

THE SCIENCE OF PUBLIC WELFARE

BY
ROBERT W. KELSO



NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

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May, 1928

PRINTED IN THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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PREFACE

This book undertakes to assemble, to analyze and to appraise the knowledge we now have regarding the broad question of the public welfare. Its purpose is to place before the teacher a convenient treatise in the teaching of social practice and the approach to the social sciences, and to afford the general reader a convenient guide to the rationale of modern public welfare and social work. It attempts to present a reasoned program of governmental action in furtherance of the public welfare. It aims to add one more contribution to that solid factual basis now slowly building beneath the teaching of social science.

The subject is presented from the point of view, not of the student of social theory, but rather from that of the worker in the field of public welfare. Principles and standards of action are presented as a challenge to thought. These standards the author believes to be sound. He will have accomplished high purpose if he can bring the wary and inquiring student either to agree with them or to improve upon them.

Although the public welfare is the concern of all social service undertakings, whether public or voluntary, this text is limited primarily to governmental functioning. Only in the chapter upon the relationship between public and private agencies is the voluntary society, as such, given more than passing consideration. But the basic standards of action are the same whatever be the auspices of the enterprise. Hence the reader who considers such chapters as those setting forth the principles of public relief or child care will find them equally applicable to the voluntary board of managers.

While the title does not limit consideration strictly to the United States, the topic is dealt with mainly from that point of view. It is only in the historical development of present-day practices that the experience of other countries has been offered.

The method of developing the subject is to present first the

philosophy of public welfare with a reasoned definition of just what we are to understand by that term throughout the treatise. This is followed by the broad historical background and the evolution of modern public welfare practice. What were the determining influences in that historical background? Four aspects are submitted, namely: church benevolences and public poor relief in Old England; the age of machinery and its effect upon social relations; changes in the concept of law and government; and the upgrowth of the science of psychology, which means in effect the discovery of the individual. It has been deemed particularly useful to such a treatise to present special chapters upon the law of charitable trusts; the charity franchise in law and practice; and the relationship between public and private agencies in public welfare service.

This evolution of the present state of things is followed by a series of chapters on the content of modern public welfare practice. Modern methods of administrative organization; poor relief; the care and treatment of law breakers; the insane; the feeble-minded; the care of dependent and neglected children; juvenile delinquency; and the public health—all represent convenient headings about which to group the program of the present day. The standards in each main sector of the field are set out separately for greater convenience of both student and teacher.

Although the book is designed for use in teaching, it is offered also to social workers, the charity director, and the interested citizen, as a helpful statement, within one set of covers, of the difficult riddle of community action in meeting and coping with specific phases of social problems.

R. W. K.

BOSTON, 1927.

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**THE SCIENCE OF
PUBLIC WELFARE**

CHAPTER I

PUBLIC WELFARE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Benjamin Kidd, writing in the early nineties, begins his noted thesis on *Social Evolution* with the remark that "despite the great advances which science has made during the past century in almost every other direction, there is, it must be confessed, no science of human society properly so called."¹ In the four decades that have elapsed since Kidd, the discoveries and the inventions of science have multiplied with bewildering speed. We have added another dimension to human life since that recent day; yet this comment upon the science of human society still holds true to a large degree.

It is not that science has been laggard, nor yet that men have failed to observe keenly the phenomena of human contacts, for the story of science has been the story of unparalleled development and adaptation, and the record of the social sciences during the last half century has been remarkable. Sociology, economics, history, political science, social psychology, anthropology, and other branches of knowledge have developed until their story gives promise of being the distinguishing feature of American life. In the end they may set up that better coördinated science of society of which man stands so greatly in need.

A SCIENCE OF PUBLIC WELFARE STILL LACKING—The present lack of a science of public welfare follows naturally upon the fact that "human society" embraces well nigh the totality of man's experience; therefore a science of social relationship must rest upon knowledge the most general and far-reaching and upon deductions the most profound. The science of public welfare, unless it be restricted arbitrarily for purposes of analysis and exposition, must turn out therefore to be the most general of all those systems of knowledge which we

¹ Kidd, Benjamin. *Social Evolution*.

call the sciences and in which for convenience we group all knowledge.

Social Service as the term is understood to-day sounds more in art than in science. It emphasizes the application of rule and practice. It presupposes the correctness of its rules and the sufficiency of that body of knowledge upon which they are based. Its greatest defect lies in its feverish attempt to execute rules or laws of public welfare the validity of which is too readily assumed and the reasoning of which is too dimly seen. It is true that sociology is seeking constantly to evolve a philosophy of society, and that psychology and psychiatry are groping for some solution of the riddle of personality; but down to the present, man and the secret of man remain as remote and far from attainment, yet alluring as the white tip of Tacoma. We are adding to our knowledge every day but it is early, from such data as we have at hand, to deduce the basic laws of human society and to seek to hypothecate thereon a philosophy of the public welfare. We can at best review our knowledge and verify the deductions already made therefrom.

LACK OF SCIENTIFIC ATTITUDE IN SOCIAL WORK—A serious handicap to progress toward a science of public welfare is the lack of training and insight,—the almost universal absence of a scientific point of view among the workers in this new profession of social service. Devotion to a cause and constancy to an ideal may uphold the standard of quality to a degree, and will always produce noteworthy exceptions; but in the long run, in this necessitous world, economic pressure will force the lowest-paid enterprises to accept the poorest assistance. Hence it is that the pulpit is filled with doleful dullness, and social work as a life calling contains a high proportion who have failed in the competitive world of business and the other professions or are too timid and self-distrustful to venture beyond an activity where the general public is indifferent and where no identified taskmaster, risking his personal capital, stands forward with the lash. Of the personnel of democratic government as thus far practiced in America it is not too severe to say that it is organized mediocrity, producing a statesman

now and then, affording a steady crop of politicians and incompetents always.

But new professions grow slowly. It is but yesterday that surgery was a trade. Let the world but hold out the opportunity and the individual of caliber will arise to take it. In the literature of sociology, each year brings less from the pen of the paraphrastic candidate for the Ph.D. and more from the well grounded investigator in the human laboratory. The new profession of social work is seeking a scientific basis and with commendable enterprise is fast approaching that accomplishment.

The attempt will be made in this work to develop in as brief space as practicable the historical thread of development in our conception of public well-being and in our methods of fostering those values and combating those destructive forces which we find in our social life. Some review will be offered of those rules and precepts of social life which have come now to be accepted and an account given of the more important methods and processes which we have adopted in their applications.

But first what do we mean by a science? What do we mean by "public welfare"? And in what manner if any must these terms be limited for purposes of this analysis?

SCIENCE—A science is a body of knowledge. It may relate to any subject matter or phenomenon whatsoever, as for instance the science of radio-activity; of government; of human belief in the supernatural. But in order that it may claim the dignity of the name, it must be of such magnitude that a process of reasoning is able to deduce rules from it. A science in its common acceptance then is an important body of knowledge concerning some phenomenon of nature or of human experience, together with the reasoned deductions therefrom.

To borrow a simile from the loom, science represents the woof or binding cross thread of our study. Public welfare is our warp. It is made up of the running threads—the great substance of our topic—gathered together into one texture by those conclusions which we call our science. And because it is our subject matter we find it hard to define. Indeed persistent search in the treatises upon human relations fails to reveal a