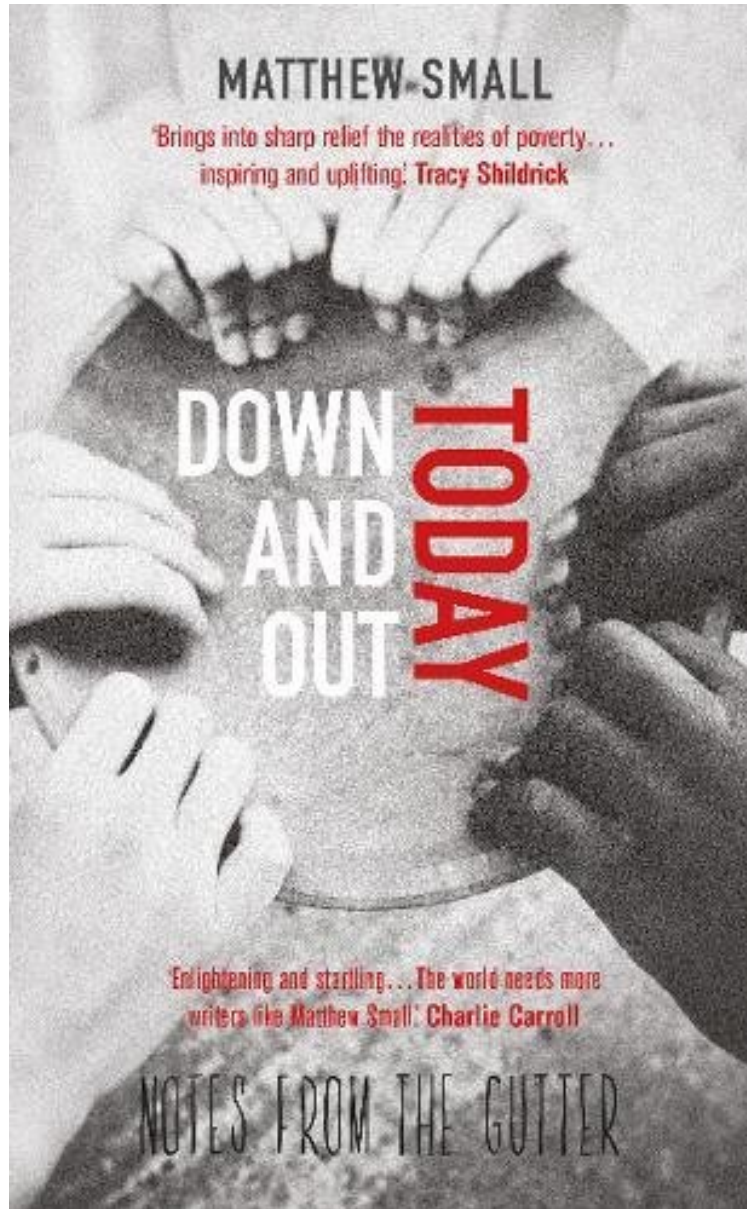


(Download free ebook) Down and Out Today: Notes from the Gutter

Down and Out Today: Notes from the Gutter

Matthew Small

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1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Down and Out TodayBy S RiazIn a time when our television screens are filled with programmes about people on benefits, author Matthew Small has taken a very topical subject to focus

on. What does it mean to be poor? As you can see from the title, this book was partly inspired by George Orwells, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, and, in the same way, the author focuses on two different places. Part of the book takes part in Bath and then he travels to India and Nepal. *Down and Out in Paris and London*, was published in 1933 and I recall, when I last re-read it, thinking that many of the points Orwell made were still valid today and this book suggests I was correct in this assumption. Like Orwell in Paris, Matthew Small spends his time in Bath working, living fairly simply (in a borrowed caravan), with low funds. While in Bath, he spends a lot of time investigating the various charities and food banks that abound in a city more known for tourism, Jane Austen and the baths than for poverty. Also, like Orwell, the author writes really moving journalism and tells the story of the homeless and those who use the various charity resources in the city. There is also a side story about his time spent on a demonstration in London, which is extremely interesting. During his book, Small is completely non judgemental about his subjects, as are those who work for the charities, attempting to help those who need assistance. With benefits being cut, punitive punishments and, often, chaotic lives, it is easy to label people; but the author has to resist this and he does so extremely well. Many of those in poverty are not homeless and are viewed as using resources that are not really for them, while some of the homeless people that the author interviews prefer to stay away from the various charities available. There is also, of course, the important question of whether those we see as poor view themselves as such and what it means to be living in poverty in a country many view as rich. As a counterpoint to this, the author travels to both India and Nepal, where poverty is more obvious; rather than the hidden, dispossessed poor in Bath. In both India and Nepal, the author finds more shocking, obvious concerns, such as children sleeping on the street and the way the physically handicapped or mentally ill are viewed. He works with charities, investigates slums and talks with everyone he comes across about what being poor either physically or spiritually means to people. This is not a light read by any means, but it is an important book. The authors interest in the subject begins in Paris, where he views camps of homeless people; part of the influx of immigrants that have recently poured into Europe. Whatever your political beliefs or opinions, there is no doubt that issues of poverty and homelessness are more apparent, and pressing, than ever. Whether it is people sleeping on the street in India or families in emergency accommodation in a UK city, inequality is everywhere in education, lifestyles and health, it blights, and it damages, not only individuals, but society. At times, the author wonders whether charity embroils those struggling in a never ending cycle of poverty, rather than helping them. At others, he wonders whether the young Indian man who offers to act as his guide and is rewarded with the price of a shoebox, supposedly to help him earn a living, was just using him as a source of guilt money. Would he use it to buy a shoebox? Would Dean, the book loving seller of *The Big Issue*, spend the change given to him on something useful, or tobacco? In the end, the author asks, does it matter? A charity worker in Bath looks at those who arrive for a hot meal, tea and company and states flatly that, if they are here, then they need help and deserve to receive it. You may not agree, but I suspect you will be unable to read this book and remain unmoved. Lastly, I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Small goes through enough whinging and self-doubt for this book to be less of a commentary on poverty and more of a sad travelogue. By Kristine Fisher *Down and Out Today* by Matthew Small is a free NetGalley ebook that I read in late September. I must be honest: before I really got a look at the cover and synopsis, I had thought it was a GLBT memoir. Small goes through enough whinging and self-doubt for this book to be less of a commentary on poverty and more of a sad travelogue.

A comparison between impoverished communities in UK and India explores the meaning of poverty today, questioning whether it's specific only to money. What does poverty mean today? Writer Matthew Small seeks to answer this question and witness the similarities and differences between poverty in the UK and India. Poverty stretches across all of humanity and by traveling East, Small encounters the raw faces of poverty in Indias slums; he works in a leprosy community, and joins the Sisters of Mercy on the smoggy and exhilarating streets in Calcutta. He then returns to the UK to see what the passing of three months means to those who are scarred by one of the most unglamorous of all humanities ills, being poor. Small engages with different community members who are living with poverty, to answer these long standing questions: Whats keeping them down? Whats pushing them out? And how can we move forward?