

AN EIGHT HOURS DAY.

THE NECESSITY OF IT.

WHEREIN lies the utility of mechanical inventions, of the improvements in machines already invented, and of the increase in productive power brought about by the subdivision of labour? Production has been enormously increased during the last half-century; but are our wages so very much higher, our hours so very much shorter, or our work so very much lighter while we are at it than the work, the hours, and the wages of the last generation of workers? We were told that the sewing-machine would very much lighten the toil of the over-worked sempstress; but were we to consult the sweater's machinist, who lives in a slum, and on several days of the week works eighteen hours on a stretch, I am afraid he would not dilate with much exuberance on the blessings of machinery as applied to the making of slop pants; nor would the woman who makes a dozen shirts for 10d. be more lavish in her admiration.

In Professor Leone Levi's "Work and Pay" we read—"Seventy years ago, with the old-fashioned handloom, one weaver could produce six yards, narrow width, per day. With the steam power-loom to-day at Accrington a weaver attending to four looms can produce 160 yards every day—that is, the amount of human labour is 1-27th now of what it was 70 years ago." Yet the handloom weaver had better wages, his work was more pleasant because less mechanical, his working day was very little longer than that of the power-loom weaver to-day, while the cloth he turned out was greatly superior in quality and not much dearer in price.

A similar acceleration in the rate of production has, to a greater or less extent, been going on all round. In the various processes of agriculture, in the many departments of the iron industry, in shipbuilding and house-building, in the printing-