

Testimony of 17 year old Patience Kershaw in 1842

It's good of you to ask me,
Sir, to tell you how I spend my days
Down in a coal black tunnel, Sir,
I hurry corves to earn my pay.
The corves are full of coal, kind Sir,
I push them with my hands and head.
It isn't lady-like, but Sir,
you've got to earn your daily bread.

I push them with my hands and head,
and so my hair gets worn away.
You see this baldy patch I've got,
it shames me like I just can't say.
A lady's hands are lily white,
but mine are full of cuts and segs.
And since I'm pushing all the time,
I've got great big muscles on my legs.

I try to be respectable, but sir,
the shame, God save my soul.
I work with naked, sweating men
who curse and swear and hew the coal.
The sights, the sounds, the smells, kind Sir,
not even God could know my pain.
I say my prayers, but what's the use?
Tomorrow will be just the same.

Now, sometimes, Sir, I don't feel well,
my stomach's sick, my head it aches.
I've got to hurry best I can.
My knees are weak, my back near breaks.
And then I'm slow, and then I'm scared
these naked men will batter me.
But they're not to blame, for if I'm slow,
their families will starve, you see.

Now all the lads, they laugh at me,
and Sir, the mirror tells me why.
Pale and dirty can't look nice.
It doesn't matter how hard I try.
Great big muscles on my legs,
a baldy patch upon my head.
A lady, Sir? Oh, no, not me!
I should've been a boy instead.

I praise your good intentions, Sir,
I love your kind and gentle heart
But now it's 1842,
and you and I, we're miles apart.
A hundred years and more will pass
before we're standing side by side
But please accept my grateful thanks.
God bless you Sir, at least you tried.