

POVERTY

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Poverty by James Platt

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P O V E R T Y .

BY

JAMES PLATT, F.S.S.,

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"Do what thou canst, and then invoke the Gods.
God helps the man who toils to help himself."

HENRY MORSE STEPHENS

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INTRODUCTION.

"To mortal man great loads allotted be,
But of all packs, no pack like poverty."

HERRICK.

POVERTY has been one of the most difficult social problems of all ages. How to lessen it has been the aim of every good man in every country; how to "extirpate it," how to make men equal, has been the dream of those who will not recognize the inevitable and strive after what is practicable. And the last attempt by Mr. George gives us, as the "sole and sovereign remedy," a scheme of confiscation, the taking by the law of property, which society, opinion, law, is bound to preserve for its own sake—a cold-blooded, unscrupulous attempt at wholesale robbery, which all honest men must repudiate in sadness and in shame. It is an insult to Englishmen to ask them to do an act that would put them on a level with bandits and highway robbers. The solution of this problem must be sought in another direction; and if I fail to prove this to you, study the works of other writers more competent. My opinion is that the only possibility for the diminution of poverty is to start every one in the race resolved to improve his condition, and to make them understand that, to achieve this result, they must be more apt and skilful in their respective avocations than their predecessors or rivals, but, above all, to be actuated by a desire to develop their "better self," the higher part of their nature, so that, as they become wiser and more intellectual, they will also become better men and women, more just and true, more tolerant, more sympathetic, more

kindly disposed to feel for those less favourably equipped for the battle of life.

The Italians have a proverb, "The better is the enemy of the good." It is our duty, while there is a *better* capable of attainment, not to rest satisfied with the *good*; and having attained the *better*, to press forward towards the *best*, although it may be for the time unattainable. To lessen poverty, to get rid of much of the misery that exists, men must have a more practical training, be better qualified for earning their daily bread, and must recognize the necessity for a higher intelligence, to get a living in an advanced and complicated social system like our own in 1884. It is of the greatest importance for the national progress, that it be impressed upon each one as a duty to strive after improvement, to have an ideal before us which we strive earnestly to overtake; and to understand that although we may not overtake it, yet our struggle to overtake it is in itself of inestimable advantage to our intellectual and moral character.

Poverty! Are there causes for poverty? Yes, to a certain extent, it is the natural result of their condition. They enter upon the struggle of life heavily weighted with all that keeps man to the level of the beast. Born in and accustomed to life in a small room, which serves as the living and sleeping room of the family; the room foul and dirty, their only recreation idling or playing in the street; uncleanly, familiar with drink, and its attendants, vice, quarelling and crime,—it is surprising that the "outcast poor," the "lowest" class of our people, are not worse than they are. The few among them who work on, hoping to get away from such horrible surroundings, are like a rare plant in a bed of weeds, and support the belief that there exists in all great power of higher development, if you will incite the same to action by giving it a "motive." All theories of social reform are valueless unless their object is to degrade the man in his own sight, so that, from his own intense feeling of disgust at the wreck he has become, he will willingly grasp the rope held out to save him, and work heart and soul with his only true friend, the man who is trying to "make him save