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A word for the poor

When we see man in all his symmetry of form, and perfection of intellect struggling up the ascent free from the deformities and wickednesses of life; his virtues exerting a genial influence upon his fellows the scene calls up an emotion of grandeur and sublimity.

Why should not an emotion of pity thrill through ~~through~~ our frame when the object of our perceptions is wallowing in the sloughs of misery? Why should not a feeling of horror creep over us, and make our very souls tremble within their fleshy casements when we behold the being of godly form cast down from his lofty seat into ^{want} and its attendants misery and crime?

In the successive periods of the world's history the relations existing between the monarch, and the serf, the feudal lord, and the vassal; the employer, and the employe were strikingly analogous ~~to~~ those existing between the rich, and the poor.

These relations may be pointed to as undeniable characteristics of the state of civilization in the ages, and countries in which they were respectively practiced.

In Rome the rich were to the poor as the patrician to the plebeian, or slave; in the middle ages the one was to the other as the baron to his vassal; in the seventeenth century when the season of liberty opened upon us the relation between the rich, and the poor the employer and employe assumed a more liberal form.

The short sighted and enthusiastic philanthropist rushing headlong into the arena to battle for humanity has attributed the indigence, and want of the poorer to the avarice, and ambition

A word for the poor

of the wealthier classes of society as the only cause. If such is not universally the case they are not entirely ^{free} from the imputation of adding a few drops that the cup of human woe may be filled to running over.

She has added to the frightful list of misery, and desecrated the blooming countenances of innocence, and happiness the hand which has shed gems more ^{precious} than the diamond. Indolence should not be lost sight of as a cause of poverty; she has her victims as well as votaries: those who follow in her train will not always receive the propitious smiles of fortune.

Even heire (the daughter of the sun) has made the number to increase (whose charmed cup whoever tasted lost his ^{upright} shape, and downward fell into a grovelling scoundrel). The hatred which one class of society bears toward another is often inherited from our fathers; it naturally arises from our relative conditions of the so called superiority, and inferiority. He whose lot is poverty is looked upon as an inferior being; he has received the curse of the rich—he is a degraded lover in the scale of humanity than those whose coffers are filled with gold oftentimes taken from his hard earnings.

Thus a mighty barrier is cast into the road of the poor—his hopes of comfort and prosperity ~~his hopes of comfort and prosperity~~ and entirely shut out from him—a damper is thrown over his almost untiring energy—he is disheartened.

Man thus situated snatches from the world its choicest enjoyments with an epicurian indifference—regardless of the future he allows himself to be drawn into into the great maelstrom of passion, and temporary pleasure. In the language of Byron

"He would smile to see

That death would set him free"

As a nation becomes more densely populated the numbers of the laboring class increase and the price of labor decreases in the same ratio. In comparing the conditions of the poor of other nations with those of our own we are immeasurably superior in beholding the lists of the indigent of England and those of our own Country an immeasurable space is to be filled before they are equalized. But is this wholly attributable to a density of population in one and a sparsity in the other? No!!! It is owing to a tyrannical aristocracy then and a principle of equality here.

Let us should not suppose ourselves free from the ravages and gnawings of this social ulcer we should endeavor to strike at its roots before they have entered so deeply into our social frame as to preclude the possibility of arresting their progress. Although poverty may not appear in bold relief at our own thresholds - although only an occasional victim of this grim and terrible hydra struggles into the pale of our vision we should arm ourselves for its attacks.

It has been a question with legislators and ethical philosophers whether the indigent and needy should be supported by compulsion or voluntary donations and we are convinced the world is too cold and too selfish for the latter mode to be carried into operation.

Legislation has to a great degree effected the and proposed it has partially destroyed the germ of this noxious plant

yet a few are continually springing up here and there.

If all other means are ineffectual mutual dependance is used to accomplish the end proposed—it strengthens the might of each strong arm and adds to the valor of each stout heart. It strengthens those bonds union which will last after the dust of labor has been washed away and a happier era has settled down upon us.

John M. Lusk

is now for the year

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

1839

Commencement Oration of John McCarty, Class of 1852
Transcribed by Sarah-Hazel Jennings, May 2008
Edited by Chris Altieri, June 2008

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