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# Benevolence

by Eugene V. Debs <sup>1</sup>

Unsigned editorial in *Locomotive Firemen's Monthly Magazine*,  
vol. 3, no. 2 (Feb. 1879), pp. 47-48.

The word Benevolence, the headlight of the grand motto of our Order, is used and applied by the members in its broadest sense and fullest definition. It means that the members of the Order are possessed of a disposition to do good; that they are filled with the love for mankind, accompanied with a desire to promote their happiness. Not by wild and reckless charities, whereby the undeserving, the idle, and profligate are enabled to live without producing, by appeals to the active benevolence of our Order, but by love and kindness, tempered with sense and good judgment. To see that the meritorious do not suffer, and that honest suffering humanity may know that there still lives a sentiment and race of men who have higher aspirations and more lofty conceptions of life and its duties than the mere struggle for sordid gain. To see that the brother disabled in the line of duty is provided for with a weekly stipend sufficient to keep the wolf at bay, the wife and little ones from suffering and want.

Benevolence, as used and understood by this fraternity, means *practical humanity*; that rational application of the laws of right and justice inherent in the heart of *natural* humanity; but too often, alas! educated out of the heart and mind, by too much theorizing and too much theology. We have no patience with that kind of seedy benevolence that starves our next-door neighbor, and contributes money to send gospel and food to the benighted heathen. If the heathen needs gospel, the hungry need food, and practical benevolence says: A wise and beneficent father will save in his own good time the untutored mind, let us attend to the demands of suffering, ever present need.

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<sup>1</sup> Attributed to Associate Editor Debs by style. This issue includes a notice that "All questions of minor importance relative to the Magazine, should be addressed to E.V. Debs, our Associate Editor..." and seems to effectively mark the start of Debs' tenure as de facto editor of the publication, with Grand Secretary and Treasurer William N. Sayre thereby freed up to concentrate on other matters.

Benevolence is not a theory full of high sounding words and platitudes about the elevation and amelioration of the condition of the whole race; it is a living, acting principle that aids the needy and helps the truly deserving to help themselves. If a brother is unfortunate, and without blame, aid him until he can aid himself and repay all. If he has lost a position aid him to another, and thus without squandering recklessly means for the suffering, we only lend a helping hand to the halt, the lame, and the blind, until their lameness is cured and their blindness removed, and they are able to help themselves. We have seen men upon the streets respond to a pathetic plea for help and watched the recipient squander his charity for tobacco or whiskey. The world is too full of such sickly sentimentality about true benevolence. Unless your labors for the alleviation of suffering result in some practical good, it is worse than folly to expend either time or money. A false benevolence makes beggars of men and criminals of destitute persons. True benevolence as practiced by our Order makes men brave, manly, and self-reliant, and humanity the better for it.

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport*

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