

Mr. Chairman, the ladies of this Society have requested me to read their Annual Report; but previous to complying with their desire, I would ask the liberty to make a few remarks upon a subject which is considered as an attribute, is one of the most prominent in the character of God, and is daily sung by angels. But as great as it is, man is permitted to take it up, and proclaim its merits. It concerns all mankind, and it cannot be neglected without disregarding the happiness of our fellow creatures, and stifling that natural feeling which we sustain to each other. My theme is *Charity*; and the fact alone, that it is such a distinguished attribute of God, and that angels love and admire it, is sufficient to bespeak it a favorable hearing on this occasion.

“My country is the world – my countrymen are all mankind,” is the motto of the fearless champion of American liberty; and none but the truly great minds are capable of conceiving such a thought; – none but purely benevolent hearts can adopt and appreciate such a sentiment.

It matters not what may be the creed, color, or condition of a man – the individual possessing the principles embodied in the noble sentiment, recognizes in him the features of a brother. There is no room in his bosom for sectarianism – the Jew and the Gentile, the African, the most miserable of Eastern India, the vassal sufferers of Europe, and the native sons of our own forests, claim alike his sympathies. The whole habitable earth he considers his country. His noble soul drinks in the joys of all mankind, and though he may dwell amid the burning sands of Shaharee, or wander over the frozen hills of [Lapland], yet his soul partakes of all the happiness that smiles over the glens and green heaths of Scotland, or

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that gilds the plains of New England. And he not only sympathizes with the joys of his fellow creatures, but the nobler feelings of his soul wing their flight to wherever one of his kind pines alone in distress, or weeps unpitied among thousands.

No one will doubt, Sir, that our labors of benevolence ought to be directed towards that point at which it is most needed. At present, it is no difficult matter for us to determine where that point is. To find it, we have not to cross the ocean, or wander through the wilds of some heathen land. That spot is our own country. It is true, that it may not be in my power to act *directly* in the most necessitated portion of it, yet it is within our reach to do it *indirectly*, by turning our hands to that portion which next in order claims our attention. Then it is clearly evident that the improvident and unfortunate immediately around us, are the most needy objects of our charity.

There is, Sir, a great error prevailing in regard to the character of the persons who are to claim our assistance. Of what description are they to be – is it the wealthy and affluent? Is it the provident and economical? Is it the robust and healthful, and those who, in the hour of affliction, have friends to comfort and cheer their pillow? – To answer these inquiries, we have only to refer to the Gospel. The whole need no physician, but they that are sick. Then it matters not whether the sufferer be one who in the day of prosperity was careless, and indifferent in providing for the hour of need – or whether fortune has suddenly frowned upon him; he claims our assistance.

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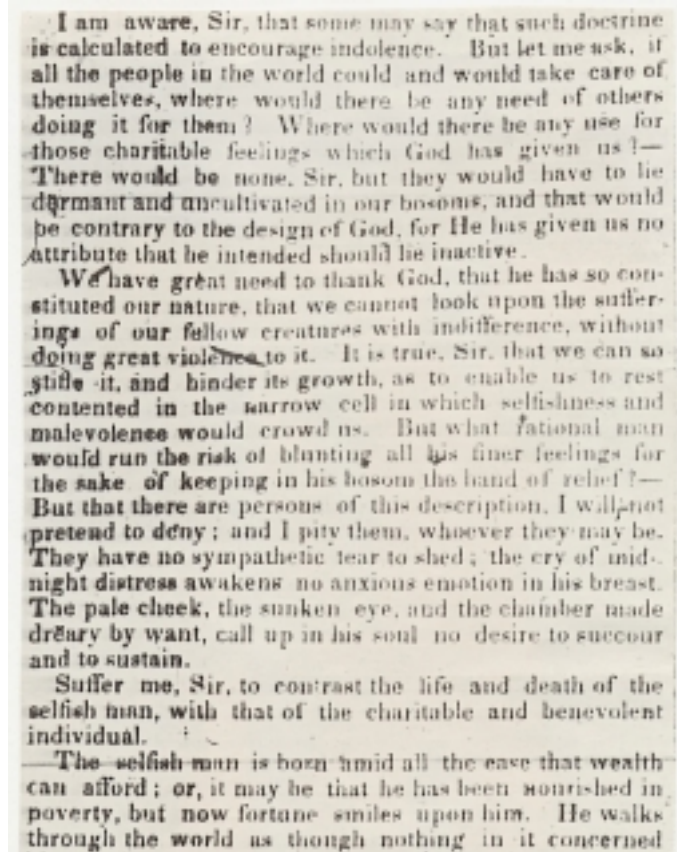
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I am aware, Sir, that some may say that such doctrine is calculated to encourage indolence. But let me ask, if all the people in the world could and would take care of themselves, where would there be any need of others doing it for them? Where would there be any use for those charitable feelings which God has given us? — There would be none, Sir, but they would have to lie dormant and uncultivated in our bosoms, and that would be contrary to the design of God, for He has given us no attribute that he intended should be inactive.

We have great need to thank God, that he has so constituted our nature, that we cannot look upon the sufferings of our fellow creatures with indifference, without doing great violence to it. It is true, Sir, that we can so stifle it, and hinder its growth, as to enable us to rest contented in the narrow cell in which selfishness and malevolence would crowd us. But what rational man would run the risk of blunting all his finer feelings for the sake of keeping in his bosom the hand of relief? — But that there are persons of this description, I will not pretend to deny; and I pity them, whoever they may be. They have no sympathetic tear to shed; the cry of midnight distress awakens no anxious emotion in his breast. The pale cheek, the sunken eye, and the chamber made dreary by want, call up in his soul no desire to succour and to sustain.

Suffer me, Sir, to contrast the life and death of the selfish man, with that of the charitable and benevolent individual.

The selfish man is born amid all the ease that wealth can afford; or, it may be that he has been nourished in poverty, but now fortune smiles upon him. He walks through the world as though nothing in it concerned



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him; being blessed by heaven, he forgets that he is mortal. He folds his arms and delights in singing his favorite song —

“Live while you live, the epicure would say,
And seize the pleasures of the passing day.” —

But, Sir, amid his selfish enjoyment, he hears a faint knock at his door, and, with a tone of commanding authority, he bids the individual “come in.” The door slowly opens, and a female figure presents itself before him. It is emaciated and wan; her eyes are glistening with tears, and her cheek is deeply marked with grief. — In her arms she holds an infant babe — but no smile is upon its face, for it has drunk in the sorrow that pervades the bosom of its mother. She approaches with an air of conscious inferiority, and tells all her tale of woe. With clouded brow he listens to it, and when she has finished, he tells her that he has nothing to give, and that her own imprudence has brought upon her distress; and if she would find relief, she must seek it in the poor-house!

“Breathes there a man with soul so dead?” Heart broken, the poor child of want takes her leave, and when the wretch feels his conscience arising within, he stifles it, and cries “peace, be still!”

But, Sir, in a few short days he dies, and leaves all his selfishness behind him. It may be that the marble column is erected to mark his narrow abode, and the poet’s muse is invoked to immortalize his name. But if it is ever remembered, it will only be that it may be despised. Thus he lives and dies.

There is, Mr. Chairman, a difference between benevolence and charity. Benevolence consists in good feeling towards our fellow beings. Charity is made up with

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There is, Mr. Chairman, a difference between benevolence and charity. Benevolence consists in good feeling towards our fellow beings. Charity is made up with

good feelings and good actions combined.

The charitable woman while she sits by her quiet fireside; enjoying the bounties of a kind Providence, remembers the poor. When she hears the keen north wind whistling around her dwelling and her children draw close and closer to her bosom, she thinks of the many mothers who are houseless, and roaming in penury and want. When she kneels by her bed-side, and fervent prayer flows from her heart, she remembers the poor. When she walks abroad, her eyes and heart are open to behold and pity.

She forgoes those amusements which are not essential to real happiness, and seeks the chamber where need lies pining. Unasked, she delights in administering relief, and hastens to bind up the aching heart. No suppliant is driven unpitied from her door. In the spirit of pure charity, she adopts the sentiment –

“Here to the houseless child of want,
My door is open still,
And though my portion is but scant,
I give it with good-will.”

She dies, and her soul is carried by angels to rest in Abraham’s bosom, and her body is conveyed to the tomb, by a grateful and weeping multitude. And this is not all – Widows will often visit the place where she lies, and shed tears of gratitude and love over her ashes. At set of sun, or when the hills are glistening with the morning dew, orphans will bring garlands, and strew them over her grave. Thus the charitable woman lives and dies.

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