

PAUPERISM AND CRIME

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Pauperism and Crime by W. L. Fisher

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W. L. FISHER

PAUPERISM AND CRIME

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PAUPERISM
for the Author
AND
CRIME.

BY W. L. FISHER.

"The right use of riches is more commendable than that of arms. And not to desire them at all, more glorious than to use them well."

LIFE OF CORIOLANUS.

Philadelphia:

PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHOR.

FOR SALE BY CARST & HART, AND J. GRIGG;—O. & C. & H.
CARVILL, NEW-YORK;—AND CARTER, HENDER, & BARCOCK,
BOSTON.

1834.

TO
JOSEPH TUCKERMAN,
BOSTON,
THE POOR MAN'S FRIEND,
AND TO EACH INDIVIDUAL READER,

THIS WORK IS INSCRIBED,

BY THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

THE following pages were written during the severe weather of the late winter, when the sufferings of the poor became so interesting a subject of enquiry.

Independent minds will not be displeased with an unreserved expression of private sentiments, which have no sinister object in view, no preconceived opinion to establish, no desire to control the free exercise of individual judgment.

I impugn neither the motives nor philanthropy of those who may differ from me, and can only ask, that the positions I have taken, may be examined, condemned, or approved, in the spirit of candour in which they have been written.

Wakefield, Phila. County. 1831.

PAUPERISM.

THE ARGUMENT:—The wealth of nations being limited, if any engross an unreasonable share it results in distress to others—England—Ireland—Saving Labour Machinery—Agriculture—Commerce—Idleness—Education—New England Temperance Societies—those for the Encouragement of Faithful Domesticity—luxury—public opinion—individual reformation.

THE increase of pauperism and crime in a greater relative ratio than that of general population, is a subject of interest to every reflective mind.* I have classed them toge-

* In reviewing the progress of this society through many years, the number that have since been formed for the same benevolent purpose, and the general spirit of philanthropy, which is continually devising various means for alleviating the sufferings of the poor, we are brought to the discouraging conclusion, that, notwithstanding all these efforts, the evil increases in a greater ratio than even the increase of population of the country will account for. It is beyond the power of the Board to account for this melancholy result, although the experience of the Managers might suggest some causes, as the source of much of the suffering they are called to witness. But in this spirit-stirring enterprising age, calling for labourers in every department of active business, when in the private circle, there is a constant and increasing demand for respectable, trust-worthy domestics; when the present style of living employs a greater number of persons than formerly, when wages are as high, and every article of real necessity is as cheap as at any former period, there must be some hidden, deep-rooted evil continually operating to produce the misery that presents itself for relief.—*Extract from the Report of the Female Association—Poulton's Daily Advertiser, March 17th, 1831.*

ther, because the same causes sometimes contribute to both; yet they are not necessarily connected. Many estimable and pious people become objects of charity; many crimes are committed by such as are above want.

I am aware that the subject is apparently of great intricacy—involving many interests, many plans of reformation. Simplify it, consider it in detail, not in the mass, and it is easily unraveled.

Societies are formed for relief with the most benevolent intentions; plans for education are adopted and enforced; houses for public worship, so called, are built; ministers are increased; Bibles and tracts are circulated without number; still, the evil increases; and it will be so, while the causes remain untouched!

There appears to be sufficient wealth in each state and country, to raise all above pauperism, and to make every one easy and happy in their circumstances. In this conviction, which will probably be believed by every mind, I might rest my argument, that a too great individual monopoly is the cause of pauperism in every country; and facts will support my theory, that its increase or decrease is in reference thereto!

Nations have their economy as well as individuals, which can not be violated with impunity. We require no Agrarian laws, nor

an equal division of property. Nature has given to some districts greater resources than to others, and there is no evidence that such a division would add to the general happiness.

It is true that the plan has been adopted, both nationally and in smaller communities, as it is said, with success; but it is also true, that greater relative comfort has existed under other circumstances, where men have been more left to individual responsibility.

To avoid the distresses of society, that harmony must be maintained, which in the animal economy, preserves each part in its proper place, and thus enables it to contribute to the good of the whole.

The amount of population which a country will sustain, strictly speaking, can only be limited by its ability to produce the necessities of life; this not being alike in all, one nation will naturally be richer and sustain more inhabitants than another; and the inequality of individual wealth, may vary in each in proportion thereto, without derangement to the social order; but in all countries, where it exceeds, in any considerable degree, a proper ratio in reference to the whole, the body becomes diseased and distress prevails.

Wealth, depends not on the ability of the country, but on the demand for its industry. The tobacco crop of the United States has

varied to a great extent in different years; yet it has been demonstrated, that the nett proceeds of each has been nearly the same—the increased quantity has but lessened the price. So of cotton, when in about ten years, the quantity was extended from one to two hundred millions of pounds, there was no proportionate increase in the returns; and the farmer in the neighbourhood of this city, finds his potatoes varying in price from twenty to eighty cents per bushel, and often receives an equal return from a smaller as from a larger crop. The principle is a sound one, that over-production gives no wealth—though particular circumstances may change the aspect of the immediate effect. It can not be too clearly kept in view, that the wealth of every country is limited; and I argue, that so far as this is absorbed in too great a degree by individuals, pauperism must be the result. We could readily perceive, that a town with a thousand inhabitants, limited to a thousand barrels of flour and a thousand cords of wood for an annual supply, would experience distress, if a fifth or a twentieth part of the population were to engross half or three-fourths of the whole—and money is but the sign of these things, and generally much more limited than they. There is a ratio which may be taken by each without producing distress, and no more.