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Across the Bridges. by Alexander Paterson; E. S. Talbot

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The Economic Journal, Vol. 21, No. 84 (Dec., 1911), pp. 578-580

Published by: [Wiley](#) on behalf of the [Royal Economic Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2221742>

Accessed: 24/12/2014 20:26

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The latter are a very competent piece of work. Specimen indentures show that many difficult matters can be covered by the form of contract, and are, in fact, so covered by that of the Apprenticeship Associations. Extracts follow from Acts of Parliament which deal with the subject, and these might perhaps have been carried farther back than the Employers and Workmen Act, 1875. The digest of cases (Appendix III.) forms the necessary complement to the short treatment of the law and meets the objections which might otherwise have been raised to its extreme brevity.

Appendix IV. contains two admirable papers by Miss M. K. Bradby dealing with general principles—Apprenticeship in Relation to the Unemployed, and the Apprenticeship of Crippled Children. The former urges “a revival in a modified form of the old system of apprenticeship,” which “the economists fail to consider in all its bearings and condemn on too slight a hearing.” It also states the arguments for it as against what may be called “the half-time school,” but Miss Bradby’s condemnation of the system of learners is perhaps a little too whole-hearted. The article on Crippled Children rightly urges the danger of unduly favouring them at the expense of the sound. An excellent index forms a fitting conclusion to this entirely admirable little book.

N. B. DEARLE

Across the Bridges. By ALEXANDER PATERSON. With an Introduction by the Right Rev. E. S. Talbot, D.D., Bishop of Winchester. London: Edward Arnold, 1911. (Pp xiv + 273. Price 6s. net.)

COMPARISON of working-class life in East and South London will show a far larger proportion of better-paid artisan labour in the latter than in the former. Even when account is taken in South London of large districts of so-called villadom, and, on the other hand, of many black spots even in the most prosperous of its boroughs, this still holds good, and accounts largely for the far greater share of attention that the East End has received. But in and round Bermondsey the conditions are different. “The part that lies closest to the river is far poorer than the rest. On these streets poverty has set a seal, and its many problems have sunk their tangled roots deep into the life of the people.”

This it is that Mr. Paterson has set himself to delineate, “content to trace the life of the average man by the river-side,” and to do this he has taken and described it from birth, with

particular attention to boy life. With the whole subject he is remarkably familiar, having lived for some years in the district, and among other things been a teacher in an elementary school. His method is entirely descriptive, avoiding the popular statistical treatment, and his picture of riverside life drawn with rare insight and sympathy. Success on these lines is difficult to obtain, but it is striking when, as in this case, it is achieved.

The first three chapters—Streets and Homes, Family Life, and Customs and Habits—give a general picture of the district. The prevailing notes are those of monotony, irregularity, and waste. The neighbourhood is almost entirely given over to unskilled labour, and for the average man this provides so little stimulus to the intelligence that “at fifty he is found but little more intelligent than his uneducated grandfather.” Dock work, too, brings its inevitable accompaniment of casual employment, and that, in its turn, a hand-to-mouth existence. Often the boy of fourteen to eighteen is the real breadwinner. Finally, waste is not confined to material resources, appalling though this often is, when the income is too uncertain for any planned house-keeping. The effect of cheapness, both in quality and price, is largely offset by the prevailing habit of buying in minute quantities. This waste, however, produces its worst results in loss of brain- and man-power—in the premature transition from boy to man, and in the fact that with “the majority of boys only half their ability is ever used in the work they do.” Yet there is a great fund of “natural goodness in the people.” Conditions render family life often almost impossible; but, lax though the tie appears, its real strength is shown on any occasion of distress or sorrow. “The family life,” Mr. Paterson writes, “is the natural life for all English-speaking peoples, so firmly inset in the national character that every healthy and hard-working man falls unconsciously into this way of living.” A case in point is the Poor Law boy. “All that is required is one generation of strong boys and girls, and they will do all that is needed for their own children and the State can once more confine itself to drains and bridges.”

Such, then, are the salient features of life across the bridges. The work of the elementary school finds a candid but sympathetic critic who is as definite in pointing out mistakes of method as he is quick to recognise the difficulties and the merits of the teachers. School influences fall short of what they might be for a number of reasons, the greatest being the absence of “that pride of school” that is the great feature of our public schools. Still, the school does to a very great extent offset the defects of home and the

weakness of certain home influences, whilst the difficulties of child-life outside it partially necessitate child-labour. And when all is said and done, "never in his life does the river-side boy touch so high a level as in his last six months at school."

At work, again, we find casual choice and a lack of good openings. The whole problem is undeniably complicated by the large proportion of the skilled workers in Bermondsey factories who live outside the district, and many of the boys to obtain the best jobs come from elsewhere. From this point the course is taken through the Spare Time of the Working Boy, Character and Religion—treated with true sympathy—and Youthful Offenders, to Marriage and the Life of the Working Man. Two chapters on Failures round off the treatment. In conclusion, greater knowledge and sympathy between classes are stated to be the urgent need—"a change of spirit rather than a change of government." Without this no legislation can succeed; compared with it law-making is of secondary importance.

The character of the book has, I hope, been sufficiently indicated. Its most salient features are that "knowledge and sympathy" for which the author so eloquently pleads. Moreover, it is a fine piece of work from the literary point of view. The style is clear and often brilliant. Interest never slackens for a moment, and it is an interest that will absorb alike the most careless, or the most tired, reader.

N. B. DEARLE

The Steel Workers. By JOHN A. FITCH. 8vo. Pp. xiii. + 380; and *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town.* By MARGARET F. BYINGTON. 8vo. Pp. xv. + 292. (New York Charities Publication Committee. 1910. Price \$1.50 each.)

THESE volumes form two out of the six in which the results of the investigation known as the "Pittsburg Survey" are to be finally embodied. The Survey has been conducted under the editorial direction of Mr. Paul Kellogg, and in the various branches of the inquiry made, as the prospectus justly claims, at "close range" of the conditions of life and labour in an American industrial district, many competent workers have shared, including Mr. Robert A. Woods, of Boston; Professor Commons, of the University of Wisconsin; and Mr. Laurence Veiller, the former Secretary of the New York Tenement House Commission. The investigation was made under the ægis of the Russell Sage Foundation, and the volumes, forming part of its series of publications, include already, in addition to the above, two others