THE FIELD OF SOCIAL WORK

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by

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To
HARMON CALDWELL

Preface

IN OFFERING this volume, the intention is to present the substance of social work philosophy and practice in understandable, non-technical language. A number of laymen can state succinctly what some aspect of social work *is*. For instance, former Governor Alfred E. Smith recently remarked that social case work meant helping one's neighbor to get on his feet and stay there with confidence and self-respect. To describe the *how* and the *why* is a far more difficult assignment, demanding an analysis of the process of how help is offered and how it is used, as well as why it is done in a particular way. The aim throughout these pages has been to trace that process of offering and using help and at the same time to hold to a minimum the technical language of social work.

At least four classes of readers have been kept in mind: first, the college student who is looking toward social work as a career and wondering what substance there is to it; second, the beginning worker, who has been drawn by thousands into the public welfare field within the last decade and who wants and needs some perspective on the larger area of social work; third, the lay person who wants to know why he should be called upon to support social work as an established institution; fourth, the board member who is interested in knowing more of the particular branch of social work with which he is associated and how it fits into the total picture of social effort to help people in difficulty. It is not inconceivable that workers in allied fields and students in schools of social work may find it of value as well.

Social work as a profession is young in years but old in experience. Edward T. Devine can write within his own lifetime of the days *When Social Work Was Young*. Within one census period the practitioners have more than doubled or trebled (depending upon what estimates one accepts) from an approximate

30,000 in 1930 to an estimated 75,000 to 100,000 in 1940. The depression era through which we have just passed has increased the multiplicity and complexity of our social problems, and laid upon the profession of social work the necessity to clarify its helping role in the contemporary scene. To perform that helping function requires a professional skill based upon training, discipline, unsparing effort, and genuine conviction of the worthwhileness of the task. Since social work is a helping profession, it makes those demands upon its workers, for the quality of its service depends upon the quality of its personnel.

Not the least of the profession's attributes is its passion for self-study. An examination of the many papers read at conferences and the wealth of publications reveals an extraordinary absorption in the processes of social work. This volume undertakes to treat of these processes, and to do so largely through the medium of the agencies set up to provide certain services. Each chapter begins with a short historical account of the development of the work, proceeds to an analysis of philosophy and practice, and concludes with a discussion of job requirements, professional associations and training, and trends. As a further step toward making the chapter content as understandable as possible, an illustration drawn from actual working experience is presented and interpreted. The author of each selection of case material is an active practitioner in the field and brings to these pages a balance of theory and practice. The case material is presented as one instance of helpful practice, not necessarily as a model.

To a number of people there may seem to be omissions of certain areas in the field of social work, some of them quite important. No doubt this is true, depending upon one's approach. A selection has had to be made at the expense of some subjects, but this was preferred to making the volume too all-inclusive. It is hoped that the *Social Work Year Book* will serve for ultimate reference on the many areas and myriad aspects of social work. Disproportionate space devoted to social case work is not to be taken as indicating any relative priority. It so happens that social case work was the first to develop its process, that its literature is more extensive and explicit, and that it occupies a larger number of workers. The three processes discussed—case work, group work, and community organization—

are considered the basic processes of social work, each with its valid contributions.

A host of persons have been helpful in the preparation of this volume. To all of them I wish to express my sincerest appreciation. In addition to each contributor who has made useful comments on respective chapters, I would like to thank the following who have read and criticized chapters in manuscript: Betsey Libbey, Maurine Boie La Barre, Margaret Huntley, Harriett G. Anthony, Clinton W. Areson, Alice Scott Nutt, C. Wilson Anderson, Ida M. Cannon, Ruth Ellen Lindenberg, M. Ruth Butler, Dorothea Gilbert, Ruth Tartakoff, and Everett Du Vall. To Mrs. Rosa Wessel, who read the entire case work section and made invaluable suggestions, I am deeply grateful. Richmond Page and Margaret H. Beale were most generous in making available the resources of the Library of the Pennsylvania School of Social Work.

Philomene McMahon and Charlie Holbrook worked faithfully and well through endless pages and countless hours of typing and have my earnest thanks many times over. To my wife, Kathleen Boles, I owe, as always, much of my inspiration, and express publicly, for once, my appreciation of her constant encouragement as well as of her forbearance during the many days this work has been in travail.

A. E. F.

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Homewood, Alabama.

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CHAPTER I

The Development of Social Work

The Place of Social Work in Modern Society

A CIVILIZATION that spends billions of dollars for what is generally termed welfare purposes affecting the lives of millions of people must consider such an activity, to put it temperately, important. There is room for considerable difference of opinion as to how desirable or effective such activity may be, but the incontrovertible fact still persists that it meets basic needs which otherwise seem to be unmet. There may be disagreement as to what should be done, how much should be spent to do it, and who should perform the service, but there is agreement that in a society as complex as ours some form of social work is essential.

A glance at our activities and interests will give support to this premise. Our economy is primarily an industrial and commercial one, and only secondarily agricultural. Within the framework of such an economy there are insufficiencies everywhere. In a deficit economy these would arouse no concern, or at best they would point out the need for a more adequate productive system, but in an economy of abundance these same insufficiencies indicate a faulty functioning of the system. When the industrial and commercial machine slows down or breaks down, human needs must be met. Industry and commerce assume very little responsibility for the fate of ten or fifteen million workers and their dependents, or for the effect on people of inadequate wages, or concern for the cost in human values. As for the disabled and the aged, one feels that until recent times very little effort had been made to accept any share of the calamity entailed. Looking to our farms we find the situation intensified: inadequacy of income, unproductiveness of land,

lack of demand for products of the land, and the countryman as badly off as his city brother.

The community reflects all of this: poor housing, poor health, lack of recreation facilities, low tone in community spirit. Within the community children escape from the schools because no one has seen the need to individualize the child within a massed system. In the family, so strategically crucial in the formation of attitudes and patterns of behavior, we find strife, disharmony, frustration and despair. In hospitals we find the demented, in institutions the feeble-minded, in prisons the desperate and the unfortunate. What of the aged, the dependent child, the blind, and the crippled?

These deficiencies are not without their antecedent causes nor are they removed from our industrial and commercial development of the last three hundred years. They seem part and parcel of a highly competitive system that places a huge premium on success and that prospered under an economic and social philosophy of "leave me alone and I'll leave you alone." Some may be so irreverent as to translate this into "every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost." At any rate there developed—perhaps inevitably—within such a system a profession which undertook to provide a "connection," as it were, in the form of services, tangible and intangible, which would make possible a more effective utilization of human potentialities. Indeed, one might declare that the purpose of this developing profession of social work was to effect such an organization of potentials within the community and the individual so that those without resources or with limited resources, as well as those ineffectively using what resources they have, might be helped to achieve a more adequate way of life.

Looking at the role which this profession occupies in contemporary society, we must clearly understand that its function is not to guarantee happiness to any individual or community. Rather, it works toward two ends: first, the creation of those conditions which help to make a more satisfying way of life possible, and, second, the development within the individual (and the community as well) of capacities to live that life more adequately, even creatively. No individual, no community is required to surrender a present way of life, nor give up independence, nor subscribe to a philosophy alien to his or its present

convictions. Social work as a profession seeks to offer a service to the individual and to the community that may be accepted or rejected upon the basis of the needs that it meets or fails to meet.

If doubt still remains the evidence afforded by the *Social Work Year Book* of 1941 should serve as convincing proof of the validity of social work philosophy and of the utility of social work in our world of today. An examination of the 83 topics presented in that volume indicates the range of interests of social work and the many fronts on which it touches as well as the many areas into which it penetrates. By choosing one subject to a letter a sample list would include the following: adult education, birth control, community organization for social work, disaster relief, employment services, family social work, housing and city planning, international social work, juvenile and domestic relations courts, labor relations, mental hygiene, Negroes, old age and survivors' insurance, public health nursing, rural social programs, social and health work in the schools, trade unionism in social work, unemployment compensation, vocational rehabilitation, work relief, youth programs.

In the pages that follow the same attempt will be made to present the working divisions within the larger field of social work. Specifically these will be: family services; children's services including institutions, child placing; child guidance; school counseling; the juvenile court; the correctional services of the prison, probation and parole; medical social work; public welfare and public assistance; social group work; community organization. Before proceeding to such an account we must first examine the development of social work to its present status.

Origin and Development

An analysis of human behavior and attitudes strengthens the conviction that man's living together is characterized by a spirit of mutual aid as well as by a spirit of aggression and possession. Were it otherwise it is doubtful that human societies would ever have taken their present form. It is not enough to show the acquisitive, competitive aspects of the human pattern without balancing over against it the helpful and cooperative. Long before the Russian, Kropotkin, elaborated the thesis of mutual

aid, there was abundant evidence that man had climbed the upward way by principles other than the Darwinian survival of the fittest. No group of men could ever be held together to form the family, the tribe, the state or the modern society without mutual assistance. It is but laboring an obvious point to dwell on this theme.

Long before the Biblical injunction of alms and succor for the needy, primitive peoples had expressed their generous impulses. What the teachings of organized religion did was to institutionalize and give supernatural sanction to a sentiment already expressed in the mores of the people, which in turn drew strength from man's elemental nature. The form that such expression took may have been the contribution of a particular people or of a particular age but what underlay the form, i.e., the content, derived from the essential nature of the human animal whom we call man.

Long before the religion of the Jews and the Christians, expressions of benevolence had found their way into the life and literature of older and earlier peoples. Judaism, and later Christianity, made mutual aid an article of faith. For nearly twenty centuries our expressions of fellow feeling took their tone within the bounds of Christian teachings. Such expressions may have been unregulated between man and man except as enjoined by the teachings of the Church, or on the other hand they may have been regulated within the formal conventions of that same Church. Monastic orders gave food, clothing, shelter and relief to the poor. No state stepped in to define these relations, although a feudalistic society had long since been molded in the pattern of a mutual dependency. In a static world, in a world that looked not to this one for solace and comfort but to the world beyond, these relations remained fixed.

Once the ferment of ideas which we called the Scientific Revolution and the Renaissance had set in, enlarging man's mental horizon and eventually his physical world, these relations of man and the Church, of lord and serf no longer prevailed. The *status quo* had changed and in its place stood the emerging state. It is one of these states, the English, whose history of public aid we shall trace as a prelude to the experience in America and in our own day.

As is so common in dealing with unpleasant situations, the

answer given to the increasing problem of distress was repression and still more repression. The breakup of feudalism, on the Continent and in England, had cut loose from their dependence thousands upon thousands of workers who wandered about aimlessly and in bewilderment in search of employment and a place to take root. The dissolution of the monasteries made apparent a tremendous amount of poverty and cast upon the wayside in open view multitudes of the poor who had heretofore found some relief, if not within the bosom of the Church at least within its walls. England met this evident widespread misery by enacting laws to repress begging. In 1536 Parliament passed a law decreeing that alms were to be collected by the churches each Sunday and that local authorities were to help to relieve the impotent and sick poor. Begging and beggars were to be discouraged; valiant beggars were to be returned to their own settlements, hastened on the way if need be by flogging and even mutilation. To loiter once might cost an ear, to loiter twice earned for the beggar hanging and burial in a pauper's grave. No triflers were these early English. Attempts were made to stop such generous impulses as the giving of individual alms, by assessing a fine tenfold that of the amount given.

Harsh though this system may have been it signalized the transition of poor relief from an unregulated dispensing of aid by the Church to the beginnings of regulation by the state. Bread and circuses may have been Rome's answer centuries ago; England's under Henry VIII in the sixteenth century was to secure a far more rigorous control. The story of poor relief in England during the ensuing four centuries is an elaboration of these early principles: repression, local responsibility, and work relief.

It was not long before it was generally recognized that a system of voluntary collection under voluntary agents furnished neither the necessary funds nor the essential stability of personnel to ensure even a modicum of relief. By 1572 overseers of the poor were appointed as civil officers to direct the expenditure of tax funds levied upon the local community for the purpose of relieving the poor. Within four years the justices of each county were empowered to secure by purchase or lease the buildings to be used as houses of correction. Here materials for work were to be provided for the unemployed to the end

that work habits might be instilled, and relief be administered on a *quid pro quo* basis. Thus early England established the principles of work relief which found their fullest expression in the famous—or infamous—workhouse test.

The Elizabethan Poor Law

It was during the latter days of the reign of Queen Elizabeth that the confused jumble of vagrancy and poverty laws came to be welded into the organic unity that we have since called the Elizabethan Poor Law. It is the 1601 revision of the act passed in 1598 which brought order out of chaos and established the basis of poor relief in England, and even America, for over two hundred years. The act of 1601, often referred to as 43 Elizabeth, established three categories of relief recipients: the able-bodied poor, the impotent poor (unemployables), and dependent children. For the able-bodied poor employment was to be provided under pain of a session in jail or in the stocks for refusal to work. The almshouse was to be the sanctuary of the second group, the unemployables; while children who could not be supported by their parents or grandparents were to be apprenticed, the boys until they were twenty-four years old and the girls until they were twenty-one or married. Marriage then, as sometimes now, was one way out. For the execution of these legal provisions a tax was to be levied in the parish upon lands, houses, and tithes, which was supplemented by private charitable bequests of land or money, and by the use of fines for the violation of certain laws.

Though there were some who regarded this law as the model for all time, it soon yielded to an addition here, a repair there, an alteration in some other place. Indeed, such is the fate of every man-made law, as reflected in the penetrating description of our own Social Security Act of 1935 as "the *first* social security law." Inevitably (and this all scunds modern) the poor moved from one place to another, from parishes where relief was lean to parishes where, if relief was not ample, at least it was comfortable. Several hundred years before, Parliament had ordered laborers to stay in their own parishes; but so acute had the condition of laborers become that no man would root himself to a spot where he was doomed to slow starvation. By the