

# The Cotton Mill

Ernest Crosby

Ogre dread!  
Slavery raised from the dead!  
I see you-not in the fields as of yore --  
But stalking the factory floor,  
Cracking your whip overhead,  
While pale-faced children droop in the rumbling roar,  
With tiny fingers twining the hateful thread,  
And dreaming of bed.

Half gone is the night.  
To left and right  
An acre or more of dim-lit whirr extends.  
For six dull hours' interminable length  
These babies have strained their strength; --  
Another six must wear away  
Before, at break of day,  
Their torment ends.

What is that piercing cry?  
Only another thumb and finger crushed;  
Another little hand awry.  
The cry is hushed.  
The girl has fainted, but the surgeon comes;  
How skilfully he cuts and binds and sews.  
Fingers to sever, and thumbs,  
How well he knows!  
Carelessness maims and kills,  
And children will be careless in the mills.  
Now he leads her out, never to climb  
Those stairs again to earn her nightly dime.

Yes, in this dismal hall  
Broods the angel of death.  
Many his shapes.  
He lurks in their very breath --  
In the cloud of cotton-dust that hangs like a pall,  
Over all.  
Strange that a child escapes,  
For dropsy, the wasting sickness, the fatal cough,  
Crouch, ready to carry them off.

In a dozen years from to-day  
Half of these infant slaves  
Will sleep in forgotten graves,  
More happy there than those who stay,  
Still bound to the wheel of the mill,  
And racked and tortured still.

Will a monument ever rise to attest  
How they fell at the Ogre's behest?  
Yes, far away in the North  
Will a Herod's palace set forth  
Why they laboured and died;  
For its splendours will hardly hide  
Its foundation laid on their tombs,  
And the walls of its sumptuous rooms  
Cemented with children's blood, where lingers  
The trace of bruised and wearied flesh and mutilated fingers.

Murder will out;  
And the palace will tell  
How its corner-stone stands firm in hell  
With a shout!  
And, who knows? our Herod may build  
With the gold of the killed  
A church to his devilish god -- his Moloch, who, from his throne  
Gave him the world, as he thinks, for his own.  
And asylum, and hospital, too,  
May spring from the bleaching bones  
Of these innocent ones,  
Crying to heaven the truth  
Of their massacred youth,  
And the story of Herod anew  
In an epitaph true.

These be thy triumphs, O Trade!  
Triumphs of peace, do they say? -- nay, of war.  
At the cannon's foul mouth afar,  
Sore afraid,  
Brown men, and yellow and black,  
Buy what they never would lack  
When the Ogre says "Buy!"  
And with white lands as well it is war that we wage.  
Let them die!  
Their trade must be shattered to naught in this age  
Of the dollar supreme.  
We must conquer. Our dream

Is a beggared world at our feet.  
So we draw up the armies of trade  
And invade,  
With the children in front, to fall first, as is meet --  
Children of mill and of sweat shop and mine --  
And behind them the women stand,  
Jaded and wan, in line;  
Then come the hosts of the diggers and builders, artisans, craftsmen and all.  
It is fine!  
It is grand!  
Let them fall!  
We are safe in the rear, with the loot in our hand.

And you, makers of laws  
Who are true to the gold-bag's cause --  
Who will not interfere --  
To whom commerce alone is dear,  
And who pay any price --  
Child's life, or woman's, or man's --  
For its plans --  
Makers of devil's laws, breakers of God's,  
Open your eyes!  
See what it means to succeed!  
Confess once for all that you worship the Ogre of Greed.  
And then  
Turn again!  
For know, there are scorpions' rods  
Of remorse, and dishonour, and shame,  
In the wake of his name.  
Ogre dread!  
Send him and his slavery back to the dead!