

**QUESTIONS OF THE DAY
- NO. XIII. PUBLIC RELIEF
AND PRIVATE CHARITY**

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Questions of the Day - No. XIII. Public Relief and Private Charity by Josephine Shaw Lowell

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JOSEPHINE SHAW LOWELL

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JOSEPHINE SHAW LOWELL

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PREFACE.

I have compiled this little book because I believe some such restatement of the principles upon which the Modern methods of Charity are based is needed.

There is not, perhaps, an original thought or suggestion in it :—an important part of it is direct and verbal quotation ; and to every student of the subject it will be apparent that almost the whole of it is taken from the writings of wise men and women who have lived during the past hundred years. Yet I do not apologize for offering it to my fellow workers and the public, for there is nowhere a small book in which the principles underlying our science can be found clearly stated.

I speak of "our science," because fortunately the task of dealing with the poor and degraded has become a science, and has its well defined principles, recognized and conformed to, [more or less closely,] by all who really give time and thought to the subject.

From all parts of the world the testimony of the experts is the same, and it is this fact which makes our task so encouraging. We have set ourselves to work to "strengthen such as do stand, to comfort and help the weak-hearted, and to raise up those who fall," and to have found out how this is to be done, is to have taken one step, at least, toward success.

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PART I. PUBLIC RELIEF.

CHAPTER I.

PUBLIC OUTDOOR RELIEF.

THEORY.

THE only justification for the spending of public money is, that the result is a public benefit, that is, that it is better for the whole mass of the people that the money should be spent.

It is not right to tax one part of the community for the benefit of another part; it is not right to take money by law from one man and give it to another, unless for the benefit of both. The public funds are always somebody's money; they are composed of the taxes which are very often hard to pay, or it would be safe to say, which are usually hard to pay; for the men to whom the payment of taxes is an unimportant item are the exceptions in every community, and pay but a very small proportion of the amount raised by taxation. The bulk comes from the many, who are struggling to keep or to obtain their own homes, and to whom a slight increase or decrease is a great matter.

Therefore, the policy of public poor relief, or the feeding and maintenance of one part of the people, by money taken by law from the rest, can be justified, only on the ground that it is better both for those who are so fed and maintained, and for those who supply the food and maintenance, that this should be done.

There are persons who argue that compulsory or public relief in all its forms, tends in the end to do harm, by diminishing prudence and industry, in consequence of removing, not only the most pressing incentive to those virtues (the fear of suffering and starvation), but also by diminishing the rewards of industry and forethought, which is necessarily done, when a part of what they gain is seized upon to feed indolence and improvidence. Those who argue thus, are undoubtedly right in the abstract, but they forget, apparently, that there are in every community, persons who cannot maintain themselves, and who have no friends upon whom they have a claim, and that it would not be well, even for others, that these should be driven to desperation by the absolute pressure of want; in this view, public relief is a benefit to the whole people, acting as a preventive of violence. Those who object to public relief in all its forms, also seem to forget that human pity is imperative, and that were there no final resort for those who cannot maintain themselves, nor assurance against their dying by