

**OUR SOCIAL QUESTION**

By HENRY GEORGE III

**M**OST men have come to accept it as the nature of things that some should be rich and some should be poor, and that the gross inequalities in the distribution of wealth imply no fault in our institutions. I say most men, for when the majority of men start to think for themselves the order of things will change. The man who yesterday was suffering from want will today, if fortunate, look down upon his less fortunate brother and callously say, "Well let him work, I had to work for what I got, and if he would work he would be equally fortunate."

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We are told that this is a free country, that every man and woman has a vote and that each of us has a chance. The ditch digger's son may become president; the poor boy today may be rich tomorrow and the rich man's grandson will probably end up being poor. If a man has courage, daring, prudence and foresight he will make a fortune, and if he lacks these abilities he has only himself and his progenitors to blame. If one man works hard and gets little it is because he lacks the wit, so must use the brawn, while for the business titan there may be no physical and very little mental work required.

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We continually hear it said that the poor man remains poor because he will not practice the first economy and save enough money to accumulate capital with which to make himself more productive. We are told that the inequalities in position result from the inequalities of human nature, from the difference in powers, talents and adaptabilities of different men. That the man who swings a hammer should expect little more than enough to subsist upon, while for the wizard of Main street, his gigantic intellect entitles him to his fortune. All of this colossal inequality is heaped upon the shoulders of good fortune and good breeding. We are told that we are great or small in our position because of the talent Almighty God

gave us and how well we use it. On the one hand we find the man who has worked long hours the year around for a few hundred dollars and on the other the great-grandson of an early settler to Main street who while living in California or Chile or England derives a huge fortune in rents from ten thousand tenants in tenderloin districts. Still we are told that it is breeding and breaks that count every time, and we have come to tacitly accept the Divine Right to Kings in spirit while we scoff at such inequality in form.

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From the anatomical and physiological standpoint there is little difference in men, the smallest being little short of two feet and the tallest not much over eight. As with their structure so with their function, both in digestive abilities, reproductive powers, and creative capacities. There is in all the world little difference in our biological needs and abilities, yet everywhere we turn we see such tremendous economic differences, that no one can accept the theory that blood and breaks count. There is something else, and because there is something else, our governments have tried to scale down these gigantic fortunes through taxation, while labor unions have tried to protect the poor man from being ground down by instituting legislative barriers to the overworking of the man who has only his labor to sell.

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We have deep wrongs in our present method of society, wrongs which make every thinking man tremble. But these wrongs are not inherent in man, for like our own bodies, that are made up of countless cells, each has a need and benefits from his fellow and can help the body social. These wrongs are not inherent in man nor in the constitution of our fundamental concept of government.

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