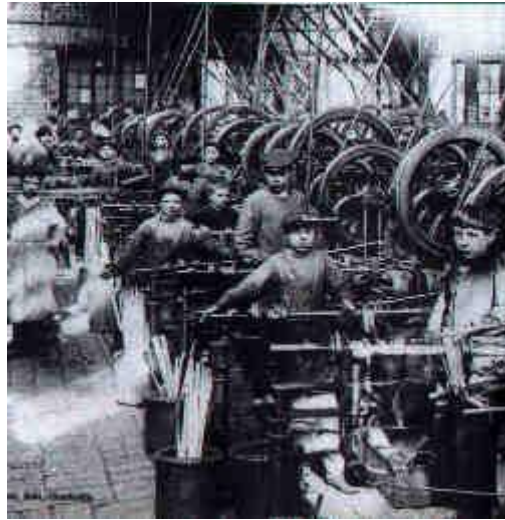


Victorian Cotton Mills



Cotton is a natural material that comes from cotton plants which grow in hot countries like India. It is a soft, white fibre that is used to make clothes because it is cheaper, more comfortable to wear and easier to wash than wool.

Originally, cotton fibres were twisted together with a wooden spinning wheel to form threads of yarn which were then woven together to make cloth using a device called a loom. Families often farmed land during the day and then made cloth at home in the evening. The women would do the spinning, whilst the men would do the weaving. It was called a 'cottage industry'. Streets of small, cheap houses were built nearby. People walked to work early in the morning and walked back at night. Often, whole families shared a single room. They suffered from bad health because they could not afford: good food, warm clothes or medicines.

Small children called 'scavengers' were used for cleaning out machinery whilst they were running so it was very dangerous. Many lost fingers and some were killed. Mills were also hot, humid, dusty and extremely noisy. With little ventilation, cotton dust caused eye infections, breathing problems and stomach complaints. Workers spent long hours tending fast moving machinery which resulted in many serious accidents. Children were especially at risk. Children as young as seven years old could be found working fourteen hours a day in the mills.

They spent most of their time at the machines with little time for fresh air or exercise. Even part of Sunday was spent at the mill cleaning machines. There were some serious accidents where children lost their hair when it was caught in the machine, hands could be crushed and some children were killed when they went to sleep and fell into the machine. The industrial revolution saw hundreds of large, steam-powered cotton mills spring up across the country.

Wages were low and people worked for up to 12 hours a day in the mills because their owners wanted to make as much money as possible.

Questions

Retrieval

1. What did scavengers do?
2. What three things were caused by cotton dust?
3. How does the writer describe the material cotton?

Vocabulary

4. Find and copy a word that means the same as looking after.
5. What does the writer mean by the term spring up?

Inference

6. Why do you think men, women and children still chose to work in cotton mills, despite the conditions they faced?

Tending

Definition

to apply oneself to the care of : watch over

Sentence

She was tending to her sick father.

