

EDITORIAL

## A WASTED LIFE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE biographies that have followed close upon the heels of the death of Baroness Angela Georgina Burdett-Coutts are pathetic reading.

Fallen, at her early womanhood, heiress to a vast fortune, the Baroness Burdett-Coutts lavished her wealth, her time and her efforts in acts of philanthropy:



Baroness Angela Georgina Burdett-Coutts (1814-1906)

The fallen among her own sex received her first attention. How? By building shelters for their use. Thus, while the capitalist system bred, fomented and incited prostitution at wholesale rates, she did nothing to stop the cause but “alleviated” the evil at retail.

Destitute boys bespoke her next attention. Like prostitution, the hordes of destitute children are a direct effect of capitalism. Wealth could not be amassed if Labor is paid the value of the full time it works. Not only is Labor not paid the value of the full time it works, Labor is paid only a pittance and that pittance is made still smaller through the adulteration of the cheap goods that alone it can buy, and their increased price at retail. The evil results of this system are numerous. Among these is the premature death of working parents, with the consequence of destitution among their children. This result the Baroness sought to alleviate in the novellest of ways. In 1859 she fitted out hundreds of destitute boys for the royal navy—That is, the child victims of capitalism were fitted out to uphold a branch of capitalist Government that is essential to the plentiful production of destitute boys.

To close the long list of similar philanthropic acts, the following should be mentioned as typical. The gorgeous costumes worn by wealthy women are but huge

bloodstains accented by the spots of even deeper dye in the ornamentations. These bloodstains are the life-blood of male, female and child labor, the glow of whose existence is caught in the drapery and gewgaws of the women of the rich. Baroness Burdett-Coutts made a veritable campaign against what she termed “murderous millinery.” Did she assail the inhuman use that human Labor is put to in the production of such goods? No. The use of hummingbirds and ospreys that, and only that was, in her own phrase, a “bloodstain” on woman’s attire.

Pathetic is the sight of a life so completely wasted as that of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts. That the lady’s heart was good none would question. Yet how pathetic the sight of a good heart, unguided by a good head. Instead of wisely devoting the wealth at her disposal to the overthrow of the wrongs that are inseparable from the social system which furnished the necessary pedestal for her statuesque pose as an “Almoner,” the good heart squandered that wealth to stop little wounds, often in ways that promoted the widening of the huge gashes which she could not choose but leave untouched.

Of course, the capitalist government of Great Britain applauded the philanthropy of Baroness Burdett-Coutts, and distinguished the lady by conferring upon her—the only woman thus distinguished—a peerage of the United Kingdom.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
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