

# **THE VISITOR OF THE POOR**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649363339

The visitor of the poor by Joseph Tuckerman

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Cover @ 2017

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**JOSEPH TUCKERMAN**

**THE VISITOR  
OF THE POOR**



THE  
VISITOR OF THE POOR;

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

OF  
THE BARON DEGERANDO,

BY  
A LADY OF BOSTON.

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WITH  
AN INTRODUCTION,

BY  
JOSEPH TUCKERMAN.

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BOSTON:  
HILLIARD, GRAY, LITTLE, AND WILKINS.  
1832.

## INTRODUCTION.

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I HAVE been requested by the translator of this little book, to give her an Introduction, or Preface to it. I very readily accede to this wish of my friend; and I shall be glad, and grateful, if my recommendation of the work will exert any influence in attracting attention to it. I have no hope, indeed, of being useful in this cause, beyond a very small circle. But as I am known in the city in which I live, as a Minister of the Poor, and as I have been very favorably regarded here in other efforts I have made to lead public attention to the means of preventing and of remedying poverty and crime, I will trust that I may, without further apology, say to those who have read, and have kindly received my Reports, that the work which is here offered for public approbation is worthy of the interest and patronage which it solicits. Its author knew the poor, not merely as they are seen in the streets, nor merely as they are represented in books, or as they appear to the casual observer in Alms-Houses; but by personal, free, and long-continued intercourse with them in their habitations. He was therefore qualified to write of the poor, as others, who have little or no personal acquaintance with them, cannot. It will therefore be perceived, I think, that the details and the senti-

ments of Degerando are neither the fictions of a dreamer, nor the speculations of a theorist; that they bear upon their front the lines of a character, which truth only could have imparted to them. It is but a part of the original work which is here published. But this little book, I believe, contains all of the original which would be generally interesting to American readers. The translation, too, it may be observed, is very free; and this, it is confidently thought, will not be considered a fault. I am not willing to doubt whether the book will obtain a good sale, or whether it will be extensively read among us. The name of Degerando has been made familiar to many here by his treatise on Self-Education, and it has a high place in the respect and regard of our reading community. And, should this work be read, it can hardly fail to do something for the great object it proposes, — a more extended Christian union of the rich with the poor, with a view to a greater extension of human virtue and happiness.

The aim of this little volume is single and simple. But its object is one of the highest importance. Its design is to awaken, and give excitement to a sense of human relations, wherever sensibility on this great subject is sluggish and inactive; and wisely direct it, where it is either wasting its power in comparatively useless efforts, or is perhaps occasioning evil by the very means by which it intends, and hopes for good. For this end, it proposes to make the great classes of the rich and the poor, of the strong and the feeble, of the wise and the unwise, and of the virtuous and the vicious known to each other. It proposes to bring these classes together, not by con-

founding the distinctions between them, but by making the virtuous, and wise, and strong, and prospered feel, that by communicating of what they have received, and by acting as the instruments of God's goodness towards those from whom he has made them to differ, they are at once accomplishing the purposes for which he instituted the diversities which we see of human condition; and are most effectually promoting their own, by advancing the virtue and happiness of others. Its aim is to extend virtue, and through virtue to extend happiness, by the most simple and legitimate of all means, the exercise of virtue. It seeks the redemption of the victims of poverty and vice, by bringing those who have the means of redeeming them to a knowledge of the exposed and wretched condition of their fellow beings, and thus to the exertions which are demanded for their redemption. In this benevolent enterprise, it addresses the sympathies, not only of the rich, but of all who are not poor. It invites, and it solicits those into whose hands it may fall, and who have any means of alleviating human want and suffering, to be visitors of the poor. The physical and temporal relief of the poor is here sought, principally through an amelioration of their moral condition; and much is done to give distinctness to the proper objects of charitable efforts, and to the principles by which a wise charity should be directed, and regulated. Here are statements, the correctness of which, it is believed, will not be doubted, — for I am quite sure that they are not exaggerations of actual distress, or even of vice or virtue to be found among our own poor, — and which, if admitted to be true, can hardly



fail to call forth a very active sympathy with our similarly exposed, and suffering fellow beings. Here, too, are the reasonings of a mind which was as calm, as cautious, as discriminating and judicious, as it was zealous and philanthropic. And here are appeals, the most simple, and natural, and touching, which can be addressed to the human heart. I feel indeed no small degree of diffidence in uniting my name, and my voice, with those of this distinguished friend of humanity. But he would not forbid, and will not you allow me, reader, to join with him in the solicitation, if God have given you the means, not to wait for, but to seek, and if need be to make, opportunities of doing something to supply the pressing necessities of those, who cannot make this provision for themselves; something for the consolation of those distressed ones, who are often suffering without the solace of a human comforter; something for the succour of those tempted ones, whose greatest exposure is in a want of the means of living honestly, and of a friend to aid, to advise, to encourage, and to guide them; and something for those, who, having by want and discouragement been led into sin, have not yet lost all their dispositions to virtue, or all their convictions of duty; and who may therefore be brought back, and saved, by no means so effectually, as by the notice, and kind regard, and Christian offices, of the lovers of virtue. Let us extend our aid, as we may, to the poor, to the ignorant, to the fallen, and even to the debased, when that aid is most imperiously demanded, and they will believe in the reality of virtue, as no mere words would bring them to believe in it, when they have been made to feel its power,

by the very exercises of it, of which they have themselves been the objects. The truth is, — and it will be worse than in vain to overlook or disregard it, — that by nothing short of this sympathy with the poor and suffering, this care for them, and this kindness towards them, can we meet the claims of our religion upon us, as stewards of God, and believers in the gospel of his Son. And it is not less certain, that by nothing short of a recognition of our relation and duty to each other, as children of one Father, may we most effectually promote even the best immediate interests of society, as far as these interests are concerned either in the remedy, or the prevention, of poverty and crime.

But we must anticipate difficulties in this work, and objections to it. All, it may be said, have neither leisure for it, nor are qualified for its duties. If, then, the service should be extensively, and much more if it should generally be assumed, by those who have any thing to give to the poor, a far greater amount of want would be created, than would be relieved by it; and it might consequently minister even to the increase of depravity and crime. These are difficulties which demand serious consideration, for in part at least they have strong facts to support them. I will therefore begin with concessions, which will do something to prepare the way for the questions, 'Have you not, reader, sufficient leisure for this service? And, are you indeed not qualified, or might you not qualify yourself, for it?'

First, then, let us look at the plea, 'I have not leisure to be a visitor of the poor.' Is this true? I do not say that it is not; and I admit that the service has

no claim upon you, if you have no time which you can spare for it; for there can be no such thing as a conflict, or even an interference of duties. If it be your duty, in any hour of life, to be in one place, and engaged in one work, it cannot be your duty at the same time to be in another place, and at another work. This is a very important elementary principle, the establishment of which by every individual in his own mind would add immeasurably to the order, and virtue, and happiness of life. There may be, and often is, an interference, and even a strong conflict, of inclinations, and inducements, and immediate interests, which are sometimes most unhappily mistaken for a conflict of duties. But I grant to you, that if your time be actually filled by duties which forbid you to enter upon this service, you are not only right in declining it, but you would do wrong if you should engage in it. With this concession in view, may I ask your attention to the inquiries, 'How much of your time will be demanded, even for very considerable usefulness in this office?' And, 'have you not, in truth, any leisure which you might give to it?'

Again: It is freely admitted that you may not be qualified for this work, even if you shall have leisure for it. You may be too credulous, or too skeptical. You may not be sufficiently alive to a sense of the wants and sufferings of others, or you may have an excessive, or even a diseased sensibility, which you cannot control. You may be too impatient, irritable, and harsh in your judgments of others; or, too easy to be overcome by their appeals, even against your better judgment. But the most deficient in qualifications for this office are not always those, who,