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THE PROBLEM  
-  
OF THE AGES.



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By "PETER PLAINSPEECH,"  
In *Westralian Worker*.

William Morris never said a truer thing than when he wrote these words: "What the worker ought to be taught is how to know his own, and how to use his own."

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When the worker is taught these three things, he will be free. So long as he is not taught them, he must remain a slave. And he must be taught all the three before he can be truly emancipated.

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It would be of little avail if he knew his own, but did not know how to get it. And it would not help him much to have his own if he did not know how to use it.

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The question of questions for the social reformer, therefore, is: How is the worker to be taught to know his own, to get his own, and to use his own?

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It is quite evident that the task is a mighty one—a task for the ages. For

it really means the transforming of the poor, stunted, undeveloped toilers of the world into the free and happy and fully developed men and women they ought to be.

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The task is so great, so terribly, so overwhelmingly hard, that many good men have given it up in despair. They have felt overcome with a sense of their own utter helplessness when face to face with this problem of the ages. And yet, as Spencer has said, the true reformer is he who, knowing that he can do little, yet does it cheerfully and hopefully. For it is only by the apparently useless efforts of countless reformers in many lands and many times that the world moves forward. And, after all, it does move forward. The worker to-day is, on the whole, superior to the worker of a hundred years ago—economically, socially, intellectually, and morally. He sleeps on a better bed, partakes of a better dinner, lives in a better house, has a longer measure of leisure, a more

educated brain, and a more refined nature.

The years are slow, the vision tarrieth long,  
 And far the end may be ;  
 Yet one by one the ancient fiends of wrong  
 Go out and leave earth free.

\* \* \*

Teaching men is not so easy a matter as at first sight appears. For it is not enough to gain a mere intellectual assent to a proposition. To know the right is one thing ; to do the right quite another. For example, it is not difficult to convince a drunkard that drunkenness is a wickedness and a folly. The drunkard knows as well as the moralist, and even better. But still he goes on drinking. His drunkenness is not the result of ignorance ; it is rather the result of moral weakness. And to teach him thoroughly it is not only necessary to give him knowledge ; it is also necessary to give him strength. How, therefore, is the worker to be taught in this deepest sense ? How is he to be made

strong—to be lifted from his degradation to the higher altitudes of truer manhood ?

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The reply is, generally : We must multiply the agencies of education. We must get him to read the right kind of literature, to be fired by the right kind of ideals, to be inspired by the right spirit. But how are we to accomplish this mighty task ?

\* \* \*

One thing is certain : We cannot educate men by purely moral and intellectual agencies. The best books, the best papers, the best lectures, avail nothing if the surrounding conditions are not of the right character. Books, however wise, however elevating in tone, will never lift men up if the conditions of their lives tend to drag them down. It is a mockery and an insult to prate about moral purity to men and women who live under conditions which make moral purity an impossibility. It is mockery

and insult to expect men and women to be elevated and refined if they have inherited in their very souls the accumulated results of centuries of social degradation. We can never get men to act like angels if society treats them like brutes. Moral purity is a beautiful flower, but it will only grow in the sunlight of justice.

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In order, therefore, to teach men in the truest and deepest sense it is necessary to utterly destroy those social conditions which stunt their natures, starve their souls, and drag them down to the pit. The old idea of teaching the poor and degraded was to go down into the slums in which they live, and preach them nice, moral sermons. The newer and truer method of education is to sweep the slums utterly away. Half an ounce of social justice does more in the way of educating men than a whole cartload of sermonising. "Take care of the body," says somebody wisely, "and

the soul will take care of itself." Give the worker justice, cease to rob him of his rights, give him the chance of having a free and healthful human existence, and you will do more to teach him to be all that he ought to be than if—still leaving him in his morally degrading surroundings—you filled his starved and stunted soul with all the wisdom and learning of the ages. In fact, you cannot educate a man's mind so long as you half-starve his body. You cannot really elevate his brain—if you connive at the conditions that degrade his life. Culture, refinement, purity—these things have, after all, their roots in material conditions.

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You cannot teach a man to swim if you don't permit him to go into the water; and you can never teach the workers to use their own until you hand it over for them to use.

\* \* \*

The best thing the rich man can do for the poor man is to get off his back.

And if the rich man won't get off, he must be thrown off. The worker, then, will have got his own, and in due time he will learn how to use it.

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The moral of this long article, is :  
Get ye first social justice, and all other things will be added unto you.

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WHEN READ PASS ON.

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*T. utt Typ., Gympie.*