

**BRIEF ESSAYS ON
SUBJECTS OF
SOCIAL ECONOMY**

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Brief Essays on Subjects of Social Economy by Thomas Lewin

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THOMAS LEWIN

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P R E F A C E.

THESE brief Essays were mostly contributed to a Periodical published monthly in the village of Eltham, in Kent, in the years 1854-5.

Reading, as I did, with much satisfaction, the purposes of the "Eltham Journal," as set forth in its first number, it appeared to me to offer a convenient and opportune means of inculcating a better acquaintance with the leading and most important principles of social economy. I felt sure that if I could do this in a manner to engage attention, and to make the subjects themselves more clearly understood and better appreciated, I could not fail to render this unpretending Journal, to some extent, as useful in this respect as it might hope to be in the range of its subjects generally.

I felt also that there could not be any instruction more beneficial to those readers whose education had not conveyed to them such knowledge, nor any occupation more congenial to my own mind than that of communicating to them so much information on those important subjects as the opportunity of leisure had enabled me to acquire for myself.

Taking into review the condition of the working classes of this country, the *Eltham Journal* commences its career with an effort to explain the causes of that depressed and unimproved condition which characterizes them, notwithstanding that their wages, in many instances, exceed the stipends of Curates in the Established Church, and the average of those of Dissenting Ministers, the pay of Surgeons in the Navy and Army, and the average salaries of Clerks in warehouses and counting-houses, &c., and tracing these to the improvident and otherwise imprudent (and too often depraved) habits of their lives, and these again to that want of christian education or training, as respects the conduct of life, which their own particular position in society as much as possible requires; this *Journal* shows that, as respects the practical

interests and duties of human life, large masses of the population are, to all intents and purposes, as uncivilized as if they had been born and bred in the very heart of Africa itself. How otherwise, it remarks, are we to account for those intemperate habits in men, which impel them to the coarse, wanton, and cruel assaults on the weaker sex, and in particular on their own wives, which characterize and so shamefully disgrace the operative population of this country at the present time.

Such sad evidence and proof of depraved morality and general bad dispositions and habits of life, could surely not exist if they had been rightly taught to estimate the interests and duties of social life, and made to feel, as they should do, that their welfare, as members of a good and prosperous community, must, to a great extent, depend on the manner in which they apply themselves to render the laws subservient to their own personal welfare.

If in this way people will not help themselves, the best arrangements of society and the wisest legislation, must fail to do so ; for, as this Journal most properly and emphatically observes, "self help" lies at the foundation of all human prosperity.

To help, therefore, this small periodical, thus so

well commenced, in furtherance of these views, I wrote the papers which it has been pleased to publish under the initial signature of "T. L.," together with some others under other signatures, as also others besides these, which will be found in the following pages.

My excuse for the reproduction of these Essays in the present form, is the same which at the first impelled me to write them; and if the conviction of their importance should influence others as it has done myself through many past years of my life, I cannot doubt but they will feel as grateful for the instruction thus imparted, as I have long since felt under the deepest sense of obligation to the sources from whence I have derived so much valuable knowledge respecting the duties and obligations of social life.

Happiness is indeed our being's "end and aim;" and it may, perhaps, be expected to be found in various pursuits. Some may place it in "action," others in "ease," and it may be found in neither. But one thing is quite certain respecting the condition of man in this state of society, namely, that however happiness may be sought, either in action or in ease, so much as may be attainable on this

side of the grave, must, in the main, depend on either acting or reposing on those fundamental principles on which alone the prosperity of society itself depends.

These principles comprise the duties and responsibilities of mankind towards one another; and if there were wanting proof of the yet higher authority on which they rest, I do not know what could be more strongly alleged than the fact that when mankind form themselves into the state of civil society, it is absolutely of necessity that they adopt these principles as the foundation on which alone it can be made to subsist. They are the principles of nature, and nature is the work and ordinance of God.

THOMAS LEWIN.

Eltham, October, 1855.



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