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CHILD LABOUR

AND

THE HALF-TIME SYSTEM

BY

MARGARET McMILLAN.

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ONCE upon a time, not very long ago, children had no observers—to speak of. Wise men saw no light above the place where “a young child lay.” And certainly they did not bring any gold, or frankincense, or myrrh. They wrote books, of course, on “Education,” but the contents were far from fragrant or sweet. Indeed one feels in reading them that the authors were not “wise men” at all, but only well-intentioned Herods, and that it is a mercy they did not end by destroying all the Innocents.

The children's hour came, however. Goth and Greek had ignored them. Christian England, for all her Child-Christ, had not learned humility. But their hour came. And very extraordinary people ushered it in. Sir Joshua Reynolds gave to the world his wonderful little living maidens—who had revealed themselves only to Sir Joshua. Bobbie Burns noticed the “toddlin' wee things”—Bobbie having eyes (like Sir Joshua) for insignificant things. Dickens' “Paul Dombey” and “Little Nell” were not, all things considered, convincing; and Charlotte Brontë's little Paulina was not a child portrait, but a miniature woman. However, George Eliot gave us her flawless child-drawings, small yet unflatteringly true, so that Totty Poyser is as distinct and unforgettable a personage as her mother. Huxley, Spencer (who has included children in his exhaustive psychological studies), and every physiologist of note, have taken part in the new movement. And in the art world—Birket Foster, Walter Crane, and Kate Greenaway! But all these child-students are modern products—much more.