

THE LABOR QUESTION.

The Condition of Mill Operatives and Shop Girls.

The examination of Mr. Frank K. Foster, of Cambridge, Mass., was continued yesterday before the Senate committee on education and labor. Mr. Foster said that most of the tenement houses in the manufacturing cities of Massachusetts were owned by the mill owners and that the lessees were compelled to furnish so many operatives. The houses are generally small, ill ventilated and uncomfortable, and the operatives are compelled to live in the companies, houses, or be dismissed. The sewerage and sanitary facilities are bad and on summer nights the stench from the cesspools is nearly overpowering.

The French Canadians are to New England what Chinese are to California and the Pacific coast. Their morals are lower, their necessities fewer and their only aim seems to be to see how much money they can get to take out of the country. They do not wish their children to attend schools and when compelled to send them, often move to another place. They seldom accept the right of franchise. Out of a French Canadian population of 88,653 in thirty-two cities in New England only 5,006 are naturalized and 2,859 property owners.

Mr. Foster spoke strongly against the employment of children of tender years. In Massachusetts there is a law against the employment in mills of children under ten years of age, and those from ten to fourteen must attend school thirteen weeks in the year. This law does not include the little cash boys and girls, employed in large numbers in the city stores, these little ones being too young in many cases to be out from under the eye of a mother, although employed during the busy season from 8 A. M., until 9 and 10 P. M.

The girls employed as shopwomen are paid on an average about \$2.50 per week and out of this they are expected to board themselves, provide for all the necessaries of life and dress well. Society demands that they should be virtuous, yet with the meagre stipend received and the snares often thrown around them by those over them, it is not a wonder that many fall. The firms of Jordan, Marsh & Co., and McCullar Williams & Co., of Boston, are shining exceptions to most firms. The former have provided a large hall, the commercial rent value of which is \$23,000 per year, in which their employes can meet, in a social way, use as a reading room, or give dancing parties in. Over a year ago this firm established a fund to which, each week, each employe contributed a very small sum. Last summer they drew lots and the lucky ones went to Europe under the direction of a member of the firm.

The condition of the mill girl is to be deplored. Away from home influence and restraints, thrown often among the depraved of both sexes, in low tenement houses, their morals are too often low. "I speak advisedly," said Mr. Foster, "that the city of Lowell, Massachusetts, alone, presents a wide field for philanthropic work. There is more need there and a better object than the building of places for decayed gentle women, or donating large sums to Harvard college. Large strides have been made in Boston towards giving the working people the benefit of art galleries and libraries by opening them on Sunday."