

CHARITY AND JUSTICE

SHELLEY told Leigh Hunt in the duomo at Pisa that a new religion might be founded on charity instead of faith. It is in quite another sense that it is now so often and so passionately declared that what is wanted is not charity, but justice; further, that charity is only possible in an unjust society. It is one of the *gravamina* against the Gospel that it says so much about charity. 'Curse your charity!' was the legend on a Hyde Park banner. And 'Christian-Socialist' divines go so far as to say: 'We do not want brotherhood, but justice.' The reason is obvious. Brotherhood speaks of sympathy and helpfulness, of mercy and gratitude; whereas what is demanded is rather equal rights.

So St. Simonism, that pantheistic and epicurean religion of humanity, had for its object 'the harmonious development of human society by the establishment of justice, and the increase of well-being and comfort.' Roaring Camp and Poker Flat have also this aim.

Of course, if men are deliberately withholding justice and giving doles instead, they are impostors. Or even if it is not done intentionally, Lady Bountiful may need to be sharply reminded that taking soup to cottages covered with eglantine and roses instead of spending money on the drains is reprehensible self-deception. Noble-hearted women are frequently unjust. Reade says of Margaret Woffington that 'the sacred principle of justice was as strong in her as in the rest of her sex—she had not one grain of it.' The remedying of social conditions, not relief, is the first duty of philanthropy: if only reformers, instead of preaching denunciatory generalities, would condes-

¹ See the noble passage in Job xxix, 12, beginning: 'I delivered the poor that cried and the fatherless.'

Charity and Justice

pend to tell bewildered shareholders and well-meaning consumers exactly what they are to do!

But the assumption underlying the demand for 'justice, not charity,' is that we can so order and rearrange God's world for Him that there shall be no need or room for charity—a word which does not mean doles, but love, just as 'alms' means pity. And it is assumed that every disability or inferiority is a suffering of injustice which society can and ought to remove. So that compassion and helpfulness are regarded as a kind of hypocrisy.

It is curious that the cry, 'justice, not charity,' should come from those who usually insist that God is loving and benevolent rather than sternly and strictly just. If everybody in the world 'had his rights,' had his deserts, whether good or evil, where would most of us be? And if everybody enjoyed equal happiness, where would be the place for benevolence? Self-sacrifice for others would be positively immoral.

Here are twelve men and six pairs of boots. What is to be done? Charity, which never faileth, says: 'Give them to six men and let them take the other six upon their backs.' Justice says: 'Give them one boot apiece, and all start fair.'

Blindfolded Justice, having no respect of persons, is an impressive figure. But let her peep a little under the bandage to see what the circumstances are in each case. The merits of Christ, the intercessions and good offices of the Saints, ever weigh down one of her scales.

Socrates' conception of justice was the assignment to everything of its proper function,² to know which

² The first words of Justinian's Institutes define justice as '*Constans et perpetua voluntas jus suum cuique tribuendi.*'—S. Paul commands: 'Obey your parents in the Lord, for this is justice' (Eph. vi., Col. iii., 20).

Blackfriars

was to 'know oneself'; and virtue was excellence in the performance of one's function. In his merry way he would have accepted the modern gibe :

' God bless the squire and his relations,
And teach us all our proper stations.'³

In a ship each member of the crew, from captain to stoker, has his proper station, where his country expects that every man will do his duty. 'I know my place.' He may look for promotion; and a fore-castle hand like Benbow, or a cabin-boy like Shovel, may become a quarter-deck admiral. But meanwhile he has to do his job conscientiously.

That is what we were put into the world for—not to 'realise ourselves,' 'develop fully our whole nature,' or 'live the abundant life,' but to be tried and tested, and to do our job, our ἐργον. In the year 1753 the Academy of Dijon offered a prize—for which Rousseau competed—for an essay on the subject of *The Origin of Inequality among Men*. The Catholic answer is: the endless diversification of functions required in the body politic, which prospers by 'that which every joint supplieth.' Men need one another.

This would hardly have been accepted as an answer by the fanatic Fraticelli and Beguins of the Middle Ages, or by John Ball, priest of St. Mary's, when he preached from the text :

' Whanne Adam dalf and Eve span
Who was thane a gentilman?'

' Good friends,' he cried with pathetic passion, ' things will never be well in England so long as goods be not in common, and so long as there be villeins and gentlemen. By what right are they whom men call

³ Or, as Mrs. Alexander's hymn puts it :

' God has given to each his station,
All may have His precious grace.'

lords greater folk than we? All came from the same father and mother, Adam and Eve.'

Yet in Tsarist Russia the universal style of address was 'brother'; and, selfish though the occidentalised world of pleasure and fashion had largely become, masters on holy-days dined with their servants and officers with their men. Now that God is gone, why honour His image? 'We kill chickens,' said a Bolshevik, 'and why not men?' In 1793 at the Meudon tanneries French patriots manufactured breeches out of the skins of decapitated seigneurs and dames. The story has been questioned; but in the Carnavalet Museum at Paris there is a copy of the Constitution of 1793 bound in the skin of an aristocrat.

If, indeed, there is no God, and if man is but the ephemeral denizen of a speck of verminous dust attached to a fifth-rate star, or is only the cunningest of nature's clock-mechanisms, the immediate effect of the conviction, in a pitiful age which hates suffering, may even be a temporary increase of philanthropy. Much of the modern feverish eagerness to make the world happier and healthier springs from decay of the belief that there is any other. There being no Providence, we must be it. Worms shut round with a wall of darkness must succour one another

Such 'social righteousness,' however, is quite insufficient as a moral and spiritual ideal. The service of man would not long survive general acceptance of the idea that each mortal becomes at last a gas, and goes to 'house with darkness and with death,' or that human society is but a trouble of ants in the gleam of a million million of suns. The *Vinculum Sociale* would dissolve into Hobbes's natural state of universal war—*homo homini lupus*. Even if everyone had a pound a day, and all suffering and pain were banished, it might be a Kingdom of the Devil rather than of God.

Blackfriars

We have to reorganise life, says the Social-Democrat, by means of our common humanity. But a naturalistic worship of humanity is wholly irrational. Only if God has made man to be 'the image of His own eternity' can we exclaim with Shakespeare: 'What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty; his doing and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!'

What, for instance, is there to 'worship' in Zola's men and women, any more than in the crawling things that you turn up under a fallen gravestone?

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