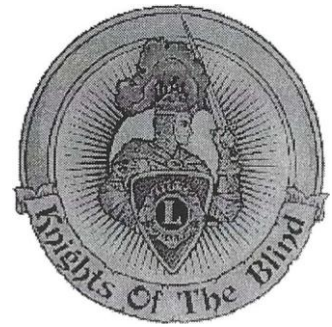


Knights of the Blind, delivered by Helen Keller before the Lions Club at Washington, D.C. (October 19, 1927) Transcription



"Knights of the Blind"

Knights of the Blind, I salute you!

I am delighted to participate with you in the Lions International Week for the Blind. This week for the Blind is an event full of promise for thousands of handicapped people.

There is always a sense of adventure in a new enterprise, and the Lions' way of serving the blind is something new in the world. I think nearly everybody who starts something is a good deal like a traveller in a strange land. We wonder what the next place will be like, and what kind of people we shall meet; and ever there is the unexpected the hope that an event out of the common may happen.

I began by saying that the Lions' attitude towards the blind is something new in the world. What I mean is the Lions are trying to help the blind as they would help one of their own number who had met with a misfortune, and not as people different from everyone else. The usual attitude of the seeing man emphasizes the difference between himself and his blind neighbor. If he would only stop for a moment and try to imagine what it would be like not to see, how he would feel if an accident dashed the light out

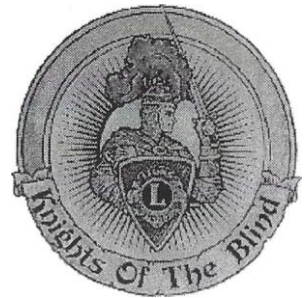
of his eyes! Of course it would not change him in any respect, except to make everything in life harder for him. Mentally, morally, emotionally he is the same man as he was before the accident. He would like to go on with his work if that were possible. He suffers terribly because of his helplessness. He finds himself out of a job, out of luck, dependent on others. Pity does not help much in such a situation, and mere charity is degrading.

What such a man wants more than anything else in the world is a friend who will stand by him through the period of readjustment. He must learn how to live in the dark, how to do things with his hands, how to find his way about, and usually he must learn a new way of earning his daily bread. Because the Lions are active, and many of them young and intelligent, they have grasped the situation, I think. That is why the Lions are going to be a power for good in the work for the sightless.

To do anything well, we must first get a right concept of what we are aiming at. We must think right before we can act right. Keep the blind before your mind's eye as people just like yourselves, and you will avoid the mistakes that are so often made by those who started out to assist the blind. Do not think "the poor things" will all want to read the same books, or engage in the same kind of occupations, or marry the same kind of women. The Lions can build up in the business world an intelligent valuation of the capabilities of

the blind. The employer should not lower his standard of efficiency to meet the requirements of people without sight. If they can do a job at all, they should be held to the prevailing standard. They are just average human beings. If you coddle them, and let them have their own way in everything, they become spoilt, and behave like irresponsible children, just as you would do under similar circumstances.

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Another mistake to be deplored is, many blind youths receive excellent vocational training in the schools for the sightless, and are not able to utilize it. Thousands of dollars are expended on their education. They devote years to the study of music, and when they leave school there is nothing for them to do but go into the semi-charitable workshops for the blind. This is a waste of money, time, capacity. If these young people were assisted until positions could be found for them, life would be different for many of them.

It is hard enough for people with all their faculties to succeed in life alone, and it is almost impossible for the

blind to win their way without the right kind of help. We, blind and seeing we are all parts of a great whole, and we depend one upon another. This thought is at the foundation of our institutions, our civilization and our homes. Beneath the superstructure of our civic life there are thousands of devoted men and women giving of their very best towards this principle of cooperation, and whose joy is service to their fellow creatures. It is in this capacity of up-builders (sic) of a better world that we meet here tonight.

It is important to aid those who have been wounded on the battlefields of life. It is still more important, more intelligent to render life safe and sweeter for coming generations, and that is what prevention of blindness and other physical disasters means. I rejoice that the Lions International has manifested such earnestness in the movement for the conservation of human eyesight. This is the rallying-point of progress. It has taken centuries to bring about the wrong conditions which have resulted in so much suffering. We cannot hope to abolish these conditions in a day; but if we all brace ourselves for a long, grim fight against ignorance and wrong living, we shall not only save men's faculties, we shall also build up a saner, nobler civilization for the future.

Some day you will come together again here in this beautiful capital of our country, and look over the field of your endeavors. If I am alive then, I shall stand before you

with glad confidence and say to you: "Well done, good and faithful Knights of the Blind," and you will say with equal joy, "We have received as richly as we have given." Thus we come to the conclusion of it all, that in every useful work the best gift is not in admiration or endowment, but in the life and character which pours out of its spiritual wealth and power blessing and comfort to others. This is a proud moment for me because I feel that I am one in a valiant crusade of fifty thousand Lions to arouse nation-wide interest in the blind and the best way of helping them to help themselves. Again, I salute you, Knights of the Blind, torch-bearers in darkness.

I thank you.