



# Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People From 1820s to 1920s

*John Burnett*

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## **Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People From 1820s to 1920s** John Burnett

"Useful Toil" focuses on the "ordinary" people of the 19th century. John Burnett has assembled 27 telling extracts from the diaries and autobiographies of working people - wheelwrights and stone-masons, miners and munition workers, butlers and kitchen maids, navvies, carpenters, potters and ship assistants, to list only a few. The men and women who speak in these pages concentrate on their working experiences, though they also write about their homes and their fears. They thus reveal, often unconsciously, the essence of their attitudes, values and beliefs. The majority of these writings were previously unpublished. Burnett's broad and sympathetic introductions focus and contextualize the wealth of material. These stories provide the antithesis of "great name" history, yet they constantly touch on human experiences that are timeless and universal. Burnett's other works include: "Plenty and Want: A Social History of Diet in England From 1815 to the Present"; "A History of the Cost of Living" (1969); "The Challenge of the Nineteenth Century" (1970); "Destiny Obscure" (1982, 1994); and "Idle Hands: The Experience of Unemployment, 1790-1990".

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