

**WHAT GOOD DOES
WISHING DO?**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649010592

What good does wishing do? by Anna Robertson Brown Lindsay

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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ANNA ROBERTSON BROWN LINDSAY

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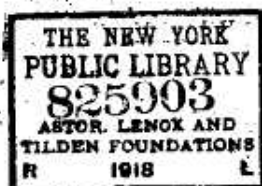
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FAITH," "CULTURE AND REFORM," AND
"GIVING WHAT WE HAVE."

Sixth Thousand.

NEW YORK
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

NEW YORK: 46 EAST 14TH STREET
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & COMPANY
BOSTON: 100 PURCHASE STREET

cop. 1897
77.07



*"O Lord, whose heart is deeper than my heart,
Draw mine to Thine to worship where Thou art:
For Thine own glory join the twain,
Never to part again,
Nor to have lived nor to have died in vain."*

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

NEW YORK
JUN 18
1918

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WHAT GOOD DOES WISHING DO?

It would seem hard at first thought to find a connecting link of interest between four such diverse works as Chambers' *Book of Days*, Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Marshall's *Economics*, and Andrew Murray's *With Christ in the School of Prayer*. Yet each of these books has a word to say in regard to wishing; each answers, in its own way, the question, What Good Does Wishing Do?

In the *Book of Days* there is related the legend of the Wishing-Wells of Walsingham. In the old days there were, in Norfolk, England, two wells, between which lay a stone. Upon that stone, said tradition, one must kneel with his right knee bare. He must plunge one hand in each well, so that the water reaches the wrist, and while doing so, may wish for anything he desires. After this, he must drink as much of the water of the wells as may be held in the hollow of his hands. If he never tells his wish to any other, — never utters it aloud, even to himself, — within a year his wish will come true!

In "The Intelligence Office," a story in *Mosses from an Old Manse*, there is a wonderful Book of Wishes, in which are recorded the longings of the heart of man. This book is kept by a figure "who looked like the spirit of a record, the soul of his own great volume, made visible in mortal shape." Into the office filed day by day, the long processional of the Unsatisfied, — of men and women who wished for health, beauty, wealth, truth, power, youth, fame, or even death. One wish was the most curious of all. It came from a man who said: "I want my place — my own place, my true place in the world, my proper sphere, my thing to do which nature intended me to perform when she fashioned me thus awry, and which I have vainly sought all my life-time."

In the *Economics* there is a scientific "study of the variety of human Wants, considered in their relation to human Efforts and Activities."

The *School of Prayer* presents the desires of man as realized by faith, and fulfilled through earnest and prevailing prayer.

On this ascending ladder, thought may step across many centuries, and look out on many dreams. The first idea is that of early superstition, revealed in folk-lore and legends. It is the idea of the answer to wishes through magic, through spells, through a mysterious and blind fate, to which man may appeal by occult rites. Even yet we hear of pulling wish-bones, and of looking up

at the new moon over our left shoulder, in order to gain our heart's desire!

The second phase is psychologic. It is the insight of the seer into the forces which are determining life, — the presentation of the inner arena of the soul, where various longings are contending for recognition and realization, — where the real history of man is being born. Says Hawthorne, "Human character in its individual development, human nature in the mass, may best be studied in its wishes; and this was the record of them all."

The third is technical and practical. It is a plain, direct examination of the relation of desire to activity, to economic progress.

The fourth is spiritual. It is an outlook upon the possibilities of life, and the final destiny of man. Taken as a whole, they present four phases of the endless quest of the soul for growth, happiness, power, content.

Certain points may be noted in them all. First, the universality of Desire. We all want something. Second, the intensity of Desire, — its psychic force. It underlies all effort and activity. If nobody wanted anything, what would anybody have? Not only would all ideals and ennobling efforts be cut off, but existence itself would be sapped at the roots. Action would cease. Naked, cold, wet, starved, unloved, untaught, unfed, unsheltered, the race would perish from the earth. Civi-

lization means the multiplication of desires, — their new scope and co-ordination. The study of social evolution is chiefly the study of Desire.

The day of wishing is the day of fate. "The lesson of life," says Emerson, "is practically to generalize; to believe what the years and centuries say against the hours; to resist the usurpation of particulars, to penetrate to their catholic sense." The hours say, We are frustrated in many a hope, disappointed in many a dream. But the centuries say, Man has in all times moved forward by virtue of his heart's desire. What I am to-day, I yesterday longed to be. I stand to-day on my past desires.

If this be true, our Wishing-Well is not at Walsingham. It is the universe itself: eternity is at our beck. To be reckless in desire, is to be reckless of social progress. To be heedless in our wishing, is to be heedless of the destiny of man.

The Desire-problem is an intellectual problem of the day. Bound up with it are many current phases of scientific inquiry in psychology, biology, sociology, and economics. The time has come when Desire must also be thoughtfully considered in relation to religion. What has it to do with the spiritual aspect of our lives? What is its place between man and God? In a large sense, What Good Does Wishing Do?

At once one asks, Must we get rid of Desire, in

order to lead a religious life? Must our human longings be cast out?

To the questions of the soul, each age gives its own answer. In mediæval times, the answer to this question was: Crucify Desire! If you have a human affection, crush it; if you have an intellectual ambition, put it down; if you have a social hope, bury it. Resignation, submission, retirement from men, were the watchwords of the technically religious life. Says Thomas à Kempis in praise of the Holy Fathers, "They renounced all riches, dignities, honors, friends, and kinsfolk; they desired to have nothing which appertained to the world; they scarce took the necessaries of life; they grudged even the necessary care of the body." There is even yet a form of quietism running through our teaching and our prayers. We are not to have what we want — we are to take in patience what we get.

But to-day we are reaching out toward something quite different from the old outlook on Desire. Is there no way of dealing with Desire, which shall be more consistent with the free and happy course of nature, with the unfolding of the promise of the world? We seek a religion that shall bring a large activity into the spiritual life, that shall appeal to us as a fulness of being, not as a fragment of being set apart for a heavenly use. If we deliberately shut family affection from our lives, if we turn our back on business, society, and