

GOD OR YOU, WHICH?

Who is Responsible?

"The one divine work—the one ordered sacrifice—is to do justice; and it is the last we are ever inclined to do. Anything rather than that! As much charity as you choose but no justice. 'Nay,' you will say, 'charity is greater than justice.' Yes, it is greater; it is the summit of justice—it is the temple of which justice is the foundation. But you can't have the top without the bottom; you cannot build upon charity. You must build upon justice, for this main reason, that you have not, at first, charity to build with. It is the last reward of good work. Do justice to your brother—you can do that, whether you love him or not—and you will come to love him. But do injustice to him, because you don't love him, and you will come to hate him. It is all very fine to think you can build upon charity to begin with; but you will find all you have got to begin with, begins at home, and is essentially love of yourself. You well-to-do-people, for instance, who are here to-night, will go to 'divine service' next Sunday, all nice and tidy, and your little children will have their tight little Sunday boots on, and lovely little Sunday feathers in their hats; and you'll think, complacently and piously, how lovely they look! So they do, and you love them heartily, and you like sticking feathers in their hats. That's all right; that is charity but it is charity beginning at home. Then you will come to the poor little crossing-sweeper, got up also—it, in its Sunday dress—the dirtiest rags it has—that it may beg the better. We shall give it a penny, and think how good we are. That's charity going abroad. But what does justice say, walking and watching near us? Christian justice has been strangely mute, and seemingly blind; and, if not blind, decrepit, this many a day. She keeps her accounts still, however—quite steadily—doing them at night, carefully, with her bandage off, and through acutest spectacles (the only modern scientific invention she cares about). You must put your ear down ever so close to her lips to hear her speak; and then you will start at what she first whispers, for it will certainly be, 'Why shouldn't that little crossing-sweeper have a feather on its head, as well as your own child?' Then you may ask justice, in an amazed manner, 'How she can possibly be so foolish as to think children could sweep crossings with feathers on their heads?' Then you stoop again, and justice says—still in her dull, stupid way, 'Then, why don't you, every other Sunday, leave your child to sweep the crossing, and take the little sweeper to church in a hat and feather?' Mercy on us (you think), what will she say next? And you answer, of course, that 'you don't, because everybody ought to remain content in the position in which Providence has placed them.' Ah, my friends, that's the gist of the whole question. Did Providence put them in that position, or did you? You knock a man into a ditch, and then tell him to remain content in the 'position in which Providence has placed him.' That's modern Christianity. You say 'We did not knock him into the ditch.' How do you know what you have done, or are doing? That's just what we have all got to know, and what we shall never know until the question with us very morning is, not how to do the gainful thing, but how to do the just thing; not until we are at least so far on the way to being Christian as to have understood that maxim of the poor half-way Mahometan, 'One hour in the execution of justice is worth seventy years of prayer.'—*From Ruskin's CROWN OF WILD OLIVES.*