

ITALIAN CHILD-SLAVES.

BROUGHT TO WORK IN FRENCH FACTORIES.

The "happy days of childhood," a phrase that comes glibly enough to the lips of those whose lives have been cast in pleasant places, sounds like bitter mockery to many a man and woman as they look back upon the years that are gone; but to none, assuredly, can the recollection be more bitter than to those Italians whose youthful years have been passed in the slavery of the French glass works.

The parental instinct in the peasants of certain parts of sunny Italy has been dulled by hardship, and the people readily sell one or more of their numerous offspring as "workmen" for the glass works.



"EXPECTANCY."

Photo. by Ellerbeck.



"HER DEBUT."

Photo. by Ellerbeck.

Cambridge.

The method adopted is for a man—called the padrone, or employer—to go round the villages in search of boys of ten to thirteen years of age, to whose parents he offers a sum varying from £4 to £6 for the boy's services for three years. This sum is quite a little fortune for the peasants, and the transaction also results in their having one mouth less to fill; they consequently do not scruple to sign the contract, and the padrone goes off with a convoy of hapless youngsters, many of whom certainly will not live to complete their term of slavery.

The children—they are not more

than that—live under the worst possible conditions. They work in a super-heated atmosphere filled with noxious gases, and are liable to dreadful accidents. They are hated by the workmen because they are Italians, and because they work cheaply, and thus keep down the wages of the men.

From inquiries instituted a short time ago, it appears that the cost to the padrones of maintaining these boys averages threepence a day. They go about in rags, for the padrone does not waste his money on clothes, although he pockets all their earnings, ranging from seven shillings a



"ONE LITTLE MAID FROM SCHOOL."

Photo. by Ellerbeck.

week, and even the gratuities they occasionally receive.

At night they rest on sodden straw mattresses without other covering than their ragged clothing, whether it be winter or summer.

It is difficult to get precise figures concerning the mortality among these unfortunate children, but carefully-compiled estimates show that it must be at least fifty per cent. Quite another thirty per cent. remain in their adopted country after their term of slavery, so that twenty only out of every hundred ever see their parents again. Yet, although the peasants know that so few return home, there is no trouble in obtaining a supply of boys to take the places of those who have died off.

So great has been the demand for these youthful workers that the padrones have not been able to meet it, and have been sending girls to make up the deficiency; but the attention of both Governments has been called to the whole practice, and it is to be hoped that it will now be stopped.

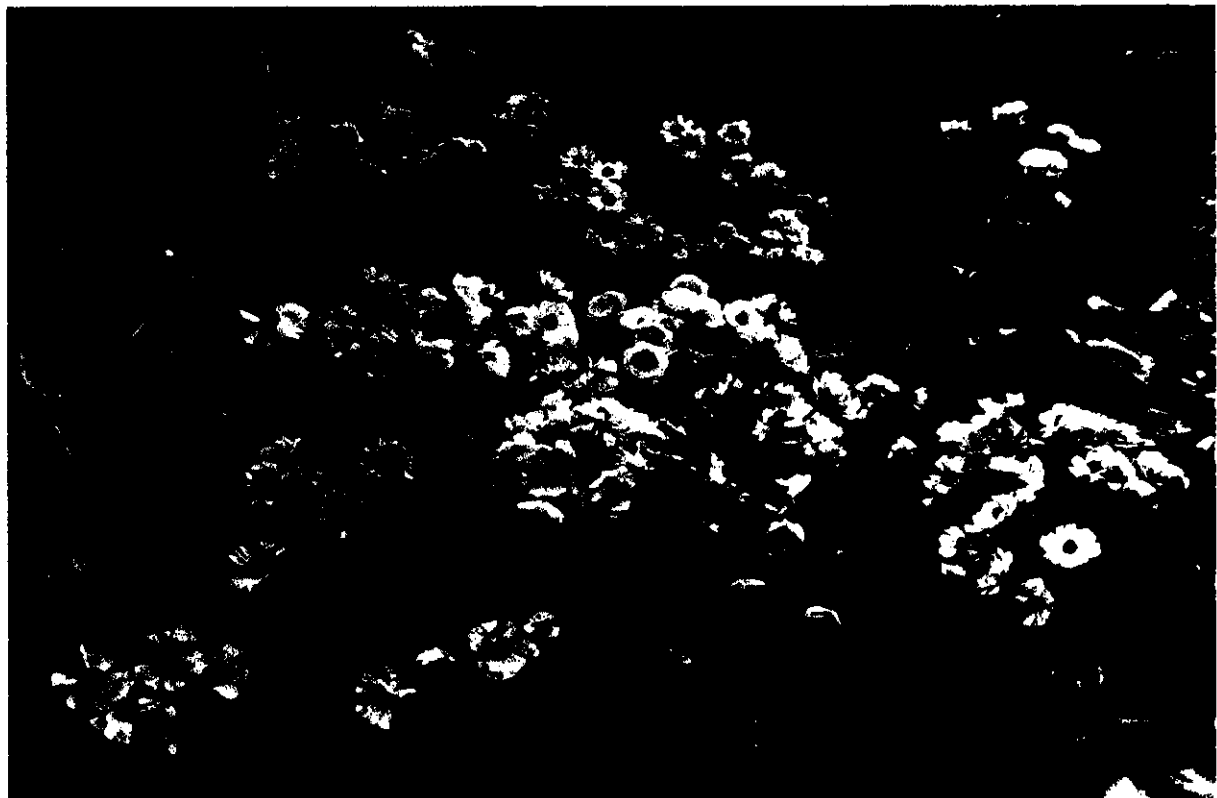


Photo. by Wheeler.

RANUNCULUS, LYALIC (MOUNTAIN LILY).