AP World History

Unit V: Industrial Era

Primary source analysis: middle class perspective

*Samuel Smiles (1812-1904) was a businessman who held several managerial posts in the railroad industry. He achieved worldwide fame through his inspirational books on morality and personal behavior.*

**Focus Questions: According to Smiles, who is responsible for the poverty in England? In his view, what can be done about it? What evidence do we have of his POV? How might his POV influence his opinion?**

From *Thrift:* “Faults of the Poor”

England is one of the richest countries in the world. Our merchants are enterprising, our manufacturers are industrious, our labourers are hard-working. There is an accumulation of wealth in the country to which past times can offer no parallel. The Bank is gorged with gold. There never was more food in the empire; there never was more money. There is no end to our manufacturing productions, for the steam-engine never tires. And yet, notwithstanding all this wealth, there is an enormous mass of poverty. Close alongside the Wealth of Nations, there gloomily stalks the Misery of Nations, - luxurious ease resting upon a dark background of wretchedness.

Parliament reports have again and again revealed to us the miseries endured by certain portions of our working population. They have described the people employed in factories, workshops, mines and brickfields, as well as in the pursuits of country life. We have tried to grapple with the evils of their condition by legislation, but it seems to mock us. Those who sink into poverty are fed, but they remain paupers…Thus the Haves and the Have-notes, the opulent and the indigent, stand at the two extremes of the social scale, and a wide gulf is fixed between them.

With respect to the poorer classes – what has become of them in the midst of our so-called civilization? An immense proportion of them remain entirely uncivilized. They work, eat, drink and sleep: that constitutes their life. They think nothing of providing for tomorrow, or for next week, or for next year. They abandon themselves to their sensual appetites; and make no provision whatever for the future. The thought of adversity…never crosses their minds. In these respects, they resemble the savage tribes, who know no better, and do no worse. Hence, the skilled workman, unless trained in good habits, may exhibit no higher a life than that of mere animal; and the earning of increased wages will only furnish him with increased means for indulging in the gratification of his grosser appetites.

Complaining that the laws are bad, and that taxes are heavy, will not mend matters. Aristocratic government, and the tyranny of masters, are nothing like so injurious as the tyranny of vicious appetites. To blame others for what we suffer is always more agreeable to our self-pride than to blame ourselves. But it is perfectly clear that people who live from day to day without a plan – who spend all their earnings, without saving anything for the future, are preparing beforehand for inevitable distress.

All this may seem very hopeless; yet it is not entirely so. The large earnings of the working classes is an important point to start with. The gradual diffusion of education will help them to use, and not abuse, their means of comfortable living. The more extended knowledge of the uses of economy, frugality, and thrift, will help them to spend their lives more soberly, virtuously and religiously.