

## The Curse of Poverty.

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One often hear some longfaced, "I am resigned to my fate," person say solemnly. "What a blessing is poverty, and what a curse is wealth!" They are the people who speak with disdain of the "almighty dollar", the "filthy lucre", which is the root of all evil; but they love the juggle of those same dollars as well as their neighbors, and many of them would hold on to a little, dirty, copper cent till the very Indian on it howled from pain.

After all, is it not the want of the "almighty dollar" that is the root of all evil rather than the presence of it? Is it not the intense longing to possess rather than the possession which causes so much crime and misery? And, is it not more than all, the necessity of the many warring against the luxurious wants of the few?

What is there that so maddens a man as the sight of a lady dressed in the richest silk and heaviest furs when his own poor wife has hardly enough clothing to cover her shivering limbs and every thread in her thin garment counts so much of the toil, and sacrifice she has made somewhere to obtain the little that she has?

I would make a distinction between poor and poverty. To be poor means to have a little you can call your own, perhaps, an employment that brings returns sufficient (by careful planning) to meet the wants of each day; but poverty means to be without sufficient food and clothing, to be hungry and cold, to be weakened by excessive exposure and so ready to contract any disease that may be prevalent. It means to live without any of the pleasures in life and to die uncared for and unknown. What more is there in life worth living for?

Poverty may come upon any one, and in almost any way. A man may work hard, and work all the time, but no matter what he does he cannot get ahead, he get behind instead - a little this year, a little more added next year - and so on until he has passed through being poor to actual poverty. Suppose he is a farmer - he works hard - everyone knows how a farmer must work - and just as he is getting started upward one of his best horses dies his corn dries up and is nothing but chaff, or maybe his wife gets sick and he must

spend all he has saved to pay a doctor, or suppose he is a labourer in town in the bank where he has deposited his small savings, but he is temporarily disabled and loses his position, so it goes on from one loss to another and he is left without money or a chance to get any.

Some people are poor and will always be so not from any apparent fault of theirs but because they seem to have been picked out by Providence to be poor and miserable and nothing can make them otherwise.

We might see, if we looked along the streets of some of our large cities, little serious, sad faced, children, hardly old enough to talk plainly, walking along in the early morning to work in one of the great factories. Then the frail little creatures, side by side with another and often times grandmother, begin their struggle for food and shelter and clothing, when others of their age have scarcely left the cradle! The responsibilities of life are landed to them early, and they become pinched and stunted from lack of food and from confinement in close, suffocating, work

shops that would kill a strong man in time, and not a long time either.

Beside these little workers there are waifs and strays drifting about the streets without home or employment and nothing they can call their own but hunger, cold, and wretchedness. The miserable den which is the only place they have ever known as home, is so distasteful, even to them who have never known what home meant, that they seek crime in order to have a better sleeping place in the station house.

Thousands whose only crime is to have no home, no friends and no money, are too proud to ask for charity, and die like a poor dumb creature in some infrequented corner of the city. Thousands more are shut out from the land of charity because someone has imposed on generosity and the land that would give does not, for it can not know whether it is giving to true poverty or an impostor.

Can one wonder at the crime committed in the world when we see starvation staring in the face so many people

to whom none speak a kind word, whom none wish to employ, and none will give the necessaries of life! And is it such a crime to take from those living in opulence a little of their fortune and place it where it will save the lives of all that is dear on earth! I have but stop to consider the motive that has prompted many an innocent person to steal, the hatred we feel for the offense will be tempered by the pity we feel for the offender.

Suppose a case in point, a frail, delicate, woman with three small children is left a widow; her husband was accidentally killed while constructing a bridge, and left her but little money to provide for his family. She had never worked outside her own home, and was too frail to take up any task that would call for great exertion or close confinement; but her children must be fed and clothed. She got a little plain sewing and by as close application as she endure, managed to make fifty cents a day. How could she keep herself and three children on that! She soon found

she was getting behind, but she could do nothing else. How to live, was the ever present tormenting thought in her mind! One night, after having at last gotten her children asleep, for hunger made them wakeful, she walked out of the house and down the street till she came in front of a large pleasant looking house, not extravagantly but more than comfortably furnished. What was it urged her to steal in and take whatever would best serve her in her great need! Surely it was not the mere love of gain! She was starving, and, more than that, her children were calling for bread which she could not give them. The world would look on and allow her to do it then stand back at respectful distance and call her thief, a miserable sinning creature fit subject to bring before stern justice. But who can say her motive was not good, her pride not honourable! Who can say that her reward hereafter will be less than some who held up their hands in horror at the sacrifice of self she made!

Every day, men and women die in the streets of our cities because they have no

bread to put in their mouths, no roofs to cover their heads, no clothing to protect their bodies. Men and who, every day, are one step lower in civilization, one step nearer a paupers grave. Miserable creatures, some of whom have not even heard of the world beyond, but pass to that "bourne from which no traveller returns", there to receive their reward or punishment. Who can say they have not filled their place in the world, that it is not better for their living lives in it! Who can say that their cross has <sup>not</sup> been a heavy one, their burden not a light one! We can not help pitying them, nor wondering why they could not have been better prepared to battle with the world, better prepared to fill their place in the world, but, since whatever is, is right, so be it. Yet we can not help thinking how much happier they might have been", had their cross been easier, their burden lighter.

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