



pr group, i beg your prague, Prague 2014 |





Yet if one looks closely one sees that there is no essential difference between a beggar's livelihood and that of numberless respectable people. **Beggars do not work, it is said; but, then, what is work?** A navy works by swinging a pick. An accountant works by adding up figures. A beggar works by standing out of doors in all weathers and getting varicose veins, chronic bronchitis, etc. It is a trade like any other; quite useless, of course~but, then, many reputable trades are quite useless. And as a social type a beggar compares well with scores of others. He is honest compared with the sellers of most patent medicines, high-minded compared with a Sunday newspaper proprietor, amiable compared with a hire-purchase tout~in short, a parasite, but a **fairly harmless parasite**. He seldom extracts more than a bare living from the community, and, what should justify him according to our

ethical ideas, he pays for it over and over in suffering. I do not think there is anything about a beggar that sets him in a different class from other people, or gives most modern men the right to despise him.

Then the question arises, **Why are beggars despised?**~for they are despised, universally. **I believe it is for the simple reason that they fail to earn a decent living.** In practice nobody cares whether work is useful or useless, productive or parasitic; the sole thing demanded is that it shall be profitable. In all the modern talk about energy, efficiency, social service and the rest of it, what meaning is there except 'Get money; get it legally, and get a lot of it'? **Money has become the grand test of virtue.** By this test beggars fail, and for this they are despised. If one could earn even ten pounds a week at begging, it would become a respectable profession immediately. A beggar, looked at realistically, is simply a businessman, getting his living, like other businessmen, in the way that comes to hand. He has not, more than most modern people, sold his honour; he has merely made the mistake of choosing a trade at which it is impossible to grow rich.

"What is a pick-lock compared to a debenture share? What is the burglary of a bank compared to the founding of a bank? What is the murder of a man compared to the employment of a man? ... Nowadays a man must work within the law; it's just as much fun! ... In this present age one uses peaceful methods. Brute force is out of date."

pp 226, "Threepenny Novel", Bertolt Brecht, Penguin books, 1961.

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