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# CANAL BOAT CHILDREN.



BY

ROBERT J. PARR,

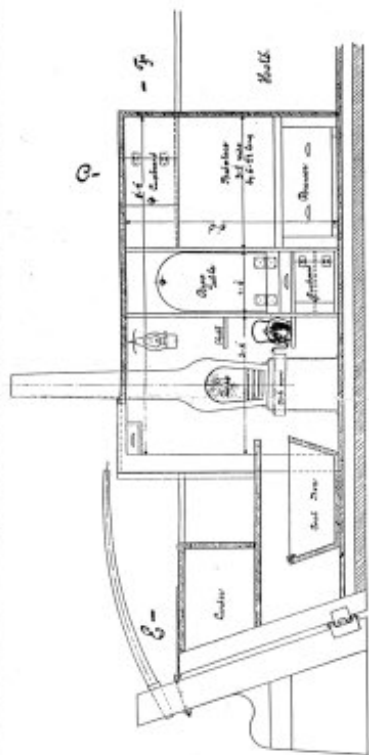
DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO CHILDREN.

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1910.

NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE  
PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO CHILDREN.

40, Leicester Square, London, W.C.

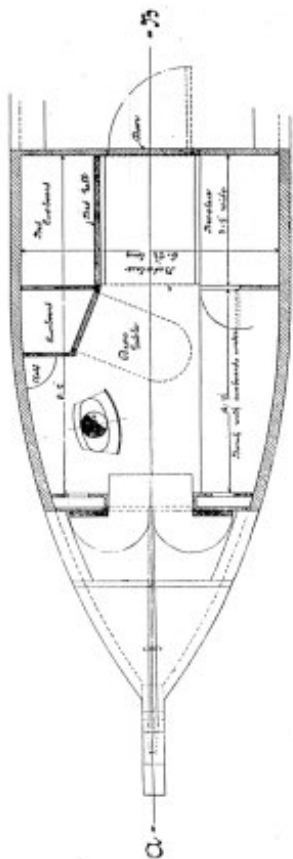


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-Sectional Plan on line G-H-

# CANAL BOAT CHILDREN.

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## I.

THE awakening of the public conscience on all matters affecting children has become such a characteristic feature of this age that it appears to be the right moment to bring into notice the disabilities under which many children live.

Compared with the state of things existing twenty-five years ago the condition of children has considerably improved. This is due, in a great measure, to the awakened interest in the general welfare of the youthful members of the community, and to beneficent legislation passed for their benefit.

Both in the matter of public interest, and in legislation, the influence of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has been manifest, and the effect of its operations can be traced in the marks of progress that are characteristic of the last quarter of a century.

Without doubt these results are in the main to be attributed to the fact that a National Society wields an enormous power because of the concentrated action of its members and supporters. By the accumulation of evidence it is able to show the necessity for the changes it proposes, and through the loyal support and devotion of its large army of helpers, it possesses a force for securing these necessary changes either by local administration or in the larger sphere of the national legislature.

Probably one of the most valuable functions fulfilled by the Society is that of giving prominence to the existence of certain evils which bear hardly on children who are the subjects of special conditions of life, evils which would be unknown to the great majority of people because they are unseen by them.

Though much has been done for children during recent years by way of legislation, notably by the passing of the

#### CHILDREN ACT

and other measures of equal value though not covering such a wide area, there is one class of child that has remained outside the scope of all the Acts. In the interests of the children who have to live in and work on Canal Boats, attention is now called to the risks and hardships to which they are subjected.

Anyone who has travelled along the routes of the inland waterways of this country will have seen certain things that have left unpleasant memories behind—a small boy leading a horse on a tow path; a little girl busy with a boat passing through a lock; a family of children within the restricted limits of their floating home—each and all with some special feature of their surroundings that at the time of observation gave rise to a mental question as to whether everything was all right with the children concerned.

At some seasons of the year there is a trace of the picturesque in the movements of the little wanderers, when the boats are passing easily along between flowered fields, and the haze of summer heat seems alive with myriad wings; or when, the day's work over, the family takes an evening

meal on the boat deck, what time the setting sun sheds a golden glory on the scene. Little wonder if, enhanced by an attractive eye-picture, the glamour of romance seems to settle on the lives of those whom it is thought are enjoying the natural advantages which the advocates of the open-air existence are never tired of praising.

But it is not always summer, and before evening comes there is the long day of weary tramping, when tired limbs have to be dragged along the narrow path that unwinds with almost interminable length before the little travellers.

Those who speak with knowledge say, and there is every reason to lay stress on their words, that life on a canal boat is not the normal life for children, and that in their interests, for health as well as for education, they should be given the chance that other children have of knowing something of an average home.

The subject of Canal Boat Children has received much attention from the Honorary Secretary of the Northwich and Mid-Cheshire Branch of the Society. Having an exceptional position for knowing what happens on the boats, and receiving through the local Inspector the complaints that are made from time to time as to the neglect of children on them, Mr. John I. Watts has devoted a great deal of time to securing facts and data which would enable him to move the Local Authorities in his district to take some action in the matter.

## II.

Three years ago Mr. Watts brought the subject before the members of the Northwich Rural District Council. At a meeting of that body held on January 11th, 1907, the Inspector of Canal Boats submitted his Annual Report under the Canal Boats Acts, and the Clerk was directed to forward a copy to the Local Government Board. Mr. Watts then gave notice that he would, at the next meeting, draw attention to the difficulty of ensuring proper sanitary conditions and decent habitation on canal boats under the provisions of the Canal Boats Acts of 1877 and 1884, and suggest the propriety of the Council memorialising the Government to ask for such alteration of the law as would ensure the safety, health, and morality of the occupants of the boats; and further, to make it an offence for children to be carried on the boats.

In accordance with this motion, Mr. Watts addressed the Council on February 22nd, when he said :—

“ Before giving my reasons for asking the Council to consider the

### ADMINISTRATION OF THE ACTS

affecting the use of canal boats as dwellings, I propose to state as shortly as possible what the provisions of the Acts are.

The Canal Boats Act, 1877, provides for the registration and regulation of canal boats used as dwellings, and provides :

(1) That no boat shall be used as a dwelling unless registered. That the number and sex of persons allowed to occupy it shall be specified on the Register.

(2) The Local Government Board is given power to make regulations for the registration of boats and the marking of them, for determining the number, age and sex of persons who may be allowed to dwell on the boats, and for regulating the cleanliness and habitability of the boats, and the spread of disease therefrom.

The Local Government Board has power to vary these regulations from time to time.

(3) Every canal boat is compelled to carry a certificate giving the number, age and sex of persons allowed to be carried, and all boats have to be legibly marked.

(4) A Sanitary Authority is compelled to take steps to prevent the spread of infectious disease from the boats.

(5) A person duly authorised by a Registration or Sanitary Authority, or by a Justice of the Peace may, if he has reasonable cause to suppose any boat is contravening the Act, enter such boat by day and inspect.

(6) For educational purposes, a child residing on a canal boat is deemed to be resident in the district of registration; but the School Attendance Committee may grant a certificate for attendance at school in some other district.

The Canal Boats Act, 1884, enacts that :—

(1) A certificate shall be invalidated if the structural alterations of a boat alter the conditions.

(2) Every Registration or Sanitary Authority bordering on a canal shall enforce the provisions of the Acts and make a return each year of its work done.

(3) The expression 'BY DAY' SHALL MEAN BETWEEN 6 a.m. and 9 p.m.

The difficulties in carrying out the

### INSPECTION OF BOATS

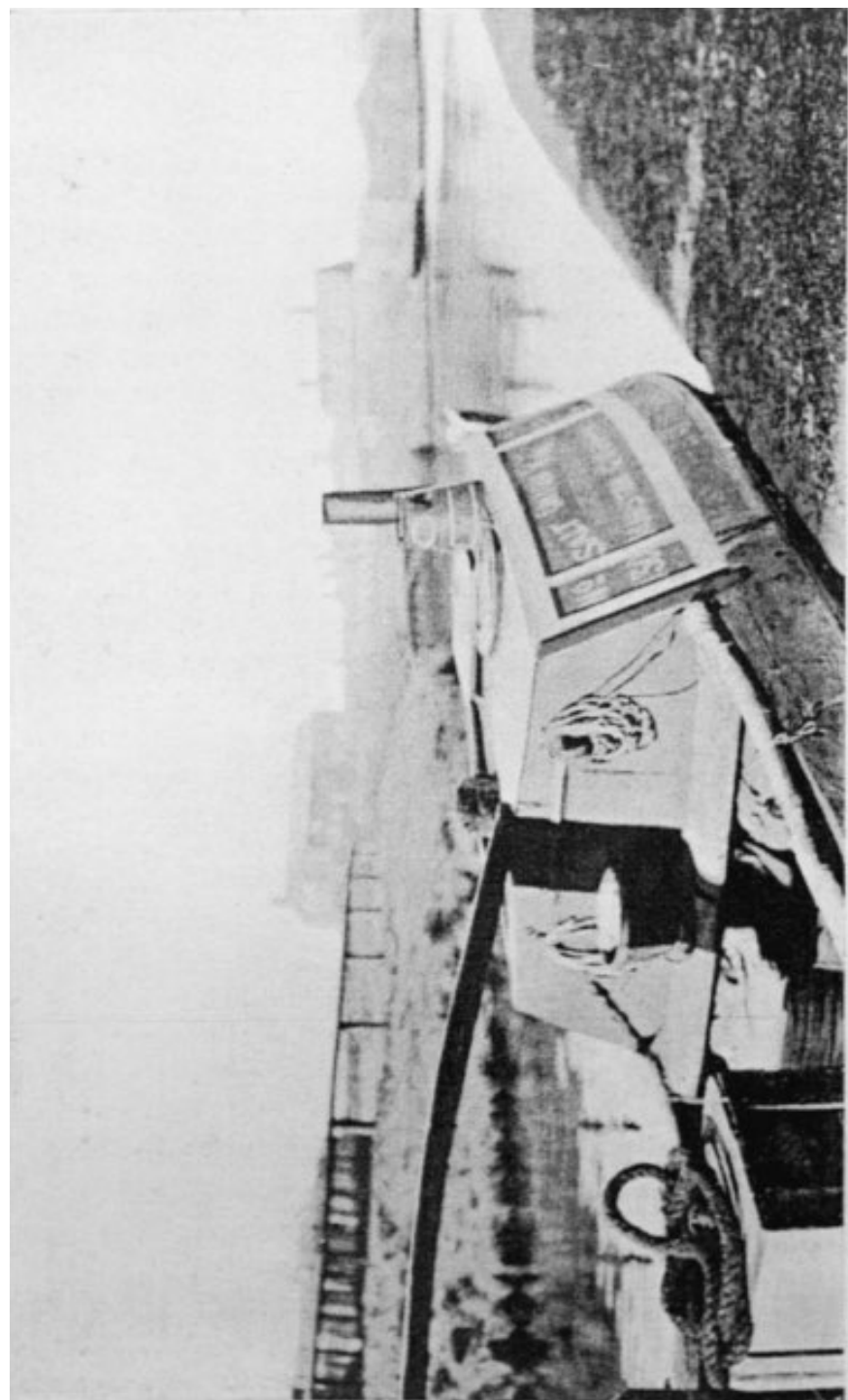
in an efficient manner are very great.

Firstly.—It is impossible to say how many canal boats there are in existence used as dwellings. The Chief Inspector says he does not know. Boats are registered when they are new or after alterations, but they are never struck off the register when they are broken up. A fee is paid for registration, but no further payment is made. I think that there should be a license issued each year for a small sum, and the owner should be called upon to pay it until he showed that the boat was broken up. It would then be to his interest to have the boat struck off the register.

In rural districts such as ours there is no Inspector who is able to devote the requisite time to systematic inspection of the boats. The constant wish to keep down the rates results in the work being thrust upon an official who had quite enough work to occupy his whole time before this and the Dairies Order, the Notification of Diseases Act, and the Factory and Workshop Act were handed to him to deal with.

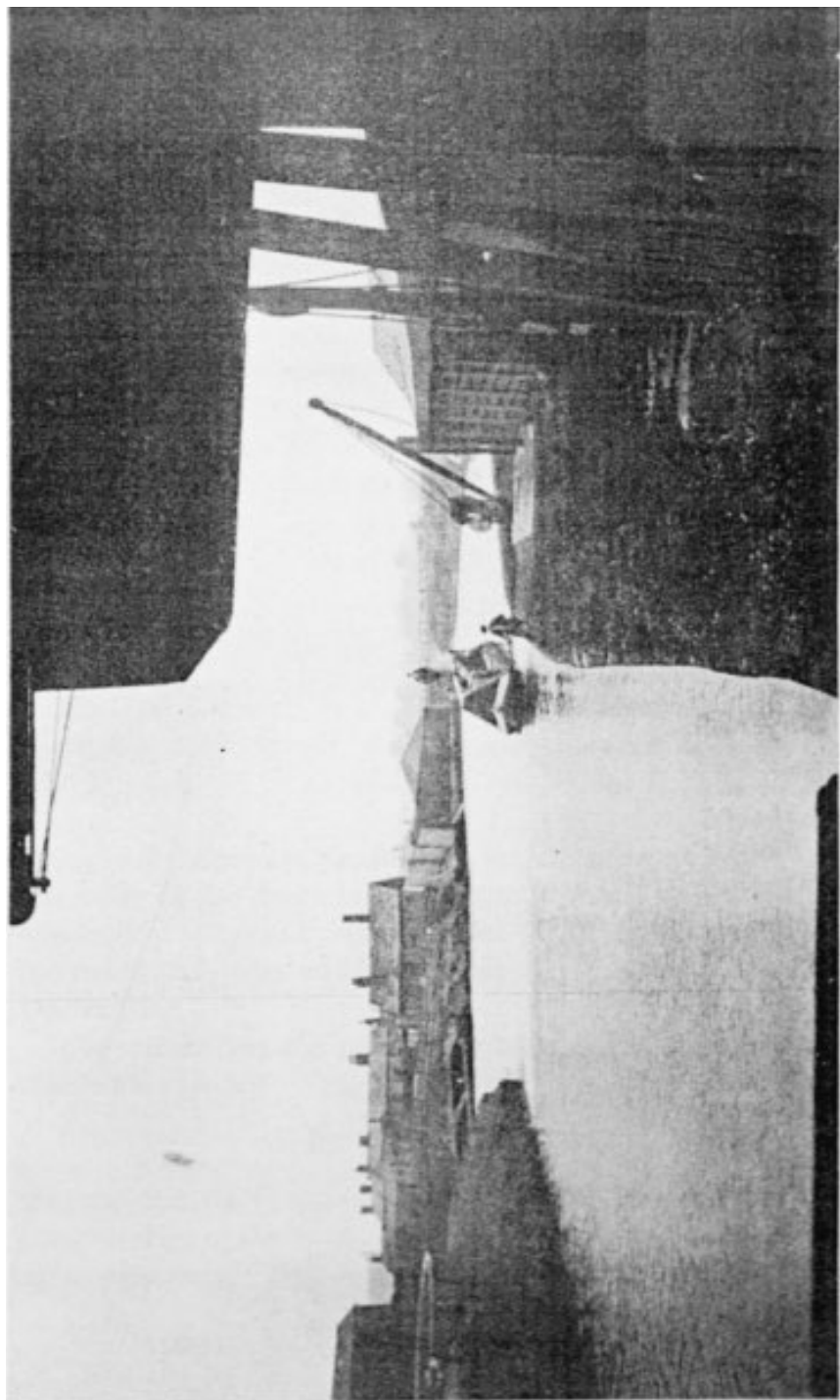
Nothing but constant and systematic inspection of the boats can either reveal the conditions of life on them or remedy the defects. Occasional observation is useless, for news travels as fast along canals as in the desert, and the presence of an Inspector on the bank sends the women and children ashore as surely as an unwary fisher frightens the trout in a stream on a bright day.

Then, again, according to the Act, an Inspector only has the right to board a boat where he 'has reasonable cause



**Exterior and Forward End of Cabin.**

The curved plank is the only gangway between forward and after parts when boat is loaded.



Boat Fully Loaded, with Man on Plank Gangway.

to suppose ' there is a contravention of the law, and he may only enter between 6 a.m. and 9 p.m.

He has to make sure that there is ample sleeping accommodation and proper provision for separation of the sexes, but he cannot see the people in bed. In day time he may always be told that most of the family he sees sleep ashore, and he cannot disprove the statement.

Then, too, the Government idea of decency is peculiar, for it terms the occupation of a cabin by two women and one man under any circumstances indecent, while it assents to the presence of two men and one woman, if the woman is the wife of one and there is a moveable wooden screen separating the other.

Then, considering the life of children on canal boats, what do we find ?

The Chief Inspector, in his Report to the Local Government Board for 1903-4, recommended that no child of school age should be allowed on a boat except in holiday time.

Our own Inspector, Mr. Bennett, says ' there are sadly too many of the boats carry children.' The cabin of a narrow boat is not a fit place for either woman or child, and the conditions under which they live are disgusting and demoralising.

It is certain that the provisions of the Act of 1878 for their education are

#### A DEAD FAILURE.

They are first of all supposed to go to school at the place of registration of the boat. Many boats never revisit their registration place. The parent may obtain a certificate from

the School Attendance Committee, authorising their attendance at some other more convenient place, and there is nothing to prevent the parent obtaining several of these certificates. I have known parents to have more than one, and assure the School Attendance Officer in Sandbach that the children were attending school at Runcorn, and then equally successfully convince the Officer at Runcorn that the children were being taught at Sandbach. In this way I have known a boy to reach the age of thirteen without ever having been inside a school, and to be a perfect young savage.

There is little doubt that boat people's children become boat people, and the fact is plain that as a class they are some of the worst-educated people in the kingdom, after thirty-six years of compulsory education.

The children who are allowed to live on the boats are systematically put to work at ages much below that which the law allows, and the difficulty of supervising their daily life renders the detection and prevention almost impossible.

Children of immature age are put to drive the horses, steer the boats, and work the lock gates, and they frequently sustain serious or fatal injuries in the fulfilment of these duties.

In our local papers for June 17th, 1905, you will find the report of an inquest held on the body of Wilmot Bland, aged ten years. This boy was in charge of the horse passing Anderton, and was riding on its back at Wincham. The horse became excited and the boy tried to get off its back, but his foot caught in the harness and he was dragged some distance, his head bumping on the towing path. After being pulled 30 yards he fell to the ground and was picked up with a fractured skull. He never recovered consciousness, and died shortly after his admission to the

Infirmary. This child was an orphan that had been adopted by his grandparents ; but canal people have curious ideas with regard to children, and occasionally we find that the terms and conditions of employment differ very little from actual slavery.

In 1897 the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children had occasion to warn a man three times about his treatment of two boys, and after the last warning the man disappeared from the district. In 1903 a complaint was received that two boys aged sixteen and ten were being systematically ill-treated on a canal boat, and were being made to work at all hours of the day and night. The Society's Inspector discovered that the boys were not the sons of the boatman employing them, but he discovered their father and interviewed him. This man, who proved to be our friend of 1897, stated that he was not responsible for the charge of the boys because he had transferred the custody to the boatman four years ago, and had signed papers to legally renounce all control of them. The Inspector, however, advised the father to procure the young boy of ten at once and send him to school, and he promised to do so. We ascertained later that he wrote the following

LETTER TO THE BOATMAN :—

*Dec. 21.*

' Tell ——— Northwich cruelty man is after you about Fred not going to school and being illtreated he has been to me to-day a bout it and runcorn cruelty man was with him.

' The Northwich cruelty man say you have him for as slave you had better let me have him as soon as you can and I will go with you to them to stop them from going to law. The are wactting you night and day the tould me not write to you the

wants cath you the have been waching the boats the told me has you have him up at half past tow in the morning and the want me to fatch him away or else you and me will be in trouble the say that paper is no use at all the that has to go before the magistrate you must send me word what day will be at runcorn and I will meet you the are going to compell me to have him back again and send him to scool.'

The father professed not to know the name of the boat, but the Inspector found it out, and eventually, after some months, saw, from a point of concealment, the boy of ten working the lock gates at Middlewich. On interviewing the boatman, he obtained admission of the fact that the boy did

#### WORK AT NIGHT

when required, and the man produced the papers transferring custody. They proved to be two printed forms of wills and set forth that 'I William so-and-so give and bequeath my son Fred to so-and-so,' and we ascertained that in order to render the transaction fully legal, consideration money to the value of 2s. 6d. had changed hands. I am thankful to say that the boy Fred was taken off the boat and sent to school without the dreaded necessity of 'going to law.' He had much leeway to make up, because he had never been inside such a place before in his life.

Life in a canal boat is fraught with the utmost danger to infants. Like the Spartans, most of the boatmen and boatwomen are people of iron constitution, and probably for the same reason, that no weakling can withstand the alternation of excessive exposure and lack of fresh air that life in a cabin entails.

The danger of infants being over-lain is, you will readily imagine, greater in a boat cabin than in a bed where a mother unwisely keeps a child alongside her. Then there are risks peculiar to boats. An inquest was held in Northwich last year on a child of three that fell out of a boat in a lock while its mother was busy with the ropes.

Some years ago a narrow boat was unloading at a Winnington wharf and, owing to faulty distribution of the cargo, it overturned, carrying down two little children with it.

I have quoted cases from our own district ; but the waste of life is the same all over the country and cannot, in my opinion, be lessened until the law removes children from the boats.

A Coroner in the Midlands recently said he saw no reason why

#### CHILDREN SHOULD BE SACRIFICED

on canal boats as they so often were ; he had frequently referred to the mortality among such children.

He had enquired into the death of a boatman's child, the last of a family of fourteen, all dead. Of another family eight children had died, and at the last inquest he held, evidence was given that only six children were alive out of a family of fifteen.

I am anxious, therefore, that this Council should endeavour to obtain an alteration of the law and an amendment of the Local Government Board regulations to secure the following points :—

- (1) That children under fourteen years of age should not be allowed on canal boats at any time.
- (2) That every owner of a boat used as a dwelling

should be required to take out a licence each year and should pay a fee for so doing.

(3) That an Inspector should have power to stop and inspect a boat at any time of the day or night.

(4) That an Inspector should report upon all boats that he inspects, and not merely upon those found to be infringing the regulations.

And I beg to move that a Resolution to this effect be forwarded to the Local Government Board.

I cannot help feeling that we are not doing as much in the way of inspecting as we ought to do under the existing Regulations, and I should like the Council to consider whether, instead of this and neighbouring Councils leaving the inspection to officials who are already overburdened with other duties, it might not be better to employ a special man as the joint servant of several Councils, and let him devote the whole of his time to the work."

A Resolution embodying the four recommendations was passed by the Council, and it was agreed to print the speech of Mr. Watts and to send it with copies of the Resolution to the Local Government Board and the Members of Parliament for the County of Cheshire.

### III.

Further information of material value is gleaned from the Annual Reports of the Society's Northwich and Mid-Cheshire Branch. An extract taken from the Report for the year ending March 31st, 1908, is as follows:—

“Feeling convinced that there is considerable suffering amongst children who travel on canal boats, and wishing to show the pressing need for

#### PROHIBITORY LEGISLATION,

we have, during the past twelve months, made a special study of such boats as could be seen at a certain point whenever the Inspector could spare time to be there. The results show that children of tender age are constantly exposed to inclement weather and to the risk of accident, that children are habitually worked at dangerous occupations, and that large numbers of children of school age are growing up with little or no education. We find that parents are, for the most part, perfectly callous about the danger to life and limb, and, regarding the lack of education, arguing that they themselves grew up under the same conditions. One or two women have been found who say they wish women were not allowed to travel or live on boats.

“On 42 boats inspected we found 72 children, 36 boys and 36 girls. There were 7 children under the age of 12 months, 3 from 1 to 2, 10 from 2 to 3, 6 from 3 to 4, 9 from 4 to 5, 3 from 5 to 6, 5 from 6 to 7, 5 from 7 to 8, 5 from 8 to 9, 5 from 9 to 10, 1 from 10 to 11, 5 from 11 to 12, 5 from 12 to 13, 3 from 13 to 14, 3 from 14 to 15, and 4 from 15 to 16.

“There were 37 children of school age on the 42 boats. Children were found to be employed as follows :—

Steering the boat.	{	Boys aged 15. Girls aged 8, 9, and 12.
Working lock gates.	{	Boys aged 14 and 15. Girls aged 12.
Leading the horse.	{	Boys aged 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ , 7, 8, 11, 11, 12, 12, and 12. Girls aged 8, 9, 11, 11, 13, 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ , and 15.

“The boy of 6 $\frac{3}{4}$  was suffering from wounds on the head, obtained while leading the horse.

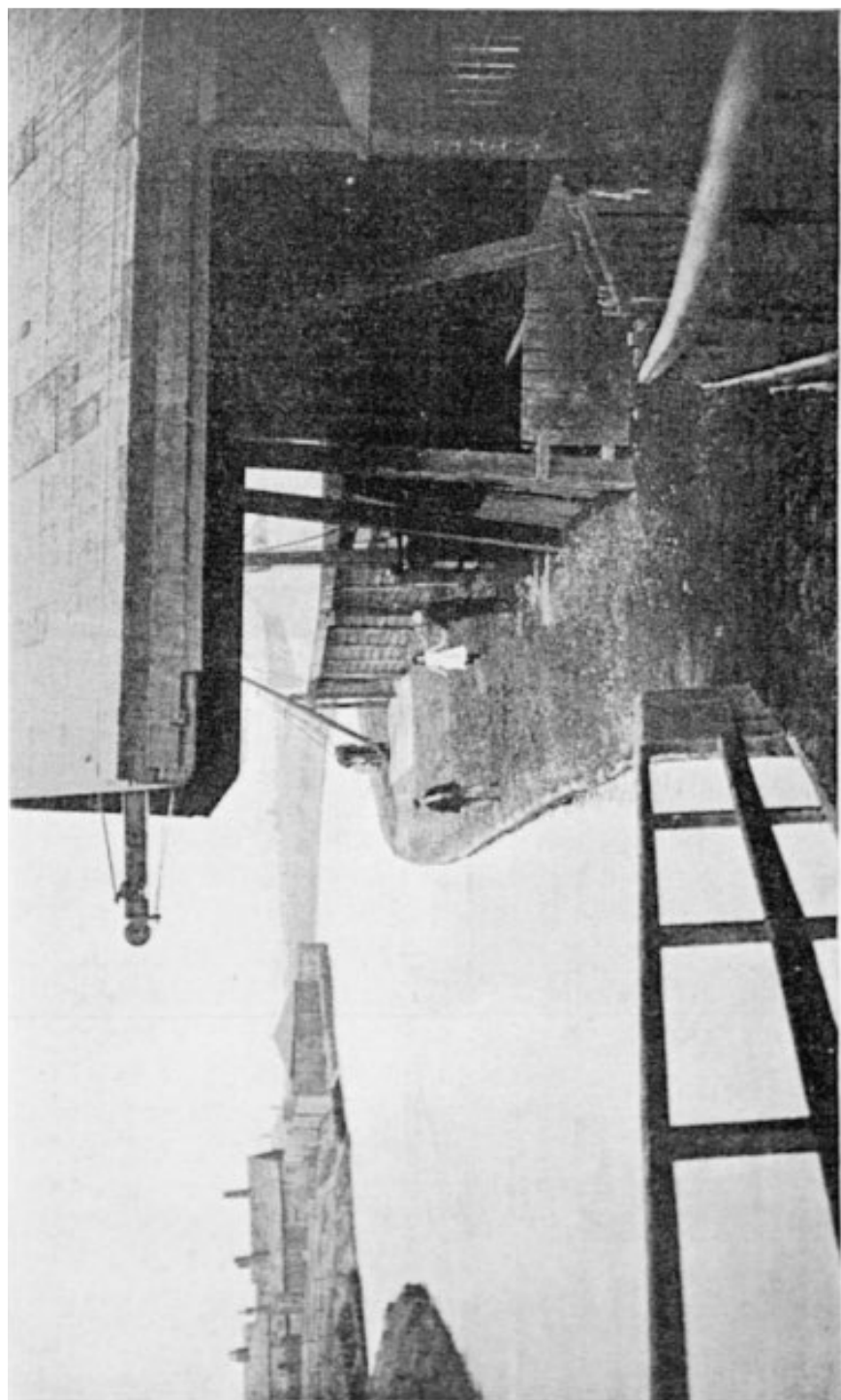
“Thirty-six of the boats had a woman on board.”

For the year ending March 31st, 1909, the Report says :—

“The Inspector has observed twenty-one boats, and has found, as before, children of school age daily employed in opening lock-gates and driving horses, always in danger of accidents, and sometimes suffering from them. On one boat he found a boy practically deaf and dumb, uncontrollable by his parents. Nothing had been done all the boy’s life to make him anything but a savage, and, on a neighbouring Branch kindly following up the case for us, it was found that nothing could be done, because he was too old to be sent to any school.

“Unfortunately our Government works in Departments. The Home Office drafted the Children Bill, the Education Department is responsible for juvenile instruction, and canal boats are controlled by the Board of Trade, so the combination of *children on canal boats requiring education* appears to be nobody’s special business.”

Thinking it advisable to make a more extended investigation outside the area covered by the Northwich Branch, it



During School Hours.



**His Father's Helper.**



**A Canal Boat Family**

was decided to set Inspector Turpin free from ordinary duty for the necessary period, so that he might pursue his observations on other canals. An officer was sent down to relieve him of his ordinary duties, and Inspector Turpin proceeded on the task, taking much interest in it and carrying it out with success. The result is shown in a

#### SPECIAL REPORT.

“In the Annual Reports of this Branch for 1908 and 1909 we gave some details of the conditions under which children live on canal boats. The figures were obtained from Reports made by the Inspector, of observations of forty-two boats in 1907-8 and twenty-one boats in 1908-9.

The Reports of the second year served to show that the sufferings of the children observed during the first period were not casual, but could be considered to be continuous.

As, however, these observations were all made on the same canal and mostly at the same place, it was deemed advisable to ascertain whether the children on other canals had any different surroundings or treatment. And further, as all the boats reported upon were of one type, namely, so-called ‘narrow boats,’ it seemed advisable to find out whether children were carried on other kinds of boats and, if so, what the accommodation was like, and whether the children were compelled to work instead of attending school.

With the object of gaining this information, the Inspector made observations of boats on the following canals at the places mentioned :—

North Stafford Canal at Middlewich.

Bridgwater Canal at Preston Brook and Brooklands.

North Stafford Canal at Barnton, Anderton, Marbury,  
Marston, Lawton, Kidsgrove, Harecastle, Runcorn.  
Leeds and Liverpool Canal at Wigan.

Shropshire Union Canal at Barbridge, Stoke, Etruria,  
Chester.

Warwick and Birmingham Canal at Birmingham.

Birmingham and Worcester Canal at Birmingham  
and Wolverhampton.

Huddersfield Narrow Canal at Ashton-under-Lyne  
and Stalybridge.

The following canals were also visited :—

\*Lancaster Canal at Preston.

\*Rochdale Canal at Rochdale.

\*Rochdale and Huddersfield Canal at Huddersfield.

†Nottingham and Trent Canal at Nottingham.

‡Nottingham and Grantham Canal at Nottingham.

†Erewash Canal at Nottingham.

Most of the points for observation were selected either because of the existence of locks (where the Inspector was able to see the children and interrogate the parents during the delay), or because of the proximity of a junction with another canal or a river, which would ensure the passage of a large number of boats.

#### THE INVESTIGATION

shows that the practice of carrying children on canal boats is practically confined to 'narrow boats'; but this type

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\* On these canals only large boats were seen, and they contained no children.

† On these canals no boats were seen.

of boat is the prevailing one on the artificial canals, and the accommodation on it is of the poorest description.

The larger the boat the fewer the children seems to be the rule for horse traction, and, where the boat is self-propelled or drawn by a steam tug, children are practically unknown.

One is forced to speculate that children are found on canal boats because their mothers are there, and that the women go only on those boats where they can do part of the work; and the older children are kept there because they can help with the boat and relieve the mother and father.

The ordinary 'narrow boat' is about 70 feet long and 6 feet 7 inches wide at the bilge. A few have cabins fore and aft, but the great majority possess an after cabin only.\* Such cabin is commonly 9 feet long and 5 feet high, and slightly over 6 feet in its greatest width. A bed-place is constructed athwart the cabin and so is 6 feet long. It is 3 feet 6 inches wide. The air space of the cabin is less than 270 cubic feet. A few have a window looking forward into the hold of the boat, but this often becomes blocked when the boat is loaded. The vast majority have no ventilation except the hatchway and the stove pipe, and, when the hatchway doors are closed at night, there is not proper air space for more than one adult. It is quite common for a man and woman and two children to share the cabin. It is commonly said that the open-air life on a canal boat must make the children grow up very strong; but whatever benefit they derive from their exposure to fresh air during the day must be more than counterbalanced by the

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\* See frontispiece plan.

pernicious air they breathe at night, and it is a fact that these children are not healthy, strong specimens.

'Wigan' boats, such as are met with on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, the Leigh and Manchester Canal, and the Bridgwater Canal, are 60 feet long and 14 feet 6 inches broad, and have much more spacious cabins. The Manchester Ship Canal Company does not allow women or children to travel on its boats on the Bridgwater Canal.

On the ninety-six boats observed by the Inspector, he found 167 children—83 boys and 84 girls. They were of the following ages :—

	Boys	Girls
Under 6 months - - -	1	5
From 6 months to 11 months -	5	5
1 year - - - - -	2	8
2 years - - - - -	6	2
3 " - - - - -	4	5
4 " - - - - -	8	8
5 " - - - - -	7	4
6 " - - - - -	3	7
7 " - - - - -	3	5
8 " - - - - -	3	8
9 " - - - - -	4	6
10 " - - - - -	7	3
11 " - - - - -	3	3
12 " - - - - -	10	3
13 " - - - - -	6	5
14 " - - - - -	6	3
15 " - - - - -	1	2
16 " - - - - -	4	2
	—	—
	83	84

} School Age. } School Age.

There were ninety-nine children of school age. Of these, thirty-five were

NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL AT ALL.

Others were said to be attending when it was possible ; but this must be very seldom. The Inspector's means of questioning the children were very poor ; but he discovered eighteen who could not read.

Fifty-six children were found to be working and were engaged as follows :—

*Driving the Horse :*

Boys : 1 of 9 years, 2 of 10 years, 1 of 11 years, 6 of 12 years, 3 of 13 years, 3 of 14 years, 1 of 15 years, 1 of 16 years. Total, 18.

Girls : 2 of 8 years, 1 of 9 years, 2 of 11 years 1 of 12 years, 2 of 14 years. Total, 8.

*Opening and Shutting Lock Gates :*

Boys : 1 of 7 years, 1 of 9 years, 2 of 11 years, 2 of 12 years, 1 of 13 years, 1 of 14 years. Total, 8.

Girls : 1 of 12 years, 1 of 13 years, 1 of 15 years. Total, 3.

*Steering the Boat :*

Boys : 1 of 10 years, 2 of 13 years. Total, 3.

Girls : 1 of 10 years, 1 of 13 years, 1 of 15 years, 1 of 16 years. Total, 4.

*Otherwise Working the Boat :*

Boys : 2 of 9 years, 3 of 10 years, 1 of 12 years, 1 of 14 years. Total, 7.

Girls : 1 of 9 years, 1 of 10 years, 2 of 13 years, 1 of 14 years. Total, 5.

One boy of thirteen driving the horse was going to work all through the night. One of twelve had been four years on the boat driving the horse. There were sixteen children under the age of 12 months, and in several cases one of these was being carried in the woman's arms while she steered the boat, exposed to any weather that prevailed. At the time of observation the weather varied from bitter east wind to rain and sleet. It is not an uncommon thing for children to be born on the boats. In one case recently investigated by the Inspector, all the four children—aged 7, 5, 2,  $1\frac{1}{4}$ —had been so born, and the mother was working on the boat, whenever it was employed, and was expecting to be confined again."

## IV.

The official view as to the presence of children on canal boats may be summarised in the extracts taken from Government Reports. Reporting to the Local Government Board for the year 1903-4 the Chief Inspector of Canal Boats said: "In my opinion, no hardships would be inflicted if it were made an offence to keep a child of school age on a canal boat except during holiday times."

For 1904-5 he says: "The number of women and children on the boats does not seem to alter to any extent, and the much discussed

### EDUCATION QUESTION

appears to have affected the canal boat population not at all."

The Report of the Board of Education for this year, 1904-5, gives some evidence of the fact that things were not considered altogether satisfactory. "As in previous years several Authorities urge that it should be made illegal for children under fourteen years of age to reside on canal boats. It is, however, satisfactory to find that in most districts it is becoming unusual for either women or children to live permanently on the boats. We hope that boat owners may be induced generally, as they have already been in some cases, to co-operate by forbidding their workmen to take their families with them."

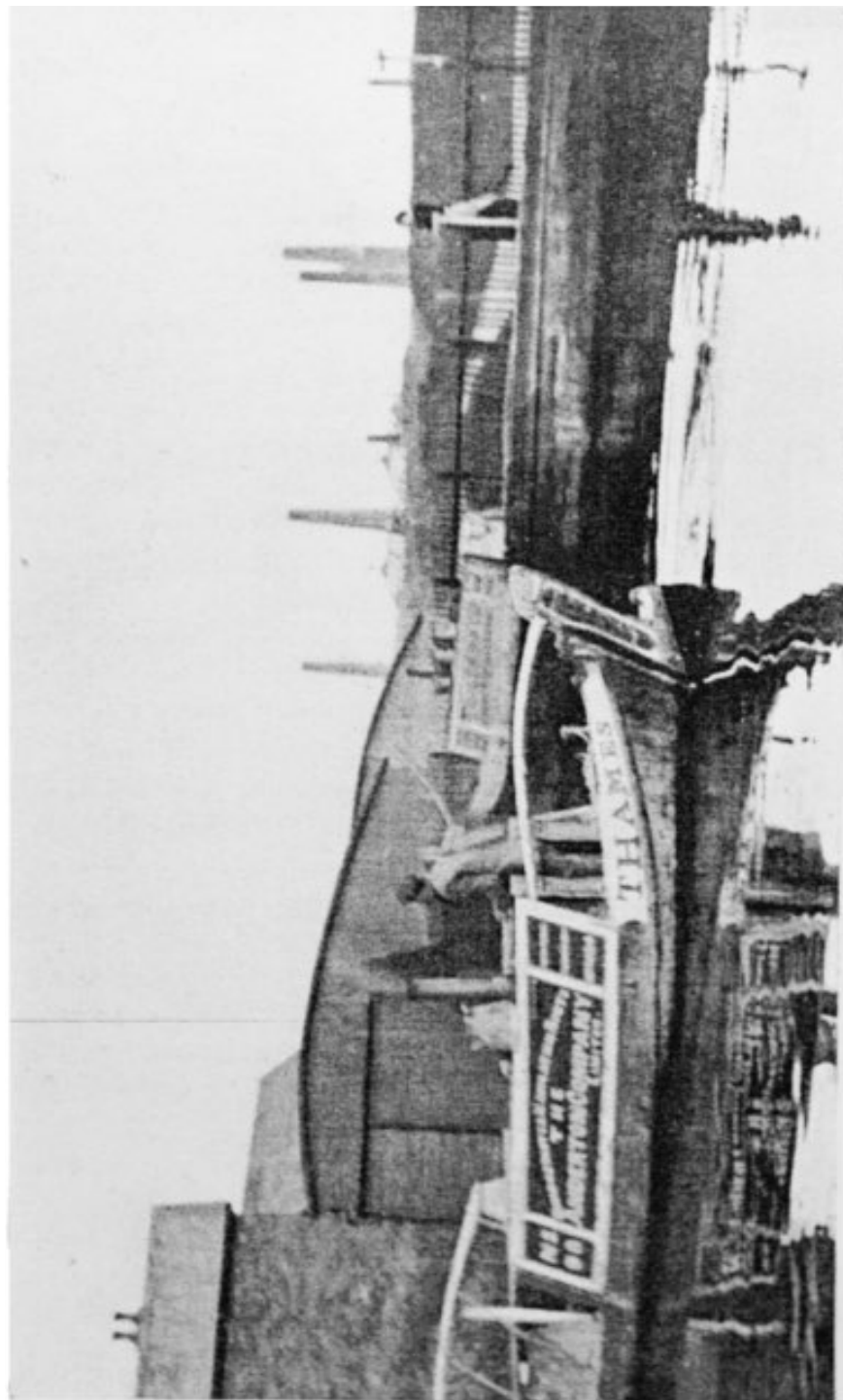
The Chief Inspector's Report for 1907-8 is a little contradictory in comparison with those of 1903-4 and 1904-5,

for he says: "My views with regard to the presence of children on the boats have undergone no change, and I rejoice to see that the Children's Bill which has been brought in by the Parliamentary Secretary for Home Affairs will not operate to exclude them from the surroundings of their hereditary calling and the good effects of never-ceasing parental supervision." †

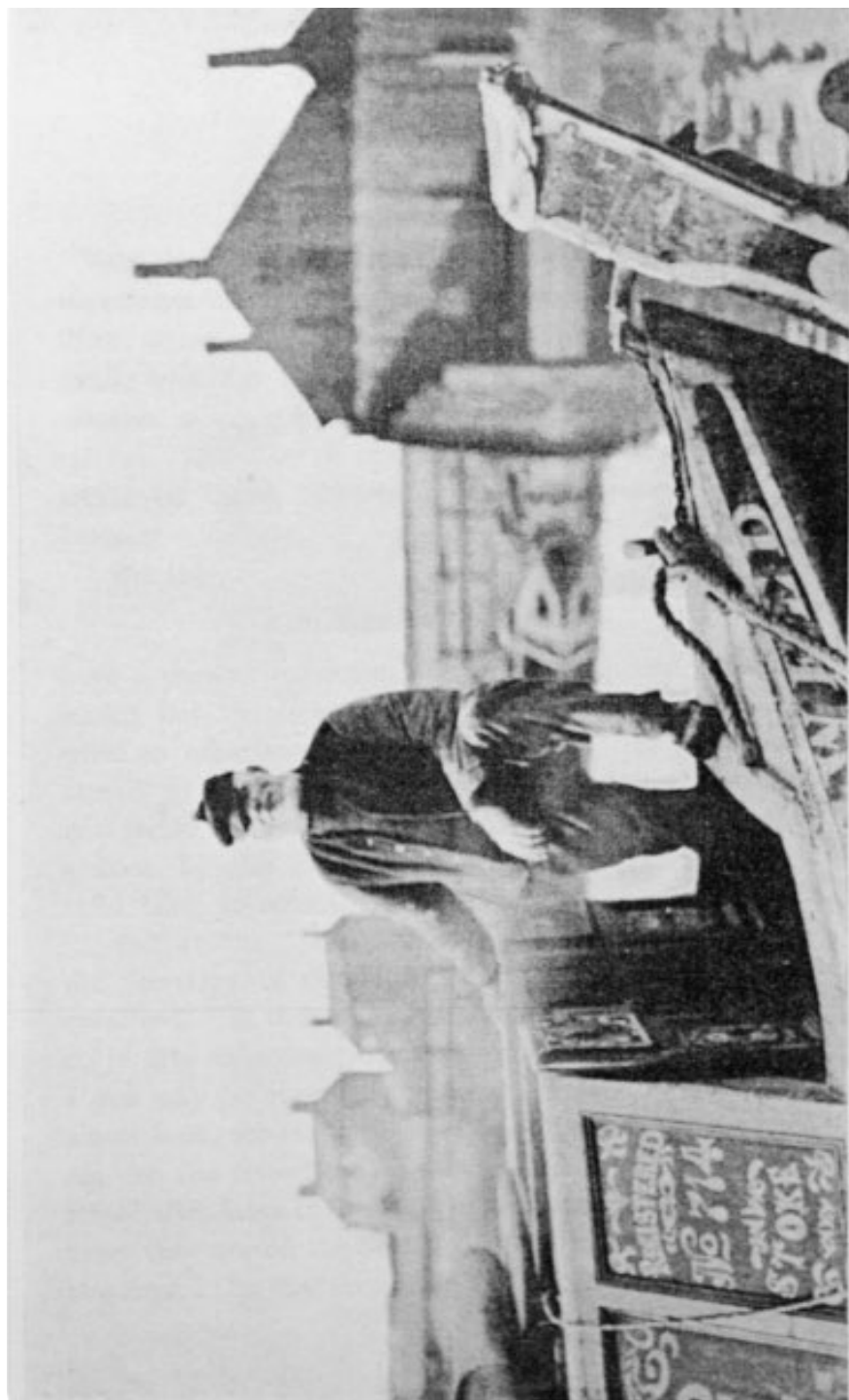
For this year, 1907-8, the total number of boats on the register is given as 12,832, though the Inspector says: "I retain my opinion that the number of boats now used as dwellings is not much more than half the number still on the registers."

Unfortunately there is no Table showing whether any children were living on boats of which complaints were made of contraventions of the law specified under the following heads:—

Cabins overcrowded	-	-	-	-	-	-	138
No partition separating the sexes	-	-	-	-	-	-	54
Females over twelve improperly occupying cabins							13
Cabins not in cleanly condition	-	-	-	-	-	-	498
Cabins not sufficiently ventilated	-	-	-	-	-	-	82
Cabins out of repair	-	-	-	-	-	-	636
Without proper water vessels	-	-	-	-	-	-	258



After End of Boat, showing Cabin.



Entrance to Cabin.

## V.

With special reference to the difficulty of securing the full advantages of the Education Acts for Children on Canal Boats, it may be observed that many people have been struck with the impossibility of getting anything like an effective administration of the Acts under the present system. This view is emphasised in an extract from an article on Canal Children in the *Co-operative News* of January 15th, 1910.

“ But the

### CHILDREN OF SCHOOL AGE

have a peculiar existence. They are compelled to attend school, but the compulsion is very much evaded. But what an experience they must have! They rarely ever attend to one school—at least, those do not who do not reside on land. But the parents are provided with a book by the Education Authorities. This book the child takes to school. The attendance is marked with it, and at the ‘port’ of call the book is taken to the Secretary of the local Educational Committee and examined. If it is not satisfactory, the parent is called up to give an account. If the account is not satisfactory a fine may be eventually imposed. I saw a record in a school book, showing that one poor woman had been fined 20s. for the non-attendance of her child. Of course, the school attendance of the children is not continuous. Sometimes they are on the boat—going its journey—a day, or two days. One day they attend school, then they are kept

on the boat the night and the following day. Next time they put in appearance at any school it may be twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty miles away—in another town or village, another county, among an altogether different class of children. One day, for instance, I noticed that a child was at school in Liverpool, another day in Manchester, another day at Hanley (in the Potteries); and this child, in the course of its young life, had been to school at London, and in many other parts of the country. Usually they do not shift about so widely, but they shift about all the same. They may learn much from experience; they may learn something about human nature; but often they grow up illiterate, a circumstance which is noticeable among the men and women.”

This weakness in securing proper schooling for canal boat children has had many illustrations which can be supplied from the Society's records, and it often happens that the children who have the least chance of learning are those who are otherwise neglected.

It is almost impossible to effectively supervise children on canal boats who are being neglected, as can be judged from the particulars of a sample case. A good friend of children being greatly concerned at the condition of three children, and finding them to be in a deplorably dirty and neglected condition, reported the facts to the Society's Inspector in the district. The ages of the children were, a boy of thirteen, a girl of eleven, and another boy of ten. It was found that the family of seven, there being two elder children, lived on two canal boats travelling together. The boats were in excellent order, but

the children were puny, delicate looking, and poorly clad. Neither of them could read, nor 'did they appear even to know their letters. This family had no other home but the boats. The parents had been previously warned on two occasions, on one of which the girl, then only ten years old, was engaged in pulling the empty boat into the lock chamber.

There are other perils to these children, and these reports from the *Manchester Evening News* of February 21st, 1910, and *Liverpool Echo* of March 30th, show what they are :—

#### CANAL BOAT DANGERS.

“Two deaths of children as the result of burning accidents on canal boats are reported to-day.

The neglect to provide a fireguard resulted in the death of a child aged three years, the daughter of the captain of a barge which travels between Hull and Sheffield, and an inquest was held at Doncaster on Saturday.

About one o'clock on Thursday the keel was approaching Thorne on its way to Doncaster, and the mother of the child went into the cabin to prepare dinner, taking the little girl with her. Afterwards she returned to the deck, leaving the deceased in the cabin. A few minutes later another child shouted 'Hetty is on fire,' and the mother rushing below, found the girl in flames. She rolled her in the rug, the father assisting.

A Thorne doctor was sent for, and after attending to the child ordered her to be sent to the Infirmary at Doncaster, where she died on Friday night.

The Coroner commented on the fact that no thought was taken by the parents to protect the children from fire. The floor was a wooden one, and there was no protection of any

description from the fire. An Act of Parliament was passed in 1908 making it a criminal offence on the part of any parent to allow a child under seven years of age to have access to an open grate in which there was a fire without being sufficiently protected, and it was a shocking thing that parents should be so utterly neglectful.

Evidence was given by the father, and the mother said they thought the wind must have blown the flames out of the fire, the child's clothing thus catching fire.

The Coroner asked if the parents would promise to provide some protection against the fire-grate.

The father replied that there was very little space.

The Coroner: I shall report the case to His Majesty's Inspector of Canal Boats.

The father said he would mention the matter to his employers at Hull.

A verdict was returned that the child died from shock following the burns.

The father of the deceased lives at Thorne, and there were three children on board.

#### ANOTHER VICTIM.

On Saturday, a boy, aged eighteen months, son of a boatman, died in the Rotherham Hospital from shock, following on severe burns. On Thursday, February 10, the man, with his wife and three children, were on their barge at the Rotherham Wharf, when one of the little ones pulled over a paraffin lamp in the cabin, which ignited the deceased's clothing. The parents, who were on deck at the time, were attracted by the screams, and extinguished the flames."

## YET ONE MORE.

“ On March 29th, 1910, a child died in Dutton Workhouse, aged three years, daughter of the master of the canal boat ‘Crow,’ belonging to Longton, Staffs. The girl was admitted into the institution on January 28th, suffering from severe burns sustained by falling on the fire in the cabin of the boat. She lingered for two months.”

There would be no difficulty in adding to the list of similar calamities, incident to the perils of confinement within the limited space of a canal boat cabin.

## VI.

From the evidence adduced, it will be clear that a good case has been made out for the exclusion of children under fourteen years of age from canal boats.

When the Children's Bill was being drafted, a strong plea was made that this special class should receive the benefits of legislation. There were practical difficulties in the way, owing to the fact that the Bill was in the hands of the Home Office, whilst the interests of these children were supposed to be safeguarded by the Education Department, the Local Government Board, and the Board of Trade. No better argument than this can be quoted in support of the appointment of a special department to consider the interests of all children under all conditions.

A Bill has now been drafted which it is hoped will be introduced into Parliament at an early date. Its provisions are simple and should not arouse any active opposition.

It stands in these terms :—

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### DRAFT BILL TO AMEND THE CANAL BOATS ACTS, 1877 AND 1884.

“Be it enacted by the King's Most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons in this present Parliament assembled, and by the Authority of the same as follows :—

(1) This Act may be cited as the Canal Boats Act,

1910, and shall be construed as one with the Canal Boats Acts, 1877 and 1884, which Acts and this Act may be cited together as 'The Canal Boats Acts, 1877 to 1910.'

(2) On and after the first day of January, 1911, no child under the age of fourteen years shall reside or travel on or in a canal boat.

(3) If any person over the age of sixteen years who has the custody, charge, or care of any child under the age of fourteen years, causes or allows such child to reside or travel on or in a canal boat in contravention of this Act (notwithstanding that such child shall not thereby be caused unnecessary suffering or injury to its health) that person shall be deemed to have committed in respect of such child an offence of exposure under Section 12, Sub-section 1 of the Children Act, 1908.

(4) The provisions of Part II. of the Children Act, 1908, shall apply in all respects to an offence under this Act as if such offence had been included in Section 12 of the Children Act, 1908."

Copies of this Draft Bill will be supplied to any persons who, interested in children, are willing to help in creating a force of public opinion that will induce Members of Parliament to give their support to the measure.

Resolutions in support of the Bill should be brought before Local Authorities in districts where there are canals.

Most valuable of all help is that form of personal service which will show itself in writing a letter to a local Member of

Parliament, bringing the subject to his attention and asking for his personal support in the House of Commons. If all the friends of the Society would undertake this slight duty, it would not be long before another triumph would be added to those already attained for children who are in need.