THE SOCIAL WELFARE LIBRARY

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

BY

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DEMOCRACY IN EDUCATION

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PREFACE

THIS book is the outgrowth of ten years of work in educational and social lines in Western States, together with six months' experience with the War Camp Community Service in intensive study of the problems of community life and organization under reconstruction conditions. The backgrounds of the discussion may be found in the educational and sociological literature of the recent past and present; in the actual work of social construction and reconstruction now going on in the world; and in the community programs of many individuals, groups, associations, and communities.

It is an effort to approach our social problems from the standpoint of the community as a whole. We are attempting to discover some of the laws, biological, psychological, and social, within which human association goes on and in terms of which more or less satisfactory communities have been built up. We are attempting to develop means by which community thinking of a higher order may be brought to bear on the problems of the community in order that our democracy may have the fullest possible use of all its latent resources of enthusiasm, intelligence, and good will. We are attempting to point out the larger community ways in which volunteer energy and co-operation may be made to bear fruit in programs of health,

happiness, and social understanding. We are attempting to work out natural social motivations that will bring the common masses of people together in firmer bonds of mutual understanding and helpfulness in order that our democracy may become real, substantial, and humane.

The field here outlined is still largely open country. This is not a final guide book, it is a sketch of certain high points from which the whole country has been more or less dimly descried. May it stimulate many others to exploration in the same field!

I am greatly indebted to a host of friends and students for inspiration to undertake this task, and particularly to the members of the "Social Service Publishing Company," for providing the leisure that has made the work possible.

I am indebted to innumerable individuals and groups who have enabled me to come into intimate and concrete contact with the realities of community life in many parts of the country.

I am indebted to Mr. Ray F. Carter and Mr. Tam Deering of Seattle for many helpful suggestions; and to my secretary, Miss Adelaide Morey, for continuous helpfulness in the selection of materials and for stimulating criticism.

My thanks are also due to the editor of the series, Dr. Devine, and to Miss Lilian Brandt and Mr. H. S. Braucher, for illuminating criticisms upon the completed manuscript.

J. K. H.

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

DURING the past ten years social workers have been at school in technique. Processes of diagnosis and of specialized treatment have been persistently pressed upon their attention. Such broad facts of our common economic life as had been effectively presented in Professor Patten's New Basis of Civilization have been allowed to sink into a secondary place, when not altogether ignored. The training schools for social workers have not unnaturally emphasized the technical aspects of investigation and treatment; and special periodicals devoted to one or another department of social practice have further favored this tendency.

Within limits this is a necessary and beneficial development. Knowledge of procedure which has proved to be successful, mastery of technique, critical analysis of experience, familiarity with case records, are essential in social work as in every vocation. The danger is that we may become so absorbed in the particular manner in which a group of chosen individuals are to be treated—in their reactions, favorable and unfavorable—as to lose altogether the larger view of the conditions under which they live, the social forces which are operating upon them independently of our intervention, the motives which do in reality determine their general course of action. Similar over-specialization may occur in those forms of social

work which are concerned with group interests or the common welfare as distinct from family case work. Community organization, for example, may develop a technique in which selected problems are followed to their most intricate ramifications in calm disregard of entire lack of interest in those problems by any existing community of human beings.

In either case this tendency may be fostered by excessive sensitiveness to the good opinion of those individuals who at the time are regarded as authorities in the field in question. An actual dread of general popularity, coupled with an intense desire for the approval of one or more "experts," a mutual admiration guild based on proficiency in a special form of service, an intellectual aristocracy which substitutes inner satisfaction for objective tests of social utility, are the logical outcome of an over-elaboration of "technique," when not controlled by the observations and criticisms of economists, by the dicta of common sense, by the facts of our common social life as plain people see and interpret them.

A social agency created, let us say, to care for neglected children, or to furnish facilities for wholesome recreation, has constantly to ask, not only, What are the most approved methods of child care? What rare and interesting obstacle has a playground leader uncovered? but also, Are children on the whole less neglected as a result of the activities of the agency? Is the leisure time of the community more profitably

employed, and by what test of profit? Are the problems on which attention is so minutely concentrated the fundamental, the urgently pressing ones? Case records are useful for instruction, but they may contain little information about the deeper needs even of those with whom they deal, and none at all about the needs of their neighbors.

The Social Welfare Library, of which this is the initial volume, will attempt to contribute to the interests of those who are engaged in what is broadly called "social work," including not only that directed toward the relief and rehabilitation of individuals and families but that which is undertaken for the community as a whole. The Editor's desire is that the studies which appear in this Library shall do something to supply the deficiency to which attention has been called; that they shall contribute to social thinking rather than to technique, while not undervaluing the latter; that they shall add to the general knowledge of the social conditions in the midst of which social work is done rather than re-analyze processes already sufficiently established; that they shall aid in a human appreciation of the difficulties caused by sickness, poverty, and maladjustment, rather than make converts to some one way of meeting these difficulties.

With this aim in view, the present discussion of community organization by Professor Hart is confidently recommended to the favorable attention of all

social workers and of the general public. It is not propaganda, open or covert. It is not designed to inflame the emotions over some one aspect of the problem. It is a thoughtful and sincere presentation of the larger problem itself—a demonstration of the importance of a sense of community, a sympathetic examination of the current plans for deepening and giving expression to that sense, a suggestion as to how current experience and thinking may be audited and applied in a democratic spirit. It is written for those who are directly engaged in community service in any form, and for the larger number who have become uneasy over the absence of community spirit and who know that without it all devices for promoting the common welfare are worse than useless.

EDWARD T. DEVINE.

August 3, 1920.

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUNDS

HUMAN beings are not separate and independent grains in the midst of drifting social sands. They are complex centers of instincts, impulses, appetites and desires, which impel to all sorts of entangling contacts. They are not simple and distinct atoms in the neighborhood of other simple and distinct atoms, but centers of complicated and ever-changing (not always growing) relationships. The "individual" as such does not exist. We live and move and have our actual being, whether we will or no, in the mazes of social contacts and relationships with our fellows.

Human beings are, therefore, centers of a variety of needs. Five of these may be considered major, and out of these have grown our five major social institutions. First, as infants and children, we need nurture and care, and this need has given rise to the institution of the family. Second, as centers of ideal aspirations and unsatisfied longings, we need some broad outlook upon the meanings of life and destiny, and this has given rise to the institutions of religion. Third, we need provision for our physical wants and the

chance to impress ourselves upon the world of things in constructive fashion, and this has given rise to the institutions of industry. Fourth, we need the opportunity of sharing and enjoying, in some more or less just fashion, the various goods of the world, and since this calls for order and restraint it has given rise to the institution of the state. And, finally, we need to know, and to extend our capacity to know, continuously, and this has given rise to the institution of the school. (Of course we have many minor needs which have given rise to many sorts of minor instrumentalities besides.)

But specialized institutions, although they have developed out of common human needs, divide the community among themselves, each attempting to satisfy the needs of individuals and the community in its own particularized way. The great modern city community is not an undifferentiated family or industry or government or religion or school. These distinctive institutions tend to divide the community. They develop their own particular partisanships and champions; and they compete more or less openly for the attention and loyalties of the people. The result is that individuals live by fragments and human life becomes a sort of mosaic patchwork instead of a unified experience. More than this: our large cities tend to break up into segregated districts—industrial quarters, residential sections, church neighborhoods, etc. The government is centralized at the city hall and police station. And education is shut up from the world inside school

buildings whose windows are so high that the children cannot see what is going on out in the city.

Children are born into the complications of this social world, this world wrought of many aspiring —sometimes co-operative, often antagonistic—fragments. Some of these fragments are native to the community soil, the products of long development. Some of them are of later growth, the contributions of immigrant peoples or other innovating influences.

Some of these children early lose themselves or are lost in one of these struggling groups, and grow up without ever making institutional contacts of a wider and more effective sort. They never learn any real sort of partisanship, except perhaps a sort of primitive, wolfish following of the clan. They never become aware that there is anything ideal in the world that is big enough to be worth fighting for. They fall into a groove of the city's life and spend their years irresponsibly. They never achieve a share in the complex life that goes on all about them. They are not criminals; they are simply the city's ignorant undertow.

Others, in large numbers, grow up to become completely institutionalized in the conventional industrial, political, social, and religious fashions, and to spend their lives in a round of group relationships, privileges, and in a narrow way, responsibilities. These make up the great bulk of the city's population—respectable, unimaginative people with no large interest in anything save the welfare of the group with which their own welfare is identified.

A very few, under contemporary conditions, having keen imaginations and vigorous sympathies, grow up through all levels of institutional relationships and achieve a more or less vivid and true conception of the physical and human conditions in the midst of which they live. These few grasp something of their own intimate relationship to these conditions; they see something of the significance of their local groups to the larger life of the nation; and they may even be able to envisage the nation as a member of an eventual world-league of communities. Many are called to this vision, but few there be that find it.

Now the existence of these many fragmentary elements, with their many varying objections and interests, and their many narrow and often exclusive loyalties, leaves many crevices in the life of the city into which unattached individuals may easily fall, or through which they may drop out of sight. Some of these crevices are disease, crime, poverty, isolation, defeated hopes, and the like. The number of those who do fall into them is socially appalling.

How can we account for this unsatisfying character of community life, if institutions were developed to serve human needs? And how explain this carelessness of individuals and groups, if the individual is really a center of social relationships? The answer is found in the story of the development of our communities.

The colonists who poured from the Atlantic seaboard into the wilderness of the West, after the

so-called "French and Indian War," and especially after the Revolutionary War, carried with them an intense pride in their individual independence and self-sufficiency—a pride which was the lineal descendant of the "separatist" and "non-conformist" convictions of their European forbears. They carried their individualistic tendencies often to the extreme; they wanted neighbors, but they did not want their neighbors to be too near. The story of the frontiersman who "had to move on" when he heard that a neighbor had settled five miles down the trail illustrates the point.

This pioneering life selected these qualities of individualistic self-sufficiency and wrought them into the blood of succeeding generations and into the doctrines and traditions of the nation; until the picture that we have of the early pioneer is of one standing on his own farm and saying to all comers: "This is a free country. This is my farm, and I can do as I please with my property. I can run my business as I please!" And because he stood on his own rights and met his problems in his own independent way, the continent was rapidly conquered and developed.

But recent decades have seen multitudes of people trained in this pioneering way moving into the cities, where they must live in close touch with one another. Under these city conditions some of the old pioneering lessons must be unlearned. In the farm days if the farmer wanted to keep a pig in his back yard, or even in the "parlor," that was his own business—his and the pig's. His neighbors were so far away that, though

they might talk, they had no real ground on which to object, even had they been inclined to interfere. But if as a city resident, cherishing his old pioneer customs, he wants to keep a pig in his back yard, his neighbor claims the right to have something to say about the matter. The doctrine, "this is my own property and I can do as I please with it" narrows down until it disappears, at least in certain directions. That which was good old American doctrine in the pioneer days on the farm turns out to be no longer good doctrine in the city. Health authorities, police authorities, moral squads, and many other sorts of "impertinent interferers" insist on calling around to help the independent pioneer adjust his old habits to the new conditions of city life.

In fact, just as the Anglo-Saxon pioneer in America showed himself to be the true descendant of the older European pioneers not by doing the things he had previously done in Europe, but by doing the things that needed to be done under the changed conditions of living in the wilderness, so the modern city dweller will show himself to be the true descendant of the American pioneers by doing what needs to be done in the city. And the thing that needs to be done is not to stand on the inviolability of traditional individual rights, but so to readjust habit and custom as to make possible a good life for all in the city. But this is a hard lesson, and few there be that learn it.

There is another phase of historical development which demands a word. The life of the race began in