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**SERMON,**

Delivered, on the 4th of February, 1816,

FOR THE BENEFIT OF

**A SOCIETY OF LADIES,**

INSTITUTED FOR THE RELIEF OF

**POOR WIDOWS WITH SMALL CHILDREN.**

BY

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## SERMON, &c.

Psalm LXXVIII. 4th and 5th verses.

*"Sing unto God, sing praises to his name; extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widow, is God in his holy habitation."*

DID I rise before you to plead the cause of the widow and orphan children of some statesman or patriot, whose name is endeared to his countrymen, but whose family, after his decease, had sunk to indigence, I might feel confident that I had fallen on one of those happy occasions, which, if they do not inspire with eloquence, will do more than eloquence, since their appeal is directly to the best affections, and noblest sensibilities.

But though I can lay hold of no such favourable circumstance to awaken the attention, or move the compassion, of this assembly—though no hero's name or patriot's praise is now the talisman that, with magic impulse, can relax the covetous grasp, and expand the soul with benevolence—though the claim of nameless, praiseless poverty, is all that we can urge, and that, perhaps, impeded by the feeble efforts of an insufficient advocate, yet this occasion is not without advantages, calculated to cherish hope—to inspire confidence. Not merely because

the class to be discriminated hold powerful claims on public sympathy, and in all ages and nations, whether savage or civilized, whether heathen or christian, have been regarded as entitled to notice, commiseration, and relief; but because most, if not all whom I address, need but to know where affliction points her shaft, and they are ready to administer the balm of healing: But our highest encouragement is grounded on the illustrious patronage, under which the widow and the orphan solicit your aid this evening: The LORD of hosts—the GOD of the universe has declared himself to be their patron—their friend. “A FATHER OF THE FATHERLESS, AND A JUDGE OF THE WIDOWS, IS GOD IN HIS HOLY HABITATION.”

The psalmist, who touches on this topic with great earnestness, in various other places, seems here to be contemplating the divine character, in that peculiarly amiable light, as the friend and guardian of “the widow and the fatherless.” He connects and contrasts it with his majesty and glory, as presenting a special motive of gratitude and praise: “Sing unto the LORD: sing praises to his name; extol Him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH,” or, which signifies the same, JEHOVAH. He immediately points us to that which, at this moment, seems to excite his highest admiration: to that peculiar excellence in the character of GOD, which fills his eye with wonder—his soul with rapture—and his tongue with praise. While from a

strain so bold—so forcible—so sublime, we might be ready to conclude he was about to celebrate Jehovah, “that rideth upon the heavens,” as the creator of worlds and systems—the conqueror of the powers of darkness—the universal sovereign, the self-existent, eternal, incommunicable God, he suddenly strikes a chord, less bold, but more touching; less lofty and sublime, but more exquisitely beautiful: “A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.”

I have chosen this passage of the psalmist as the theme of our meditations this evening. And I know of none, from which nobler, more interesting, and more commanding motives, for the furtherance of the present object, can be derived. Not that I hope to gain your ear, by any new speculations upon a subject which has long since been exhausted of its topics by the energies of more acuminated intellect; or to interest your hearts by a presentment of human misery, marked with stronger lines and deeper shades than you have ever seen before; or to compel your hand to the unwilling concession of a farthing, by an appeal to the sanction that is terrible—to the curse that is interminable—this is not the object.

My design is, to hold up to your view the character of God, in that peculiarly amiable and beautiful light, in which it is presented by the psalmist; and my hope is, that all of you will, not only by your praise, “extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name

JEROVAH," but, by voluntary beneficence, imitate him who is "A FATHER OF THE FATHERLESS, AND A JUDGE OF THE WIDOWS, IN HIS HOLY HABITATION."

This subject will be pursued on the following grounds:

- I. *That God is to be recognised in the character of a benefactor of the destitute.*
  - II. *That the situations in which he has placed them, furnish the occasions on which that beneficence is manifested*
  - III. *That God has taken care to furnish means with the means, for this express purpose, that they may be the dispensers of his beneficence to this destitute part of his great family. And,*
  - IV. *That those who act as faithful stewards, in this service, shall not lose their reward.*
- I. *God is to be recognised in the character of a benefactor of the destitute. "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation."*

Did they but comprehend the import of this declaration—could they avail themselves of this privilege, in all its extent, the widow's heart might sing for joy, and the orphan child might look towards heaven, "the habitation of his holiness," and with its earliest reason say, "There dwells my Almighty Father."

This endearing relation, which God assumes towards the destitute, relates simply and exclusively to them as such. In a general sense, he is equally the great creator—the powerful preserver—the kind benefactor of all flesh: all creatures are the constant recipients of his diffusive beneficence. But in a particular sense, God has required himself to be recognised as the benefactor of this destitute portion

of his universal family. "For the Lord your God," said Moses to the Israelites, "is God of gods, and Lord of lords; a great God, mighty and terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward; he doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving them food and raiment." Divine compassion regards their afflictions—relieves their wants, and opens to them the highest and purest sources of consolation, in the midst of destitution and wo.

As though he would say to her, bereft of her earthly partner, her head and husband, her guide and protector, "Fear not, but repose thy confidence in me; 'Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them;' and let thy widowed heart 'trust in me.' As though he would say to the children, deprived of an earthly parent, to provide and to defend, Fear not, little flock; I will be your guardian and friend; 'I, who sit in judgment, mighty to save,' will be your father, and maintain your cause."

It is not in this psalm, nor, indeed, in the writings of David only, that this language—this character—and these promises of God, are found. In the law of God, given to Israel, under the Theocracy, the widow and the fatherless were esteemed peculiarly worthy of legislative provision: "Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If thou afflict them, in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will, surely, hear their cry: and my wrath shall wax hot, and I

will kill you with the sword ; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless."—Ex. xxii. 22. This language is repeated, with enlargement, in Deuteronomy. It runs through the psalms and prophets ; and by precept and example, we abundantly recognise this peculiar aspect of the divine character and conduct, that "he will judge the poor of the people ; he will save the children of the needy, and break in pieces the oppressor." It is, also, incorporated in the spirit, if not in the letter of law, with various parts of the New Testament, and enforced by sanctions of a spiritual and eternal character. "Pure religion and undefiled," saith the Apostle James, "before God and the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." A remarkable phraseology ! "Religion, pure and undefiled, before God and the Father," is, in part, the discharge of a duty towards a class of our fellow creatures, on whom the beneficent eye of the great Father of all is constantly fixed. If an injury be done them ; if their miseries go unpitied ; if their necessary wants be unrelieved, it is "before God and the Father"—it is in the presence of "Him that rideth upon the heavens," whose name is JEHOVAH, and who will pursue the oppressor with many a curse. But if a kindness be done them ; if their sufferings be commiserated ; if their wants be satisfied, it is "before God and the Father," who will reward with many a blessing—it is in the pre-

sence of Him, who is "a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, in his holy habitation."

But where is his "holy habitation?" Whence do the destitute receive such high tokens of divine compassion? Where is the judgment bar of the helpless widow—the patron seat of the orphan? It is in the sanctuary of his grace, below, where God delights to appear, before his humble saints, an everlasting *Sebechinah*. It is in the seclusion of poverty, where "He that rideth upon the heavens" delights to fix the imperishable record of his mercy and protection. It is in his high and holy sanctuary, where, seated on the throne of his glory, and surrounded by the awful ministers of his providence—of his justice—and of his grace, the cause of the destitute is ever before him. He sees their tears—he hears their sighs—he knows their sorrows. The voice of their cry swiftly ascends "to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven," and makes, before his judgment seat, the report of misery, and the claim of retribution. The hand that is lifted to oppress, is liable to be arrested with sudden wrath—the hand that is closed against their wants, to be smitten with a leprosy, never to be healed.

"For many a crime, shew'd innocent on earth,  
Is register'd in heaven; and these, no doubt,  
Have each their record, with a curse asser'd."

And, by a retribution of vengeance, or of mercy, God will, sooner or later, be recognised throughout the universe, as "a father of the fatherless, and a



judge of the widows, in his holy habitation." But I observe,

II. *The situations in which God has placed this class of people, furnish the occasions on which his beneficence is manifested.*

I am far from believing, that the providence of God designs, in this world, to equalize the good and evil which every individual is called to experience ; much less do I believe, that the degree of enjoyment, or suffering, is to be measured by the scale of desert. This grand account is to be settled, and the balance to be rendered, strict and even, when eternity shall unfold its retributions. Yet God, who can bring good out of evil, often sends afflictions upon mankind, as a mean of accomplishing the purposes of his mercy. Not that any one suffers what he does not deserve, but that the beneficence of God may appear more transcendant, which places even afflictions among the approximating causes of greater good than could otherwise have been enjoyed. Surely this is the beneficence of God : " Sing praises unto his name, extol him that rideth upon the heavens, by his name, JEHOVAH, and rejoice before him." Do we need any corroboration of this idea ? Witness the various situations into which a widow is thrown by the death of her husband.

Perhaps she has followed to the grave, one who has been the discouragement of her life, and the grief of her soul. An abandoned course has consumed her scanty earnings—has extinguished every successive gleam of hope—has fed the fountains of

unutterable sorrow—has consumed her days with unprofitable labour, and her nights with the anguish of ceaseless disappointment. But far worse than this, she has seen her children, who are now all her joy—all her ambition—all her hope, rapidly imbibing the first principles of vice; and, by the force of example, growing up to be vagabonds, like their father.

But now the scene is changed!—and who will not say that, as far as her comfort is concerned, 'tis changed for the better? Intemperance has done its work—vice has sacrificed its victim—and the last farthing of worldly fortune is spent upon the shroud and coffin of her wretched husband. Still, however, will she mourn. He was her first love—he was the father of her orphans! Perhaps she will mourn in view of his destiny, and lament, saying, “it had been better for him if he had never been born.” Still will she mourn her destitute, friendless, pennyless situation—she will tremble at the prospects of her children.

Such a situation demands compassion. Even now the mercy of God is begun to be manifested, by removing the greatest barrier to her earthly comfort. And it remains for you, who can feel “for others’ woe,” to be the instruments on this occasion of illustrating, still more, the beneficence of the “father of the fatherless, and judge of the widows.”

On the contrary, she who has buried the husband of her youth, who was faithful, affectionate, industrious,

and worthy, has drank no ordinary cup of affliction. And when poverty, that ponderous weight, is thrown into the scale, sunk to such a low and hopeless depth, we have before us a spectacle of grief sufficient to prove the tone of our sensibility. She once had a kind partner of her toils, who was ever ready to mitigate her sorrows—whose society cheered her lonesome hours—whose eye anticipated her wishes—whose arm was her temporal security, and whose efforts, united with hers, seemed to point to better prospects, and brighter days to come.

But now, how changed the scene! Follow her— if the sight of real misery do not offend your affected sensibility—follow her, in thought, to her home, if there be a dwelling, however humble, that she can call her home; view her there, seated in one of those long, solitary evenings, of which she has many in prospect. What is there to divert her thoughts from pursuing their way through the deepest shades of sorrow? The scanty fire on the hearth, which she has, perhaps, not the means of renewing, and which is insufficient to repel the advances of an inclement winter night, counterfeits, by its fitful glare, the gloom of her soul. She gathers her little children round it. But, perhaps, this impoverished mother is unconscious, nay, careless of herself. Her children—her children are all her anxiety. Their father is gone—his eye will no longer watch over them—his tongue will no longer instruct or reprove them—his hand will no longer guide them—his au-

thority will no longer restrain them—his presence—alas! instead of his presence, the frightful image of want hovers over them, and is sternly conspicuous in their fire—their food—their clothing—their bed—their house—their all!

Nevertheless, this unhappy mother, after having soothed her children to rest, prepares to protract her labours into a late hour of the night, if, indeed, sickness have not exhausted her strength, or excessive fatigue have not already rendered her own arm powerless as her infant's: for what will not a mother do for her children? Still, however, she is tortured with the irresistible conviction, that her utmost endeavours will fall far short of their necessary relief. And to this is superadded the chilling expectation, that they must soon be torn from her bosom, and go to experience the kindness or cruelty of strangers, before they are able to distinguish between them.

Let it not be imagined, that because this woman is poor, she is destitute even of the most distinguishing virtues of her sex—

*" Full many a gem of purest ray serene,  
The dark, unfath'ed caves of ocean rear,  
Full many a flower whose blissh'ed sweets,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."*

She may have merits, which, if robed in wealth, or moving in a less humble sphere, would enable her to please, and to shine. She may possess a degree of sensibility which, under the poet's pen, might vie with that of Porcia, which thousands have extolled.

or with that of Penelope, at which millions have wept. She may possess a meekness and heroism of soul, which, cast in the tragic drama by Shakspeare's glowing genius, might suffuse the veteran's cheek with tears, or agitate their flinty heart with a compassion not its own.

But, ah! the veil of poverty—let humanity and reason be ashamed at the truth—the veil of poverty is suffered to screen her from every eye! She is unknown, unpitied by the world! The chariot of the rich rolls by her dwelling—and no one knows, or cares to know, her merits—her joys—or her sorrows.

Such is the situation to which thousands are reduced; and the details of human misery would tell us, that such is the situation, in which thousands are left to die!

Yet, think not, amiable sufferer, that thou art unknown to all! Thou hast a judge, a patron, and thy children have a friend, a father. The Almighty, who sits in his holy sanctuary, is thy guardian God, and the father of thy fatherless children. He can provide for them—He can protect them. Though now the prospect is dark and frowning,

"Thou'rt's poverty's cold wind and crashing rain  
"Best known and heavy on their tender ones,"

yet God can lift them from this vale of affliction. For though he is "the great and the terrible"—though "he rideth upon the heavens by his name Jehovah," he is known also by another name: "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows."

“Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly, but the proud he knoweth afar off.” Fear not, therefore; your case is all before him; and he invites you to repose under the shadow of his wing, till the tempest be overblown.

There is a comfort in affliction—there is a joy in sorrow—there is something rich, even in the blankness of poverty, when we reflect that the existence of suffering proves the existence of the attribute of mercy; and, therefore, that the situation in which God has placed the destitute, is intended to furnish the occasions on which his own infinite beneficence is manifested. Let me then say to the indigent widow and orphan, the means of your relief are in the hands of a bountiful God: his is that flaming eye which never slumbers over your welfare, though the rich may laugh you to scorn, and the proud spurn you as “the off-scouring of all things;” his is that strong right hand which will guard your peace in the day of trouble, and maintain your cause against the triumph of oppression; and his is that spirit of goodness, which imparts and sustains the energies of universal beneficence. “The silver and the gold” are his; “the cattle upon a thousand hills are his; all hearts are his; the universe is his, and the fulness thereof.” Fear not, then; despair not—tremble not, while the joyful assurance lives, and may live, in your bosom, that from the insect that banquets on the rose leaf, to the seraph that burns in glory before him, there is not one, no, not one,

of all created beings, that is less dependent than you, and your needy children, upon "the father of the fatherless, and the judge of the widows, in his holy habitation:" Which leads me to observe,

III. "*God has taken care to furnish man with the means, for the express purpose, that they may be the dispensers of his beneficence.*"

In the course of his holy providence, the universal Father has afforded one portion of mankind the power, and vested in them the high privilege of being the channels, the instruments, the dispensers of his bounty. But how often are we compelled to exclaim, O dangerous privilege! O formidable trial to unrighteous men! Would to God we had less reason to doubt, whether the guardian angel, that hovers over the widow and the orphan's abode of penury, thinks them more severely *tried* than those possessed of the riches and honours of the world!

Our trial, my beloved friends, is for eternity. Its modes are innumerable—its crisis is rapidly approaching—its issues will be vast and irrevocable—Jehovah is the judge. And wo—wo be unto them who "heap up silver as the dust," while the unheeded "cries" of the destitute are "ascending into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."

But is it not an honour for a prince to entrust a subject with a large portion of his revenue? Thus, in a high and distinguishing manner, has God honoured the rich. While, on the one hand, he has allowed them to make use of his bounties, so far as may conduce to their highest felicity; on the other, he

has declared their duty to the poor and needy, saying, "to do good, and to communicate, forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." And while he proves their individual virtue, in the enjoyment of that beneficence, he, at the same time, opens a channel, through which that beneficence may freely flow to the widow and the fatherless.

But where are the affluent, who can steer exactly between the utmost point of innocent indulgence, and the adamant boundary of divine prohibition? Who can stay his hand, and arrest his schemes of pleasure, ostentation, and ambition, where religion requires him to pause, and bestow the rest of his wealth upon the children of want? Who can stop where permission ends, and requisition begins?

Had God furnished some, nay, many, with the means of giving abundant aid to the deserving poor? The evidence is conclusive, that the obligation of active benevolence rests upon them; and in all places, and at all times, 'tis enough to be told, that a fellow creature suffers. "The poor," said our Saviour, "ye have *always* with you." And till such time as God shall see fit to make temporal prosperity the criterion of desert—to abolish the law of universal benevolence—or to equalise, by his providential agency, the enjoyments and sufferings of this life, still must we obey the injunction of Paul to Timothy, and "charge them that are rich in this world, that they be rich in good works—ready to distribute—willing to communicate."



But how have we heretofore discharged this duty? have we discharged it at all—either in the true spirit of christian charity, or as a miserable salvo to a conscience but half at ease? If God have set his seal upon the abundance of the rich, and constituted it the storehouse for the supply of the poor, who, among us, dare be so ungrateful to God—so inaccessible to pity—so brutal in obduracy, as to lock up this portion of his prince's revenue, and pervert it to his own exclusive enjoyment? And, may I not ask, if God require us to be good and faithful stewards of his bounty, who, among us, can now lay his hand upon his heart, and, in the presence of Jehovah, "the father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows," use the imprecation of Job? "If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel, myself alone; if I have seen any perishing for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone." Again:

This is not to be considered merely in the light of a ceaseless obligation, but of a *peculiar privilege*. How easy would it be for Him "who covereth the heavens with clouds—who prepareth rain for the earth—who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains—who giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry," to supply the wants of the destitute without the agency of secondary causes? What a privilege, then, is it, that men

are called to be co-workers with God, in the diffusion of his exhaustless goodness! That those who are crowned with prosperity have their own wants supplied—that they suffer no destitution of things necessary for their temporal and eternal felicity—and that they may see their children rising and flourishing around them, with the fairest prospects, and the brightest hopes, is, in itself, an invaluable privilege. But when, in addition to this, they are furnished with the means of giving to others the enjoyment of similar blessings—when they are elevated to an extensive sphere of beneficence—when they are called to be co-workers with God, in the diffusion of his bounty, the privilege rises above conception. But, alas! this privilege is as trying as it is great—as dangerous as it is elevated! As a *duty* incumbent, it involves a vast responsibility—as a *privilege* gratuitous, it will draw out from the mighty stores of God's retributive justice, an interminable blessing, or an interminable curse.

Hence the last consideration,

IV. *That those who act as faithful stewards, in this service, shall not lose their reward.*

That man alone will be truly honourable before God, who has been useful to his fellow creatures, in the sphere in which God has placed him. Far be it from me to say, that God requires men to give from the sole motive of being rewarded. This would be at best but a selfish motive. Nevertheless, in condescension to our weakness, or from his own sovereign and boundless munificence, he does not

more frequently or forcibly urge the obligation to give, than he pledges the grandest security, I may say, for the grandest recompense of reward: a reward far—yea, infinitely transcending all the pittance which the most liberal hand may, or *can* bestow. “He that hath pity on the poor, lendeth to the Lord, and that which he hath given, will he pay him again.” “Give to the poor,” said our Saviour, “and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.” “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

The poor, of all descriptions, are commended to the benevolence of the rich, and God is their high security. But the fatherless and the widow are distinguished above all classes by their innocence—their helplessness—their interesting character—their disheartening prospects; by the happy consequences that may follow a liberality well directed; and, in fine, by the favour expressed towards them by God himself, when he styles himself “a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, in his holy habitation.”

Whence, then, are the common-place, threadbare objections to the bestowment of charity? They arise from that mean, selfish, contracted, exclusive principle, which makes a man feel as if he were toiling through the world, as a kind of independent being, with no objects to gain but his own—with no interests to secure but his own—with no sufferings to mitigate but his own—with no felicity to promote but his own.

*But what are the rewards of beneficence?*

I. Let me observe, in the first place, that efficient liberality to the poor brings its own reward. It is the exalted consciousness of having made a fellow creature happy. Where the benefactor sees the tear of thanks fall from the eye which has long been wet with the bitter drops of wo; the glow of gratitude on the cheek, long blanched with sorrow; when he sees the artless smiles of children, which silently bless him, although they scarce know why:—say—is he not rewarded? Did Dives feel such pleasure in his raiment of purple and sumptuous fare? Did Nebuchadnezzar feel such pleasure at surveying the strength and the beauty of Babylon? Did Vespasian feel such pleasure when he triumphed in the massacre and flames of Jerusalem? Ah, no! Such pleasure springs only from the soil enriched by the showers of mercy, and vivified by the sunshine of love. There is a pleasure in “doing good;” more especially in rewarding merit; but most of all in relieving the destitute. Hence it is, that one act of this kind is apt to be followed by another, and a man is borne away, as with a torrent, like the benevolent Howard, and stops not his career of active goodness, till called to heaven’s everlasting rest. Nay, I have thought, that even if the miser himself would suffer his flinty heart once to melt, at the sight of misery and indigence—if he would once consider, that his gold and silver, his lands and tenements, cannot be transferred to those ever-during shores beyond death’s fearful gulf—if he would consider that the whole value of life is to be estimated by the good

we do, and that its purest pleasure is to do good to others, he would hasten to redeem his time, and to prevent the corrosion of his gold and silver, by applying them to valuable use. Like the Emperor Titus, who, when he recollected one evening that he had done no act of kindness that day, vehemently exclaimed, "*I have lost a day!*" he would exclaim, "*I have lost a life!*" "For what is there in all the pageantry of state—in all the gratifications of sense—in all the delirious joy of dissipation, once to be compared with this? Oh pleasures! cheaply purchased—placidly enjoyed; ever rising—ever new; never languid—never remorseful, why are you pursued so seldom, and attained by so few?"\*

2. Again: Aside from the pleasure of doing good, (and it must be confessed, with a blush for humanity, that most people need some more powerful motive to quicken their benevolence,) God, we have reason to believe, does sometimes, if not often, reward these acts of goodness in kind. If he have threatened those that neglect "the fatherless and widow" with many a curse, by a powerful parity of reasoning, we may conclude, that he will smile on those whose liberal charities promptly relieve that portion of his desolate and afflicted children.

And how unsearchable, how profound are the movements of Providence! Many a barren tree is cut down out of the human forest—we only see it fall—the high and dreadful hand is not seen! and

\* Hunter's Occa. Serms. II. 140.

many a desolate plant, though seemingly unpromising, is silently and secretly watered by streams at the root—it grows tall, and becomes great—it shoots forth fair and lovely branches. Thus, who has not noticed how suddenly, sometimes, a great family is blasted, melts away, and becomes extinct?—while, on the other hand, others rise from obscurity to the highest earthly privilege? It is the work of Jehovah, “that rideth upon the heavens,” and “judgeth in the earth.” But,

3. The ultimate rewards of human conduct are not to be expected here. They are to be developed on one great day, and are to be reaped in the retributions of an unchangeable state. And what, my brethren, will then be the award, when He “that rideth upon the heavens” shall come in his glory, with all his holy angels, and shall separate all nations into two vast societies? “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer, and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye

have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

Let it not be understood, that I would consider these good works as the foundation of the soul's justification before God. Far from it. But these good works are the necessary evidences of the christian character. In vain will it appear that we have made a great noise about standards and orthodoxy, and marred the beautiful form of the church, in fierce vindication of what we esteem correct speculative opinions; in vain will the religionist urge that he has been a strenuous defender of sound doctrine, and even rooted out, by his perseverance and influence, every *heretic* within his reach, if he be found deficient in that "pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father," which consists in visiting "the fatherless and widows in their affliction." Though he go out to meet the bridegroom with a silver lamp, if he have no oil, he cannot enter.

Be it that these external acts of charity are sometimes performed from sinister motives: they had better be

done from any motive, than not done. Though a man relieve the destitute from that same tender sensibility, by which he weeps at the fall of a hero of romance;—though he do it “to be seen of men”—to be recorded in a public document, and reported by hundreds and thousands as a *friend to the poor*; though he do it from the worst of motives; yet—oh, for mercy’s sake, let him do it; for then, however his account may square, heaven’s afflicted and depressed children are comforted and relieved. And if he at last become “a castaway,” though he may bitterly repent his motive, it will not be found among his agonizing regrets, that he ever lived to make a fellow creature happy. On the contrary, “he that hideth his eyes from the poor, shall have many a curse.” His inclemency shall be a swift witness against him, because it hath “covered the altar of the Lord with tears;”—yea, it shall stand foremost in the tremendous sentence from the throne of judgment. Cursed are the inclement, for they shall cry in vain, but “blessed are the merciful, for they shall find mercy.” But to conclude:

We are assembled, this evening, to solicit the kind and charitable aid of the public for a class of our needy and suffering fellow creatures. Our motives to liberality, in this case, are certainly more numerous—more imperative—less impeded with objections, and less qualified with doubts, than usual. Judge for yourselves.

The “society for the relief of poor widows with small children,” was instituted in the year 1797. The objects of its care are poor widows, of good character, who have two or more children under ten years of age. They are all visited annually by the first and second directress of the society, and each person, previously to



their being assisted, and frequently afterwards, by the managers. They are supplied, as far as the funds of the society will admit, with the necessaries of life only, such as wood, clothing, bread, &c. except in cases of sickness, when every thing needful for their relief is provided.

It has always been a special object of the society to get the elder children of their widows placed at schools, or in respectable families; and many are now reaping the benefit, who would probably, ere this, have sunk lower in the scale of infamy than they are in that of indigence.

The society have been enabled to supply their poor with bibles, by the bounty of the New-York Bible Society; and the managers consider it a part of their duty to encourage the widows and their children to read the word of life, and to frequent the places of public worship to which they belong, respectively, that though they are "poor in this world, they may be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom."

To remove the aspersion, that this and other societies have a tendency to encourage vice, and promote idleness, it is sufficient to say, that none are assisted but those who can, if in health, in some degree assist themselves, and a vigilant attention is paid to the occupation of all; vice and idleness preclude from the benefit of assistance.

The funds of the society arise from

The interest of a mortgage,	\$315 00
The rent of a house,	150 00
Dividends from stock,	662 00
Annual subscriptions,	900 00

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Total \$2,027 00

This sum, divided among 216 families, the number at present under the care of the society, amounts to about

nine dollars annually for each family. Such is the present state of the funds; *about 75 cents per month to each family, to assist in procuring wood, clothes, shelter, food!* It may be easily perceived, that unless the society be assisted in their efforts, the otherwise pleasant task of visiting the necessitous, will be discouraging and totally inefficacious.

Need I make a stronger appeal than is embodied in this unvarnished statement? Need I, in the face of this statement, ask, whether it is more a sarcasm, or a reproof, or a slander, that the "cold hand of charity," is so frequent a phrase? Surely this phrase could never have arisen from St. Paul's description of *charity*. And were it a common thing for the heart to glow with the feeling, where the hand is extended in the act of charity, it would never be thought cold. But where the temperature of the heart has evidently sunk below the freezing point, the chill is considered as quickly propagated to the hand. Hence this odious phrase, "the cold hand of charity." Yet an occasion sometimes occurs, which happily and strongly refutes so unworthy a reflection; which triumphantly shows, that neither the heart nor the hand of charity is always cold. And if such an occasion but rarely occur in regions the most void of humanity—the most sterile of benevolent affections, to the honour of men, and to the praise of "him that rideth upon the heavens," be it spoken, there are places where such occasions frequently occur;—there are bosoms where these affections legitimately glow.

Need I point you to the BENEVOLENT SOCIETY, who are your petitioners, and who have honoured me as their advocate this evening? The mantle of *the mother in Israel*, who hath retired to her everlasting rest, has

descended upon them.\* They have "visited the fatherless and the widow in their affliction;" they are eye-witnesses of the wo that is felt, where the cries of orphans cannot be hushed—where the cravings of hunger cannot be satisfied—where the keen blast of winter cannot be repelled. They come forward as a body, to solicit wherewith to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked; they call upon their husbands—their fathers—their children—their friends—their enemies—ALL;—they urge the claims of present suffering, in the name of "the father of the fatherless, and the judge of the widows." In their tender solicitude, surely the destitute have found a friend: And, oh! peradventure they sometimes reflect, with a thrill of anguish, that they also may be widows, and their children fatherless! That awful providence, which has laid these suppliants thus low, exacts from them the tribute; and we hope—we trust—we are persuaded, that the tribute will be offered in such a manner, that some recording angel will, with pleasure, bear it to the testimony on high, *never to be blotted out!*

My young friends!—I need not again point you to the objects of your liberality. It is the *female*, who holds a natural and irresistible claim on the homage of your generosity—it is the *deserving female*, whose guardianship and protection forms the brightest star in the hemisphere of modern improvement—it is the *suffering female*, whose rights are not cancelled in the soul of benevolence, though the "age of chivalry is gone!" Her petition is to you—and shall that petition be changed into the voice of lamentation and wo? Will it not

\* The labours of Mrs. Graham, Mrs. Mills, and Mrs. Fendleton, in this, and other benevolent societies, will ever be remembered.

be unreasonable to invite upon yourselves the issues of an adverse Providence? Will it not be unjust to deny the merits of an unimpeachable claim? Will it not be cruel to aggravate the pain of endurance by the anguish of disappointed hope? Will it not be heaven-offending to refuse an advocacy, which the God of heaven has been pleased to recognise, when he calls himself "a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, in his holy habitation?" But why do I thus inquire? Should I not wrong the young—the ardent—the ingenuous—the benevolent heart, to say otherwise, than that *now* an expression of gratitude will not be wanting, that *you* are not thus comfortless—afflicted—destitute—fallen? And,

Ye fathers! place your own children in the condition of these helpless orphans, and think—oh! think what you would wish others to do for them. And, ye happy mothers! whose every wish is anticipated—who are now above want and care—whose cheek pale sorrow has never visited—at whose door relentless death and blasting disappointment, have never knocked—O think of a suffering sister, whose heart is chilled with poverty, and wasted with grief; at whose board, remorseless famine is now presiding, and, with disheartening menace, is severing into miserable morsels, the last pittance of bread! Think what feelings must wring her bosom, while, "girded with sackcloth, she laments for the husband of her youth!"

"Wails to the dark and freezing grave,  
Her children, not a friend to save,  
Unheeded go!"

Ye citizens! who love your country—your state—your city, and would lay down your life for their de-

fence, a milder—more benevolent—more heaven-pleasing sacrifice is now solicited. Some future patriot may be among the recipients of your bounty; and the tender plant, protected and nourished by your care, may, by and by, afford a grateful shelter for your offspring, or cast a fragrant branch upon your grave. But if your charity meet not so large a reward, still, God grant that it may be in your power to adopt the language of a saint upon the confines of eternity, “What I have used, is lost—what I possessed, is left to others; but what I have given to the poor, I have laid up in store for myself.”

But why should I classify? It is humanity's voice that calls! She speaks from the abode of misery, in the plaintive accents of the bereft widow! She cries from the lowest and most desolate vale of adversity, in the supplicating tones of the fatherless child! And is there an ear so deaf, as not to hear? an eye so stern, as not to weep? a heart so hard, as not to melt? a hand so clenched, as not to relax? a tongue so ready in the language of refusal, as to say, “depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled?”—Oh, no! In the honour of humanity—in the conscious power of universal love—in the active energies of diffusive beneficence—in the fear of the Almighty God, let us now have reason, triumphantly to say, *subito*, no! Why would you willingly forego the illustrious privilege of dispensing favours so high in their cause—so beneficent in their effect? Why would you deprive yourselves of the exquisite pleasure of being able to say, “When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help

him, and caused the widow's heart to sing for joy?" Let us bear the glad tidings of your munificence to the lowly dwelling of the destitute, that "the blessing of those that are ready to perish, may come upon you" from the secret of a grateful soul. And, oh! forbid us not, with the testimonials of divine goodness in our hands—forbid us not the pleasurable office of inspiring them with the language of gratitude and praise!—saying, "Sing unto God, sing praises unto his name; extol him that rideth upon the heavens, by his name, JEHOVAH, and rejoice before him; for, surely, A FATHER OF THE FATHERLESS, AND A JUDGE OF THE WIDOWS, IS GOD IN HIS HOLY HABITATION!" Amen.