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Professor Proctor

History 54 – Section A

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Essay Three

The following is a fictitious set of diary entries by a factory-working mother in the latter portion of the year 1795, serving to describe her ever-worsening quality of life.

*August*

When did life become so hard? Money so thin? I remember the good old days when everyday life was predictable and a source of money was reliable. Now, nothing is certain. But alas, not all is bad. My husband and I thank the Lord each day for the biggest blessing we could have ever asked for – our beautiful ten year old son. My, is he growing so fast! Between my husband working in the mines (he is so big and strong!) and me doing odd jobs at home, we have been able to support ourselves as well as our son and his nanny. We pray it shall be all up from here!

*September*

Much has changed in the last month, and none of it good. Despite my husband’s steady income, money has become continually more and more scarce. We want the world for our son of course, and to keep him healthy and pay his nanny I decided to get a job of my own. I work now in the spinning room of a textile factory, and it has been such a shock. It’s not all bad. The girls are all so nice and many are a lot like me! The owner is very mean though. He works us so hard. I work from 6am to 9pm every day but Sunday, my only rest. When I come home, I hardly have energy left to ask my son about his day! And the conditions are so harsh in the factory. I feel exhausted all the time and I’m always coughing and thirsty because there is so much dust.

*October*

Things are much worse than I ever expected. First of all, my poor son. Even though my husband and I are now both working long hours, wages are still not high enough to support our son’s activities. We felt like we had no other choice but to have him work as well. There was just no other way to make ends meet. So, now he goes to work every day with his father at the mines. He is so cute. I can tell it is hard for him, but he wants more than anything to make his father proud. And I know he is! For me, life at the factory is worse than ever. As the year goes on, the owner seems to grow meaner. I don’t know how much faster and harder I can physically work, but I know if I don’t try he will just replace me with another girl. Several of my friends in the factory have been hurt on the job. One of my best friends put her hand where she shouldn’t have and got it completely mangled. I feel so bad for her. I would help but I have hardly enough money to survive. My cough is getting worse, but so far I have been lucky enough to keep clear of injuries and lashings from the owner.

*November*

Thankfully my husband and son are still doing alright, but this has been the worst month for me so far. The owner has increased our hours even further, requiring us to come in at 5am now. I sometimes get cold and clumsy with my fingers and make mistakes. The owner hates this. He straps and beats me. Once, I was working so hard, I fainted on the spot. And he even strapped me for that too! I don’t see many of my old friends anymore. They have all been hurt and replaced by new faces. I sometimes wonder if tomorrow will be my last day in the factory.

*December – no entry; death due to pneumonia caused by freezing conditions at work*