



The Crime of Poverty: An Address Delivered in the Opera House, Burlington, Iowa, April 1, 1885 (Classic Reprint)

Henry George

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The Crime of Poverty 1ADIES AND GENTLEMEN: I propose to talk to you tonight of the Crime of Poverty. I cannot, in a short time, hope to convince you of much; but the thing of things I should like to show you is that poverty is a crime. I do not mean that it is a crime to be poor. Murder is a crime; but it is not a crime to be murdered; and a man who is in poverty I look upon not as a criminal in himself so much as the victim of a crime for which others, as well, perhaps, as himself, are responsible. That poverty is a curse, the bitterest of curses, we all know. Carlyle was right when he said that the hell of which Englishmen were most afraid was the hell of poverty; and this is true, not of Englishmen alone, but of people all over the civilized world, no matter what their nationality. It is to escape this hell that we strive and strain and struggle; and work on oftentimes in blind habit long after the necessity for work is gone. The curse born of poverty is not confined to the poor alone; it runs through all classes, even to the very rich. They, too, suffer; they must suffer; for there cannot be suffering in a community from which any class can totally escape. The vice, the crime, the ignorance, the meanness, born of poverty, poison, so to speak, the very air which rich and poor alike must breathe. I walked down one of your streets this morning, and I saw three men going along with their hands chained together.

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