

## CIVIC HELPFULNESS

PUBLISHED IN THE "CENTURY," OCTOBER, 1900

## CIVIC HELPFULNESS



IN Mr. Lecky's profoundly suggestive book, "The Map of Life," referred to by me in a former article, he emphasizes the change that has been gradually coming over the religious attitude of the world because of the growing importance laid upon conduct as compared with dogma. In this country we are long past the stage of regarding it as any part of the state's duty to enforce a particular religious dogma; and more and more the professors of the different creeds themselves are beginning tacitly to acknowledge that the prime worth of a creed is to be gaged by the standard of conduct it exacts among its followers toward their fellows. The creed which each man in his heart believes to be essential to his own salvation is for him alone to determine; but we have a right to pass judgment upon his actions toward those about him.

Tried by this standard, the religious teachers of the community stand most honorably high. It is probable that no other class of

our citizens do anything like the amount of disinterested labor for their fellow-men. To those who are associated with them at close quarters this statement will seem so obviously a truism as to rank among the platitudes. But there is a far from inconsiderable body of public opinion which, to judge by the speeches, writings, and jests in which it delights, has no conception of this state of things. If such people would but take the trouble to follow out the actual life of a hard-worked clergyman or priest, I think they would become a little ashamed of the tone of flippancy they are so prone to adopt when speaking about them.

In the country districts the minister of the gospel is normally the associate and leader of his congregation and in close personal touch with them. He shares in and partially directs their intellectual and moral life, and is responsive to their spiritual needs. If they are prosperous, he is prosperous. If the community be poor and hard-working, he shares the poverty and works as hard as any one. As fine a figure as I can call to mind is that of one such country clergyman in a poor farming community not far from the capital of the State of New York—a vigorous old man, who works on his farm six days in the week, and on the seventh preaches what he himself has been practising. The

farm work does not occupy all of the weekdays, for there is not a spiritual need of his parishioners that he neglects. He visits them, looks after them if they are sick, baptizes the children, comforts those in sorrow, and is ready with shrewd advice for those who need aid; in short, shows himself from week's end to week's end a thoroughly sincere, earnest, hard-working old Christian. This is perhaps the healthiest type. It is in keeping with the surroundings, for in the country districts the quality of self-help is very highly developed, and there is little use for the great organized charities. Neighbors know one another. The poorest and the richest are more or less in touch, and charitable feelings find a natural and simple expression in the homely methods of performing charitable duties. This does not mean that there is not room for an immense amount of work in country communities and in villages and small towns. Every now and then, in traveling over the State, one comes upon a public library, a Young Men's Christian Association building, or some similar structure which has been put up by a man born in the place, who has made his money elsewhere, and feels he would like to have some memorial in his old home. Such a gift is of far-reaching benefit. Almost better is what is done in the way of circulating libra-

ries and the like by the united action of those men and women who appreciate clearly the intellectual needs of the people who live far from the great centers of our rather feverish modern civilization; for in country life it is necessary to guard, not against mental fever, but against lack of mental stimulus and interests.

In cities the conditions are very different, both as regards the needs and as regards the way it is possible to meet these needs. There is much less feeling of essential community of interest, and poverty of the body is lamentably visible among great masses. There are districts populated to the point of congestion, where hardly any one is above the level of poverty, though this poverty does not by any means always imply misery. Where it does mean misery it must be met by organization, and, above all, by the disinterested, endless labor of those who, by choice, and to do good, live in the midst of it, temporarily or permanently. Very many men and women spend part of their lives or do part of their life-work under such circumstances, and conspicuous among them are clergymen and priests.

Only those who have seen something of such work at close quarters realize how much of it goes on quietly and without the slightest outside show, and how much it repre-

sents to many lives that else would be passed in gray squalor. It is not necessary to give the names of the living, or I could enumerate among my personal acquaintance fifty clergymen and priests, men of every church, of every degree of wealth, each of whom cheerfully and quietly, year in and year out, does his share, and more than his share, of the unending work which he feels is imposed upon him alike by Christianity and by that form of applied Christianity which we call good citizenship. Far more than that number of women, in and out of religious bodies, who do to the full as much work, could be mentioned. Of course, for every one thus mentioned there would be a hundred, or many hundreds, unmentioned. Perhaps there is no harm in alluding to one man who is dead. Very early in my career as a police commissioner of the city of New York I was brought in contact with Father Casserly of the Paulist Fathers. After he had made up his mind that I was really trying to get things decent in the department, and to see that law and order prevailed, and that crime and vice were warred against in practical fashion, he became very intimate with me, helping me in every way, and unconsciously giving me an insight into his own work and his own character. Continually, in one way and another, I came across what Father Cas-

serly was doing, always in the way of showing the intense human sympathy and interest he was taking in the lives about him. If one of the boys of a family was wild, it was Father Casserly who planned methods of steadying him. If, on the other hand, a steady boy met with some misfortune,—lost his place, or something of the kind,—it was Father Casserly who went and stated the facts to the employer. The Paulist Fathers had always been among the most efficient foes of the abuses of the liquor traffic. They never hesitated to interfere with saloons, dance-houses, and the like. One secret of their influence with our Police Board was that, as they continually went about among their people and knew them all, and as they were entirely disinterested, they could be trusted to tell who did right and who did wrong among the instruments of the law. One of the perplexing matters in dealing with policemen is that, as they are always in hostile contact with criminals and would-be criminals, who are sure to lie about them, it is next to impossible to tell when accusations against them are false and when they are true; for the good man who does his duty is certain to have scoundrelly foes, and the bad man who blackmails these same scoundrels usually has nothing but the same evidence against him. But Father

Casserly and the rest of his order knew the policemen personally, and we found we could trust them implicitly to tell exactly who was good and who was not. Whether the man were Protestant, Catholic, or Jew, if he was a faithful public servant they would so report him; and if he was unfaithful he would be reported as such wholly without regard to his creed. We had this experience with an honorably large number of priests and clergymen. Once in the same batch of promotions from sergeant to captain there was a Protestant to whom our attention had been drawn by the earnest praise of Fathers Casserly and Doyle, and a Catholic who had first been brought to our notice by the advocacy of Bishop Potter.

There were other ways in which clergymen helped our Police Board. We wanted at one time to get plenty of strong, honest young men for the police force, and did not want to draw them from among the ordinary types of ward heeler. Two fertile recruiting-grounds proved to be, one a Catholic church and the other a Methodist church. The rector of the former, Dr. Wall, had a temperance lyceum for the young men of his parish; the pastor of the latter had a congregation made out of a bit of old native America suddenly overlapped by the growth of the city, and his wheelwrights, ship-carpenters, bay-



men, and coasting-sailors gave us the same good type of officer that we got from among the mechanics, motormen, and blacksmiths who came from Dr. Wall's lyceum. Among our other close friends was another Methodist preacher, who had once been a reporter, but who had felt stirred by an irresistible impulse to leave his profession and devote his life to the East Side, where he ministered to the wants of those who would not go to the fashionable churches, and for whom no other church was especially prepared. In connection with his work, one of the things that was especially pleasing was the way in which he had gone in not only with the rest of the Protestant clergy and the non-sectarian philanthropic workers of the district, but with the Catholic clergy, joining hands in the fight against the seething evils of the slum. One of his Catholic allies, by the way, a certain Brother A——, was doing an immense amount for the Italian children of his parish. He had a large parochial school, originally attended by the children of Irish parents. Gradually the Irish had moved uptown, and had been supplanted by the Italians. It was his life-work to lift these little Italians over the first painful steps on the road toward American citizenship.

Again, let me call to mind an institution, not in New York, but in Albany, where the

sisters of a religious organization devote their entire lives to helping girls who either have slipped, and would go down to be trampled underfoot in the blackest mire if they were not helped, or who, by force of their surroundings, would surely slip if the hand were not held out to them in time. It is the kind of work the doing of which is of infinite importance both from the standpoint of the state and from the standpoint of the individual; yet it is a work which, to be successful, must emphatically be a labor of love. Most men and women, even among those who appreciate the need of the work and who are not wholly insensible to the demands made upon them by the spirit of brotherly love for mankind, lack either the time, the opportunity, or the moral and mental qualities to succeed in such work; and to very many the sheer distaste of it would prevent their doing it well. There is nothing attractive in it save for those who are entirely earnest and disinterested. There is no reputation, there is not even any notoriety, to be gained from it. Surely people who realize that such work ought to be done, and who realize also how exceedingly distasteful it would be for them to do it, ought to feel a sense of the most profound gratitude to those who with whole-hearted sincerity have undertaken it, and should support them in

every way. This particular institution is under the management of a creed not my own, but few things gave me greater pleasure than to sign a bill increasing its power and usefulness. Compared with the vital necessity of reclaiming these poor hunted creatures to paths of womanliness and wholesome living, it is of infinitesimal importance along the lines of which creed these paths lead.

Undoubtedly the best type of philanthropic work is that which helps men and women who are willing and able to help themselves; for fundamentally this aid is simply what each of us should be all the time both giving and receiving. Every man and woman in the land ought to prize above almost every other quality the capacity for self-help; and yet every man and woman in the land will at some time or other be sorely in need of the help of others, and at some time or other will find that he or she can in turn give help even to the strongest. The quality of self-help is so splendid a quality that nothing can compensate for its loss; yet, like every virtue, it can be twisted into a fault, and it becomes a fault if carried to the point of cold-hearted arrogance, of inability to understand that now and then the strongest may be in need of aid, and that for this reason alone, if for no other, the strong

should always be glad of the chance in turn to aid the weak.

The Young Men's Christian Associations and the Young Women's Christian Associations, which have now spread over all the country, are invaluable because they can reach every one. I am certainly a beneficiary myself, having not infrequently used them as clubs or reading-rooms when I was in some city in which I had but little or no personal acquaintance. In part they develop the good qualities of those who join them; in part they do what is even more valuable, that is, simply give opportunity for the men or women to develop the qualities themselves. In most cases they provide reading-rooms and gymnasiums, and therefore furnish a means for a man or woman to pass his or her leisure hours in profit or amusement as seems best. The average individual will not spend the hours in which he is not working in doing something that is unpleasant, and absolutely the only way permanently to draw average men or women from occupations and amusements that are unhealthy for soul or body is to furnish an alternative which they will accept. To forbid all amusements, or to treat innocent and vicious amusements as on the same plane, simply insures recruits for the vicious amusements. The Young Men's and Young

Women's Christian Associations would have demonstrated their value a hundredfold over if they had done nothing more than furnish reading-rooms, gymnasiums, and places where, especially after nightfall, those without homes, or without attractive homes, could go without receiving injury. They furnish meeting-grounds for many young men who otherwise would be driven, perhaps to the saloon, or if not, then to some cigar-store or other lounging-place, where at the best the conversation would not be elevating, and at the worst companionships might be formed which would lead to future disaster. In addition to this the associations give every opportunity for self-improvement to those who care to take advantage of the opportunity, and an astonishing number do take advantage of it.

Mention was made above of some of the sources from which at times we drew policemen while engaged in managing the New York Police Department. Several came from Young Men's Christian Associations. One of them whom we got from the Bowery Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association I remember particularly. I had gone around there one night, and the secretary mentioned to me that they had a young man who had just rescued a woman from a burning building, showing great strength, cool-

ness, and courage. The story interested me, and I asked him to send for the young fellow. When he turned up he proved to be a Jew, Otto R——, who, when very young, had come over with his people from Russia at the time of one of the waves of persecution in that country. He was evidently physically of the right type, and as he had been studying in the association classes for some time he was also mentally fit, while his feat at the fire showed he had good moral qualities. We were going to hold the examinations in a few days, and I told him to try them. Sure enough, he passed and was appointed. He made one of the best policemen we put on. As a result of his appointment, which meant tripling the salary he had been earning, and making an immense bound in social standing, he was able to keep his mother and old grandmother in comfort, and see to the starting of his small brothers and sisters in life; for he was already a good son and brother, so that it was not surprising that he made a good policeman.

I have not dwelt on the work of the State charitable institutions, or of those who are paid to do charitable work as officers and otherwise. But it is bare justice to point out that the great majority of those thus paid have gone into the work, not for the sake of the money, but for the sake of the work it-

self, though, being dependent upon their own exertions for a livelihood, they are obliged to receive some recompense for their services.

There is one class of public servants, however, not employed directly as philanthropic agents, whose work, nevertheless, is as truly philanthropic in character as that of any man or woman existing. I allude to the public-school teachers whose schools lie in the poorer quarters of the city. In dealing with any body of men and women general statements must be made cautiously, and it must always be understood that there are numerous exceptions. Speaking generally, however, the women teachers—I mention these because they are more numerous than the men—who carry on their work in the poorer districts of the great cities form as high-principled and useful a body of citizens as is to be found in the entire community, and render an amount of service which can hardly be paralleled by that of any other equal number of men or women. Most women who lead lives actively devoted to intelligent work for others grow to have a certain look of serene and high purpose which stamps them at once. This look is generally seen, for instance, among the higher types of women doctors, trained nurses, and of those who devote their lives

to work among the poor; and it is precisely this look which one so often sees on the faces of those public-school teachers who have grown to regard the welfare of their pupils as the vital interest of their own lives. It is not merely the regular day-work the school-teachers do, but the amount of attention they pay outside their regular classes; the influence they have in shaping the lives of the boys, and perhaps even more of the girls, brought in contact with them; the care they take of the younger, and the way they unconsciously hold up ideals to the elder boys and girls, to whom they often represent the most tangible embodiment of what is best in American life. They are a great force for producing good citizenship. Above all things, they represent the most potent power in Americanizing as well as in humanizing the children of the newcomers of every grade who arrive here from Europe. Where the immigrant parents are able to make their way in the world, their children have no more difficulty than the children of the native-born in becoming part of American life, in sharing all its privileges and in doing all its duties. But the children of the very poor of foreign birth would be handicapped almost as much as their parents, were it not for the public schools and the start thus given them. Loyalty to the flag is taught by precept and



practice in all these public schools, and loyalty to the principles of good citizenship is also taught in no merely perfunctory manner.

Here I hardly touch upon the "little red school-house" out in the country districts, simply because in the country districts all of our children go to the same schools, and thereby get an inestimable knowledge of the solidarity of our American life. I have touched on this in a former article, and I can here only say that it would be impossible to overestimate the good done by the association this engenders, and the excellent educational work of the teachers. We always feel that we have given our children no small advantage by the mere fact of allowing them to go to these little district schools, where they all have the same treatment and are all tried by the same standard. But with us in the country the district school is only philanthropic in that excellent sense in which all joint effort for the common good is philanthropic.

A very wholesome effect has been produced in great cities by the university settlements, college settlements, and similar efforts to do practical good by bringing closer together the more and the less fortunate in life. It is no easy task to make movements of this kind succeed. If managed in a spirit of patronizing condescension, or with ignorance of the

desires, needs, and passions of those round about, little good indeed will come from them. The fact that, instead of little, much good does in reality result, is due to the entirely practical methods and the spirit of comradeship shown by those foremost in these organizations. One particularly good feature has been their tendency to get into politics. Of course this has its drawbacks, but they are outweighed by the advantages. Clean politics is simply one form of applied good citizenship. No man can be a really good citizen unless he takes a lively interest in politics from a high standpoint. Moreover, the minute that a move is made in politics, the people who are helped and those who would help them grow to have a common interest which is genuine and absorbing instead of being in any degree artificial, and this will bring them together as nothing else would. Part of the good that results from such community of feeling is precisely like the good that results from the community of feeling about a club, foot-ball team, or base-ball nine. This in itself has a good side; but there is an even better side, due to the fact that disinterested motives are appealed to, and that men are made to feel that they are working for others, for the community as a whole as well as for themselves.

There remain the host of philanthropic workers who cannot be classed in any of the above-mentioned classes. They do most good when they are in touch with some organization, although, in addition, the strongest will keep some of their leisure time for work on individual lines to meet the cases where no organized relief will accomplish anything. Philanthropy has undoubtedly been a good deal discredited both by the exceedingly noxious individuals who go into it with ostentation to make a reputation, and by the only less noxious persons who are foolish and indiscriminate givers. Anything that encourages pauperism, anything that relaxes the manly fiber and lowers self-respect, is an unmixed evil. The soup-kitchen style of philanthropy is as thoroughly demoralizing as most forms of vice or oppression, and it is of course particularly revolting when some corporation or private individual undertakes it, not even in a spirit of foolish charity, but for purposes of self-advertisement. In a time of sudden and wide-spread disaster, caused by a flood, a blizzard, an earthquake, or an epidemic, there may be ample reason for the extension of charity on the largest scale to every one who needs it. But these conditions are wholly exceptional, and the methods of relief employed to meet them must also be treated as wholly

exceptional. In charity the one thing always to be remembered is that, while any man may slip and should at once be helped to rise to his feet, yet no man can be carried with advantage either to him or to the community. The greatest possible good can be done by the extension of a helping hand at the right moment, but the attempt to carry any one permanently can end in nothing but harm. The really hard-working philanthropists, who spend their lives in doing good to their neighbors, do not, as a rule, belong to the "mushy" class, and thoroughly realize the unwisdom of foolish and indiscriminate giving, or of wild and crude plans of social reformations. The young enthusiast who is for the first time brought into contact with the terrible suffering and stunting degradation which are so evident in many parts of our great cities is apt to become so appalled as to lose his head. If there is a twist in his moral or mental make-up, he will never regain his poise; but if he is sound and healthy he will soon realize that things being bad affords no justification for making them infinitely worse, and that the only safe rule is for each man to strive to do his duty in a spirit of sanity and wholesome common sense. No one of us can make the world move on very far, but it moves at all only when each one of a very large number does his duty.

**THE  
STRENUOUS LIFE**

**ESSAYS AND  
ADDRESSES**

**BY  
THEODORE ROOSEVELT**



**NEW YORK  
THE CENTURY CO.  
1905**