THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF MASS PRODUCTION

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In the center of the theater district on Broadway, New York City, behind large plate glass windows there stood a short time since a modern cigarette-making plant. One machine, fed constantly with pulverized tobacco leaf and wrapping paper, ejects continuously a cigarette which is cut into standard lengths as it issues from the machine at the rate of 500 cigarettes a minute. A neighboring machine takes the cigarettes and automatically places them in packages, closes them and delivers the finished marketable product. The degree of skill required to operate the machine is small, though, of course, some one must fully understand the mechanism and be competent to make adjustments. At the other extreme of size, consider the automatic factory of the A. O. Smith Company of Milwaukee. This great machine literally takes in steel plates at one end and ejects finished automobile frames at the other at the rate of 8,000 daily. The machine, for such it virtually is, cost $10,000,000 and requires only 200 men to operate. Probably 5,000 men would be required to produce the same result with ordinary processes. Here again, of course, there must be a certain number of skilled engineers who can adjust the machine, but the labor cost of actual operation is comparatively insignificant.

A survey of any progressive industry will reveal similar developments and constant progress toward the mechanization of its processes. Everywhere one finds the handiicraftsman displaced by the machine and the semi-skilled operators, backed by the most lavish use of power, the world has ever witnessed. In many instances the product is equal to or better than the...