

The Story of My Cotton Dress

I HAVE HAD another accident! A big tear in my pretty new dress. This time *I* want to mend it. When we went to Atlanta Georgia, a few weeks ago, and saw the beautiful white cotton fields, mother told me how little boys and girls must help make most of the stuff used for our dresses. I used to think all other children had good times, and that going to school was very hard. Now I know better.

I appreciate my dresses more since I know that from the very beginning when the cotton is ripe in the hot sun, little boys and girls must pick it for my dresses, while their backs grow tired and their heads ache.

Mother also took me to a cotton mill, on that trip. I saw how the cotton bolls are brought to the mill and the fluffy soft white mass is combed and then spun from on bobbin another, until it is the finest thread like the ravelings from the tear in my new dress.

The bobbins whirl around on large frames in the spinning room.

Little girl "spinners" walk up and down the long aisles, between the frames, watching the bobbins closely. When a thread breaks, the spinner must quickly tie the two ends together. Some people think that only children can do this quickly enough, but that is not so, for in a great many mills only grown-ups work.

Mary is one of the spinners. She was very sad. Standing all day long, she said, had broken down the arch of her foot and made her flatfooted, which is very painful.

Some people say it is good for the girls and boys to work—that all children should be industrious. But they do not stop to think that there is a right and a wrong kind of work for little girls and boys. Spinning for a little while a day *could be made* the right kind, but work in a spinning room from 7 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock at night is the wrong kind. It keeps the children out of school, it gives them no chance to play, and they cannot grow strong.

Many spinning rooms have their windows closed all day because the rooms must be kept damp or the threads will break. Now, like growing plants, growing girls and boys need fresh air as well as light and sunshine. But there are more than a million children in this country who do not have fresh air, or play, or school because they are working. And of these there are enough in the cotton mills to make a big city full.

When a bobbin is filled, the "doffer boy" comes along, takes it off the spinning frame and puts an empty bobbin in its place.

Many doffer boys and girl spinners grow up without learning to read or write, and without even hearing of George Washington.

Sometimes the machine is so high and the boys are so little, they have to climb up to reach the bobbins. If they slip they can hurt themselves badly.