

TRIBULATIONS OF A CHEERFUL GIVER.

tion—a desolate despair. Slowly the group upon the stage melted away. *Creon*, with his hopeless cry upon his lips, “Death! Death! Only death!” moved with a weary languor toward the palace, and slowly disappeared in the darkness beyond the ruined portal. There was a pause before the chorus uttered its final solemn words. And then—not as though obeying a stage direction, but rather as though moved severally by the longing in their own breasts to get away from that place of sorrow—these others also departed, going slowly, in little groups and singly, until at last the stage was bare.

The audience was held still in reality by the feeling which had seemed to hold still the chorus after *Creon’s* exit. Some moments

passed before the spell was broken, before the eight thousand hearts beat normally again, and the eight thousand throats burst forth into noisy applause, which was less, perhaps, an expression of gratitude for an artistic creation rarely equaled than of the natural rebound of the spirit after so tense a strain. In another moment the seats were emptied and the multitude was flowing down the tiers—a veritable torrent of humanity—into the pit, there to be packed for a while in a solid mass, before it could work its way out through the insufficient exits, and so return again to our modern world.

And then the Roman Theater, to whose roll of the centuries had been added a fresh legend of beauty, was left desert beneath the bright silence of the eternal stars.

Thomas A. Janvier.

TRIBULATIONS OF A CHEERFUL GIVER.

BY WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS.

PART FIRST.

I.



SOME months ago, as I was passing through a down-town street on my way to the elevated station, I saw a man sitting on the steps of a house. He seemed to be resting his elbow on his knees, and holding out both his hands. As I came nearer I perceived that he had no hands, but only stumps, where the fingers had been cut off close to the palms, and that it was these stumps he was holding out in the mute appeal which was his form of begging. Otherwise he did not ask charity. When I approached him he did not look up, and when I stopped in front of him he did not speak. I thought this rather fine, in its way; except for his mutilation, which the man really could not help, there was nothing to offend the taste; and his immobile silence was certainly impressive.

I decided at once to give him something; for when I am in the presence of want, or even the appearance of want, there is something that says to me, “Give to him that asketh,” and I have to give, or else go away with a bad conscience—a thing I hate. Of course I do not give much, for I wish to be a good citizen as well as a good Christian; and as soon as I obey that voice which I cannot disobey, I hear another voice reproaching me for encouraging street beggary. I have been taught that street beggary is wrong, and when I have to unbutton two coats and go through three or four pockets before I can reach the small coin I mean to give in compliance with that imperative voice,

I certainly feel it to be wrong. So I compromise, and I am never able to make sure that either of those voices is satisfied with me. I am not even satisfied with myself; but I am better satisfied than if I gave nothing. That was the selfish reason I now had for deciding to yield to my better nature, and to obey the voice which bade me “Give to him that asketh”; for, as I said, I hate a bad conscience, and of two bad consciences I always choose the least, which, in a case like this, is the one that incensed political economy gives me.

I put my hand into my hip-pocket, where I keep my silver, and found nothing there but half a dollar. This at once changed the whole current of my feelings; and it was not chill penury that repressed my noble rage, but chill affluence. It was manifestly wrong to give half a dollar to a man who had no hands, or to any sort of beggar. I was willing to commit a small act of incivism, but I had not the courage to flout political economy to the extent of fifty cents; and I felt that when I was bidden “Give to him that asketh,” I was never meant to give so much as a half-dollar, but a cent, or a half-dime, or at the most a quarter. I wished I had a quarter. I would gladly have given a quarter, but there was nothing in my pocket but that fatal, that inexorably indivisible half-dollar, the continent of two quarters, but not practically a quarter. I would have asked anybody in sight to change it for me, but there was no one passing; it was a quiet street of brownstone dwellings, and not a thronged thoroughfare at any time. At that hour of the late afternoon it was deserted, ex-

cept for the beggar and myself; and I am not sure that he had any business to besitting there, on the steps of another man's house, or that I had the right to encourage his invasion by giving him anything. For a moment I did not know quite what to do. To be sure, I was not bound to the man in any way. He had not asked me for charity, and I had barely paused before him; I could go on, and ignore the incident. I thought of doing this, but then I thought of the bad conscience I should be certain to have, and I could not go on. I glanced across the street, and near the corner I saw a decent-looking restaurant; and "Wait a minute," I said to the man, as if he were likely to go away, and I ran across to get my half-dollar changed at the restaurant.

I was now quite resolved to give him a quarter, and be done with it; the thing was getting to be a bore. But when I entered the restaurant I saw no one there but a young man quite at the end of a long room; and when he had come all the way forward to find what I wanted, I was ashamed to ask him to change my half-dollar, and I pretended that I wanted a package of Sweet Caporal cigarettes, which I did not want, and which it was a pure waste for me to buy, since I do not smoke, though doubtless it was better to buy them and encourage commerce, than to give the half-dollar and encourage beggary. At any rate, I instinctively felt that I had political economy on my side in the transaction, and I made haste to go back to the man on the steps, and secure myself with Christian charity too. On the way over to him, however, I decided that I would not give him a quarter, and I ended by poising fifteen cents on one of his outstretched stumps.

He seemed very grateful, and thanked me earnestly, with a little note of surprise in his voice, as if he were not used to such splendid charity as that; and in fact, I suppose very few people gave so handsomely to him. He spoke with a German accent; and when I asked him how he had lost his hands, he answered, "Frost. Frozen off, here in the city." I could not go on and ask him for further particulars, for I thought it but too likely that he had been drunk when exposed to weather that would freeze one's hands off, and that he was now paying the penalty of his debauchery. I was in no wise so much at peace with myself as I had expected to be; and I was still less so when a young girl halted as she came by, and, seeing what I had done, and hearing what the man said, put a dime on the other stump. She looked poor herself; her sack was quite shabby about the seams. I did not think she could afford to give so much to a single beggar, and I was aware of having tempted her to the excess by my own profusion. If she had seen me giving

the man only a nickel, she would perhaps have given him a cent, which was probably all she could afford.

II.

I CAME away feeling indescribably squalid. I perceived now that I could have taken my stand upon the high ground of discouraging street beggary, and given nothing; but having once lowered myself to the level of the early Christians, I ought to have given the half-dollar. It did not console me to remember the surprise in the man's gratitude, and to reflect that I had probably given him at least three times as much as he usually got from the tenderest-hearted people. I perceived that I had been the divinely appointed bearer of half a dollar to his mutilation and his misery, and I had given him fifteen cents out of it, and wasted ten, and kept the other twenty-five; in other words, I had embezzled the greater part of the money intrusted to me for him.

When I got home, and told them at dinner just what I had done, they all agreed that I had done a mighty shabby thing. I do not know whether the reader will agree with them or not—perhaps I would rather not know; and on the other hand, I shall not ask him what he would have done in the like case. Now that it is laid before him in all its shameless nakedness, I dare say he will pretend that he would have given the half-dollar. But I doubt if he would; and there is a curious principle governing this whole matter of giving, which I would like him to consider with me. Charity is a very simple thing when you look at it from the standpoint of the good Christian, but it is very complex when you look at it from the standpoint of the good citizen; and there seems to be an instinctive effort on our part to reconcile two duties by a certain proportion which we observe in giving. Whether we say so to ourselves or not, we behave as if it would be the wildest folly to give at all in the measure Christ bade; and by an apt psychological juggle we adjust our succor to the various degrees of need that present themselves. To the absolutely destitute it is plain that anything will be better than nothing, and so we give the smallest charity to those who need charity most. I dare say people will deny this, but it is true, all the same, as the reader will allow when he thinks about it. We act upon a kind of logic in the matter, though I do not suppose many act consciously upon it. Here is a man whispering to you in the dark that he has not had anything to eat all day, and does not know where to sleep. Shall you give him a dollar to get a good supper and a decent lodging? Certainly not: you shall give him a dime, and trust that some one else will give

him another; or if you have some charity tickets about you, then you give him one of them, and go away feeling that you have at once befriended and outwitted him; for the supposition is that he is a fraud, and has been trying to work you.

This is not a question which affects the excellence of the charities system. I know how good and kind and just that is; but it is a question that affects the whole Christian philosophy of giving. A friend, whom I was talking the matter over with, was inclined to doubt whether Christ's doctrine was applicable, in its sweeping simplicity, to our complex modern conditions; whether it was final, whether it was the last word, as we say. Of course it does seem a little absurd to give to him that asketh, when you do not know what he is going to do with the money, and when you do not know whether he has not come to want by his own fault, or whether he is really in want.

III.

I MUST say that his statement of his own case is usually incoherent, and sometimes seems even a little fabulous. The poor fellows have very little imagination or invention; they might almost as well be realistic novelists. I find that those who strike me for a night's lodging, when they stop me in the street at night, come as a rule from Pittsburg, and are iron-workers of some sort; the last one said he was a puddler, "A skilled mechanic," he explained—"what is called a skilled mechanic"; and of course he was only watching for some chance to get back to Pittsburg, though there was no chance of work, from what he told me, after he got there. On the other hand, I find that most of those who ask by day for money to get a dinner are from Philadelphia, or the rural parts of eastern Pennsylvania, though within six months I have extended hospitality (I think that is the right phrase) to two architectural draftsmen from Boston. They were both entirely decent-looking, sober-looking young men, who spoke like men of education, and they each gratefully accepted a quarter from me. I do not attempt to account for them, for they made no attempt to account for themselves; and I think the effect was more artistic so.

I am rarely approached by any professed New Yorker, which is perhaps a proof of the superior industry or prosperity of our city; but now and then a fellow-citizen who has fallen out asks me for money in the street, and perhaps goes straight and spends it for drink. Drink, however, is as necessary in some forms as food itself, and a rich, generous port wine is often prescribed for invalids. These men,

without exception, look like invalids, and I have no doubt that they would prefer to buy a rich, generous port wine if I gave them money enough. I never do that, though I have a means of making my alms seem greater, to myself at least, by practising a little cordiality with the poor fellows. I do not give grudgingly or silently, but I say, if I give at all, when they ask me, "Why, of course!" or "Yes, certainly"; and sometimes I invite them to use their feeble powers of invention in my behalf, and tell how they wish me to think they have come to the sad pass of beggary. This seems to flatter them, and it makes me feel much better, which is really my motive for doing it.

Now and then they will offer me some apology for begging, in a tone that says, "I know how it is myself"; and once there was one who began by saying, "I know it's a shame for a strong man like me to be begging, but—" They seldom have any devices for working me, beyond the simple statement of their destitution; though there was a case in which I helped a poor fellow raise a quarter upon a postal order, which he then kept as a pledge of my good faith. Their main reliance seems to be lead-pencils, which they have in all inferior variety. I find that they will take it kindly if you do not want any change back when you have given them a coin worth more than they asked for the pencil, and that they will even let you off without taking the pencil after you have bought it. In the end you have to use some means to save yourself from the accumulation of pencils, unless you are willing to burn them for kindling-wood; and I find the simplest way is not to take them after you have paid for them. It is amusing how quickly you can establish a comity with these pencil people; they will not only let you leave your pencils with them, but they will sometimes excuse you from buying if you remind them that you have bought of them lately. Then, if they do not remember you, they at least smile politely, and pretend to do so.

IV.

OUGHT one to give money to a hand-organist, who is manifestly making himself a nuisance before the door of some one else? I have asked myself this when I have been tempted, and I am not yet quite clear about it. At present, therefore, I give only to the inaudible street minstrels, who earn an honest living, and make no noise about it. I cannot think that a ballad-singer on Sixth Avenue, who pours forth his artless lay amid the roar and rattle of the elevated trains, the jangle and clatter of the horse-cars, the bang of the grocers' carts, and the thunder of the express-wagons, is practically molesting anybody; and

I believe that one can reward his innocent efforts without wronging the neighbors. It is always amusing to have him stop in his most effective phrase to say, "Thank you, thank you, sir," and then go on again. The other day, as I dropped my contribution into the extended hat, I asked, "How is business?" and the singer interrupted himself to answer, "Nothing-to-brag-of-sir-thank-you," and resumed with continuous tenderness the "ditty of no tone" that he was piping to the inattentive uproar of the street.

It may be doubted whether a balladist who is not making himself heard is earning his money; but, on the other hand, it may be asked if he is not less regrettable for that reason. A great many good people do not earn their money, and yet by universal consent they seem to have a right to it. We cannot oblige the poor to earn their money, any more than the rich, without attacking the principle on which society is based, and classing ourselves with its enemies. If people get money out of other people, we ought not to ask how they get it, whether it is much or little; and I, at any rate, will not scan too closely the honesty of the inaudible balladist of the avenue. Neither will I question the gains of those silent minstrels who grind small, mute organs at the corners of the pavement, with a little tin cup beside them to receive tribute. They are usually old, old women, and I suppose Italians; but they seem not to be very distinctively anything. How they can sit upon the cold stone all day long without taking their deaths, passes me to say; and I am inclined to think that they do really earn their money, if not as minstrels, then as monuments of human endurance. The average American grandmother would sneeze in five seconds, under the same conditions, and be laid up for the rest of the winter. But these hardy aliens remain unaffected by cold or wet, light or dark. One night I came upon one sleeping on her curbstone,—such a small, dull wad of outworn womanhood!—her gray old head bent upon her knees, and her withered arms wound in her thin shawl. It was very chill that night, with a sharp wind sweeping the street that the Street Department had neglected; but this poor old thing slept on, while I stood by her, trying to imagine her short and simple annals: a dim, far-off childhood in some peasant hut, a girlhood with its tender dreams, a motherhood with its cares, a grandmotherhood with its pains—the whole round of woman's life, with want through all, wound into this last result of houseless age at my feet. How much of human life comes to no more—if indeed, one ought not to say how little comes to so much! I sighed, as people of feeling used to do in the eighteenth century, and dropped

a dime into the tin cup. The sound startled the beldam, and I hope that before she woke and looked up at me she had time to dream riches and luxury for the rest of her life. "*Bella musica!*" I said, with a fine irony, and she smiled and shrugged, and began to feel for the handle of her organ, as if she were willing to begin giving me my money's worth on the spot. If we did not see such sights every day, how impossible they would seem!

V.

THE whole spectacle of poverty, indeed, is incredible. As soon as you cease to have it before your eyes,—even when you have it before your eyes,—you can hardly believe it, and that is perhaps why so many people deny that it exists, or is much more than a superstition of the sentimentalist. When I get back into my own comfortable room, among my papers and books, I remember it as I remember something at the theater. It seems to have been turned off, as Niagara does, when you come away. The difficulty here in New York is that the moment you go out again, you find it turned on, full tide. I used to live in a country supposed to be peculiarly infested by beggars; but I believe I was not so much asked for charity in Venice as I am in New York. There are as many beggars on our streets, and as for the organized efforts to get at one's compassion, there is no parallel for New York anywhere. The letters asking aid for air funds, salt and fresh, for homes and shelters, for reading-rooms and eating-rooms, for hospitals and refuges, for the lame, halt, and blind, for the old, for the young, for the anhungered and ashamed, of all imaginable descriptions, storm in with every mail, so that one hates to open one's letters nowadays; for instead of finding a pleasant line from a friend, one finds an appeal, in print imitating typewriting, from several of the millionaires in the city for aid of some good object to which they have lent the influence of their signatures, and inclosing an envelop, directed but not stamped, for your subscription. You do not escape from the proof of poverty even by keeping indoors amidst your own luxurious environment; besides, your digestion becomes impaired, and you have to go out, if you are to have any appetite for your dinner; and then the trouble begins on other terms.

One of my minor difficulties, if I may keep on confessing myself to the reader, is with a very small pattern of newsboys, whom I am tempted to make keep the change, when I get a one-cent paper of them, and give them a five-cent piece. I see men, well dressed, well brushed, with the air of being exemplary citizens, fathers of families, and pillars of churches,

wait patiently or impatiently while these little fellows search one pocket and another for the pennies due, or run to some comrade Chonnie or Chimmie for them; and I cannot help feeling that I may be doing something very disorganizing or demoralizing in failing to demand my change. At first I used to pass on without apparently noticing that I had given too much, but I perceived that then these small wretches sometimes winked to their friends, in the belief that they had cheated me; and now I let them offer to get the change before I let them keep it. I may be undermining society, and teaching them to trust in a fickle fortune rather than their own enterprise, by overpaying them; but at least I will not corrupt them by letting them think they have taken advantage of my ignorance. If the reader will not whisper it again, I will own that I have sometimes paid as high as ten cents for a one-cent paper, which I did not want, when it has been offered me by a very minute newsboy near midnight; and I have done this in conscious defiance of the well-known fact that it is a ruse of very minute newsboys to be out late when they ought to be in bed at home, or at *the Home* (which seems different), in order to work the sympathies of unwary philanthropists. The statistics in regard to these miscreants are as unquestionable as those relating to street beggars who have amassed fortunes and died amidst rags and riches of dramatic character. I am sorry that I cannot say where the statistics are to be found.

VI.

THE actual practice of fraud, even when you discover it, must give you interesting question, unless you are cock-sure of your sociology. I was once met by a little girl on a cross-street in a respectable quarter of the town, who burst into tears at sight of me, and asked for money to buy her sick mother bread. The very next day I was passing through the same street, and I saw the same little girl burst into tears at sight of a benevolent-looking lady, whom undoubtedly she asked for money for the same good object. The benevolent-looking lady gave her nothing, and she tried her woes upon

several other people, none of whom gave her anything. I was forced to doubt whether, upon the whole, her game was worth the candle, or whether she was really making a provision for her declining years by this means. To be sure, her time was not worth much, and she could hardly have got any other work, she was so young; but it seemed hardly a paying industry. By any careful calculation, I do not believe she would have been found to have amassed more than ten or fifteen cents a day; and perhaps she really had a sick mother at home. Many persons are obliged to force their emotions for money, whom we should not account wholly undeserving; yet I suppose a really good citizen who found this little girl trying to cultivate the sympathies of charitable people by that system of irrigation, would have had her suppressed as an impostor.

In a way she was an impostor, though her sick mother may have been starving, as she said. It is a nice question. Shall we always give to him that asketh? Or shall we give to him that asketh only when we know that he has come by his destitution honestly? In other words, what is a deserving case of charity—or, rather, what is not? Is a starving or freezing person to be denied because he or she is drunken or vicious? What is desert in the poor? What is desert in the rich, I suppose the reader would answer. If this is so, and if we ought not to succor an undeserving poor person, then we ought not to succor an undeserving rich person. It will be said that a rich person, however undeserving, will never be in need of our succor, but this is not so clear. If we saw a rich person fall in a fit before the horses of a Fifth Avenue omnibus, ought not we to run and lift him up, although we knew him to be a man whose life was stained by every vice and excess, and cruel, wanton, idle, luxurious? I know that I am imagining a quite impossible rich person; but once imagined, ought not we to save him all the same as if he were deserving? I do not believe the most virtuous person will say we ought not; and ought not we, then, to rescue the most worthless tramp fallen under the wheels of the Juggernaut of want? Is charity the reward of merit?

William Dean Howells.

THE WORLD'S NEED.

SO many gods, so many creeds—
 So many paths that wind and wind,
 While just the art of being kind
 Is all the sad world needs.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

TRIBULATIONS OF A CHEERFUL GIVER.

BY WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS.

PART SECOND.

I.



Y friend who was not sure that Christ's doctrine was the last word in regard to charity, was quite sure that you ought to have a conscience against dead-beats, whom I suggested for his consideration, especially the dead-beats who come to your house and try to work you upon one pretext or another. He said he never gave to them, and I asked what he answered them when they professed themselves in instant want, and whether he plumply denied them; and it appeared that he told them he had other use for his money. I suspect this was a proper answer to make. It had never occurred to me, but I think I will try it with the next one who comes, and see what effect it has upon him. Hitherto I have had no better way with them than to offer them a compromise: if they ask twenty, to propose ten; and if they ask ten, to propose five; and so on down. The first time I did this (it was with an actor, who gave me his I O U—the first and only I O U that I ever got: I suppose he was used to giving it on the stage) it seemed to me that I had made ten dollars, and since then it has seemed to me that I made five dollars on several occasions; but I now think this was an illusion, and that I only saved the money: I did not actually add to my store.

It is usually indigent literature which presents itself with these imaginative demands, and I think usually fictionists of the romantic school. I do not know but it would be well for me as a man of principle to confine my benefactions to destitute realists: I am sure it would be cheaper. Last winter there came to me a gentleman thrown out of employment by the completion of an encyclopedia he had been at work on, and he said that he was in absolute want of food for his family, who had that morning been set out with all his household stuff on the sidewalk, for default of rent. I relieved his immediate necessity, and suggested to him that if he would write a simple, unrhetical account of his eviction, I could probably sell it for him; that this sort of thing mostly happened to the inarticulate classes; and that he had the chance of doing a perfectly fresh thing in literature. He caught at the notion, and said he would begin at once,

and I said the sooner the better. He asked if it would not be well to get the narrative typewritten, and I begged him not to wait for that; but he said that he knew a person who would typewrite it for him without charge. I could only urge haste, and he went away in a glow of enterprise. He left with me the address of a twenty-five-cent lodging-house in the Bowery; for he explained that he had got money enough, by selling his furniture on the sidewalk, to send his family into the country, and he was living alone and as cheaply as he could. While at work on his narrative he came for more relief, and then he vanished out of my knowledge altogether. I had a leisure afternoon, and went down into the Bowery to his lodging-house, and found that he really lodged there, but he was then out; and so far as I am concerned he is out still. I am out myself, in the amount I advanced him, and which he was to repay me from the money for his eviction article. He never wrote it, apparently; and perhaps his experience of eviction lacked the vital element of reality. I am quite sure he was at heart a romanticist, for he was an Englishman, and the Englishmen are all romanticists.

II.

I WAS at one time worked for a period of years by a German-born veteran of our war, whom I was called out to see one night from dinner, when I was full of good cheer, and, of course, quite helpless against a case of want like his. He represented that he was the victim of an infirmity brought on by falling from a burning bridge under the rebel fire, and was liable to be overtaken by it at any moment; and he showed me all sorts of surgeons' certificates in proof of the fact, as well as kindly notes from college professors and clergymen. I had, therefore, a double motive for befriending him. I had as little wish that he should be overtaken by his infirmity in my reception-room as that he should go on sleeping in unfurnished houses and basement areas; and so I gave him some money at once. He was to have his pension money at the end of the month, and till then he said he could live on what I gave him. I hurried him out of the house as fast as I could, for I did not feel safe from his infirmity while he was there. But he kept coming back, and always, in view of his threatening infirmity, got money from

me; I am not sure that I always pitied him so much. At last he agreed to seek refuge in a soldiers' home, upon my urgency, and I lost sight of him for several years. When he reappeared, one summer, at the seaside, as destitute as ever, and as threatening as ever in regard to his infirmity, it seemed that he had passed the time in working his way from one soldiers' home to another, in Maine and in New York, in Virginia and in Ohio, but everywhere, because of some informality in his papers, the gates were closed against him. I gave him a suit of clothes and some more money, and I thought I had done with him at last, for he said that now, as soon as he got his next pension money, he was going home to Germany, to spend his last years with his brother,—a surgeon, retired from the German army,—who could take care of him and his infirmity, and they could live cheaply together upon their joint pensions. I applauded so wise a plan, and we parted with expressions of mutual esteem. Two or three months later, after I had come from the seaside place, where he visited me, to New York for the winter, he presented himself again to me. Heaven knows how he had found me out, but there he was, with his infirmity, and his story was that now he had money enough to buy his steamer ticket to Hamburg, but that he lacked his railroad fare from Hamburg to the little village where his brother lived. His notion seemed to be that I should subscribe with others to supply the amount; but I had at last a gleam of worldly wisdom. I said I thought the subscription business had gone on long enough; and he assented that it had at least gone on a good while.

"Very well, then," I added; "you go now with the money you have for your steamer ticket, and buy it. Come back here with the ticket, and I will not oblige you to wait till you can collect your railroad fare from different people; I will give you the whole of it myself."

Will it be credited that this sufferer did not come back with his steamer ticket? I have never seen him since, though a few weeks later I went to call upon him at the ten-cent hotel in the Bowery where he said he slept. The clerk said he was staying there, but he could not throw any light upon his intention of going back to Germany, for he had never heard him say anything about it. He was out at the moment, like my romanticistic Englishman.

Whilst I lived in Boston I had a visit from another romanticistic Englishman, who professed to be no other than the cousin of Mr. Walter Besant, though he gave me reason to think he was mistaken. It seems that he had arrived that very morning from Central Africa, and, for all I know, from the mystical

presence of She herself. In that strange land, he wished me to believe, he had been a playwright and a journalist, but he really looked and spoke and smelled like a groom. He dropped his aspirates everywhere, and when he picked them up he put them on in the wrong places. In his parlance I was a bird of night, or several such, and I cannot rid myself now of the belated conjecture that he had possibly mistaken me for Mr. 'Aggard. He was a cheery little creature, however; and when I put it to him, as between man and man, whether he did not think he was telling me a rather improbable story, he owned so sweetly he did that I could not help contributing to pay his expenses 'ome to Hengland. He was not quite clear why he should have come round by way of Boston, but he said that he would send me the money back directly he got 'ome.

He did not do so, and my experience is that they never do so. They may forget it, they may never be able to spare the money. Never? I am wrong. Only last winter I made my usual compromise with a man who asked ten, and lent him five; and though he was yet another Englishman, and, for anything I can say, another romanticist, he returned my little loan with such a manly, honest letter that my heart smote me for not having made it ten. I looked upon his five-dollar bill as a gift from heaven, and I made haste to bestow it where I am sure it will never stand the remotest chance of getting back to me.

III.

I WISH, sometimes, that they would not say they were going to send the money back; but I wish this rather for their sake than for mine. I am pretty well'inured to the disappointment sure to follow; but I am afraid that the poor pretense demoralizes them, and, above all, I do not wish to demoralize them by my connivance. Once, when I was a visitor for the Associated Charities in Boston, the question came up in the weekly meeting whether, if one gave money when there was no hope of getting work, one ought to let the beneficiary suppose that one expected to get it back. Ought one to say that he was making his gift a loan? Would it not be better to treat it frankly as a gift? A man to whose goodness I mentally uncover said he had given that point some thought, and he believed one ought not to pretend that it was a loan when it was not; but one might fitly say, "I let you have this money. If you are ever able to give it back, I shall be glad to have you do so." It seems to me that this is the wisest possible word on the subject.

Of course the reason why we have such a bad conscience in giving is that we feel we ought not to pauperize people. Perhaps this

is one reason why we give so little to obvious destitution. I am this moment just in from the street, where I gave alms to a one-armed tatterdemalion, with something of this obscure struggle in my mind. As I came up with him, well fenced against the bitter wind that blew through his ruins, I foresaw that I should give him something, and I took from my outside pocket all the change there was in it—three coppers, a nickel, and a piece of twenty-five. I was ashamed to give the coppers, and I felt that a good citizen ought not to give a quarter for fear of pauperizing a man who had already nothing in the world, and no hopeful appearance of being able to get anything. So I gave him the nickel, and I am not quite easy in my mind about it.

Perhaps I was remotely influenced not to give a quarter to that one-armed man by the behavior of another one-armed man whom I befriended. I did give him a quarter, not from a good impulse, but because I had no smaller change, and it was that or nothing. The gift seemed to astound him. It was in a shoe-store, where I had only one boot on, in the process of trying a pair, and I was quite helpless against him when he burst into blessings of Irish picturesqueness, and asked my name, apparently that he might pray for me without making a mistake in the address; and when I said, from a natural bashfulness, and a mean fear that he might find me out at home and come again to beg of me, that I would take the chance of the answer of his prayers getting to me, he told me all about the railroad accident that lost him his arm; and not content with this, he took his poor stump—as if to prove that it was real—and rubbed it over me, and blessed me and blessed me again, till I was quite ashamed of getting so much more than my money's worth. Shall I own that I began to fear this grateful man was not entirely sober?

IV.

I DARE say poverty and the pangs of hunger and cold do not foster habits of strict temperance. It is a great pity they do not, since they are so common. If they did, they could do more than anything else to advance the cause of prohibition. Still, I will not say that all the poor I give to are in liquor at the moment, or that drunkenness is peculiarly the vice of one-armed destitution. Neither is gratitude a very common or articulate emotion in my beneficiaries. They are mostly, if thankful at all, silently thankful; and I find this in better taste. I do not believe that as a rule they are very imaginative, or at least so imaginative as romantic novelists. Yet there was one sufferer came up the back elevator on a cer-

tain evening not long ago, and burst upon me suddenly, somehow as if he had come up through a trap in the stage, who seemed to have rather a gift in that way. He was most amusingly shabby and dirty (though I do not know why shabbiness and dirt should be at all amusing), with a cutaway coat worn down to its ultimate gloss, a frayed neckcloth, and the very foulest collar I can remember seeing. But he had a brisk and pleasing address, and I must say an excellent diction. He called me by name, and at once said that friends whom he had expected to find in New York were most inopportunistly in Europe at this moment of his arrival from a protracted sojourn in the West. But he was very anxious to get on that night to Hartford, and complete his journey home from Denver, where he had fallen a prey to the hard times in the very hour of the most prosperous speculation; and he proposed, as an inducement to a loan, borrowing only enough money to take him to New Haven by the boat: he would walk the rest of the way to Hartford. I no more believed him than I should believe a ghost if it said it was a ghost. But I believed that he was in want,—his clothes proved that,—and I gave him the little sum he asked. He said he would send it back the instant he reached Hartford; and I am left to think that he has not yet arrived. But I am sure that that brief moment of his airy and almost joyous companionship was worth the money. He was of an order of classic impostors dear to literature, and grown all too few in these times of hurry and fierce competition. I wish I had seen more of him, and yet I cannot say that I wish he would come back; it might be embarrassing for both of us.

Not long before his visit, I had a call from another imaginative person, whom I was not able to meet so fully in her views. This was a middle-aged lady who said she had come on that morning from Boston to see me. She owned we had never met before, and that she was quite unknown to me; but apparently she did not think this any bar to her asking me for \$250 to aid in the education of her son. I confess that I was bewildered for a moment. My simple device of offering half the amount demanded would have been too costly: I really could not have afforded to give her \$125, even if she had been willing to compromise, which I was not sure of. I am afraid the reader will think I shirked. I said that I had a great many demands upon me, and I ended by refusing to give anything. I really do not know how I had the courage; perhaps it was only frenzy. She insisted, with reasons for my giving which she laid before me; but either they did not convince me, or I had hardened my heart so well that they could not prevail with me, and she

got up and went away. As she went out of the room, she looked about its appointments, which I had not thought very luxurious before, and said that she saw I was able to *live* very comfortably, at any rate; and left me to the mute reproach of my carpets and easy-chairs.

I do not remember whether she alleged any inspiration in coming to see me for this good object; but a summer or two since, a lady came to me, at my hotel in the mountains, who said that she had been moved to do so by an impulse which seemed little short of mystical. She said that she was not ordinarily superstitious, but she had wakened that morning in Boston with my name the first thing in her thoughts, and it seemed so directly related to what she had in view that she could not resist the suggestion it conveyed that she should come at once to lay her scheme before me. She took a good deal of time to do this; and romantic as it appeared, I felt sure that she was working with real material. It was of a nature so complex, however, and on a scale so vast, that I should despair of getting it intelligibly before the reader, and I will not attempt it. I listened with the greatest interest; but at the end I was obliged to say that I thought her mystical impulse was mistaken; I was sorry it had deceived her; I was quite certain that I had not the means nor the tastes to enter upon the esthetic enterprise which she proposed. In return, I suggested a number of millionaires whose notorious softness of heart, or whose wish to get themselves before the public by their good deeds, ought to make them more available, and we parted the best of friends. I am not yet quite able to make up my mind that she was not the victim of a hypnotic suggestion from the unseen world, and altogether innocent in her appeal to me.

V.

IN fact, I am not able to think very ill even of impostors. It is a great pity for them, and even a great shame, to go about deceiving people of means; but I do not believe they are so numerous as people of means imagine. As a rule, I do not suppose they succeed for long, and their lives must be full of cares and anxieties, which of course one must not sympathize with, but which are real enough, nevertheless. People of means would do well to consider this, and at least not plume themselves very much upon not being cheated. If they have means, it is perhaps part of the curse of money, or of that unfriendliness to riches which our religion is full of, that money should be got from them by unworthy persons. They have their little romantic superstitions, too. One of these is the belief that beggars are generally persons who will not work, and that they are often persons

of secret wealth, which they constantly increase by preying upon the public. I take leave to doubt this altogether. Beggary appears to me in its conditions almost harder than any other trade; and from what I have seen of the amount it earns, the return it makes is smaller than any other. I should not myself feel safe in refusing anything to a beggar upon the theory of a fortune sewn into a mattress, to be discovered after the beggar has died intestate. I know that a great many good people pin their faith to such mattresses; but I should be greatly surprised if one such could be discovered in the whole city of New York. On the other hand, I feel pretty sure that there are hundreds and even thousands of people who are insufficiently fed and clad in New York; and if here and there one of these has the courage of his misery, and asks alms, one must not be too cocksure it is a sin to give to him.

Of course one must not pauperize him: that ought by all means to be avoided; I am always agreeing to that. But if he is already pauperized; if we know by statistics and personal knowledge that there are hundreds and even thousands of people who cannot get work, and that they must suffer if they do not beg, let us not be too hard upon them. Let us refuse them kindly, and try not to see them; for if we see their misery, and do not give, that demoralizes us. Come, I say; have not we some rights, too? No man strikes another man a blow without becoming in some sort and measure a devil; and to see what looks like want, and to deny its prayer, has an effect upon the heart which is not less depraving. Perhaps it would be a fair division of the work if we let the deserving rich give only to the deserving poor, and kept the undeserving poor for ourselves, who, if we are not rich, are not deserving, either.

VI.

I SHOULD be sorry if anything I have said seemed to cast slight upon the organized efforts at relieving want, especially such as unite inquiry into the facts and the provision of work with the relief of want. All that I contend for is the right — or call it the privilege — of giving to him that asketh, even when you do not know that he needs, or deserves to need. Both here and in Boston I have lent myself — sparingly and grudgingly, I'll own — to those organized efforts; and I know how sincere and generous they are, how effective they often are, how ineffective. They used to let me go mostly to the Italian folk who applied for aid in Boston, because I could more or less meet them in their own language; but once they gave me a Russian to manage — I think because I was known to have a devotion for Tolstoi and for the other

Russian novelists. The Russian in question was not a novelist, but a washer of bags in a sugar-refinery; and at the time I went to make my first call upon him he had been "laid off," as the euphemism is, for two months; that is, he had been without work, and had been wholly dependent upon the allowance the charities made him. He had a wife and a complement of children — I do not know just how many; but they all seemed to live in one attic room in the North End. I acquainted myself fully with the case, and went about looking for work in his behalf. In this, I think, I found my only use: but it was use to me only, for the people of whom I asked work for him treated me with much the same ignominy as if I had been seeking it for myself; and it was well that I should learn just what the exasperated mind of a fellow-being is when he is asked for work, and has none to give. He regards the applicant as an oppressor, or at least an aggressor, and he is eager to get rid of him by bluntness, by coldness, even by rudeness. After the unavailing activity of a week or two, I myself began to resent the Russian's desire for work, and I visited him at longer and longer intervals to find whether he had got anything to do; for he was looking after work, too. At last I let a month go by, and when I came he met me at the street door — or, say, alley door — of the tenement-house with a smiling face. He was always smiling, poor fellow, but now he smiled joyously. He had got a job — they always call it a job, and the Italians pronounce it a *giobbe*. His job was one which testified to the heterogeneous character of American civilization in even amusing measure. The Jews had come into a neighboring street so thickly that they had crowded every one else out; they had bought the Congregational meeting-house, which they were turning into a synagogue, and they had given this orthodox Russian the job of knocking the nails out of the old woodwork. His only complaint was that the Jews would not let him work on Saturday, and the Christians would not let him work on Sunday, and so he could earn but five dollars a week. He did not blame me for my long failure to help him; on the contrary, so far as I could make out from the limited vocabulary we enjoyed in common, he was grateful. But I have no doubt he was glad to be rid of me; and Heaven knows how glad I was to be rid of him.

I do not believe I ever found work for any one, though I tried diligently and I think not unwisely. Perhaps the best effect from my efforts was that they inspired the poor creatures to efforts of their own, which were sometimes successful. I had on my hands and heart

for nearly a whole winter the most meritorious Italian family I ever knew, without being able to do anything but sympathize and offer secret alms in little gifts to the children. Once I got one of the boys a place in a book-store, but the law would not allow him to take it because he was not past the age of compulsory schooling. The father had a peripatetic fruit-stand, which he pushed about on a cart; and his great aim was to get the privilege of stationing himself at one of the railroad depots. I found that there were stations which were considered particularly desirable by the fruiterers, and that the chief of these was in front of the old United States court-house. A fruiterer out of place, whose family I visited for the charities, tried even to corrupt me, and promised me that if I would get him this *stendio* (they Italianize "stand" to that effect, just as they translate "bar" into *barra*, and so on) he would give me something outright. "*E poi, ci sarà sempre la mancia*" ("And then there will always be the drink-money"). I lost an occasion to lecture him upon the duties of the citizen; but I am not a ready speaker.

The sole success—but it was very signal—of my winter's work was getting a young Italian into the hospital. He had got a rheumatic trouble of the heart from keeping a *stendio* in a cellarway, and when I saw him I thought it would be little use to get him into the hospital. The young doctor who had charge of him, and whom I looked up, was of the same mind. Nevertheless, I could not help trying for him; and when the sisters at the hospital (where he got well, in spite of all) said he could be received, I made favor for an ambulance to carry him to it. I cannot forget the beautiful white spring day it was when I went to tell him the hour the ambulance would call; how the sky was blue overhead, and the canaries sang in their cages along the street. I left all this behind when I entered the dark, chill tenement-house, where that dreadful *poverty-smell* struck the life out of the spring in my soul at the first breath. In his own apartment it was better, for it was clean and sweet there, through his mother's care (I will say that this poor woman was as wholly a lady as any I have seen); but when I passed into his room, he clutched himself up from the bed, and stretched his arms toward me with gasps of "*Lo spedale, lo spedale!*"

The spring, the coming glory of this world, was nothing to him. It was the hospital he wanted; and to the poor, to the incurable disease of our conditions, the hospital is the best we have to give. To be sure, there is also the grave.

William Dean Howells.