

Calamity Facts (Preview)

Mrs. Annie L. Diggs

26 Oct 1892

[Iowa Farmer's Tribune.]

If Mrs. Lease, of Kansas, can spare a few moments from the cares and responsibilities of electing a president she might take a trip to Spring-wells, Mich., and inaugurate some measures looking to the amelioration of the condition of some of her own sex. There scores of women work in the brick yards, digging in the pits and carrying the moulds. The upper parts of their bodies are almost nude, and the lower portions are barely covered by coarse cloth. Several carry naked babies while they work. They came from Poland.—*Denver Times, (Rep.)*.

Is it possible that in this "happy and prosperous country" (B. Harrison) after "the magnificent services which the present administration has rendered the farmers and laborers of the country" (Chin Kep. Com. Kan.) and while the "Republican party goes before the people with the declaration that there is no good reason for a change and hopes there will be none" (Whitelaw Reid), that such conditions exist in this country? Women working in the brickyards, digging in the pits—almost naked and carrying naked babies while they work? Here are facts which ought to raise a "calamity howl" that would rock old Columbia to her very center.

Such is the condition against which Mrs. Lease is lifting up her voice and which urges her to brave the scorns and slanders of monopoly lick-spittle editors and shyster politicians. And she knows where to first direct her efforts. The henchmen of monopolists and beneficiaries of class legislation who have thrived and thrive on the ill-requited toil of such as this paper describes must be turned out of the national legislature and executive chair and their places filled with representatives of the toilers, not the spoilers. Before anything can be done for the oppressed and robbed "slaves of poverty" who toil in Michigan brickyards, in New York and Chicago sweating dens, in the mines of Pennsylvania and Tennessee and on the farms.

Mrs. Lease is working for such as these, and it is because her work is so effective that these monopoly tools pursue her with their venomous tongues.

[National Economist.]

The above reminds me that in the campaign of 1860 I said, in one of my speeches, that in the protected State of Pennsylvania there were women working at the coke ovens—women so worn and haggard, so bent and so wretched, that even that old savage chief, Sitting Bull, marveled, when he saw them, that the white man could so abuse his squaw. This statement was sneered at by a fervid disciple of the doctrine of protection to the American laborer, who declared that it was a calamity.

It seems, however, that when a protectionist imagines he can score a point or discredit a speaker of the new school of politics, he can paint a much more hideous picture than a calamity.

Doubtless the barbaric story of the I ten ver Times is t rue. liven st ill more horrid hells than the brick yards of Springwells are jteonled with women, and may be found in every city in this civilized Christian land of ours. The women in the brickyards are among the lucky ones who have been able to gel work; they, at least, may breathe God s fits', pure air. They doubtless get something of a pittance in the shape of wages, hence they are on the highway toward "prosperity." and should they Is¹ economical, prudent, and lay by a portion of each week's wages, they will, in time, become wealthy. At least that is the assurance we daily receive from the upholders of the present order of business " Why, Carnegie himself was once a poor boy. He was economical, prudent, and put by a portion of each week's wages, etc." But. what about the thousands of women in the foul, pestilential slums of our American infernos, who have not struck a vein of prosperity such as that within the wholesome precincts of a brickyard? How about the thousands of unemployed, despairing, God-forsaken women, and the famine-pimhed. emaciated babies, swelteringand gasping in foul alleys, reeking with green slime, fetid with stench of ofiall, horrible with vermin and diabolical with oaths and obscenity ?

While the good Denser Timesis picturing the prosperity of this country, why not show up something worth while? Pshaw, Mr. 'Times, don't turn your readers off with such a pale little picture as that of the Springwells' brickyard. Get thee round behind the scenes in the locality of some of your infant industries, and don't be a bit bashful about pain ting the picture truthfully Then, after you have done your lies! in the calamity line, l>e good enough to tell us what you pro-pose to do about it You seem to disapprove of the methods of the People's party speakers. What better met Inal of ameliorating the condition of these brick-workers do you pnrjiose?

The people who are taking upon their shoulders the responsibility of assisting m the elect ion of General Weaver do propose some new methods of dealing with the new conditions which confront the working men and women of \merica Perhaps the people of the new political school are the bet ter abk*to"nhoul-der the responsibility ' of elm-ting General Weaver, lieeause they are not bowed unto earth with the shame and the crime of responsibility for conditons which call to high Heaven for a change

The 8jleakers and writers who are shouldering thenwful responsibility of electing eit her Benjamin I' Harrison or Grover Cleveland, are entirely occupied with denial that there are any wrong's which need righting. They are too busy declaring that the nation is in n high state of proBperity to give attention to women in brickyards unless they chance to want ft brick to cast at some woman who f striving with all her God-given powers to ameliorate the condition of her voiceless, helpless. hotieless sisters

Women of the People's party are all protectionists. Vr 'Times, but we want the fact andnot thetheory We want a protectiin w hich protects We are out on the march in agreat home crusade, and wecharge the political nii'hin* which have tricked and duped heir loyal follown-s with the unjust and wicked legislation which is -esponsible for ' be homelessness. tlw wretchedness and the crime in this dear land of ours.—*Mrs. Annie L. Diggs.*

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In 1892 the People's Party (the Populists, a real third party of the time that backed women's suffrage, a graduated income tax, and public ownership of railroads and telegraphs) argued that Republicans and Democrats alike served the monopolists. Diggs answers a Republican Denver Times item about Polish women hauling clay in Michigan brickyards, which the Times used to jab Populist speaker Mary Lease. She turns it around: if that's "prosperity," Republicans should answer for it, and Populists were only called "calamity howlers" for saying so. She also recalls Sitting Bull, seeing women worn out at the Pennsylvania coke ovens, marveling that white men could abuse their women that way. She closes by saying Populist women are protectionists too, but want protection that actually protects.

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