery, and his son, member or wife would spring to the spade or scream and do a man's labor for half man's wage.

So for a cause for them all, though many were issues no longer, and I have seen women of fifty and sixty years working slowly at the screens, they cannot be known as "Pit Brow Lassies," and in time get nearly all the pit mouth labor into their dotterest hands. But, a few years ago, mutterings were heard in those districts like North-umberland and Durham, where no women were employed, against the system. It seemed, these fellows who had all the labor spoken of, said, the improvement in the mines men and often that money tempted. There came a miners' conference at Newcastle, in January of 1891, and a resolution there passed that women should not be allowed to work about the mines on security inserted as a clause in the coal miners' eight hours amendment bill, which came up for debate in the house of commons in March, 1891.

This was by broadsides against women's pit brow labor in The Miners' Journal and other influential trades papers so well as in a startling leader in the London Times. Mr. Burnett, the labor reform champion, backed by Emily Pankhurst, who afterward endeared herself to the miners by her speech in the house of commons, and Mr. Shaw Lefevre, the noted parliamentarian, and Mr. Bradlaugh, the noted atheist, and Mr. Cremer, the noted peace advocate, and Mr. Burnett, the noted labor reformer