

LETTER

Samuel Slater (New York) to Moses Brown (Rhode Island), December 2d, 1789.

“Sir, A few days ago I was informed that you wanted a manager of cotton spinning, &c. in which business I flatter myself that I can give the greatest satisfaction, in making machinery, making good yarn, either for Stockings or twist, as any that is made in England; as I have had opportunity, and an oversight, of Sir Richard Arkwright's works, and in Mr. Strutt's mill upwards of eight years. . . . My intention is to erect a perpetual card and spinning. [Meaning the Arkwright patents.] If you please to drop a line respecting the amount of encouragement you wish to give, by favour of Captain Brown, you will much oblige, sir, your most obedient humble servant, SAMUEL SLATER”

Account of Journey of Josiah Quincy (1801):

In 1801, Josiah Quincy toured Slater Mill.

This is what he saw:

“All the processes of turning cotton from its rough into every variety of marketable thread state, such as cleaning, carding, spinning, winding, etc., are here performed by machinery operated by Water-wheels, assisted only by children from four to ten years old, and one superintendent. Above an hundred of the former are employed at the rate of from 12 to 25 cents for a day's labor.”

Quincy was told of the positives of child labor by his guide.

“Our attendant was very eloquent on the usefulness of this manufacture, and the employment it supplied for so many poor children.” He saw evidence to the contrary right in front of him: “an eloquence was exerted on the other side of the question more commanding than his, which called us to pity these little creatures, plying in a contracted room, among flyers and cogs, at an age when nature requires for them air, space, and sports.”

Already, the children were showing signs of fatigue: “There was dull dejection in the countenances of all of them. This united with the deafening roar of the falls and the rattling of the machinery put us in a disposition easily to satisfy our curiosity.”

George S. White, *Memoir of Samuel Slater* (p.117-118):

The dependence between the employed and employers should be mutual. But by employing vicious, improvident, and indigent characters, the dependence falls mostly on one side-yet it is a benefit to the community that such a class should find employment and support. Though in some countries, oppression ensues, poverty and vice show their dismal and disorderly features, and then the honest, upright, and intelligent, are driven from the establishment, and perhaps from the employment ; better things can be spoken of this country, where the honest, upright, and intelligent, have always a preference. Such are leaving the old world, they are disappearing, and many of them are in the west, engaged in other employments. Pursuing such a policy, by and by, only the dregs are left, and then without looking for the causes, it appears that factories have been the immediate cause of all the mischief. On a candid enquiry, it is seen to be the abuse, and therefore not chargeable to a proper use. Slater, the founder of the cotton manufacture in America, abundantly demonstrated, that under right management, they had no immoral tendency. On the contrary, he made it appear, that they might be serviceable to the most moral purposes. Following the plan instituted by Arkwright & Strutt in England, taking the oversight of the instruction and morals of those he employed, and instituting and keeping up sabbath schools, he successfully combated the natural tendency of accumulating vice, ignorance and poverty. Such remedies not only prevented their occurrence, but had a tendency to remove them, when they actually existed.

Multitudes of women and children have been kept out of vice, simply by being employed, and instead of being destitute, provided with an abundance for a comfortable subsistence. Those who are furnished with an opportunity, and are trained up to lay by in store-moderate and regular returning means, to be used at some future day-are invariably superior in point of character to

those who have not. It is not so when means flow excessive and irregular. Many a youth has been ruined by beginning with large wages, and having in prospect plenty of money. It is believed that there may be found more young men and women, who have laid up a few hundred dollars, or even a few thousands, by being employed in manufacturing establishments, than among those who have followed other employments. On the score of employment, manufacturing establishments have done much to support the best interests of society.