INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND CHILDREN (From an article of David Kay of 2010)

In 2010 it was published an article which changed the idea of the Industrial Revolution. The writer brings the results of a research of the University of Oxford: the developments consequent to the Industrial Revolution happened because of children’s exlpoitation. Children were able to adapt themselves to the new producting demand faster than adults, so they were employed as factory workers and became indipendent at a early age. Consequently, a larger part of population became economically indipendent earlier.

The development of the Industrial Revolution led to the phenomenon of urban drift, but the factories’ owners understood that peasants weren’t good workers in their industries and that were more expensive than children (in particular wokhouses’ children), who could be educated to the factory work. At the beginning of the 18th century only the 35% of children worked, but between 1791 and 1820 the percentage grew to 55%, and then between 1820 and 1850 to 60%. Moreover between 1791 and 1850 also decreased the average age of child labourers from 11 to 10 years old. The child labour wasn’t a shocking news, because the exploitation had existed before the Revolution in the fields, so anyone was worried about the growing of children workers. However children lived a hard life, in particular who came from workhouses. These children weren’t payed for their work, but the masters gave them only food and a place where to sleep. The data came from 600 autobiographies, which helped to understand social changes during the Industrial Revolution too. Indeed, if young people became indipendent earlier, they also married and created new families earlier, for this reason it was possible the growth of population. Moreover women hadn’t to work anymore, beacuse they sent children to factories, whereas before the had to work in the fields: it’s the origin of the idea of the woman as the angel of the house. At the beginning of 19th century fathers left their families with the percentage of 18%, while a huge number of them died in accidents and so a lot of children were condemned to live in workhouses.

In cunclusion, the Industrial Revolution and the Imperialsm are strongly linked to the process just analysed: the change of the scoiety started from the change of family.