

Justice

by Frank Crane, from Four Minute Essays (1919)

There are many earnest souls occupied in trying to do people good.

There are nine million societies, more or less, organized to improve and to ameliorate. There are preachers, missionaries, evangelists, reformers, exhorters, viewers-with-pride, and pointers-with-alarm without number wrestling with sinners.

All forms of industry are booming these days in the U. S. A., but the uplift business is still several laps ahead.

It seems ungracious to say a word to any enthusiastic person who is engaged in so laudable an enterprise as that of rescuing the perishing, feeding the hungry, and healing the sick.

And yet, when you take time to think right through to the bottom of things, you must come to the conclusion that there is but one real, radical and effective way to help your fellow-men, and that is the way called justice.

If I want to redeem the world I can come nearer my object, and do less harm, by being just toward myself and just toward everybody else, than by “doing good” to people.

The only untainted charity is justice.

Often our ostensible charities serve but to obscure and palliate great evils.

Conventional charity drops pennies in the beggar’s cup, carries bread to the starving, distributes clothing to the naked. Real charity, which is justice, sets about removing the conditions that make beggary, starvation, and nakedness.

Conventional charity plays Lady Bountiful; justice tries to establish such laws as shall give employment to all, so that they need no bounty.

Charity makes the Old Man of the Sea feed sugar-plums to the poor devil he is riding and choking; justice would make him get off his victim's back.

Conventional charity piously accepts things as they are, and helps the unfortunate; justice goes to the legislature and changes things.

Charity swats the fly; justice takes away the dung-heaps that breed flies.

Charity gives quinine in the malarial tropics; justice drains the swamps.

Charity sends surgeons and ambulances and trained nurses to the war; justice struggles to secure that internationalism that will prevent war.

Charity works among slum wrecks; justice dreams and plans that there be no more slums.

Charity scrapes the soil's surface; justice subsoils.

Charity is affected by symptoms; justice by causes.

Charity assumes evil institutions and customs to be a part of "Divine Providence," and tearfully works away at taking care of the wreckage; justice regards injustice everywhere, custom-buttressed and respectable or not, as the work of the devil, and vigorously attacks it.

Charity is timid and is always passing the collection-box; justice is unafraid and asks no alms, no patrons, no benevolent support.

"It is presumed," says Henry Seton Merriman, "that the majority of people are willing enough to seek the happiness of others; which desire leads the individual to interfere with his neighbor's affairs, while it burdens society with a thousand associations for the welfare of mankind or the raising of the masses."

The best part of the human race does not want help, nor favor, nor charity; it wants a fair chance and a square deal.

Charity is man's kindness.

Justice is God's.

(Thanks to Dan Sullivan and www.savingcommunities.org — L. D.)