

THE DUTY OF REMEMBERING THE POOR

NO. 99

A SERMON
 DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 25, 1856
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 AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK

PREACHED ON BEHALF OF THE AGED PILGRIMS' FRIEND SOCIETY

*“Only they would that we should remember the poor;
 the same which I also was forward to do.”*
Galatians 2:10

POVERTY is no virtue. Wealth is no sin. On the other hand, wealth is not morally good and poverty is not morally evil. A man may be a good man and a rich man. It is quite certain that very frequently good men are poor men. Virtue is a plant which depends not upon the atmosphere which surrounds it, but upon the hand which waters it, and upon the grace which sustains it.

We draw no support for grace from our circumstances, whether they are good or evil. Our circumstances may sometimes militate against the gracious work in our breast, but it is quite certain that no position in life is a sustaining cause of the life of grace in the soul. That must always be maintained by divine power, which can work as well in poverty as in riches. For we see some of the finest specimens of the full development of Christianity in those who are the very lowest in temporal circumstances, far outshining those whom we would have imagined, from their position in society, would have had many things to assist their virtues and sustain their graces.

Grace is a plant which draws no nourishment from the wilderness in which it grows. It finds nothing to feed upon in the heart of man. All it lives upon it receives supernaturally. It sends all its roots upwards, none downwards. It draws no support from poverty and none from riches. Gold cannot sustain grace. On the other hand, rags cannot make it flourish. Grace is a plant which derives the whole of its support from God the Holy Spirit, and is therefore entirely independent of the circumstances of man.

But yet, mark you, it is an undeniable fact that God has been pleased for the most part to plant His grace in the soil of poverty. He has not chosen many great, nor many mighty men of this world, but He has “chosen the poor of this world—rich in faith—to be heirs of the kingdom of God.” We should wonder why, were we not quite sure that God is wise in His choice.

We cannot dispute a fact which Scripture teaches and which our own observation supports, that the Lord’s people are, to a very large extent, the poor of this world. Very few of them wear crowns. Very few ride in carriages. Only a proportion of them have a competence. A very large multitude of His family are destitute, afflicted, tormented, and are kept leaning, day by day, upon the daily provisions of God, and trusting Him from meal to meal, believing that He will supply their needs out of the riches of His fullness.

Now, tonight, we shall, first of all, mention *the fact* that God has a poor people. Secondly, *the duty*—we should remember the poor. And then, thirdly, *the obligation for us to perform this duty*, for there are sundry reasons why we ought to be especially mindful of the poor of the Lord’s flock.

I. First, then, THE LORD HAS A POOR PEOPLE—a fact notorious to us all, which daily observation confirms.

Why does the Lord have a poor people? This is a question that might suggest itself to us and we might not at all times find it easy to answer it, if we were poor ourselves. God could make them all rich if He pleased. He could lay bags of gold at their doors. He could send whole rivers of supplies, where

now it is a desert. He could scatter round their houses abundance of provisions, as once He made the quails lie in very heaps round the camp of Israel, so now He could rain bread out of heaven to feed them.

There is no necessity that they should be poor, only as it pleases His own sovereign will. "The cattle upon a thousand hills are his," He could supply them. He could make the rich men of this world give up all their wealth, if He so pleased to turn their minds. He could make the richest, the greatest, and the mightiest, bring all their power and riches to the feet of His children, for the hearts of all men are in His control.

But He does not choose to do so. He allows them to suffer want, He allows them to pine in penury and obscurity. Why is this? I believe that is a question we should not find it easy to answer, if we were in the circumstances, but seeing that many of us are out of the affliction, we may perhaps hint at one or two reasons why the Lord God has had, has, and always will have, a poor people in this world.

1. I think one reason is to teach us *how grateful we should be for all the comforts He bestows on many of us*. One of the sweetest meals I think I have ever eaten was after beholding a spectacle of penury which had made me weep. When we see others wanting daily bread, does not our loaf at once taste very sweet? It may have been very dry, but we saw someone begging for bread in the streets and we thanked God for what we had that day, when we knew that others wanted.

When we take our walks abroad and see the poor, he must be but a very poor Christian who does not lift up his eyes to heaven and thank his God thus,

*“Not more than others I deserve,
But God has given me more.”*

If we were all made rich alike, if God had given us all abundance, we should never know the value of His mercies, but He puts the poor side by side with us, to make their trials, like a dark shadow, set forth the brightness which He is pleased to give to us in temporal matters. Oh! you would never thank God half so much if you did not see your cause for thankfulness by marking the needs of others.

Oh! you dainty ones, that can scarcely eat the food that is put before you, it would do you good if you could sit down at the table of the poor. Oh! you discontented ones, who are always murmuring at your households, because all kinds of delicacies are not provided for you, it would do you good if you could sit down for a while to workhouse fare, and sometimes eat a little less than that, and fast a day or two, to find your appetites.

Ay, you who never sing a song of praise to God, it would be no small benefit to you if you were for once made to want His bounties, then you might be led to thank God for all His abundant supplies. Even Christian men want a spur to their thankfulness. God gives us a great many mercies we never thank Him for. Day by day His mercies come, but day by day we forget them. His mercies lie

*“Forgotten in unthankfulness,
And without praises die.”*

Put you out in the cold some winter's night and would you not thank God for the fire afterwards? Make you thirst for a little while and how grateful would be the cup of water! Now, if God has not exposed us in this way, it is at least an instance of His wisdom that He has placed others in that position, to teach those of His family who are more highly favored in temporal matters, how thankful they ought to be for the gifts of His providence.

2. That, however, I take it, is but a very low view of the matter. There are other, and higher, and better reasons. God is pleased to always have a poor people, *that He may display His sovereignty* in all He does. If there were no poor saints, we should not so strongly believe the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. Or at least, if the saints believed it, as they always must and will, yet the wicked and those who despise it, would not have so clear an evidence of it, and would not sin against such great light, which shines upon their poor, dark, blind eyeballs from evident displays of sovereignty in salvation.

Those who deny divine sovereignty, deny it in the face of all testimony, certainly in the teeth of Scripture, for it is there positively affirmed. And God, in order that there may be something besides Scripture, has made His providence bear out the written Word and has caused many of His children to be the despised among the people.

“I take whom I please,” says God. “You would have Me choose kings and queens first. I choose their humble servants in their kitchens before I choose their masters and mistresses in their banqueting halls. You would have Me take the counselor and the wise man. I take the fool first, that I may teach you to despise the wisdom of man. I take the poor before the rich, that I may humble all your pride, and teach you there is nothing in man that makes Me choose him, but that it is the sovereign will of God alone which creates men heirs of grace.”

I bless God that there are poor saints, for they teach me this lesson, that God will do as He pleases with His own. They show me manifestly, that however much men may deny the sovereignty of God, they cannot rob Him of it, that He will still exert it to the very last, long as this earth shall stand, and mayhap find ways of exerting it, even in future ages.

Certainly the existence of a poor people in the world is proof positive in the mind of the saint, and a plain and bold affirmation to the most obtuse intellect of the sinner, that there is a sovereignty of God in the choice of men.

3. Again, God has a poor people, I take it, *that He may display more the power of His comforting promises and the supports of the Gospel*. If all God’s saints were well-to-do in this world and never lacked, we would scarcely realize the value of the Gospel half so much. Oh! my brethren, when we find some that have not where to lay their heads, who yet can say, “Still will I trust in the Lord,” when we see some who have nothing but bread and water, who still glory in Jesus, when we see them “wondering where the scene shall end,” seeing that “every day new straits attend,” and yet having faith in Christ, oh, what honor it reflects on the Gospel!

Let my rich friend there stand up and say, “I have faith in God for tomorrow with regard to my daily bread.” You would say, “My dear friend, I do not at all wonder at it, for you have plenty of money at home to buy your bread with and a salary coming in on such a day. There is not much opportunity for faith in your case.” But when some poor Habakkuk rises and exclaims, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall there be fruit in the vine,” and so on, “Yet will I trust in the LORD.” Ah! then that shows the power of all-supporting grace.

You know we hear of a great many different inventions that will never stand a trial. One man advertises a swimming belt. A fine thing it would be for dry land, but when it is tried at sea, I fear it will not exactly answer the purpose. And really we cannot know the value of an invention unless we test it and put it through all the trials which it is supposed to be able to endure.

Now, grace is tested in the poverty of believers—that they are still in a great degree an uncomplaining and unmurmuring race—that they bear up under every discouragement, believing that all things work together for their good, and that out of all their apparent evils some good shall ultimately spring—that their God will either work a deliverance for them speedily, or most assuredly support them in the trouble, as long as He is pleased to keep them there. Beloved, this is no doubt one reason why God puts His people in poor circumstances.

“There,” says the architect, “this building is strong.” Ay, sir, but it must be tested. Let the wind blow against it. There is a lighthouse out at sea. It is a calm night—I cannot tell whether the edifice is firm. The tempest must howl about it and then I shall know whether it will stand.

So with religion. If it were not on many occasions surrounded with tempestuous waters, we should not know that the ship was staunch and strong. If the winds did not blow upon it, as they do on our poor tried brethren, we should not know how firm and secure it is. The masterworks of God are those that stand in the midst of difficulties—when all things oppose them, yet maintain their stand.

These are His all-glorious works and so His best children, those who honor Him the most, are those who have grace to sustain them amidst the heaviest load of tribulations and trials. God puts His people into such circumstances, then, to show us the power of His grace.

4. Then, again, God often allows His people to be a tried and a poor people, just *to plague the devil*. The devil was never more plagued in his life, I think, than he was with Job. As long as Job was rich, Job caused much envy in Satan, but he never made him so angry as when he was poor. It was then that Satan was the most incensed against him, because, after all his trials, he would not curse God and die.

You know, if a man thinks he can do a thing, he will always wrap himself up in his self-complacency, till he tries to do it and then fails. So Satan thinks he may overthrow one or other of God's children. "Now, Satan," says God, "I will give you an opportunity of trying your skill. One of My children is very poor. I will cut off his bread and water. I will give him the water of affliction to drink and the bread of bitterness to eat. He shall be exceedingly tried. Take him, Satan, drag him through fire and water, and see what you can do with him."

So Satan tries to starve out the divine life from his soul, but he cannot do it, and he finds, after all he has done, that he is defeated, and he goes away plagued, and vexed, and feeling another hell within himself, though miserable enough before, because he was foiled in all his attempts to tread out the spark of life in the heart of God's child.

God often allows Satan to test the Lord's work. It is marvelous that the crafty devil should continue to work when it all tends to the glory of God after all, but he is a devil all over and will ever continue so. He always will keep on meddling with God's children. He will persevere even to the last moment, till every saint is safe across the Jordan, he will still be plaguing and vexing God's beloved children. Ah! then let us rejoice, God will deliver us and bring us off safe at last, yea, "more than conquerors, through him that loved us."

5. Furthermore, the design of our heavenly Father in allowing a poor people in this world, and keeping His people poor, when He might make them rich, is possibly *to give us some living glimpse of Christ*. A poor man is the image of Jesus Christ, if he be a Christian. All Christians are the image of Jesus Christ, for the sanctifying influence of Christ exerted on them has made them in some degree like their Master.

But the poor man is like his Master not only in his character, but in his circumstances too. When you look on a poor saint, you have a better picture of Jesus than you have in a rich saint. The rich saint is a member of Christ. He has the image of his Master stamped upon him and that image shall be perfected when he shall arrive in heaven.

But the poor saint has something else. He has not only the most prominent feature, but the background and the foreground, and all in the picture. He has the circumstances of it. Look at his brown hands, hardened by toil—such were his Savior's once. Look at his weary feet, blistered with his journeyings—such were his Savior's many a time.

He sits upon a well from weariness, as did his Lord once. He has nowhere to rest, nor had his Master. Foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests, but He had not where to lay His head. He is fed by charity, so was his Master, others supplied His wants. See! He sits down at an invited table, so did his Master. He had not one of His own.

You see Christ then. You see as much of Christ as you will see just yet, until you are taken up where you shall be like Him and see Him as He is. He would have us always remember the Savior's poverty, "How he was rich, and yet for our sakes became poor."

And just as, on some memorable day, they strike medals which bear the impress of its hero, so I look upon every poor saint as being a medal struck from the divine mint, to be a memento of the existence of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is to make me remember my Lord, to bid me meditate upon that wondrous depth of poverty into which He stooped, that He might lift me up to light and glory.

Oh! Blessed Jesus, this is wise, for we oft forget You—wise that You have given us some opportunity to remember You.

6. But now one more reason and I have done with this part of the subject. The Lord has a poor people in the midst of us for this reason, that He *determines to give us opportunities of showing our love to Him*. Now, we show our love to Christ when we sing of Him and when we pray to Him. But if there were no poor people in the world, we should often say within ourselves, “Oh! how I wish there were one of Christ’s brethren that I could help. I should like to give Christ something. I should like to show my Master that I love Him, not by words only, but by deeds too.”

And if all the poor saints were taken clean away and we were all well-to-do and had abundance, there would be none to require any assistance, and I think we might begin to weep, because there were no poor saints to help. It is one of the most healthy things in the world to help a saint. It is a great blessing to our own souls.

It is a healthy exercise of the mind to visit the poor of the Lord’s flock and distribute as we are able of our substance to their necessities. Let us look upon it not as a mere duty, but as a delight and privilege, for if we were not able to give something of our substance to Christ, we should have to go down on our knees to ask Him to give us some opportunity of showing our love to Him. Take away the saints and one channel wherein our love might flow is withdrawn at once. But that shall never be, for the poor we always shall have with us, and these are some of the reasons why we always shall have them.

II. The second thing we shall endeavor to speak of is THE DUTY here alluded to, “*They would that we should remember the poor.*”

“Remember the poor.” That word “remember” is a very comprehensive word.

We ought to remember the poor in our *prayers*. I need not remind you to offer supplication for the rich, but remember the poor. Remember them and pray that God would comfort and cheer them in all the trials of their penury, that He would supply their wants out of the riches of His fullness. Let the angel touch you on the arm when you have nearly finished your prayer, and say, “Remember the poor. Remember the poor of the flock.” Let your prayers always go up to heaven for them.

Remember the poor, too, in your *conversation*. It is remarkable that all of us remember the rich. We talk about all men being equal, but I do not believe there is an Englishman who is not silly enough to boast, if he has happened to be with a lord in his lifetime. To have seen a live lord is a most marvelous thing and there is scarcely one of us that could resist the temptation of talking about it.

We may say what we like about believing in the equality of mankind, so we do, till we happen to get a little elevated, then we don’t believe it any longer. We are all ready enough to pull others down when we are in humble circumstances, but when we get a little elevated, we foolishly think it only a child’s fancy that we indulged in, and that after all there are more differences than we imagined. We always remember the rich.

You see a man respectable in church. You always know him, don’t you? You are on the exchange, or walking down the street, you never find any difficulty in recognizing him. Somehow or other, your memory is very treacherous in remembering the poor, but very strong in remembering a rich man. Let me remind you to “Remember the poor.”

It is singular enough that there is no command to remember the rich. I suppose because there is no necessity for it, for we usually remember them. But there is a command for us to remember the poor. Now the next time you see a poor brother coal-heaver, bricklayer, herdsman, or whatever he may be, do know him, if you please. And if you see him in all his dirty garments, still know him. Do not forget him. Try and recollect him.

Next sacrament Sunday, look him in the face as though you remembered him. For the last twenty times you have seen him, you have appeared as if you did not remember him, and the poor man’s mind has been hurt as much as if it were some slight on your part, because he was a poor brother. I will not say that it was so, but I am rather afraid it was in some degree.

Now, when you see him in the street, say, “Well, brother, I know you.” And if he comes up to speak to you, do not think it will lower you to be seen speaking to him in the street. If he is your brother,

acknowledge him. If he is not, tell no lie about it, but leave the church and make no false professions. But if you believe it, carry it out.

Now, often, when you are walking home from the house of God, you do not remember the poor, do you? If they should require to speak to you, however important their errand, they would not get attended to very frequently. If Mr. So-and-so, who is a respectable gentleman, wanted you, “Oh! yes, sir, I can stop a moment and have a little conversation with you.” But if a poor person wants you, “Oh! I am in such a hurry. I must go home.” And you are sure to go off directly.

Now, for the future, just reverse your habit. When you see a rich man, do just what you like about attending to him. I know what you will like to do. But when you see a poor man, just make it a point of conscience that you attend to him.

I was very much pleased with the conduct of a brother who is here present. He may remember the circumstance and bless God that He gave him grace to act as he did. A short time ago there stood in the aisle near his pew door, a gentleman and a poor fellow in a smock frock. I thought to myself, “He will let one in I know, I wonder which it will be?”

I did not wait long, before out he came and in went the smock frock. He thought very rightly, that the gentlemen would stand a chance of getting a seat out of some of you, but he thought it best to remember the poor. And it was likely that the poor man was the most tired, for he had no doubt had a hard week’s work and probably a long walk, for there are not many smock frocks near London. Therefore he gave in reality to the most necessitous.

I say, again, “Remember the poor.” There is no necessity to tell you to remember the rich—to be very respectful, and to speak very kindly and lovingly to those who are above you, you will take care of yourselves on that point. But it is the poor you are disposed not to attend to, and therefore I will press on you this commandment, that you remember the poor.

But this especially means, I think, that *in the provision for their necessities*, we ought to remember the poor. Some of us have pretty good need to remember the poor. I am sure I have, for I have about ten times as many poor people come to me every day as I can possibly relieve. If I were as rich as the Mayor of London, or Her Majesty the Queen, I could scarcely accede to the immense requests sometimes made to me.

There is scarcely a poor man that is hard run by his creditors, or a poor woman that cannot make up her rent, but they write to the minister. All the poor souls come to him. And I think to myself, “What can I do with you? I have really done as much as I can and here are three or four more coming.” So I am obliged to send them away and can only pity, but cannot assist, and this will be the case, unless some one shot a wagon load of gold before my door. Still, we must “remember the poor.”

Some think it very hard to have so many calls on them. I do not. I only think it hard when I cannot help them. If I could, I would think it a great blessing to assist them all. If I were put in possession of great wealth, I do not say what I would do, for very frequently people’s hearts get smaller when their means get greater. But where God has given us wealth, I am sure where there are necessitous children of God, we ought to remember them directly.

How much of the superfluities might be given to their necessities! How many of our lavished luxuries might be bestowed on that which they crave for their very existence. You know not how poor this world is. You ride through one part of this magnificent city and you say, “Talk of poverty! there is no such thing.” You ride through another part and you say, “Talk of riches! there is no such thing. The world is poor.”

Some of you should, now and then, go and search out poverty. Place you above it, and your movements in life seldom bring you into contact with it. If you would have your hearts enlarged, visit the poor. Follow them into their dens, for they are but little better in some cases. Go up their creaking staircases. See the straw in the corner of the room where they sleep, ay, see worse than that—see a chair whereon a man has been for the last five years, not able to sit without being propped, obliged to be fed

by others, and yet living on four or five shillings a week, with nothing to support him properly or give him sufficient bodily nutriment.

Go and see such cases, and if you do not put your hands in your pockets and help the aged pilgrims, I am afraid there is not much Christianity in you. Or if you do not help the one that you see has the greatest need, I am afraid the love of God dwells not in you. It is a duty we owe to the poor of the Lord's flock and we reap many advantages we should not have if we had not to remember the poor.

III. Now, allow me to press home THIS OBLIGATION—*why should we remember the poor?*

I shall not urge it upon the ground of common philanthropy and charity, that were a too mean and low way of addressing Christian men, although even they perhaps might be benefited by it. I shall urge it in another way.

“Remember the poor,” because they are your Lord's brethren. What! Do you not feel, like David, that you would do anything for Jonathan's sake? And if he has some poor sick son, some Mephibosheth, lame in his feet, will you not seat him at your table, or give him a maintenance, if you can, seeing that Jonathan's blood is in his veins?

Remember, beloved, the blood of Jesus runs in the veins of poor saints. They are His relatives. They are His friends, and if that moves you not, remember, they are your friends, too. They are your brethren if you are a child of God. They are allied to you. If they are sons of God, so are you, and they are brethren of yours.

What! Let your brother starve? If you can, will you not relieve your brother's necessity, not shield him from the cold, not ward off hunger, not provide for his needs? Oh! I know you love Jesus. I know you love the friends of Jesus and I know you love your own family, and therefore, you will love your poor brethren, will you not? I know you will, you will relieve them.

Remember, too, that you yourself may be like your poor brother ere long, therefore take heed that you despise him not, for someone will despise you. Oh! think you that all you have God has lent you. He may take it all from you if He pleases. And if He sees that you make an ill use of it, perhaps He will take it from you now. Full many a man has lost his wealth by God's righteous judgment for his misuse of it.

You are God's steward, will you cheat Him? He has given you His wealth to distribute to the poor. Will you not supply their needs out of what He has given you? Yes, surely you will. I cannot believe you will turn them away, as long as you have anything wherewith to relieve them, but will share what you have with them.

Remember, if you do not relieve them, you give great and grave suspicion that you love not Christ, for if you love not Christ's people, how can it be that you are His disciples, since it is the mark, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another”? And how can you love, where you have, and give not where God has made you rich, and yet you do not bestow? Gravely you give cause to doubt that the love of God is in you, if the love of the brethren is not in you also.

Oh! remember, when you give, God can give you more. You have lost nothing. You have put it in another purse and God may hand it back to you in larger measure yet. Men lose nothing by what they give to God's saints. It would often be a heavenly investment if they bestowed it upon God's family. But if they retain it, God has other means to make them poor, if they will not give to His cause.

John Bunyan tells of a man who had a roll of cloth and the more he cut from it, the more he had. And he says, in his rhyming way,

*“A man there was, though some did count him mad,
The more he cast away, the more he had.”*

He was not much of a madman, after all, if he had more the more he gave away. But that is a very selfish view. Remember, if you never get it back again, it is no small honor to give it to Christ. And remember, what you give to His children, you put into His palm. If Christ should stand at the door as you pass the plate, how would you put your money in to please Him! Remember, His poor believing

family are His hand. Give into His hand then, as you can at all times and seasons. Remember the poor, you shall always have the poor to remember.

Well, now, I beg leave to commend to your attention and notice tonight the Aged Pilgrims' Friend Society, as being an especially excellent institution, because it will enable you to remember the poor. Those who are relieved by it are, in the first place, all Christians, as far as man can judge. They are all examined beforehand as to their experience of a change of heart and the existence of a divine life within them. And none are received into the society but those who are really the members of Christ's mystical body and give evidence of the work of grace in their hearts.

In the next place, the funds which are given to them are distributed by Christian men who visit them once a month. And when they visit them, I do not suppose they leave them without praying with them and endeavoring to cheer their hearts. I know they do not. They often spend a season of prayer and have a kind conversation with them concerning their souls.

And last of all, they are all over sixty. They have a double claim on us, because they are the Lord's aged people, as well as the Lord's poor people. And none of them have anything without they absolutely and really require it. I will just read you this very short paper to tell you what they have done—

“The Society was established in 1807 for the relief of the aged Christian poor, above sixty years, irrespective of denominational distinction, both male and female, in town and country. It has extended its valuable aid to 1,650 aged disciples of the Lord Jesus, among whom have been distributed upwards of £50,000.

“The following is a brief account of its present state, in reference both to the number relieved and the amount of income and expenditure. There are—

45 Pensioners who receive 10 guineas per annum, or 17s. 6d. per month
 245 ditto 5 ditto or 8s. 9d. ditto
 130 Approved Candidates who receive 4s. per month.

Total 420 amongst whom are distributed, monthly, at their own habitations, £172.

“The income arising from Annual subscriptions, etc., does not exceed £1550, while the expenditure is upwards of £2000, leaving a deficiency, annually, of £450 and upwards, which the Committee have to make up by obtaining collections in various churches and chapels, wherever they can. Donations and Annual Subscriptions will be thankfully received by the Treasurers or Secretaries at any time. Every department is filled *gratuitously*. Also, legacies will, at any time, be very thankfully received.”

Our friends had no business to have said anything about legacies, for we do not wish you to die just yet. We always wish to have your subscriptions. We are very thankful to receive legacies, but do not keep the money to leave us in the shape of legacies. We would rather have your annual subscriptions for ten years, for then we would have your living prayers, your living sympathy, and your living help.

Well, if you do not think this a good Society, do not give anything. But if you do, just put it on its merits. People very often give to an object just what others give, because there is a collection. But just put this upon its own merits and your ability, and give as you think the Society deserves to receive and as you believe yourselves able to bestow. May God give a blessing to you in remembering the poor.

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