

RELATED THINGS

CONTRIBUTIONS AND REPRINT

THESE LITTLE ONES.

E. Nesbit in the *New Age* of London.

"What of the garden I gave?"

God said to me,

"Hast thou been diligent to foster and save
The life of flower and tree?"

How have the roses thriven,

The lilies I have given,

The pretty, scented miracles that Spring

And Summer came to bring?"

"My garden is fair and dear,"

I said to God,

"From thorns and nettles I have kept it clear—
Close-trimmed its sod.

The rose is red and bright,

The lily a live delight;

I have not lost a flower of all the flowers

That blessed my hours."

"What of the child I gave?"

God said to me.

"The little, little thing I died to save,
And gave in trust to thee?

How have the flowers grown

That in its soul were sown,

The lovely, living miracles of youth

And hope and joy and truth?"

"The child's face is all white,"

I said to God.

"It cries for cold and hunger in the night;
Its feet have trod

The pavements muddy and cold;

It has no flowers to hold,

And in its soul the flowers you set are dead."

"Thou fool!" God said.



THOUGHTS OF A SETTLEMENT WORKER.

Address of Miss Elma Dame of New York, Before
the Women's National Singletax League,
Washington, D. C., May 27, 1912.

It may be that some Singletaxers feel that settlement houses, along with all other forms of organized charity, are, though with the best intentions, actually delaying the arrival of fundamental social justice; because all action that is merely palliative tends to obscure the need of radical change.

I do not propose to go into this question. It is not possible that all persons devoted to reform movements should have the same angle of vision: people must work in their own way, for the good within their reach; and there is no fact more significant for progress than the steady increase

in the numbers of those who are eager to give themselves to social service.

Jane Addams said in the early days of Hull House, that that settlement did more good to its own workers by educating them than it did to the people they were trying to help.

I speak to you not merely as a settlement worker, but as a nurse; one whose attention has been chiefly directed to the physical handicap suffered by the poor, under our system of economic injustice.

As a rule, every settlement in addition to its clubs and classes and general neighborhood work maintains one or more nurses—one such organization alone in New York City employing 70. These visit the homes of the sick poor and give such nursing service and instruction as they can.

A nurse makes in a day ten or a dozen calls. She sees the lives of the poor in a very intimate way, and can more easily and naturally win their confidence than can the other representatives of organized relief. The nurses don't come as inquisitors or investigators, full of impertinent questions, bound to make sure of the worthiness of an applicant before they give aid; they don't go prying into cupboards and under sinks to see if people are trying to impose upon them. They have the immense advantage of coming only to give their own personal service. Their eyes see the need, and their hands get busy.

Everyone has a natural right to conditions that conduce to health; we all admit this. As a nation, we solemnly declare that the pursuit of happiness is the right of all. Then we proceed to create, and to sustain by law, conditions that make health impossible to a large number of our people. Who can pursue happiness successfully with an ill-nourished body, living in unsanitary surroundings? Who can even gain the fundamentals of happiness? Because a few people own all the land in the country, the many must pay tribute to the few, with the result that the large majority must live in such quarters as this privileged minority provide for them.

Our land system crowds millions into noisome, ill-ventilated tenements in the large cities, and then settlement-nurses are paid to undo the damage done to health, so far as in them lies. Our work is largely to patch up the evil results of society's blunders.

I know a baby who at the age of twenty months was having its fifth attack of pneumonia. Does anyone suppose that its surroundings had nothing to do with this? That it was at most only the ignorance or carelessness of the mother that was to blame? In that house, as in very many homes of the poor, no fire is built on an average winter day until about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and then only one room is warmed. The older children are away at school until after that time, and the mother thinks that to save fuel she and the

very little ones can put up with a half day of cold. This is verily to "save at the spigot and lose at the bung." She has learned to resist the cold, has proved fit to survive; but the babies are tender and suffer. We are called to more cases of infant pneumonia in winter than to any other class of illness. To the cold room is added more or less complete absence of ventilation; the little bodies are under-fed and insufficiently clothed—often having no underclothing at all. Coal is far more expensive to these tenement-dwellers than to the householder, for they have no storage bins, and must buy in very small quantities, paying at least one-third more for it. Truly that was a wise man of old who said, "The poverty of the poor is their destruction." Because they are poor, they must become *more* poor.

The nurse vainly urges the absolute necessity of a fire; to the mother, the absolute necessity of rigid economy is more apparent, and she takes the chance that the children won't get sick; takes it, because she has to take it.

In some sleeping-rooms I have found the walls so wet that my finger-prints left a mark, owing to lack of any ventilating facility. The Tenement House Department can do little with these old houses. When I lately reported one such building the tenant said with rather smiling sarcasm: "What do you think the inspector can do? Tear down the walls of the building?"

In one tenement that we reported for damp walls and floors, a girl of twelve lay ill with bronchitis. It took much correspondence, many visits from health officers and inspectors, to get anything done; but after two months, the house was overhauled, the drainage improved, etc. The girl, however, in the meantime, had been taken to a hospital and had died.

The terms of the new tenement house law forbid the wholly dark rooms that were formerly legal, and order that every room be provided with a window of a certain fair size. This window, however, need not open to the outer air—it being obviously impossible to adjust these old style houses with dark inside rooms to any such desirable condition. New York City is not yet sufficiently civilized to order them torn down from garret to cellar in the name of justice. So it happens that a series of rooms even four deep may open only once to the out-of-doors, and be quite legal. But it is admitted by the Department of Tenements that there are still many thousands of wholly dark rooms that they have not yet reached in their process of gradual elimination. Here stalks tuberculosis: from these rooms we replenish the ranks that pour into our hospitals and fill our cemeteries.

One winter day I was in a group of settlement nurses that visited the well-managed tuberculosis hospital boat at foot of East 26th street. We saw scores of bright children sitting out in the

sunshine—their bodies covered up to the waist with warm sleeping bags; we saw an open-air school in progress; we saw them well stuffed with good milk and eggs—all absolutely free; and a nurse near me said: "Isn't it lovely to see what wonderful provision the city makes for its sick-poor?" The Singletaxer made answer: "Why did the city let them get into this condition before it took any notice of them? And many of them will be its victims after all, when they are pronounced cured, or arrested cases, and are sent back to the old conditions. Moreover, for every one that is on this boat, there are a hundred that will have no such opportunity."

That same day we visited our clean and tidy Municipal Lodging House, where no man can come if he has 25 cents left from his earnings. This establishment also filled the gaping crowd of visitors with admiration. But the Singletaxer asked within herself: "Why does the interest of the community in the individual begin only when he gets down to his last quarter?" We were told that any man so reduced might take advantage of its hospitality for three nights in a month—a record being kept against each name. Shortly afterward the secretary of the Bowery Mission told me that a man may indeed receive a third night's lodging, but if he does he is shipped promptly over to Blackwell's Island in the morning—arrested for vagrancy. The overseer of the house had forgotten to tell us this!

I asked an old C. O. S. worker if their efforts were resulting in less poverty? The question seemed a new one to her. She thought a little, and finally said: "No, she feared there was even more poverty than there used to be—she could perceive no decrease."

The settlement nurses are dependent on the various charity organizations to supplement their nursing with food. We can get from them free milk in small quantities—never more than one quart a day per family, unless there is an invalid, when sometimes two quarts are allowed. The abundant supply of pure milk that every growing child needs to keep him well is out of the question. The single quart is used in tea and coffee which all poor children drink from the time they are weaned, and for cooking purposes. No child in the family drinks clear milk. Bread is often the only food for many meals in succession; the formality of sitting down at the table to eat it is generally dispensed with. I once saw a man open a can of fish and hand out chunks of it with his fingers into the children's hands as they stood waiting for it. Eating in such families is a purely animal function without social graces of any kind.

The head-worker of one of the New York Diet Kitchens told me approvingly of the wonderful thrift of a mother whose daily lunch for a family of five was three cents worth of yellow beans! She

said what one mother could do, all could do, and three cents was plenty for any family's lunch. (I wondered if three cents was what she allowed for her own lunch.)

But what must be the result in a child's body and a child's brain of that kind of diet—beans being, even if well cooked, one of the most difficult of foods to digest? In an Italian family of six, where all were pale and anaemic and all were coughing and snuffling—the mother, a woman with a Madonna-like face, told me of her revolt from the Catholic church—saying pathetically: "The priests eat chicken, while I starve." How great must have been the pressure that had turned this gentle soul from a faith that has a most wonderful hold on its adherents! We got clothes and a little food for this family, where the father, a laborer, had only occasional jobs. The gratitude of these people was so utterly out of proportion to the service rendered as to make me feel ashamed. What right had we to such thanks—to such love as that women poured out, when we gave her, *not justice*, but a dole of charity? In my embarrassment I tried to show her that in one thing at least she was rich: life had given her motherhood—a family of dear children. Then came her protest that rings even yet in my ears: "Where is the joy of motherhood if I must see my children lack all the good things of life?" What answer could be made to her? I knew she was right.

Not less necessary to children than food and clothing is the opportunity to play. As we run things now, our New York children have to play in the streets—our playground facilities are so meagre. If we allow each child three square yards the small parks and playground space available for children below Fourteenth street will accommodate at one time just seven per cent of them. Last year over 400 children were killed while playing in our New York streets. It is not the children's fault; it is our fault. Childhood would not be childhood—its dear charm would be gone—if we demanded of these little ones the cold calculating prudence that looks on all sides for automobiles and prancing hoofs before springing to catch a ball.

Thus a system that robs the toiler of the fruits of his toil, robs the mother of *her* fruits. There is scarcely a family among the very poor that has not one child dead for every two living. We need to think very seriously of the deadening moral effect upon a mother, to bear and nurture a child, giving long months of her own life and strength, only to see her work *frustrated, blotted out, as if it had not been*; and to see this happening again, and again, from causes that she cannot control, but which the community as a whole could control, if it had reached a proper state of civilization. I say, that we have not even begun to be civilized, while we can look calmly upon this

waste of the birth-supply—this robbery of her who supplies it through her pain and sacrifice. I know one poor overworked woman who bore six children, and lost them all, one by one, in early childhood. What would be the mental state of a man who should spend a year in making a house, and then see it burn to the ground, and the next year the same thing should happen, and the next, and the next? Do you think he would retain much of his enthusiasm, of his courage, of his faith, of any of the moral values that make life beautiful?

One woman whose husband was out of work was subject to moments of frenzy, when she felt ready to kill herself and her unborn child, because she was confronted by such dire poverty. Without the baby she could earn moderate wages at making waists, and so support her other child of three; but with the baby the prospect for all was depressing enough. It seems to be the policy of organized charities to goad a man on to find work, by letting him see his wife and children suffer. They insisted he was lazy, and could find work if he would. Whether this was true or not is immaterial here; the point is that the wife and the future member of society were deliberately left to suffer in order that the man might be disciplined. Appreciating the situation, he did what is often deliberately done under these circumstances; he deserted his wife temporarily and disappeared from the scene, leaving a note to say he was gone for good. This was for the C. O. S. to read; for between him and his wife there was collusion. The scheme worked, and now the charities came to the wife's help. Think of it! Our conditions are so cruel that a man's sensitiveness, not his brutality, compels him to leave his family when properly he is needed the most; for he can manage to pick up a living for himself, when it is beyond his power to earn enough for a family.

As we single-taxers perceive that our present system of taxation penalizes the man who makes useful things, so must we see that we live under a system that penalizes the responsible parent who tries to stand by his family. We put a premium upon desertion. We also give a cash reward to the unmarried mother who secretly destroys her baby; it is an economic advantage to her to crush out the little life. We make quite inhuman and impossible demands on human nature when we make semi-starvation the price of constancy and responsibility. How many can stand that test? Surely not those who have lived all their youth under conditions of squalor and congestion that preclude the development of high moral ideals.

To the home of a certain Mr. F. came the fourth baby. The oldest child was 6. The father's earning capacity was \$8 a week, he was an ordinary sort of man, not likely ever to get more. The home was destitute of all comfort. I told the need to the ladies of a charitable society who were

so sympathetic they could not do enough at the start, and gave me authority to buy every necessary thing at their expense. But after awhile they said: "Look here, how long must this thing be kept up? We are pauperizing this family." I said: "It will be eight years before the oldest child can help at bread-winning; they will need help until then, at least." This raised a problem which had not occurred to them. They were not prepared to cope with it.

Private alms-giving can never take the place of the justice which the state owes to its lowliest citizen.

The fear of doing too much for the poor on the part of the charity organizations is further illustrated in the home of Mrs. S., who worked all day on pants, earning about 40 cents. Her husband broke his leg two years before and it was so badly mended that he can only hobble a short distance, so sits at the street corner selling fish. He can make 30 cents a day when trade is good. Five people are expected to live on 70 cents or less a day. Shoes were needed for the father and a child. I sent for the C. O. S. worker, who not finding the father in the house took the attitude that he was probably working somewhere on a good job, and refused to do anything about the shoes, and a good many days passed before she got proof that the need was real. This matter of footwear among the poor is a serious one. How few of them ever had the luxury of a well fitting shoe. Flat foot and bunions are the affliction of the majority. When shoes are given to them, any old thing is supposed to be good enough. "Don't look a gift-horse in the mouth." A woman with a number four foot showed me the number seven shoes of wide cut she was shuffling around in. We know that aching feet make the whole body sick and tired. A few kind-hearted people have their old shoes neatly mended before giving them away, but most of those that reach the poor are run over at the heels and badly broken.

In the homes where women sew on pants or other clothing it often happens that a contagious disease appears. This is supposed to be reported by the doctor to the health department, whose inspector comes to post the house, and orders the work to cease. Sometimes the doctor fails to report the case. May it be that his sense of justice is outraged at the thought of making one woman the scapegoat for the sins of society? So long as we sit smugly indifferent to the economic conditions that make sweated labor necessary and contagious diseases inevitable, ought we not as a community to bear the consequences? Why put a still further handicap on the woman who is already the victim of a vicious system? If we must protect society by taking away her work, should we not, in decency, recompense her with a living wage during the time we compel idleness?

We don't do this, and so I say we deserve all the contagion that she spreads among us.

On my visiting list at this time are two women, one of 50, one of 65, stiff with rheumatism, who say in plain words that they want to die—life holds out ends that are altogether too meagre. One is childless, her husband in a home for incurable consumptives, while she hobbles about in loneliness, keeping herself by taking five lodgers in her three rooms, she sleeping in the kitchen. The other has an invalid husband and a drunken son, whose abuse is a constant grief. An old German woman who knits stockings lives in a back room on the ground floor that smells like a tomb. A row of outside toilet-rooms close against her windows cuts off nearly all light. She is so afraid someone will climb in and steal her wretched belongings that she keeps the windows closed and locked night and day. Rheumatic and scrofulous, she would be infinitely better off in the city home on the Island; but wild horses could not tear her away from her pitiful semblance of freedom. Our city homes are unfortunately run in the name of charity, *not* of justice, and the proud-spirited prefer independence, even if it be not the real article but a pitiful imitation.

I hear these people tell their stories, and the one great common cause of poverty is poured into my ears—"Unemployment!" "Too many men for the jobs." Competition for opportunity has crowded at least one worker in ten to the wall. Of what use for the nurse to tend them in their sickness, to teach them hygiene, to preach against dirt and flies and cold rooms—to advise rest to the overworked, food to the underfed, air to the unventilated when the poor are like rats in a trap, absolutely at the mercy of those who have so cornered natural resources that the competition for jobs has become literally fratricidal?

When the charity societies try to find jobs for the needy men they discover for themselves how few of them are in reality lazy. Look at the seats in the parks, overflowing in the main with discouraged, half-fed men; look at the want columns of the papers—such discrepancy between the "help wanted" and those "wanting work"! Is the needful work of the world indeed all done? Is there no need for more workers? Are there sufficient clothing, food, furniture, houses for all the people? Have they all the flowers, music and works of art that they need? Are our public utilities so perfect that they do not need perfecting nor enlarging? *It is not so.* The worker is needed with a need that cries out to heaven. But he is powerless to obtain the work that needs him. Could we not use more food, more coal, more iron, more brick? Our land system forbids that we shall employ needed workers in all these things, except on terms which the owners of land may dictate.

A double wrong is done to the poor man—first

he fails to get work, and next he must pay a big price for the necessities of life which monopoly has cornered.

I am not blaming the charity organizations for not doing more. (After the workers' salaries are paid, they probably do their best with the inadequate means at their disposal—as we nurses do our best, yet fail to make the slums healthy.) I blame popular apathy and ignorance for the continuance of this burden of undeserved poverty. Every one of us who does not work his utmost to spread knowledge of the principles of justice, involved in the Singletax, is personally responsible.

I want to close with some words of the Chinese sage Ye Yen, the greatest minister of the Shong dynasty, who with high sense of duty took upon himself the heavy charge of the Empire. Thus spoke Ye Yen: "If among all the people of the Empire—even the most lowly men and women—there are any who do not enjoy such benefits as the gods confer, it is as if I myself have pushed them into a ditch." And again he said: "The purpose of heaven in the production of mankind is to cause those who first apprehend, to instruct those who are slower to apprehend; and those who are awakened, to awake those who are slower to wake. I am one of heaven's people who have been first awakened. I will take these principles given to me and awake this people in them. *If I do not awake them, who will do so?*"



THE CHARITY POULTICE.

Forms of Letters Used in Reply to Appeals for Charity.



1. From Bolton Hall, of New York.

The following appears to me to be good sense:

I am trying to do what I can to relieve those who are suffering; but long experience and observation has convinced me that benevolent donations or charity can do little more than relieve a few individual cases of distress. What the poor need is not even education, but a change in social conditions that will make donations and charity unnecessary. Only to help in bringing about such a change can I give work or money.

Lest this seem unreasonable, I cite the case of what seems to me the most meritorious benevolent work—the tuberculosis sanitariums are for the care and cure of poor consumptives; but we cannot help seeing, when we look, that the conditions under which the poor must live and work inevitably breed more consumption and more poverty.

Our social system so restricts opportunities and employment that thousands must work under the most harmful conditions; this inevitably produces

invalids by the thousand. Our system puts a premium on withholding valuable land from use and crowds millions into disease-breeding tenements. Yet we are tempted to believe that, when we care for a few hundred victims of this system, our whole duty has been done. The cause of this evil and of similar evils should be removed, so that the further wholesale production of misery may be stopped, and existing invalids and their relatives enabled to become self-supporting so as not to need charity.

Your work is doubtless excellent in its intention, but we cannot deny that every improvement in the condition of the earth, whether agricultural, mechanical, educational, political, ethical or even religious, must go eventually and mainly to the profit of the owners of the earth. We are all responsible for the system that gives the use of the earth to a few.

Asking help from supporters of things as they are is merely asking the persons responsible for poverty, misery and disease to do something to relieve their victims. But asking help from Singletaxers is practically asking those who are using all their spare means to prevent further mischief to relax their efforts in order to enable others to evade the duty of relieving those whom they have made poor.

For these reasons I do not feel that I can comply with your request.



2. From Dr. Walter Mendelson, of New York.

About twice every week, year in and year out, I (and you) get appeals for "charity."

The ever increasing number and variety of these appeals must convince any thinking person that this method of combatting a great evil is useless. True, many poor individuals are doubtless relieved, but does not Poverty itself stalk as gaunt and as hideous as ever? Is there less poverty, or is there more today, in New York, in London, in Paris, Berlin or Bombay, than there was thirty years ago?

From my means I can give to about one one-hundredth of all the appeals I get. Why give to yours more than to any other? And would it not be more logical, as well as more just, to appeal rather to those who are the beneficiaries of this social system that makes millionaires on one side and paupers on the other? They get the benefit, let them pay the cost.

What we need is not pitiable alleviation, but *cure*; not "charity" but *justice*. A cancer poultice may be agreeable to the victim; but, slowly and ever beneath it, his vitals are being remorselessly eaten out. To my mind every "charity"—and by that I mean any essential thing that is given a man because his poverty denies it to him—is a mere cancer poultice.