

# CHILD WORKER SCRIPT

*David Rowland stands before Michael Sadler, a man his forties. The room is small and dark. It is lit by an oil lamp, which flickers repeatedly. A chair stands alone next to David Rowland.*

SADLER            Are you able to sit down?

ROWLAND        Yes, Sir – thank’ee!

SADLER            What age did you start working?

ROWLAND        I started working when I was six. I was a piecener.

SADLER            Tell me, what were your duties as a piecener?

ROWLAND        A piecener, Sir finds loose pieces of cotton from the cantenters and rubs the pieces together so that they join to make a long piece of cotton. It is tiring work, Sir.

SADLER            How was the work tiring, Rowland?

ROWLAND        The pieces of cotton need to be rubbed together at a quick pace and for a long time. The work can make your hands bleed after a time. My hands were often cut and sore. After a few months, the skin was well worn and would blister but with no pain. And then there were the long hours.

SADLER            How long was your working day?

ROWLAND        It might be fourteen or fifteen hours, sometimes sixteen hours a day.

SADLER            And what time did you get for refreshment?

ROWLAND        At noon, we had thirty minutes. But often we had to eat as we worked.

SADLER            Tell me, did you work in any other area of the mill?

ROWLAND        Yes, Sir. I was a scavenger.

SADLER                   And what duties did you perform in this role?

ROWLAND                A scavenger must pick up loose piece of cotton from underneath the looms, Sir – to make sure cloth was not wasted or would jam the loom.

SADLER                   Were you ever injured as a result of scavenging?

ROWLAND                No, Sir (begins *to whimper*) but I have seen a boy my own age, crushed by a loom. He did not move in time. The loom was still operating and caught him. It took some time to cut him out, Sir.

SADLER                   Did you work as anything other than a piecener and scavenger?

ROWLAND                No, Sir. I worked at the mill from the age of six until sixteen.

SADLER                   Do you feel you were over-worked?

ROWLAND                Constantly. Sir. I grew tired towards the end of the afternoon. We were so tired, it was difficult to stand.

SADLER                   Were you punished for this tiredness?

ROWLAND                Yes, Sir - if I slowed down a bit, my master would beat me!

SADLER                   How do you think the cotton mill affected your health?

ROWLAND                I first noticed my skin colour to change after a month. I was of good colour before I worked there. After a month, I went ashen and grey. I have never regained the colour since. I cannot bend my back without pain. I am in constant pain, Sir. But the main problem is my breathing. My lungs are in a weakened state through all the cotton dust. Most days, it was as thick as a snow storm in the room. There was little opportunity for fresh air.