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Loveless Charity.¹

“And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.”—I COR. xiii. 3.

NO two things impressed the heathen world with the power of Christ to elevate and transform fallen humanity more than the goodness of the primitive Christian Church to the poor, and its readiness for martyrdom. It used to be said that the Roman mob under the later Emperors only demanded “Panem et circenses,” bread and the theatres, to keep them contented. The Christians were ready to share their last crust with their brethren, and if necessary went singing to be butchered in the arena in order to make a Roman holiday. The heathen philosophers of the period felt that the poor were not worth attention at all, and no Faith in the world was important enough to die for. So the Christians were a marvel. But there were dangers. Anything that stirs admiration tempts cheap imitation. The jewellery of the Rue de la Paix costs hundreds of francs, and so one can purchase something very like it for a hundred pence, made in Birmingham. Shallow Corinthians may well have been driven to their knees by St. Paul’s light but incisive touch. The ecstatic tongue-talker, the eloquent scholar, the faith-filled organizer, the open-handed philanthropist, the unshrinking ascetic, must have been, first well-nigh bewildered, and then awed into a new and nobler ambition as the seed of the Word fell into good ground. So we are in this chapter to talk of futile philanthropy and meaningless martyrdom.

“If I share out all my goods morsel by morsel, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing.”² Here is a man who doubles the charitable fifty per cent. of Zacchæus,³ who even equals the Lord’s standard for the young ruler,⁴ and yet is left with the conviction of having gained nothing by it all. There is a tone of disappointment in the sentence, something of the bitterness of Malachi’s audience, who

¹ A devotional study from “The Practice of the Love of Christ,” by the Rev. Harrington C. Lees, M.A. London: Robert Scott. Price 3s. 6d. net. See review on p. 76.

² Deissmann’s rendering. “St. Paul,” p. 182.

³ St. Luke xix. 8.

⁴ St. Luke xviii. 28.

said it was vain to serve God,¹ and something of the perplexity of Asaph, who felt that he had cleansed his heart in vain.²

And the whole matter stirs us to further inquiry. What is wrong with philanthropy? The question is modern as well as ancient. Well, to begin with, the larger the giving the more perilous the question of motive becomes. Barnabas is admirable, Ananias is pitiable. *But Ananias is just Barnabas gone wrong.* "There, but for the grace of God, goes Joseph Barnabas," must have been at any rate the silent sentiment of that great and good man, as he saw the tragedy of the first penal death in the Christian Church. For Cyprus was far away, and few would have been the wiser if he had kept back something. Barnabas stood. Ananias fell. But in a sense Barnabas, by his generosity, was the blameless occasion of the fall of Ananias.

We must take heed how we give. There must be a pure motive behind it. When the missionaries first found their early success among the Kitkatla Indians of British Columbia, one of the troublesome hindrances which they had to eliminate was the custom of the potlach. This was a contest between two wealthy chiefs or members of a tribe as to which could give away most—a kind of "Beggar-myself-in-order-to-defeat-my-neighbour" competition. The result was most harmful, and the giving was pure bravado.

Charity is not necessarily Love. The words were synonymous when the translators completed our Authorized Version.

But is the charity ball a particularly high-souled institution? Is the charity bazaar specially marked by spiritual features and sisterly love? Nay, more, are not dubious practices frequently condoned with the reflection, "It is for a charity"? The giving which substitutes guineas for pounds in order to head the list is technically charity, but is it Love? Men have before to-day given largely to a scheme in order to hector and harass the promoters of it. Charity may exist side by side with extraordinary uncharitableness.

We may see an illustration of St. Paul's courage in laying his finger on a sore spot like this. "If I give to feed the poor and

¹ Mal. iii. 14.

² Psalm lxxiii. 13.

have not Love, it does me no good," says the apostle; and yet he was just floating the greatest charity scheme of the early Church—the collection from the four provinces for the poor Christians at Jerusalem.¹ And, as he very well knew, he was asking for funds from men who were at law with one another,² and were full of envy and strife and factions.³ He frankly tells them that that loveless giving has no fragrance and no fruit. This is because men count for more than money. He is almost more concerned for the Corinthian givers than for the Judean receivers. He is willing to imperil even the success of his scheme if only he may reproduce their first Love in the hearts of the Corinthian converts. Christian charity will not grow where hatred flourishes, yet men strive to cultivate them side by side sometimes. In one of our weekly journals there was to be found not long ago a series of vindictive utterances and bitter threats against our present unhappy foes. This was immediately followed by a page containing an appeal for patriotic funds headed in large type, "The Greatest of These is ——." The word was left blank, perhaps through a faint twinge of conscience, but assuredly charity was not Love in that connection. It is only another form of the great mistake which our foes made in attempting to bludgeon the world for what they called the world's good. But the world has recoiled in alarm from the untender and chilly touch of their fist of mail. "We only want to do you good; we have a world-mission," cried our foe. But the philanthropy of the cannon and the sword is not easy for human nature to digest. Charity must be balanced by Love. Good intentions must be proved by considerate actions. Charity is not counted, but weighed. The widow's gift proved heavier than the charity of the Pharisees who had previously devoured her house—because there was Love in it. The slumming which became fashionable a score of years ago was in many cases pitifully loveless. Before that, again, Charles Dickens held up Mrs. Pardiggle and Alderman Cute, with many others, not because they thought nothing about poverty, but because they thought so little of the poor. He complained, not that they left the poor alone, but that they would

¹ xvi. 1.² vi. 6.³ iii. 3.

not leave them alone. He felt that, rather than go in an un-Christian spirit, they had better not go at all. Charity may be extraordinarily blind to the hunger of human nature.

Oliver Twist asking for more is, after all, something more than a shame. He is a symbol. "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a roasted ox with hatred at the table."¹ What Oliver Twist wanted was not really more gruel, but more love. He could have lived without the one, he could hardly exist without the other. And the whole edge of the satire consists in the fact that the hungry boy is neglected by the guardians of the poor, and is punished by the relieving officers for asking to be relieved. Until, when the time comes that the Poor Law agents are preparing to launch him into a career, he can only break down and sob out that he is "so lonely, so very lonely." Now, against what was Dickens declaring war? Not against the thoughtless neglect of the poor, but against the heartless relief of the poor. "The reformers," says Mr. Chesterton, "in creating many other modern things, created a modern workhouse, and when Dickens came out to fight, it was the first thing he broke with his battle-axe." It has been the misfortune, many people would say the mistake, of much organized charity, whether national or private, that people in great need have nearly always been repelled by its apparent and frequently real lack of love. Limited liability companies are said to have no souls; the State and even a society are often satisfied to have no heart; it is not included in the bill. When Oliver Twist tried to thank his kind benefactress, Mrs. Maylie, it was because "her charity had rescued him from misery." Yet all his life he had been a Charity boy, but Charity with a capital "C" had left him miserable. There is only too often all the difference between home and a Home, and that difference is usually love. There are, of course, many fragrant exceptions to this; and these pages are not intended as a sour censure upon existing efforts which are always well-meaning and often noble. But when we turn to the Divine Pattern in the Gospel page, whose history was summed up in after years in the phrase, "He went about doing good,"² we see that charity and Love always

¹ Prov. xvi. 7.

² A cts x. 38.

went together with Him. His touch was tender. His word was winning, His smile was sweet. His sympathy was never hard.

“ Give me the power to feel
 For hearts that I would heal;
 Give me the power to see with sight like Thine :
 But most of all give me
 The power to love like Thee,
 O Love Divine.”

Again, Charity may be an excuse for lack of service. There are many folk who will gladly give a subscription to a needy cause because they cannot bear to look at sorrow. They contribute in their drawing-room, but they could not bear the touch of dirt in the lodging-house. Says Henry Drummond, in the finest interpretation of this chapter that most of us know, “ It is a very easy thing to toss a copper to a beggar on the street, it is generally an easier thing than not to do it. Yet Love is just as often in the withholding. We purchase relief from the sympathetic feelings roused by the spectacle of misery, at the copper’s cost. It is too cheap, too cheap for us and often too dear for the beggar. If we really loved him we would either do more for him or less.”

And this is where the preacher of the love of Christ has a standing advantage. We must never forget the warning of James the Lord’s brother about giving homilies without help, but nevertheless Christ’s servant is often able to say, “ Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee.” And in the words of Dr. Stalker, “ While ordinary benevolence may feed the hungry and clothe the naked, evangelization enables the poor to feed and clothe themselves.”¹ St. Paul, a few years after this, told the Philippians that he rejoiced in the lavishness of their giving, not because he desired gifts, but because he sought fruit that might increase to their account—interest that should accumulate for the principal they had invested. That kind of giving profited them something. And this spirit of outpoured love may be, and should be carried out far and wide through all men’s lives. To quote Drummond again: “ We may lavish love upon the poor where it is very easy, especially upon the rich who often need it most, most of all upon equals, where it is very difficult, and for whom perhaps we each

¹ “ Ethic of Jesus,” p. 328.

do least of all." It will not do to be known as a Christian philanthropist in the city, and as a "screw" in the office, and a snarler at home.

Christ must shine through our charity, and we must in our service be recognized by others as "members of His body"—His fingers felt in our touch, His eyes seen in our face, His tones heard in our voice.

HARRINGTON C. LEES.

