First principles of material well-being

Davies Benjamin
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Author: Davies Benjamin

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Symbols

In the body of this little work symbols are employed to denote certain definite physical quantities. They are as follows:

\( W = \text{Well-being or Wealth.} \) This well-being every man and woman should seek, whether social conditions be perfect or imperfect. This has little or no relation to gold \( \text{per se} \) nor its accumulation in a properly systematised society. Neither has it any relation to riches which is a phenomenon of the competitive order.

\( Q = \text{Quantity of material or commodity} \) such as a forest of timber, a field of corn or a lode of ore.

\( E = \text{Stored energy of Nature,} \) such as the energy of wind, of falling water, of coal and oil.

\( L = \text{Human labour} \) or the muscular energy of human beings.

\( f = \text{Efficiency of operations—productive as well as distributive.} \)
PREFACE.

This little book is sent forth in the hope that many readers will be helped to reconsider the Christian Doctrine relating to material Well-Being. The doctrine is held by the majority of us as being too ideal for practical purposes and is consequently abandoned as useless.

In the following brief pages the doctrine is shown to be identical with the fundamental economic principle of Well-Being and, moreover, that it is the only practically successful doctrine that man can eventually accept.

To understand this unity underlying the economic theory of wealth and its ethical counterpart is to utter the "Everlasting YES" which leads to progress instead of "Everlasting NO" which has paralysed the efforts of the past.

A subsidiary object in view is to present an expression of a simple form for Material Well-being, easy to understand and to remember.

1917.
First Principles of Material Well-Being

There are two principal ways in which one may spend one's days in this world. First, the way in which one's efforts are directed to the furtherance of one's own cause irrespective of the needs of others. Second, the way in which it is essentially necessary to labour not for one's self alone but for the whole community.

Unlike the Church of the early days of Christianity the Church* of our days does not fully realise the important and fundamental difference between the two ways: between the self and the selfless, between the Old Man and the New in the affairs of life, between Adam and Jesus. The difference is taught, but as an abstraction rather than a practical thing.

Existing Conditions.

Under existing conditions man's main object in life is the extension of his own means of subsistence and pleasure. Six days in the week

* The Church in the broadest sense of the term—Roman Catholic, Protestant and Nonconformist.
this is the governing factor in his activities. Man's main occupation and objective in life are thus material; they are commercial. This objective is sought so strenuously that commercial and industrial life has become one of great anxiety and restlessness. We perform our duties swiftly, irrespective of demands beyond those of immediate and obvious material gain. We cross the Atlantic by describing on the globe the straightest possible line between two points and free from any thoughts of possible obstacles. The distant end of this line is reached in the minimum possible time so that the process of the accumulation of the riches of this world shall not be unduly interrupted. The error is not in the speed but in the object of our interest. We seem bent on working at maximum power instead of maximum efficiency. The phenomenon is, to say the least, an ugly one.

From the moment a young man leaves the home to fight for his existence in the commercial arena he is, by force of circumstances placed in a position in which he cannot exercise his noblest gifts as a Christian, except against tremendous odds. That many emerge unscathed speaks well for men, not for the arena: speaks well for true religion, not for commerce. The very thought of having to fight our fellow beings for material subsistence
Material Well-Being

is essentially repulsive, and the fact that we, as churchmen, have to realise the thought in practice reveals a condition of things within the church that is far from being creditable.

Even within the dominion of the Church, how many children are taught, either at home or at school, that their commercial lives are really to be devoted to the service of their fellow beings? Very few, it is feared. They are usually told simply and bluntly that in the world of commerce they are to act with the utmost regard for themselves, "to get on," "to rise," and that, in a sense, obviously quite irrespective of the well-being of others. It is unlikely therefore that they can perceive any necessary and fundamental bond of union in life, for all efforts to them are purely individualistic. Socially they may be perfectly trained, and may manifest this good training in perfect gentleness worthy of the noblest type of Christian brotherhood. Nevertheless, on their entering the commercial arena, the spirit that hitherto dominated their activities must be abandoned, and life must necessarily appear to them merely as the sum of the activities of its component parts—obviously a dreadful view. Life is the sum of activities it is true, but it is meant to be something vastly greater than that. And until we see clearly that it should be greater, we cannot regard our lives as being in any sense
governed by the law of Love. The parable of the vine is realised in the home life but is most thoroughly abandoned directly one steps beyond the threshold.

We are still planning our daily duties in obedience to heathen views of life. Our commercial life is identical with that which prevailed prior to the Christian era. It is obvious that Christianity is not even an element in it. Nevertheless, Christian teaching is not without effect. Its effect has been great. Even in the dark ages, its power was astonishing. But it has been a modifying influence only. It has not yet become the motive of man’s entire endeavour, and has not yet affected Society in its structure and foundation. The foundation has not yet been truly touched. It is important to be clear on this and to bear the fact in mind. That Christianity has not yet become the Foundation of Society is the weightiest fact in human affairs to-day. With some considerable measure of truth it may be said that Christianity has not become the foundation even of the Church itself. It seems as if the Church has failed in the faith necessary to follow up abstract theory into the living thing of every day life. That the motive power of all our exertions should still be of heathen origin is undoubtedly the rock against which a vast amount of Church work comes to grief and is the main
causé of that lack of power exhibited by the Church in our day. We endeavour to make church activity to fit in both with the ways of the world, and with the ways of God, though fully conscious of their antagonism. The one tends earthward the other heavenward. The one tends to disruption, the other to union.

The Great War has revealed this weakness in the Church throughout Europe in an astonishing and tragic manner. The Church possesses the theory, but has woefully failed in exercising it—a so-called faith without works.

**Instability of the Existing Order.**

The entire field of activity of man to-day is a vast arena of conflict, incessant strife, and therefore essentially unchristian. Here we observe two forces, always in opposition, the one positive the other negative, at the very foundation of things. And the question is, whether the negative force should or should not be removed. Commercial activity is founded on a purely physical basis without the faintest reference to the spiritual, and is precisely in the same category as militarism. It is true that this activity is in a measure governed, directed and modified by external laws of a type more or less moral, designed to prevent men from developing to excess the incongruous structure
built on the physical basis. This is an obviously unstable condition. Men speak of existing Society in its thousand manifestations as if it were a gloriously successful scheme of things. Surely, in the light of the New Testament, teaching, it is a sad failure. It is truly a house built on the sand, having buttresses of various kinds with their feet more or less on solid rock designed to keep it erect. This instability is in itself a definite proof of the truth of the statement that the so-called social organism is no organism at all in the correct sense, much less a Christian organisation. This instability is the cause of persistent worry to a vast number of our fellow beings. The ever present anxiety concerning family welfare is a grave evil, and the ever existent fear of national disaster arising from the vast pent-up power in our armies and navies ready to burst forth into ghastly action at the slightest provocation, is an exhibition of instability that is deplorable, and a disgrace to us members of a Church whose real foundation is peace.

The instability of existing industrial conditions is clearly discussed by John Stuart Mill in the chapter on “Ordinary Functions of Government” in his “Principles of Political Economy.” The conclusion he arrives at is as follows: “Finally I must repeat my conviction that the industrial economy which divides