

to ask is, What work does the world really want?

People make very pathetic mistakes at this point. Perhaps they once made even more than they do now. I remember when mothers used to fancy that if their daughters ever required to earn bread, they would readily secure places as "companions" — with home and good salary—for arranging flowers and carrying on small talk! I remember one poor, poor lady, who felt that the world was very unkind when she found that it would not let her earn a good income by making pincushions!

But we must always remember that while the world will not pay for work it does not need, it could ill do without some work for which it is not particularly inclined to pay.

It requires people who will speak very plain truth to it; it requires thinkers who will remodel its thoughts for it; it wants poets who will show it the sources of true honor and joy; it wants painters who will teach it how to recognize beauty.

But, in general, it does not want to pay for any of these things. Therefore they must be omitted from the ways of earning bread. The world is very willing to pay people who speak smooth falsehoods to it, who make level the grooves in which its warped thoughts run, who sing songs in honor of its folly and passions, who draw vulgar and base pictures for its illustrated papers, or paint the portraits of its millionaires and professional beauties. Now, very few of those who are gifted with literary or artistic talents prepare to prostitute them in these ways; and yet how many sink to do so because, if they mean to live by their gifts, they must shape them to what the world asks!

Therefore, if anybody feel that

he or she has a mission to preach or write or paint, the first thing they have to do is to be independent of the world's payment. That may come—it often does come, sooner or later. But they must be independent of it. Does this mean that only rich men are able freely to use such gifts? No. The greatest of such gifts have been most successfully exercised by poor men. Shakespeare did not live by his plays; he lived by his diligence as a man of business. Milton did not live by his epics, but by his secretarial and his tutorial work. Burns did his best work while he followed his plough. Millet, the painter of the Angelus, when he could not sell his masterpieces, turned an honest penny by painting signboards. Spinoza would have starved on his philosophy, but he kept alive by grinding spectacles.

Nobody should dream of getting a living as a genius. Let the geniuses keep themselves in the rank of the average people and seek answer to the second division of my question: "For what of work really wanted is the world willing to pay?"

It is most willing to pay for food, for clothing, for shelter, for help in sickness, and within limits (very shameful limits sometimes) for teaching.

Those occupations which lie nearest to the natural instincts are not only the most happy, but also the most permanent and prosperous.

The trades which minister to the real necessities of humanity are the most desirable and the most honorable. Farmers and fishers, builders, carpenters and road-makers, bakers and clothiers, and all the other ministers to the daily needs of work-a-day humanity will be always necessary in every state of society. The woman who really knows how to keep a house, how to cook, how to