

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION BEGINS

Viewpoints

Children were an important part of the workforce during the Industrial Revolution. The jobs were often dangerous, and many labored long hours. Many started working as early as age six. In the excerpts below, two nineteenth-century members of the British Parliament offer their viewpoints on the child labor issue. ♦ *As you read, think about what it might have been like to work in a factory in the early 1800s. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Two Views on Child Labor in Factories**From *History of the Cotton Manufacture* by Edward Baines**

[I]t is alleged that the children who labour in mills are the victims of frightful oppression and killing toil,—that they are often cruelly beaten by the spinners or overlookers [superintendents or overseers],—that their feeble limbs become distorted by continual standing and stooping . . .

. . . It must be admitted that the hours of labour in cotton mills are long, being twelve hours a day on five days of the week, and nine hours on Saturday: but the labour is light, and requires very little muscular exertion. . . the children walk about, and have opportunity of frequently sitting if they are so disposed. . .

The only thing which makes factory labour trying even to delicate children is, that they are confined for long hours, and deprived of fresh air: this makes them pale, and reduces their vigour, but it rarely brings on disease.

Source: *History of the Cotton Manufacture in Great Britain*, by Edward Baines (1835).

From a speech by the Earl of Shaftesbury

[It] is the old, the often-repeated, and as often-refuted, argument that the [factory] work is light. Light! Why, no doubt, much of it is light, if measured by the endurance of some

three or four minutes. But what say you, my Lords, to a continuity of toil, in a standing posture, in a poisonous atmosphere, during 13 hours, with 15 minutes of rest? . . . I visited Bradford, in Yorkshire, in 1838, being desirous to see the condition of the children. . . I assert without exaggeration that no power of language could describe the varieties, and I may say, the cruelties, in all these degradations of the human form.

They stood or squatted before me in all the shapes of the letters of the alphabet. This was the effect of prolonged toil on the tender frames of children at early ages.

Source: *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, vol. 245 (April 4, 1879).



Child laborers, 1800s

Questions to Think About

1. Explain each man's viewpoint on the effects of child labor in factories.
2. What effects of child labor did the Earl of Shaftesbury see during his factory visit?
3. **Identify Point of View** Compare the points of view set out in the two excerpts. Which author do you think makes the best argument? Use supporting details or evidence from the excerpt to support your answer.