

Don't Be Too Good Natured

By Daniel De Leon

There was a world of wisdom in what Rev. Hugh Birckhead said to the Big Brothers club of this city when he advised them not to be too good natured.

In the Rev. Birckhead's words, the man of inert good nature is a block in the path of progress, which must then fight his inertia, together with the active hostility of its enemies.

Good nature has its time and place. Without it even the most earnest worker for better things would soon wear out. But the good nature which can hear of one miner being killed in an unsafe mine, and laugh it off; the good nature which can read of one unemployed taking his life in desperation, and imperturbably say the dead man must have been "incompetent"; the good nature which can know of one mother offering to give her babes away because she can't keep them alive, and complacently assert "she should have moved from the city"; the good nature which can be informed of one family living eight in a room in a congested tenement and reluctantly sending its children unfed to school, and smugly declare they "needn't have done so if they didn't want to"; the good nature which can be posted on the reports of forced child labor in Southern cotton mill, Northern canning factory, or intermediary coal mine, and unwinkingly ascribe it to "greed for money"; the good nature, in short, which can be confronted with any one of the myriad searing results of the present exploitative system of production, and with the "smile that won't come off" maintain that that system is alright and that only the individuals who suffer from it are at fault—that good nature deserves to be whipped from the abode of decent men.

Which does not mean that one must be morose to be good or to do good. Let the loud laugh ring which clears the brain and rests for efforts new. But the old Browningsque idea of "God's in heaven, all's well with the world" is a relic of the time man prayed to a painted stick to cure him of fevers. The earth never has become better but by man making it so. The good nature which refuses to see wrong when wrong exists, merely leaves the world free to that wrong for its unrestrained stamping ground—a state of affairs which the wrong is only too pleased to have, and will assiduously distribute large doses of "Keep Careful" chloroform to bring about. And for labor, the working class, which is the objective point and victim of the wrong of capitalism, to fall under the influence of the anesthetic, is plain suicide.

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