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HAPPY NEW YEAR.

THE HOME JOURNAL wishes friend
and foe alike "A Happy New Year."

RANDOM REFLECTIONS.

LAST week I had something to say in answer to the accusation so often repeated that men who live by industrial pursuits, or who make a profession of religious conviction, are less responsive to the claims of suffering humanity than those of openly licentious character who live by revenues obtained by the practice of vice. With the fact that want which makes necessary urgent



appeals to the generosity even of vice and licentiousness, exists in our midst, and whether charity is efficient as a remedy for that want, and it be the special province and duty of industry and Christianity to exercise such charity, it is the purpose of this article to deal.

That serious want and distress among helpless women and innocent children does exist in Victoria, the assertions of real estate boomers and political party hacks to the contrary notwithstanding, the urgent appeals and earnest efforts for its relief by respectable, well-meaning citizens is sufficient proof. It is a natural impulse with man, savage or civilized, infidel or Christian, to inflict punishment or exact reparation commensurate with human suffering trace

able to human agency and responsibility. And the best evidence that the impulse comes from a sense of justice is in the fact that it is in accord with the teaching of almost every form of religious belief. Common sense, natural justice and religious authority point out that the most rational and efficient way to deal with want would be to discover its cause and remove it, and failing in this, to place the responsibility for its existence and the duty of its relief where it properly belongs.

The most blindly prejudiced accusers of industry and Christianity for lack of generosity will scarcely assert that to either of them can truthfully be attributed the existence of want in our midst. This admitted, it necessarily follows that not on them any more than any other sections of society especially falls the obligation for its relief. While Christianity before all other religious beliefs teaches mercy and sympathy as the distinguishing virtues of religious character, it in no instance puts mercy before or in the place of justice. Justice is an eternal law, mercy an attribute of character. The command is, "Do justly; love mercy, seek truth." Are we guided by this reasoning, and do we not forget the first injunction of this command when we apply charity as a remedy to poverty?

What is the cause of poverty? I have read painfully long arguments written by men who never did a hard day's work in their lives—who wrote in carpeted rooms, sitting in a cushioned chair, their feet encased in richly embroidered slippers, and all their surroundings suggestive of ease and extravagant luxury such as manual toil might never hope to enjoy, to prove to working men that if they came to want, their own extravagance and lack of energy (or, in other words, laziness) was the cause. And yet on every side are to be found men who, living in leisure or idleness, gather more from the possession of a spot of unused earth or some privilege permitted by law in a single year than falls to the lot of a score of the hardest workers in our land.

The temperance enthusiast will tell me that drink, directly or indirectly, is the sole cause of poverty, and if this curse were stopped it would disappear.

But I recall to mind numbers of men who passed years of their existence in a condition of semi-drunkenness without suffering any loss of comfort or sensibly diminishing the provision they made for those dependent on them; and there are men in this city who spend more in drink annually than the income of many a working man without any danger of coming to want as a consequence. The truth is, that the incomes of industry leave so small a margin over necessities that misfortune or drunkenness quickly brings it to that condition in which it is a fit subject for charity—and good advice.

How much margin for drunkenness is left from the income of one of Victoria's street-car slaves—for which he toils Sunday and Monday, workday and holiday, wet or dry, from ten to twelve hours out of the twenty-four—after he has paid pluck-me prices for blue clothes when and where his superiors dictate; has donned at his own expense every new wrinkle of cap wear which catches the fancy of his lord and master; has paid fifteen dollars a month rent for a shelter for his wife and babies, warmed them with coal at monopoly's price, and fed them on beef made doubly precious by tariff and quarantine regulations? And the readiness with which men jump at even this slavery is an evidence that other avocations are either closed to them or offer them but a very little better chance.

How can any sane mind advocate charity as a remedy for such a state of things? Even for the relief of hunger it is but a plaster to the sore that has its origin in the blood. Feed the hungry poor to-day and they will be just as hungry to-morrow; and if we continue to feed them without giving them a better chance to help themselves, we degrade them to the condition of dependency upon charity. Even if we relieve completely hunger and destitution, what does that do for those who through the influence of unjust social arrangements are drifting to a like condition?

But some good people believe that God wisely leaves the poor in the care of the more fortunate that the grace of charity may be cultivated among men, and that what we give them is in the nature of an offering to God Himself. If