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The Factory Child

Lucy E. Parsons

September 10, 1905

After reading a recent census report showing that children (white children) are toiling in the cotton factories of the South for \$1.75 per week, one is constrained to inquire: Where do the burdens of capitalism press heaviest? When we see the father who has kissed his loving wife and helpless little ones an affectionate “God bless you” and turn heavily upon his heel to seek employment, he knows not where, that he may furnish them bread, he knows not how much, we are tempted to say of this man that pleasure has become to him a mockery, and misery a part of his being.

When we witness day by day the tired maiden wearing away her young life amid the dismal din of the factory wheels, we may say, here, indeed, the system of wage-slavery must press heaviest. Yet it is not so, for the deep, dark, damnable oppressions of capitalism are felt more keenly by the young and innocent, than by the more mature in years. While some whirl through the short space which time has allotted to them here, and in one grand round of pleasure fairly dance down to their graves as it were unaware, there is a great class who cannot even say their life has been sad from the cradle to the grave, since they never experienced that luxury of childhood’s inno-

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cence, a cradle; and as to a grave, why the dissecting table is quite good enough for “paupers.”

When giddy laughter and wine-bibbed mirth rings out from within the soft silken-hung halls and finds its way through gilded casements and echoes along down the broad avenues of ease, it here encounters a counter echo—this last proceeding from some noisome, dark, forbidding alley where dwell the weary little toilers, where “balmy sleep” refuses to light on lids so flooded with hot, burning tears—this last echo in the wail of the factory child, whose twitching nerves, and aching limbs refuse to be calmed after the long strain of the day’s drudgery. It is here, indeed, that the climax of misery and oppression has been reached.

It is the slaughtering of the innocents. It is the coining of these little ones into precious diadems to deck “my lady’s brow,” that brow which was never sullied by care or want. Yet why cannot this be said of the factory child, the producer of so much wealth? O factory child, what sage has sung thy song correct? Who thy tale of misery hath half told? What tongue or pen has yet been found powerful enough to depict thy wrongs in words that could touch the callous heart, that sacrifices thy innocence to the lust of greed!

O factory child! What can be said of thee, thou wee, wan thing? ’Tis thy teardrop which flashes from the jeweled hand of the factory lord. ’Tis thy blood which colors the rubies worn in his gorgeous drawing room.

But those tears of thy young years shall not be shed in vain; thy blood will not always be crystallized on the fingers of dainty ladies. O, child of late! Have patience amid the murmurs of discontent, which will be wafted back to you on every breeze that kisses thy pale cheek in the struggle of the coming years.

Toil on, toil on, thou victim of capitalism! Some day thy tears will be dried; some day thy chest will cease to heave. For brave hearts and strong arms will annihilate the accursed system which binds you down to drudgery and death. Only then

will the factory door to tender childhood be forever closed, and the schoolhouse be flung open, and all the avenues of art and learning be opened up to children of the producing many.

Men! Producers of the world’s wealth, press on to the front! Unfurl the banner of revolution, fling it to the breeze, and let its folds stream out to catch the incoming breeze which whispers liberty, fraternity, equality.

Rescue your little ones from the deep, dark, damnable throes of capitalism. Be men! Dare and do.