AN ADDRESS ON THE PREVENTION OF PAUPERISM

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An Address on the Prevention of Pauperism by Walter Channing

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WALTER CHANNING

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BY WALTER CHANNING.

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TO THE MEMORY

OF

My Brother,

WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

I was desired some time last year, 1842, to prepare and to read a discourse before a "Society for the Prevention of Pauperism." I agreed to try to do so. I did not know, when this agreement was made, to what work I had pledged myself. Many, possibly, have been as ignorant. I found the work was not simply to put on paper some common-places about the physical evils of poverty, about which a few talk, and which so many feel. Nor was it for me to make an appeal from such miseries to what of humanity there might be in my auditory. To do these things were easy; and many times have they been annually done at well-arranged anniversaries. And what then was it that came to me as the office I was to perform? It was to learn what the condition, Pauperism, really is. To learn what that is, which lies deeper, and behind, its presentments, and which last everybody looks at. It was the cause, or the causes, that, or those things, upon which poverty rests as its deep-laid substratum, — it was this, or these, I found I was to look for. I was to look somewhat into the records of the race, to discover what poverty has been, and learn under what social phases and influences it has existed so long, and promises still to exist. And when this labor was done, another came, with a great and grave demand for thought, and work, the *remedy* for so much evil.

I went to work. That which might, in the reading, be endured forty minutes, grew to twice that allotted time, or more; and when the appointed day, the 19th of February, of this 1843,

came for the anniversary, I found I could not read the half I had set down. The auditory was very small; and the few at first, were less before the forty minutes were up. The contribution boxes came to the church altar with little weight of metal, and few bills, — say about twenty-seven dollars and twenty-three cents, all told. Thus was my work accounted little, and was paid harmoniously. But some few, a very few, have asked me to print my writing. From so small a company a large request could hardly come. They have asked me to print, not because they agree much with me, but because they are a little tired of the old way of providing for poor people; are earnest men; have the subject of Pauperism deeply at heart, and welcome any earnest effort to move the public mind towards more, and it may be truer thought concerning it. They say, "Brother, you have labored as you were able. You may make others work, or think, though it be only in opposition. This were better, far better, than the death-sleep in which so much mind, heart, true power, now lie wrapped."

I have done what those few friends have asked me to do.

W. C.

July, 1843.

ADDRESS ON PAUPERISM.

Poverty tells its whole story. It has no concealments. The undisguised spirit speaks through rags, simply, and audibly. Poverty has neither bars nor locks. It wants neither. Not because its faith in man is the highest, or that it looks on Society as altogether a Christian organization, that it has not these wants. Poverty with its essential openness in the mass, may and does use deception in the individual instance. But it is when it would avoid starvation, or labor, that it often does this. In these cases it has parted with its principles, or they are overlaid by a stern necessity, or an indolence, which, having begun in some uncontrolled circumstance, habit has confirmed. Poverty can do nothing for itself. Helplessness, dependence, is one of the most pressing and saddest facts in the history of poverty. It is this which gave such significance to the laws of Moses in regard to the poor. It is this which was ever in the mind of the Saviour of the world, when he commended, nay, urged the offices of active benevolence on his disciples and his church. He left the poor as a perpetual legacy to his followers, as if he foresaw in their undying charity, love, kindness, to these his spiritual children, an expression of that providence which God himself extends to his whole universe.

The history of poverty is full of instruction, and of interest. This history begins with the very earliest records of the race. The poor are distinctly recognized as a class in the writings of Moses, and means are provided for their support in the law. "The poor shall