

From the book:

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THE POVERTY THAT HURTS.

By Sidney J. Phillips

“We are so accustomed to poverty that even in the most advanced countries we regard it as the natural lot of the great masses of the people; that we take it as a matter of course that even in our highest civilization large classes should want the necessaries of healthful life, and the vast majority should only get a poor and pinched living by the hardest toil.”—Henry George.

These words were written over thirty years ago by the author of “Progress and Poverty.” The appalling truth and the injustice of the conditions described in them is as marked today as when they were written. In fact, it is the opinion of many that they apply even more closely to present day social conditions. Among the masses the struggle for existence is growing more and more intense. Children, instead of being able to enjoy healthy recreation, are sent into the streets half-starved to pass away the time they are not at school, or else are compelled to toil to help provide the daily bread. There are women who, instead of being at home engaged in household duties, are slaving at men’s work for a mere pittance. Need we wonder why some of them throw up the struggle in hopeless despair and sell their souls? Why only the other day one of our most prominent journals gave the case of a woman who worked from eight in the morning till seven at night for 1s. 5d. per day! There are men who rise at break of day, toil laboriously through long hours, till it is time to sleep, for a miserable allowance, miscalled wages, barely sufficient to keep them and their dependents in the land of the living. There are many who have not even this opportunity. Sad indeed is their fate. They are treated like curs; spurned and kicked; satisfying the cravings of hunger with a chance crust doled out by charity or earned by a casual job now and then. To a large mass of the people, life’s promise is but a promise of one great struggle, literally from cradle to grave, to keep body and soul together.

These statements are not assertions of opinion, but a matter of positive fact. Look around you; the confirmation stares at you in all its hideousness from all sides! It is a striking circumstance that side by side with the greatest wealth, is found the greatest poverty. Where there is most wealth it is in fewest hands. Surely this is unjust? Surely there is something wrong? Surely it is not a necessity to progress?

If human affairs were managed on free and just lines, no one would suffer hunger or want through lack of opportunity to apply their abilities to the satisfaction of their needs and desires; there would be no haunting spectre of misery and poverty to hover round people so that every day is one of nerve racking anxiety of what the morrow might bring. But our affairs are not run on free and just lines, and that is why, as Henry George says in the lines quoted above, we have so become accustomed to poverty that we look on it as an evil that must be ever present; as a condition that is part of Nature's scheme. Henry George, however, saw that these hellish conditions are unnatural, immoral, and what is more important, unnecessary. He saw in them, not as we are often told, the ordination of a Just Creator, but the mismanagement of men and divergence from natural laws.

The birds of the air, the beasts on the land, the fishes in the sea, lacking the enterprise and ingenuity of humanity; who ever heard of them suffering from want or dying of starvation? Their lives are ruled by Nature; they do not try to thwart her laws.

Henry George reminded us that the Creator's gift is a bounteous nature and power to utilize it; that the workings of men have made it impossible for many to get sufficient and impossible for many more to get plenty; though Nature's store is illimitable. He showed the possibility of restoring Nature's rule; of giving to all the opportunity to obtain plenty and to lead happy and rational lives. This was his religion, and it is the religion of his followers. This religion is the moral force behind the movement for the Taxation of Land Values. Land Values Taxation is not the goal; it is the means to the end; a political action that will have a beneficial economic effect. Through it its supporters see the attainment of a

prosperous, happy, and moral humanity. Could there be a nobler ideal?

Stir yourself; look around and take in the full significance of present social conditions, and the finer feeling or sentiment that is in you will be appalled and shocked. You will begin to wonder whether the Creator intended the world to be what it is; that such vice and misery should abound. Generous thought will bring home to you the conviction that these conditions are unjust, and that we are all, every one of us, the worse off because of them. You will begin to think whether the present state of affairs is necessary and whether it cannot be put right. You may be sceptical and say that those who are free from the cares of poverty are far from being crimeless and viceless, that the weakness of human nature is to blame. But human nature is fashioned by surrounding conditions. A study of the history of human affairs and economic conditions reveals that centuries of poverty and oppression are responsible for the misery and vice that have accompanied the progress of civilization. No physical disease is more infectious than moral disease, and engendered by poverty, immorality has spread until it has come to be regarded as a part of human nature, just as poverty has come to be regarded as the inevitable accompaniment to progress. We all have in us that better nature that is sensible to and suffers much through the misery that surrounds us, and would be happy beyond measure if we could see the establishment of a prosperous and happy community.

What has caused the present state of affairs, and how can it be abolished? Many good men have tried to get at the root of the matter and sought a remedy. Some have said, in all good faith, that there is periodical over-production, and that the remedy is to regulate the output of goods. To these we say, take a visit to the slums. Look at the men, women, and children there! Do they wear a superfluity of good clothes? Go into their homes! Are they too palatial? Is there too much room? Are the sanitary arrangements too elaborate? Watch them at their meals! Are they over-fed? Is what they eat too palatable?

Some say that the solution of the poverty problem lies in the

solution of the drink question. Here effect is mistaken for cause. Intemperance is but a phase of the poverty disease. Some again, in this country, say that Free Trade is the cause and Protection the remedy. But are Protectionist countries any more free than Free Trade countries from social ills? Travel the world over, and no matter in what country you make observations. Protectionist or Free Trade, the same evils, the same poverty, the same vice, will be evident. Some believe the remedy to be the nationalization of all the means of production and distribution of wealth. This we believe to be impracticable and unjust to individual rights.

Deep poverty is prevalent in all countries; it is common to them all. The cause is a common one, and the remedy is a common one. In "Progress and Poverty" Henry George shows in a startlingly clear and vivid light the reason why poverty has accompanied progress, and the only way to put matters right.

It is the duty of everyone, rich or poor, young or old, of whatever political creed or religious denomination, to consider carefully anything that promises to help in the solution of the question of the emancipation of humanity from the slavery of present social conditions. In "Progress and Poverty," we believe, is the message of freedom, and we appeal to you to read it and study it. If you will do this we have no doubt but that you will join us in our fight.