

"DEAD FLIES."

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Ecclesiastes 10:1

(A Critique on Clap-trap Methods of Raising Money for Religious and Benevolent Purposes.)

Solomon, in our text, pictures to us the vender of perfumes, with his line of sweet smelling oils, ointments and fragrant mixtures. And he is thinking of the result to this perfumer's wares when a few flies, crawling into them, stick fast and die. Though such wares, of themselves and in their own nature, are decidedly sweet, delicate and well-scented, it takes but the presence of a few "dead flies" to drown out all their sweetness and fragrance, and cause the "oil of the perfumer to send forth an evil odor."

"Dead flies" are the little unsavory things that spoil the big sweet things of life. They are the one sinner that destroys the good of many righteous. They are the little follies that outweigh much wisdom and honor. They are the wrong motives with which we do right acts, the poor arguments with which we support sound principles. There are good deeds that we spoil in the doing. There are wrong methods that bring into disrepute the best of causes. There are sweet-smelling sacrifices to God that are never accepted by him because of the uncleanness of the altar upon which they are offered. There are ways and means and methods and circumstances that serve only to dilute, degrade and disgrace our righteousness. All these are so many "dead flies" in the ointment of our sacrifice and service.

In a recent Social Service Congress, when a resolution against gambling in its race-track and slot machine forms was before the house, a clergyman and canon of the Church of England moved an amendment, to the effect that the resolution be made to include a protest against gambling at Red Cross socials and all other gatherings for raising money for benevolent and religious purposes. In a talk with the gentleman afterward, he told me that his little boy had just received his first lesson in gambling at a Red Cross affair. A 50-cent box of chocolates raffled off to him for 5 cents had awakened the get-something-for-nothing spirit. The canon thought it a shame, that after the efforts we make to teach our children to live honestly, and always to give a fair recompense for all that they receive, religious and benevolent occasions for raising money should be responsible for the undoing of much that we have taught against "playing for stakes" and "games of chance."

Every once in a while we read of a "charity ball," or dance given for benefit of charity. Notwithstanding the fact, demonstrated from statistics made by those who know, that more girls go to perdition from the ball-room than from anywhere else, the fair name of "charity" is connected with this most ruthless despoiler of our young womanhood, and men are induced

to part with their money for benevolence when they can have "to boot" the personal privileges of the social dance.

The "Red Cross" and "charity" are good causes. But, because they are good, they are most dangerous when their interests are promoted in such ways. Because it is "Red Cross," or because it is "charity," unsuspecting and unsophisticated parents send their children, and as such places they often learn their first lessons in gambling and dancing. Do we not bring a good work into disrepute with the best classes when we employ such methods? Are not such methods so many "dead flies" in the ointment of these services to our brother man?

I do not know of any better causes than the "church," "charity" and the "Red Cross." I do not know of any causes for which there can be made stronger appeals. I do not know of any that can lay greater claims to our benevolence. They can be pleaded for on their own merits. They are in themselves a sufficient recompense for all that they cost and all that they ask. To whatever extent we help—however rich may be our gifts, they are their own reward. Their services to humanity are so undoubted, so generous, so great, so free and on such broad lines, that every right-minded denizen of this world, even if he does not feel himself a pensioner on their bounties and a reaper of their fruits, at least sees that it is a part of his own world and his own humanity that is helped, and gives out of his little or his much, because it is really some part of his own or of himself that is nourished and fed and cared for. Other causes may be selfish, local, sectarian, and appeal to classes, parties or nations; but these are international, cosmopolitan and interdenominational, appealing to all peoples, to all individuals. There are no other benevolences of the world that lay such high and holy claims on us all.

Yet how do we plead these causes to the world? How do we advertise their claims? Do we put them up to the people on their merits? Do we appeal, on their behalf, to men's benevolence, their generosity, their magnanimity, their sense of duty? Often—yes. The greater part of all the help for these causes is obtained by direct appeal. Men go down into their pockets and give; give because it is right, because they wish to give, because of the merits of the causes. All the great giving—and may I say, all the true giving?—is done in this way. This is manhood's way. It is direct giving; giving because of the work, because of the merits of the cause.

But all of these good works obtain help in another way. It is the way in which many of the smaller sums are obtained, the help from the poorer classes. It is not giving, although there is giving in it. We refer to that indirect, roundabout way of raising money through candy-sales, ice cream and strawberry festivals, pie socials and dances. The "affairs" are advertised in the name of the church, or charity, or the Red Cross. But the causes are not appealed to on their own merits, or on their just claims on the public. We might think, from the manner of the appeal, that they had no merits, no claims. The public is promised so much ice cream, cake, coffee,

or a dance, if it will part with so much of its money for the church, or charity, or the Red Cross. The people are baited and bribed to give their money away.

There is a lamentable confession in every such appeal. It is a needless, un-called-for and unfortunate confession—a confession of weakness! It is a confession that our causes are too weak to appeal to men on their own merits, and must be supplemented by ice cream, cake or a frolic, to make them worth the giver's money. Or, if this be denied, and the causes be considered strong enough, then it is implied that the weakness is in the people, that men are too weak and stingy and low-minded, too lacking in religious feeling or public spirit, to support these good causes on their merits, and must be given a lick of ice cream or a frolic before they will part with their money for these religious or benevolent purposes.

I verily believe that every church festival, every charity ball, every pie social and dance for the benefit of Red Cross, is a slam on the manhood of the community in which it takes place! Must a son be thus bribed and baited to care for an indigent mother? Is he not appealed to by the merits of the case alone, by what mother is to him and what he is to mother? And how would he regard the person who would put it up to him on any other ground, or how could he think of himself if he required any other ground to move him to that duty?

But how about the invitations to church, charity and Red Cross socials, so frequently extended nowadays to the public? Are they not a shame and a disgrace to the causes they would promote? Are they not an insult to every self-respecting man who receives them? Do they not imply that we are so lacking in manhood, in sense of duty, in appreciation of true benevolence, in religious feeling, in public spirit, in humanity, that we cannot be induced to part with money for church, charity or Red Cross purposes, unless we are offered, in connection with the claims of these causes, a belly full of sweet things and a jolly good time? How long will a self-respecting public stand for this insult! How long will the church and charity and the Red Cross trail their fair banners in this dust! Such methods are only more "dead flies" in the ointment of the apothecary.

Another disgrace in connection with all this business is the way society leaders, rich folks and "prominent people," "pull off" an affair of this kind with the chief intent and purposes of getting money for the Red Cross out of the "working men." By rallying the support of favorite retainers, lackeys and henchmen, by exclusive advertisement, by providing music and dancing, by importing "rooters" from abroad by railway at considerable expense, and by the well-to-do "running up" the bids on the poor in the auctions and sales, dollar after dollar is extracted from working men who are not paid, by some of these same rich men who are their employers, a sufficient wage to enable them to pay for a board that will give them butter on their bread. The working man