

HOW TO HELP

A MANUAL OF PRACTICAL CHARITY

BY

MARY CONYNGTON, M. A.

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HOW TO HELP



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PREFACE

IN THE three years since this book was first offered to the public, there has been little change in the principles and methods of organized charity. More and more the emphasis has been laid on preventive work. The provision of large funds for purposes of investigation has made it possible to learn where prevention is needed and how it can be effected, while the growing closeness of coöperation between the different forces of philanthropy and reform has rendered practicable large social movements which ten years ago would have been regarded as purely chimerical. There has been a general and most desirable forward movement, but the stress has been laid rather on social justice than on philanthropy or charity.

Hence it has not been necessary to make material changes in the subject matter of this book. Some chapters have received considerable additions; wherever the point of view has changed the latest opinions have been given; and the book as a whole has been carefully revised. Its general character, however, has been preserved unaltered.

Now, as in the first instance, *How to Help* is offered as a practical handbook, serviceable alike to busy men and women who feel some responsibility for right treatment of the want which appeals to them from every side, to the volunteer worker who wishes to make his help as effective as possible, and to the professional worker who

feels the need both of an office manual and of a convenient summary for the guidance of inexperienced assistants and friendly visitors. To these and all others similarly engaged it is commended with the earnest hope that it may prove itself both useful and reliable, a veritable handbook for workers among the poor.

WASHINGTON, D. C.,

SEPTEMBER 25, 1909.

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HOW TO HELP

PART I.—General Principles

CHAPTER I

THE WORK—INTRODUCTORY

THE history of philanthropic effort during the nineteenth century presents some curious features, and one of the most striking is the rapid change which took place during its last thirty years. If we look over the literature of the earlier part of the century we shall find a well developed tradition of what charitable effort should be. Like many other ideals of the period, it was simple and well defined. It was largely religious in origin, and in its outward manifestation contented itself with alleviation or cure, giving little thought to prevention. Miss Yonge's very human and charming heroines, for instance, help the poor because it is a religious duty to give to the weaker brethren, or, rather, to be perfectly fair, because they can best express their love for their Master by giving to these, His poor. The problem of charitable relief takes a very simple form to their eyes. They live among people of their own race whom they have known all their days. They know every detail of their lives; they understand their habits of thought and their attitude toward the world. They give with a full knowledge of how far the character of the poor is an element in their poverty, and what will be the probable effect of their

gifts. Above all they are not assailed by any doubts as to whether these poor ought to be poor. The conception of social justice is as foreign to them as the term itself. They accept it as part of the divine order that some should have and some should want and no thought of altering social conditions crosses their minds.

Holding these views, they naturally found charity a word of easy definition. To be benevolent involved giving money and time and thought along certain well understood lines. The poor were to be looked after and kindly treated; schools, naturally church schools, should be established among them, that the children might learn their catechism and acquire a limited knowledge of reading and sewing; a conscientious landlord should not allow his villages to fall into notoriously unhygienic condition, nor oppress his laborers unduly. In addition, it was right to carry broths, medicines and jellies to the sick, and to give blankets and coals to the old and infirm; to give food and shelter to the passing beggar; to make clothes for children and to give several school feasts yearly; and these efforts, with, of course, a due amount of instruction and exhortation bestowed upon all the beneficiaries, comprised the whole duty of philanthropic man.

It would be entirely inaccurate to say that this was the only conception of charity. During the period when this ideal held sway, Lord Shaftesbury was doing his magnificent work; Dr. Chalmers was perfecting his system of neighborhood help, a system unsurpassed by any later developments; Maurice and Kingsley were calling attention to the social conditions which held thousands in enforced poverty; the absolute necessity of changes in the poor laws was forcing the problem of poverty

upon all students of public questions. Forces were at work which would in time lead to a wider and more thorough-going view of want, its causes and remedies. But the conception described above was the one which had gained the popular ear; it was set forth in novels and advocated in sermons and praised in essays, and taken for granted in appeals for charitable purposes, until it may fairly be claimed that this was the common understanding of what charity should be; and so firmly rooted was this ideal that it maintained its hold for years and years after the conditions which justified it had passed away, and after it had become actively mischievous.

In our own country a similar conception had been evolved from the conditions of rural life. The well-to-do people of the little towns knew their neighbors, root and branch. If any one were in want, every one in town knew whether it was misfortune or fault which lay back of the immediate need. The relations between rich and poor were close and personal; help could be given without patronage on the one side or humiliation on the other. And here again grew up a conception of charitable activity direct, simple, concrete. "Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away," was a more immediately practicable ideal when each man knew his neighbor, and why he needed to ask, and what he would do with the loan when secured. And like the English ideal of charity, which it closely resembled, this conception took root in literature and in the minds of the people, and held its place firmly, while economic, industrial and social conditions were undergoing the most momentous changes the world has

known, and the forms of society to which it was adapted were passing utterly away.

In the early seventies the charitable people of the large cities waked up to the fact that this ideal was no longer practicable, and that the attempt to apply it to existing conditions had brought about a state of affairs among the poor which was nothing less than terrible. The exodus from the country to the city, the huge tide of illiterate immigration, then just becoming a serious problem, the reaction from the war and the period of inflation which followed it, the change in industrial methods which was substituting large companies for private employers and trusts for large companies,—all these things were filling the cities with impoverished strangers, and throwing on the charitable societies a burden for which they were totally unprepared.

No blame could be attached to these societies for their failure to meet the situation. They had been designed to carry out the ideals formed in earlier days under simpler conditions. They were wholly unfitted for this new order in which giver and receiver were strangers in the fullest sense of the word, in which the very characters and habits of thought of the newcomers were as foreign to their helpers as their language. Churches and societies and individual workers struggled bravely, but their efforts seemed lost in the huge mass of want and wrong and helplessness. No one knew what any one else was doing, unless by accident; the poor who put themselves forward might be helped; the poor who kept their self-respect and refused to beg suffered unseen. Most of the work done was alleviative, almost none preventive. Street begging was permitted, practically encouraged. Tenements of miserable con-

struction and unspeakably insanitary, made home life a mockery for thousands. Children were growing up under conditions which inevitably sapped their physical strength and their moral fibre. Men and women made their living by beggary, and saw in each new child an added source of income, because a baby gave additional force to their plea for alms.

Discouraging as were these conditions, the situation was further complicated by frequent and barefaced imposition on the part of those seeking help. The lack of coöperation among the helpers invited deception. If two relief-giving societies in the same district had no exchange of information, it was as easy to beg from the two as from one, and doubly profitable. It was equally easy to make the rounds of the different societies successively. One of the classic stories of the period is of a family who lived for an indefinite period on the repeated baptisms of the youngest baby. The mother, miserably dressed, would present herself at some clergyman's house. She belonged to his faith, she said, and she had a baby she wanted baptized, but she was not decently dressed herself, and she had no clothes for the little one, so she could not bring it to the church; would not the clergyman, in view of these circumstances, come to her house and baptize it? Naturally, the clergyman would and did; and naturally, also he would be so much touched by the scene of distress and destitution there presented that he would send the workers of his church to help, giving money and clothing. Aid would be continued for weeks, and by the time the people of that church were convinced that the family were idle and drunken, and that help given them was thrown away, the mother would be ready to apply to some

other clergyman, the baby would be baptized again and the whole round gone through with once more. The trick was discovered by accident, but no one ever knew how often that infant had been baptized.

CHAPTER II

THE CHARITY ORGANIZATION MOVEMENT

BY THE early seventies the situation outlined in the last chapter had become so bad that its improvement was inevitable. The very seriousness of the problem called forth the best thought which students of public questions could give, and roused philanthropists to a determined effort to cope with its difficulties. As a result of this effort came into being what is known as the charity organization movement. This movement has so profoundly influenced all the social thought of the day that although its history cannot be traced here, some attention must be given to its development and its changing attitude toward the problems of poverty.

Primarily, this movement was an endeavor to unite the disintegrated forces of good, to substitute combined for independent and often antagonistic action, to bring into philanthropy the methods of organization and coöperation which had proved so effective in the business world, and to find new ways, adapted to the changed conditions, of applying the old principles of charity⁴ and good will. Like many another movement it has accomplished far more than its originators had in mind, and has outgrown the modest conception of its functions with which it was formed.

The original intention was not to form a new organization, but merely to unite those already existing. Delegates from the charitable societies of a given place were invited to meet and form a central board, which

should be the Charity Organization Society. Under the direction of this board, rooms should be engaged and workers employed who should give all their time to serving the charitable interests of the city. To prevent duplication of effort, each society was invited to file in the central office the names of all those it was helping, and to report new applications made to it for aid. The officers and employees of the central board were to be ready at all times to investigate the circumstances of anyone applying for help, and to report the facts of the situation to the person or society making the request for investigation. If this person or society did not feel able to give the help needed, it was the further duty of the organization to strive to secure it elsewhere. Representatives of the different societies were invited to meet frequently with the central board in order to discuss the best way of meeting individual cases of need, or of dealing with problems of a general nature.

Moreover, it was understood that at the central office a careful record should be made of each case handled, with a full account of the circumstances existing when the case was first reported, together with the different methods of treatment attempted, and their success or failure. And the underlying motive of all effort on the part of the Charity Organization Society should be not merely to relieve the present want, but to find out and remove the causes leading to that want, in the hope of restoring the needy person or family to an independent position in society.

It is evident that there was nothing very startling in all this. It was merely an attempt to apply common sense and organized effort to the relief of distress. But it was so well adapted to its purpose that it met with

astonishing success. Beginning, among English-speaking people, with the formation of the first Charity Organization Society in London in 1868, the movement has spread rapidly and widely. In our own country in the little more than thirty years of its existence (the first society of the kind was organized in Buffalo, in 1877), it has been adopted in something like a hundred and forty cities, scattered throughout the United States and its island dependencies. It supports magazines and papers devoted to its special interests; it has maintained classes for training in philanthropic work, which have developed into three independent schools for such training, and have led to the establishment of innumerable courses of the kind in colleges and universities; it has created a new profession, and has added to the sentiment of charity the science of philanthropy.

In doing all this the movement has itself been profoundly modified. Three distinct phases, which might be called the repressive, the discriminative and the constructive, are visible in its history, each developing naturally from the preceding and leading in logical sequence to the next. The development has not been equally rapid in all parts of the country, so that the different phases still exist and may be studied in actual conditions. These three stages are sufficiently important in their bearing on the present situation to merit some consideration.

Perhaps it might be well to say that the second and third phases are coexistent. In the latest development of the movement the discriminative attitude is maintained toward the individual case of need, but to this has been added the wider view which takes account of the whole social field, and strives to check the causes