

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

## ARTICLE IX.

## THE UNEMPLOYED IN LONDON.

BY EX-PRESIDENT JOHN BASCOM, D.D., LL.D.

A SIGNIFICANT fact—one we could hardly have expected and should do our utmost to understand—is the large number of the unemployed in London; a number so large as to raise the question both of an immediate and of an ultimate remedy. When so many are thrown out of the productive processes of society, those processes are either working amiss, or are fatally insufficient. Such a fact opens afresh the inquiry of the adequacy of economic and social forces as we are applying them. If we have any sympathy with men, this want of employment will stand with us for a grievous social state; and if we cherish any hopes of a more perfect social condition, any belief in laws looking to the ultimate welfare of the race, it will raise most serious doubts as to our existing theories of society. These doubts will be the more troublesome because this destitution occurs in England, so productively powerful and prosperous.

The unemployed appealed, in the first instance, to Mr. Balfour, premier under a conservative administration, and later to Campbell-Bannerman, just entering on a liberal administration. They also made a half-mute, half-violent appeal to the church, presenting themselves in a body at the services in St. Paul's. This sense of a possible remedy, or at least of indirect responsibility, was expressed in thus approaching with their wants those who represented the state and the church. Society collectively is expressed in these organizations, and, finding no relief in themselves, it was natural that the unem-

ployed should bring their hard case to the notice of that society of which they were discarded members. Its construction, they felt, either on the material or the spiritual side, must be faulty, some duty must be shirked or obligation overlooked, when results so ruinous to themselves, and so inimical to social growth, stood forth in such large proportions. This reasoning was inevitable, and not altogether false. It is the province of the state, so far as possible, to provide conditions under which all industrious citizens can support themselves. It is the office of Christian faith to search into and declare those principles, and cherish those sentiments, under which the poor can, sympathetically, be given a footing in the paths of life. Inattention to these claims on the part of any organizing power in the community is an inadmissible attitude. An inability to render aid becomes a discouraging confession of the partial failure of society. When society is wholly unable to give assistance, this fact weakens the reciprocal claim of obedience. It outlaws those thus left to their own destitution. There thus devolves on every good citizen and good Christian an obligation to search into the grounds of this difficulty, both in reference to an immediate remedy and ultimate relief. The similarity of conditions in England and in the United States makes the question as much our own as if an equal destitution had already appeared in one or more of our great cities.

The problem is an economic and an ethical one. Under Economics we raise the question, Cannot the productivity of the world be so ordered as to make all partakers in it, (1) on the side of labor, and (2) on the side of reward? Are economic laws democratic by virtue of this fellowship of work? They certainly demand fellowship; is it an honest fellowship that completes itself in the common prosperity?

The question is also manifestly ethical. When we undertake

to define our relations to our fellow-men, and measure the impulses of service and good-will that run along them, do we find among them a helping hand in the struggle for the mastery of life? Are our own lives best reached in a fellowship with the lives of others? Is the dropping off of any life a dropping off of our own life? These two classes of questions are best answered together. If we put them together we can hardly miss the true solution. It is the fellowship of man with man that is the center of interest; and no year revolves, no progress is made in personal or social achievement, without a wider, deeper union of men with each other. Separation and dispersion are barbarism; extended aidfulness is civilization; all-embracing sympathy is enlightenment. Love is the only light that reaches round the world, and casts no shadow.

Economics, pushed alone for an answer, becomes confused and inadequate in its response. It does not certainly know how the world is framed. The wealth-getting activity strives to divorce itself from good-will, and brings discord and division where it should bring concurrent effort. The problem of securing wealth is like the problem of securing happiness. If we narrow the aim, our very success in it baffles us, and we miss the healthy and vital response which is the true purpose of our labor. The moment the economist looks upon wealth-getting as an individual interest simply, enterprise, competition, profits, come into the foreground, cast long shadows of bitterness, disappointment, and inadequate reward over the better workers, and over the multitude, discouragement, hostility, indolence, and vice. When the forces involved should begin to free themselves in the general prosperity, they entangle themselves more and more in the ever-returning strife of classes, and are engulfed again in the decay of society.

Though the self-seeking impulses which many put at the

basis of Economics are, when rigidly rendered, destructive of fair distribution, and so of successful production, they seem for a time to thrive and to secure a conspicuous expression of prosperity. We thus have a plausible and fascinating form of the eternal lie that elevation is a relative exaltation above one's fellows; that the fittest means ultimately, as it meant in the outset, the strongest; and that life, as it gains power, contracts itself more and more on its own center.

This is the line of thought which economists have sometimes complacently taken as most completely contained in the forces under consideration. The world is too narrow for men, and some, in the jostling, must necessarily fall off. The fall is so inevitable, so incident to progress, that we ought not to be disturbed by it. The survival of the fittest takes effect, and we have only to be careful to keep in the center of the circle. Enterprise, moreover, profits by this cheapening of labor. Those just on the borders of subsistence are more concessive to the claims of capital and make up a world in which it becomes prodigiously productive.

While there are some facts which suggest this conclusion, there are others wholly inconsistent with it. The world becomes constantly more productive under skillful handling, and the rewards of labor more favorable. We have not reached in any direction the limits of growth. Numbers facilitate production. Men isolated are necessarily savages; gathered in communities they are barbarians; compacted into nations they become civilized; and, in free international activity, they are enlightened. We have never approached a point in which the simple increase of numbers made the meeting of human wants more difficult. Compare the present resources of the South with its development under slavery, and observe the increased demand for labor now present. As

the means of production enlarge, there is also a greater call for foresight and sagacity, and these qualities lead to a more careful adaptation of the number of laborers to opportunities. With every step of progress, society is better organized, and holds famine and pestilence more completely in abeyance. The economic theory of reduced returns for labor is applicable to earlier, rather than to later, periods. It is a transient fact surreptitiously turned into a general law, as is the principle of the survival of the fittest when rendered in terms of animal life and applied to man in his higher relations.

There is a severe phase of ethics which chimes in with this opinion. The discipline of the world is regarded as cold and exacting, and, if the standard is not reached, the delinquent is snapped up with little room for repentance. Some take an endless delight in the alleged inflexible character of law, as if the world were a steel trap calling chiefly for caution where one steps. These opinions of the niggardly giving of the world shape themselves while as yet we have not begun to understand or develop the resources about us. This sense of the inexorable character of law has been gained in a world in which men have so often been forgiven for their failures and transgressions that they have, for the most part, traveled into light along a path of disobedience. Men have tramped the bloody fields of battle to learn that peace is the great productive agent in human society.

A wider economy, a more sympathetic form of ethics, give a different color to the laws of distribution, one that lights up the darkness with the dawn of day, and brings social enlargement as the crown of obedience. Diffused prosperity is the condition of the largest prosperity; as much as a free circulation of the blood means physical health. In seeking this diffused prosperity, commerce and social welfare concur; and when

it is wanting, each has the problem of explanation thrown upon it. Comfort secured by effort is the presupposition of Economics and Ethics alike. If it is departed from, both, as harmonious systems, disappear. The ethical temper forever extends and equalizes advantages; the economic temper embraces and improves them. Let the purpose of the community be the creation and just division of the fruits of labor, and each member is drawn into that prosperity and enlarges it. Wealth is far more consonant with diffused intelligence and activity than with any restriction of them whatever. The moment this arises, wasteful agencies are introduced, and a portion of the common strength is lost along these lines of resistance. Ethical welfare means sympathetic aid, and the collisions of indolence and poverty are hostile to it. As men concur in ethical sentiment they are prepared to concur in productive activity, and to accumulate a store of social benefits ever larger in reference to the number of partakers.

The difficulty with formal socialism is that it looks to a mechanical equilibrium of advantages, and a fixed distribution not necessarily associated with good-will. Economic activities and rewards are to be regulated with no corresponding development of ethical incentives. The effort is sure to fail, since it will be thrown back shortly on civic coercion, far more difficult to apply, and far less effective, than the existing persuasion of poverty. Present forms of distribution leave men, at least in a general way, to the natural results of their own action. These forms look for correction where it must be found, in improved purposes and wiser action under them. Economic law will never be fulfilled without a corresponding depth of ethical impulses; and these impulses, as they arise, will find no other or more favorable field in which to express themselves than this of economic prosperity, a constant condi-

tion of enlarged intellectual and social life. We cannot handle the factors of life separately. If we make our charities mere charities, they soon begin to fail, both in their action on the recipients and in their reaction on ourselves. Mere charity is compelled to recognize, in a despairing way, that we have the poor always with us, and that we tend to keep them with us by a game of buffet in which the ball returns as often as it goes. True charity is sympathetic, vital, and quickens the life of both receiver and giver. Good-will is as necessary to those who exercise it as to those who are aided by it. It is a common term in social development, and that it may remain a common term must beget, on either hand, new occasions and new directions of response. It is the fellowship of those who stand in the same ranks, and march together.

It was with a true instinct, though a despairing and a cynical one, that the unemployed marched to St. Paul's. The one question will always be put to the church, whatever its prevailing form, What better and more complete conditions of unity is it establishing between men? How far and how rapidly is it working up communities into a similitude of the Kingdom of Heaven? What is its potency in imparting the ethical incentives which go with economic activity?

Much of the charity of the church has been unwise and inadequate. It has looked more to the relief of suffering—a thing which must often happen—than to its removal. There is hardly a more painful question anywhere put us than the accumulated and ever-accumulating misery of a large city. The despairing inquiry of the unemployed is, What is your gospel, and what is its power of relief? If Christianity touches bottom, it will do it, not in institutions and creeds, but, in proffers of life everywhere renewed. It is here that the



solution of the question may be found, Whose money may be used in forwarding the salvation of men?

A vital method in charity means a recognition of the economic ideas which make wealth the reward of intelligence, industry, and good-will. The problem of the unemployed is a complex one, in which vice, indolence, ignorance, and misfortune play their part in ever-varying ways and proportions. It is not a problem which admits of an immediate and heroic solution. It must be approached on all sides, according to its own form of presentation. The correction, as far as the church is concerned, must come chiefly as anticipation; as a perpetual struggle with the four ingredients which are sure, as they increase in force, to give rise to extreme poverty. When the ranks of the unemployed have become crowded, and the clamor is general and loud, the church will be well nigh as helpless in relieving the evil as are those who suffer under it. The time for prevention has passed by, and all that the church can now do is to bring a sympathetic temper and immediate aid to those suffering the overthrow of poverty. If the church, in the progress of events, drops into an indifferent temper, it will remain, with the rest of the community, without wisdom or help, when the disaster comes. The relief to be looked for from the church is an ethical life which, pervading the community, anticipates the catastrophe.

The state is unable to meet at once the demand for labor, because such a provision does not lie within its province. Its purpose is social justice, a prevention of the encroachments of one person on another. It stands, or should stand, for the most complete preservation of the powers and opportunities of its citizens. It can no more provide labor for those who require it than it can furnish prosperity to those who wish it. Its actions are to be judged not only in their first effects, but

in their reaction on all the interests involved. The unemployed, in making a demand for labor, become inimical to the thrift of the industrious, whose activities are to be protected. The state cannot allow either class to trespass on the other. It does allow the thrifty, in various ways, to encroach on the opportunities of the ignorant and improvident, and so to throw them into a destitute class; but the remedy does not lie in encouraging counter claims, but in resisting all trespass and maintaining an open arena.

Public relief is admitted in apparent reduction of the principle of personal independence, but it rests primarily on the ground that the general welfare calls for some concession to those who have lost the power to care for themselves. The colliding of these two claims in public charities, mercy on the one hand and personal liberty on the other, has always made of charitable relief a most difficult question. It offers another example of the truth that in Economics and Civics no principle can be applied without reference to the ethical conditions at the time present.

Public relief, especially in the English races, has gathered about itself associations which have made it very distasteful to those who share it. It is this fact that renders the unemployed more willing to institute a comparatively new demand, that for labor, than to accept public relief. The public welfare will not allow a refusal of all aid. An extreme form of poverty would arise, under such a denial, that would endanger the general safety, and outrage social feeling. Yet this concession, guarded and meagre as it constantly is, pushes hard on the half-open door, and readily passes into a claim for labor under which the daily providence of life would be transferred from the individual to the public, and ultimately rest as a heavy burden on the industrious.

In the struggle between the temper of thrift and the temper of humanity, the needle is not likely to rest midway between them, but to pass either to the one or the other extreme. Poverty may be accepted as an inevitable fact. The poor may be divided into classes, as in Denmark, and a comfortable and respectable provision be made for the more worthy; or, as in England, there may be present a constant disposition to resist encroachment, and a feeling of shame that embitters the aid that is rendered. These two tempers have each its advantages and disadvantages, and the English method can be justified only in connection with a form of society expressly shaped to keep ajar all the doors of opportunity. The English feeling arises from a somewhat higher sense of personal freedom, and can approve itself only by a careful maintenance of the conditions of liberty.

A weighty reason why the state cannot recognize the claim for labor is found in the fact that, by easy extension, it comes to mean the support of the destitute, with little response in effort on their part. If labor is to be provided, it must not be unduly severe or underpaid. Down an incline of growing concessions the applicant slides, judging the labor and the remuneration by his own feeling, rather than by any standard of right under which the community is sheltered. Rightful claims have already been lost, and each new claim for comfort rests on much the same ground as the previous one.

This natural growth of claims has shown itself in the few facts that bear on the problem. The revolution of 1848 in France was accompanied in Paris by an extensive provision of labor for the unemployed. This labor was made, in an additional degree, unprofitable by the indolence and indifference of those who accepted it. When it was finally found

necessary to withdraw it, the discontinuance was accompanied by violence and much bloodshed.

The economic objection to labor provided by the public is that the labor, being unprofitable, weakens resources already too small. This expenditure must be suspended sooner or later; and, when it is suspended, the evil has been enhanced by a still farther reduction of capital. All aid given to the poor is attended by something of this evil; but the furnishing of employment calls for more outlay, and creates an unmanageable condition. Suspension itself means farther loss. We may make the labor of the destitute available in all profitable employment, but to create employment means a continual multiplication of losses. Business without profits is ordinarily a rapid squandering of capital. If we have once entered on an undertaking of this order, its embarrassments cease to be a guide of action. The independence given by it, and the industry evoked by it, are neither of them real. A charity which is distinctly charity is more wholesome than one disguised under the appearance of remuneration.

Outdoor aid has come to be very generally condemned, and chiefly on the ground of a growth of dependence occasioned by hiding its true character. Human nature is not strong enough to resist the temptation to apply for aid coming in this form. And yet outdoor aid often promises to be the least troublesome, least expensive, and most kindly form of help. A large-hearted administrator of public charities finds himself strongly tempted to grant, and to extend, this form of aid. The confusion of relations is still greater in furnishing labor, and tends to put both giver and receiver in an inadmissible attitude. Both the giving and the withdrawing of employment involve complex results which are not directly contained in the immediate problem. There is an inescapable hardship in

extreme poverty. If, by reducing it, we at the same time reduce the incentives of effort, we increase the social disease.

The pressure of feeling which deters one from asking charity, and which revives when the opportunity for self-support reappears, is almost wholly removed by public employment,—an employment which tends to make the laborer more and more dependent on the state. The moral deterioration which goes with extreme poverty is its worst result. English methods of relief have usually been so restricted and so uninviting, and have called out so much repugnance, as to become a safeguard against simple mendicity. Public aid has been regarded, not as a privilege to be enjoyed, but as a shame not easily to be endured. This sentiment, though it works mischief, is ingrained in an enterprising, self-reliant community. The soundest moral state is one which most distinctly recognizes all the facts, and handles them according to their own character. The ethical confusion in public employment is greater than in almost any other form of charity, and works corresponding mischief in the incentives to effort. Liberty brings heavy liabilities, liabilities that are the chief motives to its diligent use. Relief of social evils is to be sought, not so much in softening consequences as in removing causes. If we could adjust ourselves comfortably to a state of poverty, poverty would become a chronic ailment.

The evil of any considerable increase in the number of the unemployed cannot be corrected by any form of charity. The difficulty lies somewhere in the productive processes, and must be removed by a better adjustment of the ordinary conditions of labor.

The only adequate remedy for a want of employment is such a modification of society, in its economic incentives, ethical sentiments, and civic conditions, as will prevent the ap-

pearance of the unemployed. It must be distinctly recognized that the presence of this class is a symptom of social disease, and calls for some readjustment of the relation of classes to each other; for a more bracing treatment of production in its operating motives. It is a faulty production which is letting drop a portion of those who partake in it, and giving them no opportunity to return. It is of the very nature of production to multiply rewards, and to make these rewards the conditions of farther effort. When it fails to do this, there has been something deceptive in its objects or false in its methods. Our industries are not sufficiently harmonized in reference to each other to prevent partial failures; but when these become general and extended, we may be sure that it is time to search for the remedy.

Much of the activity of capital, accumulated in large amounts, and absorbed in its own gains, is fitted to frequently issue in disaster, and to scatter disaster along its path. Men have always suffered from tyranny in one form or another,—tyranny in the state, tyranny in religion, tyranny in opinion,—but none of these forms of tyranny have been more confident of their divine right than the present tyranny of industry. Shall not a man be at liberty to order his own business? Is not that into which his money and time have been put his business? Is not this business of his the very life-blood of the industrial world? Is enterprise any other than this very thing? If he were to stop business, or allow it to be clogged by those unable or unwilling to meet its claims, would not the ranks of the unemployed be at once prodigiously swollen? His authority and his prosperity, what do they mean but the welfare of men at large? There is sufficient truth in this line of inquiry to make the industrial kings confident of their claims, and to silence much complaint; but there is also sufficient exaggera-

tion and distortion in it to make those who suffer under it hostile, and those who raise fundamental questions as to the good order of society distrustful as to the present temper of the commercial world. It takes out of the hands of the masses of men labors that concern them as deeply as they concern any one. Capital that regards itself as irresponsible to labor, and irresponsible to the community, will, in its development, be marked by periods of failure whose worst evils stand exposed and registered in the unemployed. Slaves, serfs, peasants, laborers out of work, an immense multitude who have missed the ways and motives of life, have always attended, and must always attend, on the intense activity of those who gather into their own hands the government of the world. Men have always needed leaders, but it has been leaders who share their purposes and prosperity with their followers. We are in the midst of the struggle for economic liberty, a liberty in which there is a universal recognition and reconciliation of rights. We are to see that the community at large is the only field in which economic activity can exercise itself, and that that field gives law to enterprise with the same certainty that it receives law from it. Capital must stoop from its own tyrannous rule to a service which contemplates the welfare of all. This is no new notion; it is the notion which alone can make society an organic whole.

Liberty always gets its true apprehension and its adequate impulse among those subject to bondage. Not till the germs of liberty are found in this class will any proclamation of it be of any avail. The labor movement is a germ of this order. It is an effort, on the part of those most immediately suffering injury, to define and secure their rights. It is a self-helpful and sympathetic movement, and will inevitably extend to the entire working-class and to all the interests of that class. This

is the logic of events, that working men and working women everywhere must plan for and direct their collective action. It is an wholly ineffectual criticism of this movement that it is often violent in its methods, mistaken in its objects, and mischievously concessive to bad leadership. These difficulties all come, and will always come, with revolutionary ideas and are slowly worked off by them.

Capital and the community are reluctant to recognize the labor movement. When trades-unions are conceded, those who direct industry are still slow to consult with them concerning common interests, concerning a form of effort alike profitable to both. The old, one-sided methods haunt the air, rule the feelings, and baffle the better adjustment, which is, at best, difficult and delicate of formation. A state of conflict necessarily distorts men's minds, and makes action seem admissible which cannot be accepted as an amicable settlement of claims. Those who belong to labor-unions, with cost to themselves and in reference to the welfare of the class represented, find it difficult to tolerate the indifference or the interference of independent workmen. While this feeling is in a measure inevitable, it is greatly enhanced by the effort of employers to use free labor as a means of making void the counsels and efforts of organized labor. A laborer, of a bold and pushing temper, may easily find his advantage in uniting himself, in this conflict between labor and capital, with capital, and thereby securing his own gain at the expense of the class to which he belongs. Language is made to suit this phase of liberty, and an open shop means one in which the liberty of the employer, and the liberty of the employee, seeking his own in his own way, are conceded; and a closed shop means one which stands for organized labor, guarding the interests of all.

Unions are frequently faulty in limiting the output of labor.



This measure is the natural result of bitter and protracted strife, in which labor is compelled to use every weapon at hand. Let the interests of both labor and capital come under amicable discussion, and methods of this order will disappear. Reconciliation of all interests can arise only with peace. Let production be fully enlisted in the service of the employee as well as in that of the employer, and labor will find its advantage in the largest possible output. There is no more hopeful body, indeed there is no other body, before whom the interests of workmen and of all classes can be urged than labor-unions. The more freely and fully these joint affairs can be discussed, the more rapidly will production be increased, and the class of the unemployed be extinguished. The unemployed are always the dangerous foes of unions.

Every one must admit that the want of labor is united with indolence, bad habits, and a distrust of social, ethical ties. There has been but little sympathetic consideration of the exact problem of labor, and a ready passing over of the entire difficulty to alleged economic principles and religious precepts. For the most part these conventional sentiments and social truisms touch only the surface of events in the industrial world, and then glance off. Few things are more provoking than to have a grievous, personal wrong treated with an indolent emulsion of ideas reserved for this very purpose. Workmen will become more amenable to social considerations, when these considerations are honestly used for their substantial and permanent benefit. The motives of renovation are always found with those who are being renovated.

The appeal of the unemployed to state and church may be badly directed, but it is true to an instinctive feeling that the difficulty is connected with a society not soundly organized in reference to the welfare of all its members; and that church

and state alike have been negligent in inquiring into, and establishing, these wholesome relations. When the too eager and too narrow intent of capital to help itself shall be held in check, when religious faith shall mean a generous service of mankind, we shall be able to see that society, justly organized, is sufficient unto itself; that, far from casting out its members as it progresses, it draws them ever more completely into the common welfare. The public welfare is sacrificed because we constantly suppose it to be expressed in the wealth of a few, because our economic and social principles rest upon an assumed antagonism of social and spiritual development as very much divorced from the affairs of the world. We have not reached the notion of the individual and society as constituent portions of each other; of physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual development as one process, whose parts cannot, in any high degree, be separately secured. Evolution is a profounder, broader, and more consolatory conception than we have ever been able to conceive it to be. The difficulties of society slowly disappear as we come to recognize it, and pursue it in its own integrity.