Social Welfare Library

SOCIAL WORK

BY

EDWARD T. DEVINE

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PREFACE

THIS book is intended for use in the class-room and for the general reader. It contains no sort of direct or indirect propaganda. Some subjects are so technical and so intricate that the author must deliberately choose whether he will address himself to the specialist or to the general reader. In spite of the difficulties encountered by those who study and by those who engage in social work, this is not true of the subject with which this text-book deals. For this reason non-technical, general terms are preferred, when there is a choice, to those which belong to the jargon of a small professional group. At the same time the discussion sometimes oversteps the boundaries of the zones of agreement, and on controversial questions no attempt is made to conceal the author's personal views.

Social work is the serious vocation of a considerable number of men and women, and an avocation of a larger number who make their living otherwise but are desirous of doing what they can by the way to lessen poverty, ignorance, disease, and crime; to make the lives of their less privileged neighbors happier and more satisfying; to secure justice for individuals who

suffer from injustice and hardship; to advance the new social order which some visualize as a decent place for human beings to live in, and some call the Kingdom of Heaven.

The aim of this volume, and of the series in which it appears, is to make clearer the relation between every-day, sometimes discouraging efforts to help others and those larger social movements in industry, education, and other departments of life and thought to which they are essentially related. There is inspiration for the familiar, manageable, even if difficult task in the idea that its full meaning is to be found in the national or world struggle to manage also, in one way or another, the less familiar, more difficult human task of which it is a local and typical instance.

For twenty years or more I had the privilege of serving as executive officer of the New York Charity Organization Society. For a dozen years or more of this time I had also the privilege of giving instruction in Social Economy in Columbia University and serving as a member of the teaching and administrative staff in the New York School of Philanthropy. On three occasions, for periods amounting to nearly two years, I was in Red Cross emergency service. I am free to draw upon these experiences, but have no actual or implied obligation to be the advocate of any policy, the spokesman of any cause, the enemy of any proposal, the representative of any movement. I am wholly untrammelled by any conscious limitations im-

posed by past or prospective institutional connections.

This freedom leads inevitably to a certain revaluation of values. I do not mean to suggest that an academic connection or service as executive of a social agency necessarily restricts freedom of speech or action. Freedom does not consist merely in the absence of limitations—which may be only the result of indifference of the public—but in the possession of opportunities, and in this respect an executive or teaching position may confer a sense of freedom greater than an unattached individual can easily attain. This certainly has been my own experience. Nevertheless there is some satisfaction, and there may be perhaps some advantage to students and the public, in an attempt to look at charity and correction, at social work, public and voluntary, from a detached point of view; with sympathy and understanding, but with a more critical and more inclusive vision.

E. T. D.

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SOCIAL WORK

CHAPTER I

PROGRESS AND SOCIAL WORK

SOCIAL economics may be described as community housekeeping. Social work, to follow the analogy, is its salvage and repair service.

NEEDS; INSTITUTIONS; PROBLEMS; FORCES

Social economics deals with social needs and with the institutions through which they are met: with the need for education, for example, and the schools; with the need for justice and the courts; with the need of children for parental care and the family. Smoothly organized households may seem to the stranger to present no problems of household management. So prosperous and well managed communities may appear deficient in social problems. The social economist, theoretically, would deal equally with the normal operations of social forces working advantageously and equitably and with the pathological conditions which are evidence of friction or failure.

Public and private agencies for the promotion of the common welfare alike fall within his scope. When the mechanism of government adequately and economi-

cally fulfills its function, the social economist would have to concern himself with it only as an instrument in accomplishing some definite result. When government is out of gear or misused for some partisan and anti-social purpose, so that a conscious effort becomes necessary to restore it to its proper uses or to increase its efficiency, a problem in social economics as well as in the science of politics is presented. The reform of the criminal law and of criminal procedure, for example, is of interest to lawyers, to criminologists, and to social economists, each of whom has a point of view different from that of the others, but all of whom must unite to secure the evidence and perfect the plans by which the reform is to be secured.

Seeking first to understand social conditions and to become able to distinguish between such as are favorable to social welfare and progress and such as, on the contrary, are socially destructive, the social economist does not rest content with this analysis, but attempts to estimate also the social forces operating in the community, his purpose being to furnish the information, the principles and the methods, which will enable socially minded, public spirited citizens to work effectively with others of similar aim.

CARE OF INDIVIDUALS: IMPROVEMENT OF CONDITIONS

If from the broader term social economics we now turn to the narrower and more familiar expression social work, and if we think of the practical social

worker rather than the academic social economist, we may at once limit the scope of our study to those aspects of community housekeeping which have to do with getting rid of bad conditions or helping people who cannot help themselves. The broad object of social economics is that each individual shall be able to live a normal life according to the standard of the period and of the community. The narrower object of social work is (1) the care of those who through misfortune or fault are not able under existing conditions to realize a normal life for themselves or who hinder others from realizing it—dependent children, aged poor, sick, cripples, blind, mentally defective, criminals, insane, negligent parents, and so on—and (2) the improvement of conditions which are a menace to individual welfare, which tend to increase the number of dependents and interfere with the progress and best interests of others who may be in no danger of becoming dependent.

Social work may be individual, spontaneous, unorganized, or it may be associated, deliberate, and organized. It may be carried on by the government or by a voluntary society. It may be the outgrowth of some older institution which exists primarily for some other function. It may be inspired by the altruistic or humanitarian motive; it may represent a responsibility accepted by the people in their corporate capacity and detailed to public officials; it may reflect rising standards of taste with reference to what it is decent

to allow in a civilized society, and rising standards of what constitutes justice. It includes everything which society does for the benefit of individuals because they cannot do it for themselves or because they have not yet seen the importance of doing it for themselves, from whatever motive it may be done, by whatever agency or whatever means.

SLAVERY; SERFAGE; GUILDS; HOUSEHOLD INDUSTRY

In modern industrial Europe and America individual well-being is assumed to depend upon individual effort, thrift, and foresight. This assumption and the facts upon which it rests are comparatively new in the world. Under the primitive conditions of savage life, it frequently happens that an entire tribe may be reduced to want merely by the niggardliness of nature. Slavery and serfage had many hardships, but they had the advantage over savagery that they produced the necessities of life more uniformly and that they contained obvious safeguards against extreme neglect of the individual. The slave and the serf as property have a value which the master's self-interest conserves. There may be cruelty, but at least the slave must be kept alive and able bodied if the owner is to derive benefit from the relation. The serf belongs to the master, but, as the Russian serfs were accustomed to say, the land belongs to those who cultivate it and live on it. The feudal manor gave a definite status to the most menial worker, and the merchant and craft guilds of the