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BUSINESSLIKE CHARITY

(Editorial)

In no other country of the world is the cry of the needy and the unfortunate heard as readily as in America. Whether these unfortunates are victims of an earthquake in Italy, or a famine in China, or a conflagration in France, their appeal to the open hearts and hands of the American people never is in vain, while our people contributed enormous sums toward war charities such as caring for the orphans of Belgium, the poor in the destroyed villages of France, and the starving Armenians.

The American gives liberally but not wisely, often contributing to a charitable cause without knowing or wanting to know whether man, woman, or child is the recipient. This is true especially of the gifts made on the too numerous "tag days". The average American's contribution to charity is the price which he pays for the privilege of devoting himself to his own affairs for

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some time, without being disturbed. Seldom does his participation in charitable projects, which is evidence of loving sympathy and true humanitarianism, become known. To alleviate suffering, to put an end to misery, that is the duty of a commission, a society, a board, a committee, or some other organization which volunteers to take hold of the matter and collects contributions. Ergo: - Send a check, or bring your cash, to the organization. That is the only obligation of a charitable-minded citizen. As for the use of the money contributed and the nature of the charity, that, in the opinion of most contributors, is a matter to be decided by the organization which solicits and receives the money. Only a few consider it their business to find out whether or not, and how, the money is applied to the alleged purpose.

To most Americans philanthropy and charity are one and the same thing, although there is as much difference between the two as there is between the balm of a quack and the medicine of a conscientious physician. All experience made heretofore confirms the fact that charity does not decrease

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but rather increases, and cannot put an end to pauperism. Just as an organic disease cannot be cured by a plaster, so pauperism, which is an organic disease of the social body of humanity, cannot be cured by gifts which provide alleviation of only the urgent need of the moment. Therefore, genuine philanthropy, practiced on a wide scale, must co-operate in reconstructing and reorganizing the economic and social conditions which are conducive to the creation and continuation of poverty. Higher wages, legal restriction of working hours, better housing, cheaper foods, more adequate protection of health, better care for the sick, and encouragement to thrift on the one hand and, on the other, prohibition of child labor and legislation against employment of women for certain types of work.

Thorough education and occupational training upon graduation from school constitute the chief part of a program for the purpose of removing pauperism.

As far as the individual needy family is concerned, it is self-evident

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that its physical requirements should be satisfied first. But in shaping the future of the family two matters should be decisive, barring unusual circumstances: The family must not be disrupted and the family must be enabled to earn its own living. However, it is just in this respect that many charitable organizations, both public as well as private, have erred. In Illinois alone hundreds of families were broken up after they had become clients of charity because of sickness, unemployment, or drunkenness on the part of the head of the family. In many instances the members of a family were so placed that they were separated by entire states and only after many years were they united again. Food, fuel, medical care, etc., were often given in such a way that the recipients' neighbors were witnesses of the charitable act, or in a manner or under conditions that left a thorn in the heart of the aided. Many dispensers of charity lack true humanitarianism and common sense. A few years ago a pastor from a near-by city was robbed of his money and watch and chain during a short sojourn in Chicago. It was late in the afternoon and, since he wished to ride on a certain train, he asked for the loan of one dollar at the office of a prominent charitable

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organization. The officer in charge, having satisfied himself in regard to the validity of the pastor's documents of identification, furnished the dollar, but only after the clergyman had surrendered his new black necktie as security in accordance with the demand of this "charitable" man. Let this instance suffice to illustrate the "business spirit" which too often frustrates the efforts of great charitable organizations. One could relate a great number of similar cases. However, the conditions upon which they shed a light are sufficiently well known to the public. It is all the more a pity that the public participates in the work of charity as a contributor only. This is the sole explanation for the fact that many organizations perform acts of charity in a mere businesslike manner without compassionate inquiry into the peculiarities of individual cases. And yet the words of the Bible, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or as a tinkling cymbal," should not be more closely observed in any other phase of human endeavor.