

**THE YALE LITERARY
MAGAZINE. VOL. XVII,
NO. V, MARCH 1852**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649165537

The Yale literary magazine. Vol.XVII, No.V, March 1852 by Students of Yale College

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STUDENTS OF YALE COLLEGE

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VOL. XVII.

No. V.

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YALE LITERARY MAGAZINE,
CONDUCTED
BY THE
STUDENTS OF YALE COLLEGE.



*“Dum mens græcæ manus, nomen Indique Yaleæ
Cantabat sonoras, unanimes Petere.”*

MARCH, 1852.

NEW HAVEN:
PUBLISHED BY A. B. MALTBY.
PRINTED BY T. J. STAFFORD.
WHOLE.

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Mistaken Philanthropy.

WE hear much said now a days about Mistaken Philanthropy, False Sympathy, wrong views of Humanity, incorrect notions of Benevolence, and the like. Whenever any individual or class of individuals proposes any scheme for bettering the condition of men—whenever any proposition is made for relieving any class or any people from existing calamities—in short, whenever any new doctrine is set forth, concerning our duties towards our fellow men, which differs from the preconceived notions of mankind, a great hue and cry is raised about these emotions of the human heart. These emotions are said to have become utterly perverted and to have run away with the head. It is alleged that if such principles should prevail, justice would be entirely lost sight of, law would be dishonored, all government would be at an end, and society destroyed. That there may be a philanthropy abroad which would properly receive the appellation Quixotic, we will not say—but what we do condemn and protest against, is the habit of denouncing every philanthropic effort, every humanizing work, as the result of a fevered sympathy. And here we would remark that this mode of treating these matters is not confined to any class of individuals, and what is not a little remarkable, one who accuses another of it, is in turn accused of the same by a third. Take an instance. A pious, devoted Christian has all his sympathies drawn out by the destitution of the heathen. He directs his attention to their wants, and his purse is freely opened to supply their necessities. But his neighbor has his sympathies drawn out in a different direction. His compassion has always been most excited by viewing the victims of

Intemperance, and when a proposition is made for the total suppression of the traffic in intoxicating liquors, he eagerly seizes upon it as the only sure means of saving those for whom his sympathies have so long been aroused. For this, he is accused by the other of being led away by a false sympathy, or a mistaken notion of humanity. And the latter is himself accused of the same failings by a third person, a traveler it may be on missionary ground, who has with prejudiced eye looked upon the introduction of Christianity there. It would seem then that those who make such an outcry against philanthropy, draw no definite line between false philanthropy and true philanthropy, or rather, each one draws a line for himself, and these lines do not at all correspond with each other. The croakers are at variance with themselves.

Since then these persons neither give us any definition of what they call "Mistaken Philanthropy," nor agree in their application of the term, the inquiry naturally arises, what is Mistaken Philanthropy? In order however to answer this, we must first consider what is true philanthropy, using the term in its most commonly received sense.

Philanthropy we conceive to be a synonym of Benevolence and also of Humanity—the union of the heart and hand in acts of kindness towards our fellow-men. It is not pity, not compassion, not mere sympathy. It does not content itself with feeling pain at the sight of pain. Its action is not confined to the removal of the object of its distress. It ceases neither in casual wishes that the cause of distress in the object may at some indefinite period of time be removed, nor in vague prayers for the same end. It is rather the generous emotion of our nature, which, while it commiserates the object of its sympathies, forgets not to relieve it of its suffering. It is the spirit of a Howard periling every danger that the prisoner may be relieved. It is the spirit of a Swartz despising the pleasures of home and friends, and going to the distant Indies that souls may be converted to Christ. It is the spirit of a Luther braving obloquy, contumely, and papal bulls, in order to render the Church below like that above. It is the spirit of Christ, who died that man might live. In a word, it is Love. Philanthropy manifests itself in different aspects. At one time it is meek, at another it is bold; at one time it is mild, at another it is stern; at one time it is gentle, at another it is severe; at all times and under all circumstances it is lovely.

Such then is Philanthropy, as we conceive of it. Let us see if this conception of it is not the true one. "Philanthropy," says Addison, "is the love of mankind—benevolence to the whole human family." "Benevolence," says one of our distinguished Professors, "is an active principle which centres in others, and is chiefly intent on relieving suffering."

Whewell's idea of Benevolence is an affection which makes man, as man, an object of love to us. He states it as a moral principle, that man is to be loved as man, and this he terms the Principle of Humanity. Mr. Fox, in the British House of Commons, remarks—"Humanity does not consist in a squeamish ear. It does not consist in shrinking and starting at tales of woe, but in a disposition of the heart to remedy the evils they unfold."

From these definitions it would seem that we are right in using the terms Philanthropy, Benevolence and Humanity as synonymous. If then the notions which we have advanced respecting these affections are correct, what are we to understand by Quixotic Philanthropy, False Benevolence, Mistaken Humanity? It is perhaps to be regretted that they who make so much noise about these affections should have used so vague and indefinite language respecting them—that they should never have signified clearly what they mean by the terms so frequently used. It is left therefore to inference alone to determine what they mean. And we think from the spirit of their censures, the tones of their voice, the illustrations and comparisons they make use of, it will be no very difficult matter to divine their meaning. They mean, it seems to us, either a philanthropy which leaves justice out of view and which disregards the rights of others, or a philanthropy where the feelings are a predominant feature, where wild and extravagant notions prevail. Sometimes the one is intended, sometimes the other, and sometimes both.

The question then arises, is the philanthropy of those persons of whom Mistaken Philanthropy is predicated, included in either of these cases? We answer, most certainly not. Take the first case. Such men neither keep justice out of sight nor desire to injure others; for their very starting point is benefit to others, of whatever class, "equal and exact justice to all," and it is strangely inconsistent for those who admit that this is their starting point to turn around and tell them that they desire the benefit of one class at the expense of another. Some appear to think that vengeance is the object sought for by these so-called Mistaken Philanthropists. If it were, there might be some grounds for fearing, that the pounds of justice would be overstepped. Nor even is punishment the object sought for, and yet it might be, and still justice not be trampled on. But the philanthropist asks nothing of this sort. He only asks that the wrongdoer cease his wrong doings. He will freely forgive him his evil deeds, provided he will leave them off.

Again we cannot see that what may appear to be a wild and extravagant notion is evidence of Mistaken Philanthropy. If so then were Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon the most mistaken of Philanthro-

pists. Nor can we see that the manifestation of excessive feeling is evidence of Mistaken Philanthropy. If so, then was Christ weeping at the tomb of Lazarus whom he raised from the dead, the highest example of a Mistaken Philanthropist.

We think, then, that those to whom this term is usually applied are not entitled to it—that they are true Philanthropists, overflowing with good will to all, and desiring nothing so much as the happiness of their fellow-men.

But it may be objected that if benefit to others be the object sought, the means taken to accomplish this end are subversive of the principles of order and good government, which is considered proof conclusive of Mistaken Philanthropy. Far from it. This is another point entirely. We are not talking about the means used to accomplish an end, but the end itself. A person may earnestly desire to save a drowning man, and according to the best of his knowledge, he may deem a certain rope which he has, the surest means of effecting his safety. This may or may not be the case—but, be that as it may, his humanity is not called in question, his judgment, his common sense, may be, but not his benevolence.

Here then seems to be one difficulty with the croakers—they shift the ground entirely. No greater mistake can be made. But this is not the only difficulty, nor by any means the greatest. In a majority of cases where persons denounce philanthropists, we apprehend that self-interest lies at the foundation of their denunciations. This is not always the case, to be sure. We make all due allowance on the part of these persons for ignorance of the subject, and prejudice against the individuals or the name they bear. But setting these aside, do not interests, real or supposed, prompt most of the anathemas against modern philanthropists? When we consider the manifold ways in which men's interests may be affected, we are not surprised that such is the case. For hardly a reform can be mentioned which does not affect, more or less, the interest of some, either in their own persons or that of their friends, their property, their party, their town, their state, their country, or their sect. And we do not blame indiscriminately all who thus denounce those who are acting for the benefit of others. It is not in human nature to act contrary to self-interest. This our laws recognize, in not allowing *ex parte* evidence and in prohibiting officials from receiving presents from any quarter. But what we do find fault with, is allowing every little petty interest to thwart judgment, to blind reason, and to stifle conscience.

We said at the commencement of this article, that of late much had been said about these matters. But we find that this croaking is an old

story. We find that Wilberforce in his philanthropic efforts to abolish the Slave Trade met with the same opposition. M. Macnamara stigmatized the measure as 'hypocritical, fanatical, and methodistical.' Col. Tarleton, of revolutionary memory, in answer to a speech of Wilberforce, said that "they who had attempted the abolition of the Slave Trade, were led away by a mistaken humanity; * * * these enlightened philanthropists have discovered that it is necessary for the sake of humanity and for the honor of the nation, that the merchants in the African trade should be persecuted; * * * let not a mistaken humanity in these enlightened times present a colorable pretext for any injurious attack on property or character." Such was the language used by the supporters of a traffic which the whole civilized world has now declared to be piracy.

We do not wish to be inquisitive, but we cannot forbear making one inquiry. Perhaps in doing so, we may remind some of that passage in Holy Writ, which speaks of busy-bodies in other men's matters, but still we cannot help asking whether those who prate so much about False Sympathy and Mistaken Philanthropy, do themselves 'loose the bands of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, let the oppressed go free, break every yoke, give bread to the hungry, bring the poor into their houses and clothe the naked?' Does not their Religion, their Humanity, and their Philanthropy, content itself with 'bowing down their heads like a bulrush, and putting sackcloth and ashes under them?'

We would not deny to such the feeling of sensibility, or pity, or compassion. We would not deny to them painful emotions, in consequence of the distress they see. But we ask, whether, if this emotion prompts to any action at all on their part, it does not in too many cases prompt to a desire to remove from their view the cause of this emotion—not to a disposition to relieve the distress from a benevolent and disinterested concern about the sufferer.

Such are our views of Mistaken Philanthropy. We believe that there is much less of it than is generally supposed, and that that which goes by this name, is the truest Philanthropy, founded in a just apprehension of the rights of man as well as his woes and wants. We believe also in its ultimate triumph, for as has been said a thousand times, "Truth is mighty and will prevail."

C. M. B.