

A Moral View of the Weaver's Trade, 1766

(The Weaver was the aristocrat of the domestic textile industry. The independent weaver and his family were later idealized as the epitome of a balanced work and family life. An anonymous Divine comments on the moral advantages of the weaver's trade. J.C., D.D. *The Weaver's Pocket-Book: or Weaving Spiritualized. In a Discourse, Wherein Men employed in that Occupation, are instructed how to raise Heavenly Meditations, from the several Parts of their Work. To which also are added Some few Moral and Spiritual Observations, relating both to That and other Trades*, Dundee, 1766, 92-3, 147-57, 159, 218, 224; in J. T. Ward, ed., *The Factory System, Vol. I, Birth and Growth* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970), pp. 59-64.)

Once more, methinks I cannot but observe, how the wisdom of divine providence hath made work for all the children of men, that as there was no beggar in Israel, so there need be no beggars in England. How many doth a single weaver employ of all, both sexes and sizes! It must be an adult man must weave, but women must spin for him, and children must fill his pipes. It is the reproach of England that there are so many beggars in the streets thereof; when God hath furnished it with one little beast, whose profit, if improved, would set them all to work and afford them bread in the sweat of their face. That we are full of scandalous beggars, is not because the providence of God hath not laid out work enough, or the trading of England is so little, that it will not set them to it; nor because the legislative power hath not provided sufficient laws; but because they are so ill executed by inferiour officers, and parents are suffered to bring up children in idleness. O England! Spit out thy flegm, shake off thy sloth, honour God in the substance and increase which he hath given thee. It is nothing but lust and sloth that fills thee with such prodigious wickedness and beggary.

.....A second advantage of this trade is the little time that it giveth either servant or master (but servants especially) for idleness. Idleness (especially in youth) is the source and fountain of almost all the debauchery that polluteth the world, and all the beggary with which we abound....

... It is the idle person that proves the gamester, the drunkard, etc. It is true there may be an excess of labour, when it is to that degree that it wasteth the body, destroyeth the health, allows not due time for devotion, nor the reasonable repairs of the body, by food or sleep, or moderate recreation; but (these things excepted) the lesser time for idleness any trade allows, the better it is. This I am sure this trade doth. I am many many times ashamed of my own bed, when I see the candles in the poor Weavers chambers or hear the noise of their looms.

Thirdly, It is the advantage of this above many other trades, that a man may be dealing in it with a little stock, and from it get a little livelihood. It is the disadvantage of many other employments, that nothing can be done in them without several hundreds of pounds going: 'tis otherwise in this, my self *have known many who came to considerable estates, who have told me they begun with ten pound; they passed but with a staff over Jordan, and at their coming back had great droves.

Fourthly, If God blasts the Weaver in his course of trade, yet (provided he hath his health and limbs) his trade affords him a livelihood. Many trades do not this, they are more open, &c. And if the tradesman fails, he is forced to fly.

Fifthly, If God blesseth the Weaver in his trade, he is fitted by it also in a great measure for the more noble employment of a merchant: he hath learned to know the true making and the prices of most stuffs, how they may be afforded, &c.

Sixthly, It gives a great advantage for some exercises of religion to be interwoven with secular employment. It is the great unhappiness of some employments, that they do so wholly take up the head and heart of such as are engaged in them, that they hardly allow any intervals for any spiritual employment. The Weaver is not so; but his trade is very consistent with, 1. heavenly ejaculation; . . . he may weave and pray. 2. spiritual meditations . . . 3. spiritual discourse. Ordinarily three or four are working here together in the same chamber: if but one of them will be the preacher, the others are tyed to be the hearers; and indeed I have often thought (how truly I cannot tell) that this trade this way hath very much contributed to the religion of this town, God having a great number of that occupation among us, of whom we have reason to hope very well, as to their eternal state.

Seventhly, It is a trade of great ingenuity: no mechanick trade (if this may be called so) giving such an advantage to ingenious persons to improve their fancy, by the invention of new patterns, or mixing yarns and colours too for a new pattern laid before them.

Lastly, it is a trade infinitely useful as to the poor. Females both women and children are employed in preparing their yarn: children from their infancy almost, in winding their pipes, men in weaving at the loom. In short, I cannot tell whether there be any one other employment, that affords so many personal advantages to the tradesman, or political advantages to the state under whose government they are employed...

This observation may be of a double use to the Weaver. 1. To restrain his discontent for the course of life, in which the providence of God, the prudence of his parents or governors, and his own choice in his younger years, have engaged him. It is a great infirmity of our natures, that not one of many is content with his portion ... but what hath the Weaver to complain of? What can commend a trade which is wanting to his? The Alehouse-keeper, Vintner, Inn-keeper, may lie down many a night with an aking heart, to think how many he hath been helping on to the bottomless pit. Others may have sour reflections, when they come home at night to think over what they have been doing that day, and their consciences make them answer, that they have been serving the world with what is of no use, but to serve pride or luxury. The weaver's conscience shall never trouble him for this. When the weaver reflects upon his trade, and considers the general end of it approved by God, the profit of it, tho' not so great as others, yet what will afford food and raiment to the industrious hand, the advantages of it, whether God pleaseth in it to smile or frown upon him, the advantage it gives him for devout ejaculations, pious meditations, good conferences, the usefulness of it for all, more especially for the maintenance of the poor, he hath no reason to murmur at divine providence, nor to blame his

parents' prudence, or reflect upon his youthful indiscretion. God hath chosen a good lot for him, and he ought cheerfully to abide in the calling to which God hath called him, and to be content.

2. Did I say to be content? Yea to be highly thankful unto God, blessing God that by his providence directed him to such an employ in the world, as his conscience shall never justly check him for the following of it; such a one as lie can in faith go to God morning and evening, and beg God's blessing upon, so cannot many a jollier person. An employment in which he hath many advantages, more than in many others, to serve his God, himself, his generation; that he shall not live in the earth like a drone, upon the honey gathered by others, nor like a beast of prey upon rapine, nor like one who thinks he is only born for himself, and whom, both the good and sober world, could a thousand times with less inconvenience miss than keep alive. Here is abundance of matter of praise, that hath overruled our wills in the indiscretion of our youth to such a choice as this, the choice of a trade at which a man may sit with so much satisfaction, and in which he may work with so much pleasure, and the exercise of so much piety, and for so much publick profit, as well as private advantage. Let then the weaver, reflecting on his employment, sit and sing.

.....For the most part, those who begin with the least stock, raise the best estates.

It is an observation which will be found to justify itself, as in many other trades and courses of life, so in this trade also. Not many who begin with large stocks, grow rich by trading; but for the most part, the most thriving part of tradesmen are those who begin with little; nor doth the reason of this ly wholly out of ordinary sight, though possibly something of it may not be so obvious.

Lastly, I observe, That hardly any trades will maintain their glory, without some government; every particular tradesman having neither wit nor honesty enough to be a law to himself. In all considerable trades therefore, prudent statesmen thought fit to make corporations, where the multitude are under the inspection, rule and government of the most experienced, wise and discreet men of that occupation. And most trades, which to any considerable degree multiply tradesmen, either have such governours, or in a short time come to nothing for want of them.

. . . To this purpose, ordinarily such tradesmen are left to chuse their own governours, as being best acquainted with the trade, and the persons that have most skill in it, and have best approved their honesty in the managery of it.