# The Child Labor Law: *IGNORED* By Parents & Industry

The law of Connecticut, passed many years ago, provided that no child under fifteen should be employed in any manufactory or business unless he should have attended school at least three months in the preceding year. The penalty for breach of this law was formerly 25 dollars, but it was, nevertheless, very commonly disregarded. In 1869 the law was amended: the age under which a child might not be employed was reduced to fourteen, and a higher penalty of 100 dollars was substituted in case of its violation. The Amendment Act also provided that an agent should be appointed to secure the due enforcement of the law. The State Board of Education appointed Mr. Henry M. Cleveland agent for this purpose, and he made his first report in 1870. If this law has failed in Connecticut, it cannot be because there was no one whose duty it was to enforce it. Four different classes of officers—school visitors, state attorneys, grand jurors, and the agent of the Board of Education—were instructed to co-operate in carrying out the law. Mr. Cleveland visited nearly all the manufacturers in the State, and submitted to them a plan for carrying the law into effect, under which they were invited to divide the children in the mills into two or three classes, and to send out to school one class the first succeeding term, another class the second term, and the third class the third term, so that each child might get three months' schooling during the year succeeding the date of the arrangement. Nearly all the manufacturers gave their cordial assent to this plan, and pledged themselves to its execution by signing a voluntary agreement as follows :—

"We hereby agree that from and after the beginning of the next term of our public school, we will employ no children under fourteen years of age, except those who are provided with a certificate from the local school officers of actual attendance at school the full term required by law."

While the manufacturers were ready to do their duty, the parents were not, in all cases, and the agent says: "I found some parents unwilling to take their children out of the mills, and positively refusing to send them to school after they were discharged." (1) Some of the children, when they were discharged, were carried into the neighbouring states of Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Mr. Cleveland says of a similar law passed in Massachusetts in 1867: "It is conceded that the law has not answered the expectations of its friends." (2) The statistics of the Massachusetts Bureau of Education confirm this view.

That the Connecticut law has not wholly remedied the evils against which it was directed is evident from the report for the following year, 1871. Mr. Cleveland, after a year's experience under the Act, says: "Facts conclusively show that very many children have been sent out of the mills who have not entered the public school, and in many cases where ample room and a full supply of teachers had been provided. Realising the necessity, in a republic, of universal education, I cannot hesitate to say that we ought to incorporate the principle of compulsory attendance into our school system in this and in every State in the Union." (1)

In the following year the Legislature of Connecticut passed an Act for compulsory attendance.

[1] Conn. Report, 1870, p. 21. [2] Ibid, p. 20.

The law of Rhode Island prohibits the employment in the factories of children under twelve years of age, and also between twelve and fifteen years, unless they have had at least three months' schooling in the previous year. The law also provides that no child under fifteen years of age shall be employed in the factories more than nine months in any calendar year. But the law is inoperative. The reports of the manufacturing districts supply constant examples of its violation. The Board of Education, reporting in 1872, say: "In the former report the notice of your honourable body was directed to the employment, in manufacturing and other establishments, of children who are thus deprived of the privilege of school instruction. The evil referred to is a very serious one. The law regulating the matter has long been inoperative." (2)

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It would be impossible that the law should have been tried under more favourable conditions than existed both in Connecticut and Rhode Island, where the employers were, almost without exception, strongly in its favour. The parents, irritated by the exclusion of their children from the factories, either removed them to other States or left them to run about the streets. This is precisely the class of parents for whom compulsion is needed, and who are amenable to no other influence. Why they should be regarded with so much tenderness does not clearly appear. But notwithstanding the cumulative proof of the failure of these indirect compulsory laws, it may be assumed that the "patch and repair party," both in the United States and England, will continue to advocate thom.

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"The State needs it as a safeguard against the pressing demands of capital for cheap labour, raw muscle, mere human working machines, and against the incoming tide of immigration and ignorance, to supply this demand." (1)

[1] Maine Report, 1872, p. 92.

Francis Adams, The Free School System of the United States, Chapman and Hall, 1875, 124f.f, 140.