

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whitman
Darwin Thoreau Twain
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte
London Descartes Cervantes Wells Hesse
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Chambers Irving
Bunner Richter Chekhov da Shaw Wodehouse
Doré Dante Pushkin Alcott
Swift Chekhov Newton



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**Friendly Visiting among the Poor
A Handbook for Charity Workers**

Mary Ellen Richmond

Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: Mary Ellen Richmond

Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany

ISBN: 978-3-8472-1629-2

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FRIENDLY VISITING AMONG THE POOR

A Handbook for Charity Workers

by

MARY E. RICHMOND

General Secretary of the Charity Organization
Society of Baltimore

New York
The MacMillan Company

London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd.

1907

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Set up and electrotyped January, 1899.

Reprinted November, 1899; February, 1903;
February, 1906; November, 1907.

PREFACE

This little volume is intended as a handbook for those who are beginning to do charitable work in the homes of the poor, whether as individuals or as representatives of some church, or of some religious society, such as the King's Daughters, the Epworth League, or the Christian Endeavor Society. The term "friendly visitor" does not apply to one who aimlessly visits the poor for a little while, without making any effort to improve their condition permanently or to be a real friend to them. Friendly visiting, as distinguished from district visiting, originated with the charity organization societies, some of which are indefatigable in training volunteers to do effective work in the homes of the poor. Though I should be glad to find that my book was of some service to these societies, it was not prepared for their use alone, and no {vi} mention is made, therefore, of the organization of visitors into district conferences. For inexperienced workers, who need leadership in their charity, there can be no better training than the meetings of a well-organized conference under a capable chairman, and even the most experienced, by keeping in close touch with such a conference, can do more effective work.

The suggestions herein contained are not to be taken as all applicable to the work of any one visitor. Friendly visitors that tried to adopt them all would have to abandon their other interests, and their other interests make them more useful friends to the poor. Like the words in a dictionary, some suggestions will be of service to a few workers, and others will be found applicable to the work of many.

In addition to the standard authorities mentioned under General References, a list for supplementary reading will be found at the end of each chapter. These lists are in no sense a bibliography of the subject. A handbook such as this is chiefly useful in suggesting further inquiry, and, for beginners, I have thought best to include a number of references out of the {vii} beaten track to stories and magazine articles that seemed illustrative of the matter in hand.

It will be seen that I have borrowed much in direct quotation in the following pages from those who have preceded me in writing about the poor, but my debt does not end here. Whatever I may be said to know about charitable work—my whole point of view and inspiration in fact—can be traced to certain definite sources. To some of the leaders of the Charity Organization Society of London, to Miss Octavia Hill, Mrs. Bernard Bosanquet, and Mr. C. S. Loch, it will be evident to my readers that my obligation is great. It will be evident also that I have been helped by Mrs. Josephine Shaw Lowell and other workers in New York, who, against such odds, are making advances in the reform of municipal abuses; and by that group too who, under the leadership of Miss Jane Addams, have given us, at Hull House in Chicago, so admirable an object lesson in the power of neighborliness. But more than to any other teachers, perhaps, I am indebted to those members of the Associated Charities who organized Boston's friendly visitors nineteen years ago, and have {viii} led them since to increasing usefulness. Their reports have been my most valuable source of information. If I do not name also my friends and fellow-workers here in Baltimore, it is not because I fail to bear them individually most gratefully in mind.

BALTIMORE, January, 1899.

GENERAL REFERENCES

Proceedings of National Conferences of Charities and Correction, 25 volumes, especially portions containing reports of sections on Child-Saving and Organization of Charities. The Conference Reports constitute the best American authority on charities. Special papers in the Reports are noted in this book after the appropriate chapters.

Proceedings of International Congress of Charities, Correction and Philanthropy, Chicago, 1893, especially volumes on "Care of Children" and "Organization of Charities." Published by Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore.

"Homes of the London Poor," Octavia Hill. For sale by New York State Charities Aid Association, 25 cents.

"Essays," Octavia Hill. For sale by Boston Associated Charities; price, 10 cents.

"Rich and Poor," Mrs. Bernard Bosanquet.

"How to help the Poor," Mrs. James T. Fields.

"Public Relief and Private Charity," Mrs. Josephine Shaw Lowell.

"American Charities," A. G. Warner.

"Hull House Maps and Papers."

{1}

FRIENDLY VISITING AMONG THE POOR

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is a certain development in the English novel of which I have long seemed to be vaguely conscious. At one time I hoped to set myself the task of tracing it, though I have since relinquished all thought of this as too ambitious. The movement—if, indeed, there be such a movement—has always pictured itself to my mind as the march of the plain and common people into the foreground of English fiction. I venture to introduce the idea here, though it may appear foreign to my subject, as illustrating another and equally important movement in the development of charitable work.

Should any one ever turn over the pages of our two centuries' stock of novels, with a view {2} to tracing this gradual development of interest in the poor and unfortunate, he would find, of course, that facts have a tantalizing way of moving in zigzags whenever one is anxious that they should move forward in a straight line; but he would probably find also that, in the earlier attempts of the novel writer to picture the poor, they were drawn as mere puppets on which the richly endowed heroes and heroines exercised their benevolence. Very likely he would discover that, when at last the poor began to take an important part in the action of the story, we were permitted to see them at first only through a haze of sentimentality, so that, allowing for great advances in the art of novel writing between the time of Richardson and the time of Dickens, we still should find the astonishing characterizations of "Pamela" reflected in the impossible virtues and melodramatic vices of Dickens' poor people.

To Miss Edgeworth and Scott first, perhaps, and to George Eliot most of all, we should find ourselves indebted for faithful studies of plain people,—studies made with an eye single to {3} the object, and leaving, therefore, no unlovely trait slurred over or excused, yet giving us that perfect understanding of every-day people which is the only true basis of sympathy with them. In America we are in-

debted to such conscientious artists as Miss Jewett and Octave Thanet for a similar enlargement of our sympathies through their life-like pictures of the less sophisticated people of our own time.

An even more recent development would be found in what is called the "sociological" novel. Monstrous and misshapen as this must seem to us often, if considered as a work of art, it would have to be reckoned with in any investigation of the treatment of poverty in fiction.

Turning to the treatment of poverty in fact, it is surely not altogether fanciful to think that we can trace a similar development,—the march of the plain and common people into the foreground of the charitable consciousness. Here, too, the facts will not always travel in straight lines, and the great souls of earlier ages will be found to have anticipated our best thinking; but usually the world has failed in {4} any effort to adopt their high standards. Speaking roughly, several centuries of charitable practice, in the English world at least, are fairly well summed up in the doggerel verses of that sixteenth-century divine, quoted by Hobson, who counselled his flock,

"Yet cease not to give
Without any regard;
Though the beggars be wicked,
Thou shalt have thy reward."

The spirit of the mediaeval church, too, encouraged charitable giving in the main "as a species of fire insurance." The poor, when they were thought of at all, were too likely to be regarded as a means of saving the giver's soul. This view of poverty is either quite dead or dying, but the sentimental view, which succeeded it, is still very common. We are still inclined to take a conventional attitude toward the poor, seeing them through the comfortable haze of our own excellent intentions, and content to know that we wish them well, without being at any great pains to know them as they really are. In other words, our intentions are good, but they {5} are not

always good enough to lead us to take our charitable work quite seriously, and found it solidly upon knowledge and experience.

But the century drawing to a close has seen two very important developments in charitable work in England and America; developments quite as important in their own field as the advances of the century in the art of fiction. The first of these is the wonderful growth of the spirit of individual service, which has found one of its highest expressions in the work of friendly visitors in the homes of the poor. The second is the new but vigorous growth of the spirit of social service, which has found its best expression in social and college settlements. It might be possible to prove that both these developments are merely revivals, that at several stages of the world's history the same ideas have been put forward under other names; but never before, as it seems to me, have they found such general recognition.

This gives us three tolerably well-defined phases of charitable progress: the phases of indiscriminate relief, of individual service, and {6} of social service. In the first phase, we are charitable either for the sake of our souls or else to gratify our own emotions. In the second, we are charitable for the sake of the individual poor man. In the third, we are charitable for the sake of the class to which he belongs.

Of the dangers of indiscriminate relief, it should not be necessary to speak, for much has been written on that subject; but the dangers of individual and social service have not been so frequently pointed out. These two forms of service are very closely related. It is impossible to treat the individual poor man without affecting the condition of his fellows for better or worse, and it is impossible to deal with social conditions without affecting the units that compose society. The problems of poverty must be attacked from both sides, therefore, and though I shall dwell particularly upon individual service in these pages, we should remember that, unless this service is supplemented by the work of good citizens, who shall strive to make our cities healthier and freer from temptation, our school system more {7} thorough and practical, and our public charities more effective, unless this public work also is pushed forward, our individual work in the homes of the poor will be largely in vain.

I have said that there were dangers in both forms of service. In work with individual poor families we are likely to forget that these are part of a neighborhood and community, and that we have no right to help them in a way that will work harm to the community. We are always inclined to think that the particular family in which we are interested is an "exceptional case," and the exceptional treatment lavished upon our exceptional case often rouses in a neighborhood hopes that it is impossible for us to fulfil. Then, too, occupied as we are with individuals, we are likely to exaggerate the importance of those causes of poverty that have their origin in the individual. We are likely to over emphasize the moral and mental lacks shown in bad personal habits, such as drunkenness and licentiousness, in thriftlessness, laziness, or inefficiency; and some of us are even rash enough to attribute all the ills of the poor to drink or laziness. On the other hand, those {8} who are engaged in social service often exaggerate the causes of poverty that are external to the individual. Bad industrial conditions and defective legislation seem to them the causes of nearly all the distress around them. Settlement workers are likely to say that the sufferings of the poor are due to conditions over which the poor have no control.

The truth lies somewhere between these two extremes; the fact being that the personal and social causes of poverty act and react upon each other, changing places as cause and as effect, until they form a tangle that no hasty, impatient jerking can unravel. The charity worker and the settlement worker have need of each other: neither one can afford to ignore the experience of the other. Friendly visitors and all who are trying to improve conditions in poor homes should welcome the experience of those who are studying trade conditions and other more general aspects of questions affecting the welfare of the poor. But they should not permit themselves to be swept away by enthusiastic advocates of social reform from that safe middle ground which recognizes that character is at the {9} very centre of this complicated problem; character in the rich, who owe the poor justice as well as mercy, and character in the poor, who are masters of their fate to a greater degree than they will recognize or than we will recognize for them. To ignore the importance of character and of the discipline that makes character is a common fault of modern philanthropy. Rich and poor alike are pictured as

the victims of circumstances, of a wrong social order. A political writer has said that formerly, when our forefathers became dissatisfied, they pushed farther into the wilderness, but that now, if anything goes wrong, we run howling to Washington, asking special legislation for our troubles. Symptoms are not lacking of a healthy reaction from this undemocratic attitude of mind. In so far as our charitable work affects it, let us see to it that we do our part in restoring a tone of sturdy self-reliance and independence to the Commonwealth.

Turning from these more general considerations, it is proposed, in this book, to treat of various aspects of the home life of the poor as {10} affected by charity. At the very beginning, however, it may be well to inquire, Who are the poor? If this were a study of the needs of the rich, we should realize at once that they are a difficult class to generalize about; rich people are understood to differ widely from each other in tastes, aims, virtues, and vices. The great, conglomerate class of the rich—which is really no social class at all—has included human beings as different as Lord Shaftesbury and Mr. Barney Barnato. But it is the very same with the poor; and any effort to go among them for the purpose of helping them that does not frankly recognize this wide diversity, must end in failure. The charity worker must rid himself, first of all, of the conventional picture of the poor as always either very abjectly needy, or else very abjectly grateful. He must understand that an attitude of patronage toward the poor man is likely to put the patron in as ridiculous a position as Mr. Pullet, when he addressed his nephew, Tom Tulliver, as "Young Sir." Upon which George Eliot remarks: "A boy's sheepishness is by no means a sign of overmastering reverence; and while you are making {11} encouraging advances to him under the idea that he is overwhelmed by a sense of your age and wisdom, ten to one he is thinking you extremely queer." The would-be philanthropist, who is very conscious of himself and only vaguely conscious of the object of his benevolence, is likely to seem and to be "extremely queer."

If I were writing about the rich, I should be inclined to divide them, according to their attitude toward life, into workers and para-

sites, but this classification will serve for the poor as well. The motto of the worker is, "I owe the world a life," and the motto of the parasite is, "The world owes me a living." When the parasite happens to be poor we call him a pauper; but there is a world of difference between poverty and pauperism. The poor man may become destitute through stress of circumstances, and be forced to accept charity, but your true pauper, be he rich or poor, has the parasitic habit of mind. When we ask ourselves then, Who are the poor? we must answer that they include widely divergent types of character,—the selfish and the {12} unselfish, the noble and the mean, workers and parasites—and that, in going among them, we must be prepared to meet human beings differing often from ourselves, it may be, in trivial and external things, but like ourselves in all else.

Some who are ready enough to recognize these rudimentary facts about the poor, question our right to go among them with the object of doing them good, regarding it as an impertinent interference with the rights of the individual. But those who hold to this view seldom have the courage of their convictions. When they see suffering, they are very likely to interfere by sending help, though this well-meant interference, unaccompanied by personal knowledge of all the circumstances, often does more harm than good, and becomes a temptation rather than a help. We must interfere when confronted by human suffering and need. Why not interfere effectively? Why not do our best to remove the causes of need?

Many earnest workers in charity feel that social conditions could be wonderfully improved if, to every family in distress, could {13} be sent a volunteer visitor, who would seek out and, with patience and sympathy, strive to remove the causes of need. Such a visitor must have the courage and self-control to confine his work to a few families, for it is impossible to know many well, to understand all their temptations and difficulties, and so help them effectively. To supply every needy family with a friend may seem an impossible ideal, but if all who are undoing each other's work to-day by doing it twice over, and if all who now waste their time in unnecessary charities, were seriously to put themselves in training, and confine their work to the thorough treatment of a few families, the problem of how to help the poor would be solved.

The introduction to such work might come in many ways. It might come through our natural relations as employers or neighbors or church members, or it might come through the district office of a charity organization society, for these societies usually make a specialty of training volunteers and of establishing friendly relations between volunteer {14} visitors and needy families. But come as it may, an introduction can be made for us, and we need not enter the poor man's home as an intruder.

Much has been written about the qualifications necessary for charitable work. It is possible to exaggerate them. Those who are unfamiliar with the homes of the poor are likely to think it unsafe to send young and inexperienced people into poor neighborhoods. As a matter of fact, there are many good people in the poorest neighborhoods, and young workers are as safe there as anywhere. In an old note-book I find that years ago I set down the necessary qualifications of the friendly visitor to be tact and good-will. If we consider that tact includes knowledge, either instinctive or acquired, this may still stand. We cannot be tactful with those whose point of view we fail to understand, or do not even strive to understand. The best helps toward such an understanding, and the best training for charitable work, must come from life itself. If we take no interest in the joys and sorrows of human beings, if we show {15} neither judgment nor energy in the conduct of our own affairs, if life seem to us, on the whole, a flat and unprofitable affair, then no amount of reading will transform us into good friendly visitors. Given the tactful, kindly spirit, with a dash of energy added, study and experience can teach us how to turn these to the best account in the service of others. Our reading must be supplementary to experience, of course, and can in no wise take the place of it.

Leaving all further generalization about friendly visiting for the last chapter, in the following pages my point of departure will be the organization of the poor man's home rather than the organization of charity. The head of the family as citizen, employee, husband, and father; the wife as homemaker; the children; the family health and recreations; the principles involved in spending and saving; the principles of effectual relief; the relations of the church to the poor,—these will be considered in turn. Necessarily, in a book of this size, the attempt must be to suggest lines of inquiry and

points of view, {16} rather than to treat adequately any one part of the subject.

Collateral Readings: "Individuality in the Work of Charity," George B.

Buzelle in Proceedings of Thirteenth National Conference of Charities,

pp. 185 *sq.* "Scientific Charity," Mrs. Glendower Evans in Proceedings of Sixteenth National Conference of Charities, pp. 24 *sq.*

Chapters on "Scientific Charity" in "Problems of American Society," J.

H. Crooker. Papers on Social Settlements in Proceedings of

Twenty-third National Conference of Charities, pp. 106 *sq.* "The Causes of Poverty," F. A. Walker in "Century," Vol. LV, pp. 210 *sq.*

"The Jukes," Richard Dugdale. "Tribe of Ishmael," Oscar McCulloch in

Proceedings of Fifteenth National Conference of Charities, pp. 154 *sq.* "The Rooney Family," see Charles Booth's "Life and Labor of the

People," Vol. VIII, pp. 317 *sq.* "Life in New York Tenement Houses," William T. Elsing in "Scribner's," Vol. XI, pp. 677 *sq.* "An

Experiment in Altruism," Miss Margaret Sherwood.

{17}

CHAPTER II

THE BREADWINNER

A conference was held in one of our large cities lately of half a dozen church and charity workers, who had been called together to make some plan or agree upon some common principle in dealing with a certain family, to whom charitable relief had been given in an aimless way for many years with no good result. Three churches were represented, and the persons present had visited and relieved

the family for periods ranging from three to ten years. Almost immediately, however, the fact was brought out at the conference that not one of these visitors had ever seen the man of the family, or had ever made any effort to see him. By way of excuse one visitor said she had always understood that the man was very good-for-nothing. But happily there is no better dispeller of mental {18} fog than a friendly conference of those who are in earnest, and it did not take long to convince these conferees that the man's good-for-nothingness was, in part at least, their own fault. I shall have occasion to speak more than once, in this book, of the power of suggestion. Even here, where these relief visitors had never given the head of the family a thought, they had taught him a lesson. From their whole line of conduct he must have received the suggestion that his neglect of his family was an affair of no consequence.

In turning to the details of family life among the poor, I take the breadwinner, or the one who ought to be the breadwinner, as my first consideration for the reason that he is so often ignored altogether by charity workers. Especially is this true of church workers. "A church worker came to me the other day," writes Mrs. Bosanquet, "about a family of little children, concerning whom he was greatly distressed. He had visited them for months, and found the woman honest, striving, and clean, but *as usually happens* he knew very little of the man. He assured me {19} over and over again that the family was in a pitiable state of poverty and in urgent need of help; and we at once set to work to ascertain the real financial position. Result: man earning 35s., giving 20s. to his wife and keeping 15s. for pocket-money. Obviously, if charity steps in here, it will not necessarily improve the state of the wife and children at all; it will merely enable the man to keep a still larger proportion of his wages for pocket-money." [1]

But, though the charity worker may ignore the man of the family, there are others who are wiser. In the first place he is a voter, and the ward-worker, the policeman, and the saloon-keeper never forget this fact.

An illustration of the policeman's interest in the voter as an applicant for charity may be found wherever the police are allowed to become distributors of alms. In Baltimore the police have been al-

lowed to distribute relief intrusted to them by private citizens, and have been in the habit of making public appeals for such contributions to aid the poor {20} in cold weather. One policeman, who had a difficult beat, where there were many toughs and criminals, said that the distribution of police relief made his work easier, as toughs whose families had been relieved did not trouble him so much. It is an interesting fact that, during the hard times of 1893-94, political clubs vied with each other the country over in distributing aid. Leaders of Tammany Hall were shrewd enough to urge their followers to organize relief distributions in every district of New York.

It is well to realize that much of the political corruption of our large cities may be traced to the simple fact that the poor man is like ourselves: he follows the leaders personally known to him, and to whom he is personally known. He is sometimes a venal voter, but more often he is only an ignorant voter, who, while innocently following the man that has taken the trouble to do him a favor or to be socially agreeable to him, is handicapping himself and his children with dirty streets, an unsanitary home, an overcrowded school, an insufficient water supply, {21} blackmailing officials, and all those other abuses of city government which press with peculiar hardship upon the poor. The question of municipal reform is inextricably connected with any effort to improve the condition of the poor in their homes, and no charity worker can afford to ignore this connection.

In "Problems of Modern Democracy," Mr. E. L. Godkin says: "Nothing is more surprising in the attempt to deal with the problems of urban life than the way in which religious and philanthropic people ignore the close connection between municipal politics and the various evils about which they are most concerned. All the churches occupy themselves, in a greater or less degree, with the moral condition of the poor. Charitable associations spend hundreds of thousands every year in trying to improve their physical condition. A conference of Protestant ministers met in this city two years ago to consider the best means of reviving religious interest among the working classes and inducing a larger number of them to attend church on Sundays. Of course these gentlemen did not {22} seek an increase in the number of church-goers as an end in itself. The Protestant churches do not, as the Catholic church does, ascribe

any serious spiritual efficacy to mere bodily presence at religious worship. Protestant ministers ask people to go to church in the hope that the words which they will hear with their outward ears may be so grafted inwardly in their hearts that they may bring forth the fruit of good living. What was remarkable in the debates of this conference, therefore, was the absence of any mention of the very successful rivalry with religion which, as an influence on the poor and ignorant foreign population, politics in this city carries on. The same thing may be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of the charitable associations. No one would get from their speeches or reports an inkling of the solemn fact that the newly arrived immigrant who settles in New York gets tenfold more of his notions of American right and wrong from city politics than he gets from the city missionaries, or the schools, or the mission chapels; and yet such is the case. I believe it is quite within the truth to {23} say that, as a moral influence on the poor and ignorant, the clergyman and philanthropist are hopelessly distanced by the politician." [2]

It has been said that, in the effort to establish friendly relations with a poor man, often the greatest lack is a common topic. Here is at least one topic that rich and poor have in common. Here it will be found too that they have many grievances in common, and what makes a better beginning for a friendly relation than a common grievance? Another common topic, and a related one, is the news of the day. More often than not, even the very poor read the daily papers.

Beside the ward politician, the saloon-keeper, and the policeman, there are others who take an interest in the breadwinner. If he is injured, or his property is injured, there are third-rate lawyers ready to bring suit for half the proceeds—an unduly expensive arrangement for the man that has a good claim. If he would save, there are agents of unsound financial schemes ready to take advantage of his ignorance. If he would borrow, there are {24} chattel-mortgage sharks ready to burden him with a debt at ruinous interest. If he would buy, there are instalment dealers ready to tempt him into buying more than he can afford, and ready to charge two prices for their wares. Whole industries are created to take advantage of his lack of shrewdness, and every effort of his to get on, to get out of the old groove, is resisted by such agencies. Surely, if any one

stands in need of a friend, who will patiently strive to see the world through his eyes, and yet will have the courage to tell him the plain truth, it is the breadwinner.

But that picture would be a distorted one which represented the poor man as friendless save for the politicians. His neighbors and companions are in no position to protect him from the foes I have mentioned, but their neighborliness is none the less genuine. Most patient and long-suffering of neighbors are the small landlords who sublet. The tradesmen in poor neighborhoods are also heavy losers. When a family applies for the first time to a church or charity, it often means that they have been aided most generously for a long {25} time by neighbors and small dealers. Sometimes one happens upon the very best and most thoughtful charity given in this way. A Boston worker tells of a street-car conductor, not only supported through the winter by his fellow-conductors, but faithfully nursed by them at night, each one taking turns after the long day's work. Such glimpses as this show us how queer is our usual charitable perspective, in which, as in a picture on a Chinese fan, we see the church steeple in the middle distance and the church visitor looming large in the foreground, while the poor little object of charity, quite helpless and alone save for us, huddles in a corner. The fact is that every life has a background, if we will but take the trouble to see and understand it: all the barrenness is in our own imaginations.

When the poor man attempts to be charitable without knowledge, he is just as clumsy as the rest of us. Writing of "The Attitude of Workingmen toward Modern Charity," Miss Clare de Graffenreid says: "A notable instance of reckless giving came under my observation just after the great strike in the mining regions, {26} when a man who had lost both arms went begging in Georges Creek Valley. How he was maimed, whether he was worthy, proved immaterial. Nor does it appear that he was even a miner; but he asked alms at all the mines. Now the miners had had no money since they were paid off for April, the strike having begun on the 7th of May and having lasted until the 1st of July, while some workers were unable to secure employment until later. After two months and more of idleness the men had either used their savings to live on or were deeply in debt, or both. They could hope for no money until their July labor was paid for in August. In the latter part of July came this