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EDITORIAL

A GIRL TOLSTOY.

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FOR the sake of completeness, Miss Gertrude Weeks, a college young lady who wanted some personal experience of factory work to write her thesis, should have given the name of the superintendent of the Troy factory to whom she applied for and from whom she obtained work. Miss Weeks relates that the superintendent in question told her he “liked her looks”; that he quickly gave her a forewomanship, but that the daily visits to her department by the superintendent, “who liked her looks,” led her to abandon the position.

Miss Weeks is both evidence and evidence-giver.

Valuable, though nothing new, is the evidence that the young lady gives on the subject of “looks.” “Looks,” with the workingwoman, is part of her “economic value.” He who carefully reads the capitalist press will find daily evidence of the “sanctity of the home,” as the thing is understood by the capitalist “Pillars of the Family.” Engels long ago pointed out that the old feudal right of “the first night”—a practice that Mark Twain exposes, exhibits and pillories in his *Connecticut Yankee at the Court of King Arthur*—is a right, not abolished, but exercised by the modern capitalist. In feudal days, the “looks” of the female vassal was just so much “thrown in for good measure” for the feudal master. The historic scene in Sue’s *Pilgrim’s Shell* between a female vassal and her feudal bishop portrays the point to perfection. In the feudalism of capitalism, however, “looks” are not “thrown in for good measure”; they are a positive “economic value”; what is “thrown in for good measure” is the work of the female operative with “looks” that are liked.

Then also, Miss Weeks is evidence in herself. The young lady’s case is like Tolstoy’s. Not all the privations Tolstoy may suffer can make him realize the status of the toiler. His privations are self-inflicted. He can end them when he wills. To him they are a mental luxury. A “sufferer” so circumstanced can have no

appropriate idea of the status of the class whose sufferings are not to be run away from, or ended at will. So with Miss Weeks' "experience." Tolstoy's "revolutionary" works savor, unknown to himself, of his capacity to end his woes; hence they are mere lamentations, generally insipid, the fit stuff for "pink tea" Socialists. Miss Weeks' thesis can not choose but partake of Tolstoy's artificiality. Let the young lady whine as she may about the hardships—physical, mental and moral—of the factory; the circumstance that, with her, not privation, but absolute comfort was the alternative to the spurning of the "visits of the superintendent who liked her 'looks,'" utterly disqualifies her from forming a proper estimate of the nature of the hell that a girl is driven to step into when she asks for work at the factory.

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

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