

Pitiful End of a Brave Struggle

VICTIM OF SOCIAL ISOLATION LOSING IN HARD FIGHT YIELDS TO DESPAIR

TWO LAST LETTERS WRITTEN BY MRS. LUCY F. JELLISON WHO COMMITTED SUICIDE

Heart Rending Story of Her Life Struggle Told by Her One True Friend--Children Born in a Boxcar, Who Learned to Lie and Steal and Snatch Things Just Because They Never Had Enough to Eat--Awful Indictment of Social Conditions--Need of Higher Socialization of the Community Life Along Broader Lines.

The Capital Journal editorial of Saturday, entitled "The Crime of Isolation," has been widely read and commented upon in connection with the tragic death of Mrs. Lucy F. Jellison, who killed her four children with cyanide of potassium and then took the poison herself. The editorial statements are remarkably sustained by the following letters written by Mrs. Jellison just before her death. Letter number one was written to a friend who called on her the same evening before she had posted it, and it was delivered by Mrs. Jellison after she had probably reached to die. The second letter was written to the same woman after she had called and sustains the editorial comment that the woman died of social isolation, and that the Christian duty of loving our neighbors and taking an interest in them from a humane standpoint was shockingly omitted in her case. The letters and the story of her life as read at the assembly of the Salem branch of the socialists are given below:

Letter No. 1. Feb. 28th, 1912.

My Dear Friend,
Please do not fret one bit. For more than seven years I've worked and planned and we have managed to exist but we have never had enough to live. I have always hoped for better things and worked all I could.
This last blow has been one too many. It is not possible for me alone to earn enough to keep my family.
As I told you, they have developed habits from being left alone so much, that other people would not be willing to have them in their homes. I can't take them to my people even if I could have raised the money, which I could not.
I've looked every way for some other way and I can not see any. It is only lately that I have found out all of the evil consequences of our hard life. Perhaps I do not know all yet, but it is enough that I feel I should do wrong to leave such citizens as my poor babies will make. My strength has failed fast. It is only a matter of a short time till I could not work at all; and then what?
I cannot face it any more. Epsy has done a large share of my work for 3 weeks, but the law would not allow that long, even if by that means we could live, which we could not on that salary.
My head is so muddled I can not think even--and I've nothing to live on till I might possibly get over this blow.
Good bye, dear little woman. I wish I could thank you and all the rest of the good people who have ever shed a ray of sunshine over my way. You have your work to do, so do not give us a thought. Be good to "the boys." I have them much in mind. I hope the few books I've sent them will bring them a few minutes pleasure, perhaps even a little profit.
I wish you your full measure of success in your work. Sincerely yours,
LUCY F. JELLISON.

Letter No. 2. Feb. 28. My Dear.

Your visit tonight has filled me full again of the wish to benefit others, but I cannot see my way. There is

can you tell WHY it has not been answered? I fear I am a bit of a fatalist, else may be an infidel. I hardly believe that, though. There has always been a very real God to me, although not just what most of the ministers tell us. My dear, even yet I pray with all my soul, "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me." but I cannot finish it in the same spirit as our Leader did. Were I only concerned I could. But if I had no biddies I could make my way easily. "Go for my wandering boy tonight. Go search for him where you will, but bring him to me with all his blight, and tell him I love him still!"--It is an untold agony to me that he feels so hard to me. It is true that I've punished him, but it was to try to keep him from forming habits that were detrimental to him as an individual and to the state, too. And it seems I've made a grievous mistake. I do not understand. These next three never were good like he used to be. They can do, but will not. I can take any one alone and work with them and they will do fairly well, but together there is nothing.

What can I do? It is not right to rear them so. I wish you knew all my life. There is so much you could make use of but I've no time for more. Just this. I've lost my grip and grip and all is dark. Forgive me, dear, and forget as soon as possible. Should you meet my lad give him a kind word for my sake.
LUCY.
All this and I've not said what I wanted to, at all. GOOD NIGHT.

THE HEART STORY OF A MARTYRED MOTHER

By One Who Knew Her Best. On Saturday morning of March 2, 1912, occurred at 469 Liberty street, the most heartbreaking and pitiful tragedy ever recorded in the annals of Salem, when the mother of four little children administered cyanide of potassium to them, and after tenderly closing their innocent young eyes, and composing each child in form for the last long sleep, she bravely swallowed her own portion and lay down beside them, dressed all ready for her grave.

She was a woman of refinement and culture, well educated and intellectual. She was for some time a student at the Monmouth Normal school and lacked but a few weeks work to complete the requirements for a life diploma from that institution. In a recent civil service examination she stood third on the list for appointment to the Salem postoffice. On several occasions she has won honors where skill or learning were put to the test. The past eight years have been a constant and bitter struggle for the barest necessities of life for herself and babies.

Maud Jellison, aged eight, was born in a box car as she is sitting at a little way place in Oregon, where the mother and her three little ones had taken refuge for a few weeks. She picked up and worked whenever and wherever she was able, always keeping her little flock together and trying to train them up as best she could. During the last three or four years of her life she has lived in Salem, and here her youngest child was born in a bare, comfortable house at the end of Twelfth street.

For months before this baby came the family lived on flour and lard, which was made into bread, and water gravy. The mother's portion was a half slice of bread, but if she had work to do for some neighbor she took a whole slice "to give strength" for the added task. While she was too ill to work, the Eastern Star lodge helped her some. As soon as her strength returned, in any measure, she obtained work at a cafeteria, and it was about that time that she removed to her last earthly home on Liberty street. Here, with the help of her eldest son, whose wages paid the rent and the milk bill, she managed to feed the hungry little mouths and to keep the three children in school.

But her work took her away from home all the time, and she realized that her little ones were forming habits that were ominous to them.

"O," she said to me on one occasion, "you don't know how it grieves me to see them running wild like this."

"O, you who are housed and fed--no matter how humble your home, how can you have aught but compassion for her whose life was so bare--so utterly devoid of every comfort? Yes, bare even of the opportunity to train and guide her babies. Could you have stood with me that day and looked into her dear, wan face, with all the wild, fierce pain of mother love, the infinite yearning and the tenderness--the grief for the wrongs she could not overcome--O, then you could never utter one word of aught but pity for her sad fate. "My poor babies," she continued, "they need 'mothering,' and I can only feed them."

I proposed helping her to find homes for them until the night succeed in obtaining a better-paid employment, and then--a wounded doe could not have shown more pain than was depicted in her wide, startled eyes and trembling lips.

"No--no," she said with that wild, hunted look, like some wounded thing. "My children--are--'undesirable.'" I tell you this, dear, because you wish to help me, and I must be truthful."

Then with bowed head, and eyes streaming tears upon her clasped hands, she chokingly told me: "There is not one of them but will steal, not one but will lie. We have lived so hard--so hard--they have learned to snatch like little animals. They have longed for simple comforts, and O, so often my poor babies have been hungry--hungry--not only one time, but for days and days and days! Forgive me, dear, for saying this to you, but

you must know that no one would take my children into a home and keep them."

Came the day when she was left alone in all her suffering and poverty. Grief and illness soon subtracted her little strength and courage--adding also to the malady which she had borne in secret all these years, and worse than all else, at this time, came the knowledge of further wrongs to her children--because of the sad neglect which they were forced to endure.

You mothers of little girls, answer in your own mother-hearts why it was that during the last three weeks of her service at the cafeteria she always took Epsy with her--ostensibly to help her with her work, but does not your mother instinct tell you more than that? What would you do, dear mothers?

And she, remembering the hard, hard days of pinching want, the suffering of mind and body--the cold and hunger and misery, she could not face it all again.

She took her babies with her because she could not leave them to the mercies of a world that had given her nothing but torture. She could not bear the thought of the "undesirable citizen," that to her dear mother's mind they must some day be, because of their early environment, and the lack of the "mothering" that she could never give them.

Her mother-heart could not permit them to grow up in a society that was only waiting to punish their mistakes of life with bolts and bars.

O, mothers! You who read these lines! What would you have done? She had even sold their school books to help pay for food--I know, for I sold of them for her. Her honest was due, and the illness with which she had fought for so long had returned with all its torture.

Does honor mean so little, after all? Does it mean nothing to you that she held fast, her woman's crown of chastity, through all those eight long years of weariness and suffering, and watching her babies starved and cold, and that she had like a beacon light shining out before all the world of tired, hungry mothers, who are bread-winners for their children.

All the loneliness and heart-hunger and suffering only made her stronger in her purity, and so at last, when the burden became too heavy for her tired shoulders, she laid it down in fear and trembling, but bravely to the very last, doing the thing she felt best for her babies and herself.

Vague rumors have drifted about the town of a "farm" that she owned. That "farm" consists of three lots and a miserable two-room cabin in lots out-of-the-world place of some two or three hundred inhabitants down near the coast somewhere. She could not possibly make a living there. Then came a rumor that she had an "elegant bedroom suite and a piano." I have been in her house many, many times and I never saw such a thing as a "bedroom suite" of any kind. As to the piano--she did have a piano that her mother had helped her to buy more than ten years ago. It was shipped from Kansas, and stood in the freight office over seven months, till she could finally get it out. That was several years ago. I, myself, have been trying to sell this piano for her for \$50. I tried for nearly a month, and couldn't get it.

It is so easy to be angry and reproachful toward those whom we have wronged.

And now, comrades, I must say a word to you, for you can understand this pitiful tragedy as no one else can. Your hearts are brave and strong to face things as they are.

A constant stream of the morbidly curious fled through the morgue, to gaze upon the dead faces that in life they had never given more than a passing glance at.

Strange hands placed great clusters of beautiful flowers over the little, silent bodies, and in the little dead hands that but yesterday reached out to them for bread.

Hush! See--no flowers are in the mother's thin, worn hands! She who had borne all the years of crushing sorrow and soul torture; who had ever tried to shield them from pain and cold and hunger, always with the smallest portion of food for her own, and with the hardest tasks for her own, she who risked even the anger of her God to do what she felt to be best for her "babies," was ignored in this last tribute that the living can pay to the dead.

Not that it mattered to her now--she never had flowers given her when she could enjoy their fragrances and their loveliness, so why should they be given now? Only this--the outward expression of the things that people think. O, society! Have you not even a flower for her chastity? Not one?

Dear dead heart, slain by the greed and advice of present day economics! What do you care for their flowers? You asked bread for your babies and they gave them--flowers!

And do they hope thereby to cover up all these years of neglect and the pangs of hunger and the heartaches and the sorrow that in life they never once thought about?

A lady brought an armful of pale, spring flowers and laid them lovingly about the sweet, wan face and over the tired heart. Another stood by her side and added clusters of purple violets. One said "what a mockery it is to offer her flowers, when it was bread she wanted."

Then she of the violets replied, "yes, dear, but I feel that I have the right to offer flowers, for many, many times have I given her bread."

A man looked pityingly upon all the childish faces, and then turned disdainfully away from the mother's side, saying, "I can't bear to look at a woman who would do such a thing as this."

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poor, tolling, human hands, that never can enjoy any of the lavish splendors that they create--never have anything of beauty or loveliness until are stilled forever, and then some sorrowing friend places within the lifeless fingers the cluster of making flowers that tries in vain to cover up from the eyes of us, comrades, the worn, tired hands that have been defrauded all these weary years of their products. O, the mockery of it all! To fill starved hands with flowers!

And you who "cannot bear to look upon a woman who could do such a thing as that," after the first shock is over and the "three days" of morbid curiosity is satiated, will you all go back to old accustomed places, and let things drift again, trying to make yourselves believe that "all is well?"

Will you tell us that these cold, hungry, starved little "motherless" children had equal chance with the rich man's son to "make good" in this world of dollars and cents?

Will you still talk to us about "room at the top"? Yes, there is room at the top. But, listen! Just so long as some climb to the "top" they must climb over the dead bodies of their fallen brothers, and she, and her children, are, after all, but stepping stones in the system that tells us to "climb to the top." That is how people get to the top--over the these weaker ones.

When I stood in the morgue that desolate day and looked into the quiet face of her whom I had known and loved so well but yesterday, I knew that it was not her own hand which had wrought all this havoc--but the hands that wrings from labor its last

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