

THE WORKER:
Purpose and Preparation

*AN ADDRESS to the 31st National Conference
of Charities and Correction by the President*
JEFFREY R. BRACKETT, Ph.D.

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TO THE

Thirty-first National Conference of
Charities and Correction

BY THE PRESIDENT

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methods. In so doing, we do well; for laws and by-laws, forms and methods are the guns and ammunition for our use. We would have the best make of them. But the personal element is, after all, the supreme element. Improvement in the guns, powder and shot depend on it. The great need is more men and women who, in the ever-varying conditions, in the limitations and possibilities about us, will quickest know best how to get things in the right perspective, to use the opportunities of the day.

Since the International Congress in Chicago, over ten years ago, earnest pleas have now and then been made for a wider and fuller recognition of the profession of social workers. We talk of trained workers. We are quite accustomed to hearing charity spoken of as scientific. Now what is really meant, or ought to be meant by scientific charity or correction, by a trained worker? What are the chief marks of one who truly follows this social work as a profession?

Let us first, to begin a little further back, see what a science is and what following a profession is in other fields of human interest, as, for example, in the two well recognized professions, the practice of the sciences of law and medicine. Ask a student of law what that science is, and how exact it is, and he will tell us that there is a large body of knowledge, but that it is ever developing, as everything living changes; that practice tends to application of fundamental principles in such ways as best to reach what seems to be justice and good policy in the here and now. Again, the thoughtful physician will tell us that there is a body of knowledge for the practice of medicine; that, especially in the prevention of ills, it is largely the result of careful research in the past few years; that principles are to be followed, but principles as well as methods will keep on changing as research points the way. Then look for ourselves at successful practitioners of law and medicine and we see how much is due, beside special knowledge, to such personal qualities as powers of adaptability, resourcefulness, even cheerfulness, qualities partly inherent but partly to be acquired through sound instruction and wise leadership. In brief, a science and the practice of it mean a constant getting and using of knowledge by intelligence and common-sense.

Now we will not stop a moment to consider whether, in the field of charity, correction and kindred social work, the body of

knowledge now available for guidance of practice is large enough to be called a science, or the methods of application may be an art. Enough to know, beyond a doubt, that there is a considerable body of knowledge; that it has been made available by intelligent research and common-sense; that it is, in the same way, to be winnowed out and added to.

As to general principles, a number of them are already recognized by the thoughtful, as underlying all good social work. Let us look at a few of them. One is, that careful inquiry is the basis of constructive effort. This means, with needy individuals, no mere asking a few questions to find out "worthiness," but trying to find out their needs behind their wishes, in order to remove the needs. It means, equally, that a new society or agency should not be started because benevolent persons elsewhere have started one, without learning in how far the local conditions call for one, and for what kind of one. It means, throughout, that we should try to foresee the ultimate effects of actions upon individuals and the community, that we should look at the things which are not first seen. Another principle is that we should aim not to work for persons as much as to work *with* them. Good illustrations of this are all about us, if we will but see them. Boys' clubs will teach it. In the warfare against preventable diseases, our inspectors, doctors and nurses can do much by advice and direction, but the cure comes largely as the patients respond and reach for it. In schemes for industrial betterment, success has depended much on the extent to which the employees are themselves a responsible part of the management of that which is largely for their own welfare. In correction, our greatest advances are from the application of this same principle. McConochie used it in transforming the convict settlements on Norfolk Island from "a hell on earth" to a well-ordered community. Our true reformatory methods rest on it. Well has it been expressed in the simple saying that the prisoner holds the key to his own cell, that we are to show him how to use it in the lock. Close to this great principle is another, that individuals in need should receive individual treatment. Men cannot generally be educated, that is, led out of certain thoughts and ways to better ones, in wholesale fashion, by any mechanism. This is as true in charity and correction as it is in pedagogy, the science of teaching youth. In charity, the best achievements are the work of the true friendly

visitor. The flower of correction is probation, the study of one's needs by a wiser and stronger one, the influence of one individual upon another, to open up all the chances that there are for good. One more principle, for illustration, a principle which comes from the very heart of our work, the duty of making relief adequate. That means that we should work on some plan, and see it through, to the accomplishment of an end. The ill in body and the ill in mind are not to be turned out, from protection, skilled care and adequate food, into the stress of life, because of crowded wards or lack of funds, just when they are beginning only to get strength to battle with its stress. With some offenders there is an after-care no less important than care within walls. It was refreshing, the other day, at the National Conference of Jewish Workers in Charity and Correction, to hear discussed, at a meeting held in an institution for children, this vital question: "What becomes of our wards?" These are examples of principles on which good methods may be built. Such principles are not topics for chance talks, to be kept in pigeon-holes. They are for daily work.

If we are thus reading history aright, then the points which I would score are these. First, our professional worker is he who is always trying to do just what the true practitioner in law and medicine is trying to do — to make a growing body of knowledge a part of his equipment, to apply the teachings of experience to current problems, to study causes and results, and to turn the knowledge of the few into the valued possession of the many. Second, the duty rests on all of us, who venture to speak in the name of charity and correction, not only to choose our workers wisely, but to see that every opportunity is given them to equip themselves well, to keep in touch with the best, to do their daily work thoughtfully, healthfully, happily. For, thirdly, the aim of charity, correction and such social work is to be nothing short of the best efforts to cure and prevent grave human ills.

That these propositions are true, experience seems to give abundant proofs. One bit of history I venture to recall to you, because it bears so directly and diversely on our subject, and because its chief lesson, as some of us see it, has not been sufficiently read. In England, in the administration of public aid for relief of the needy, a crucial point seemed to be reached early in the last century. The proportion, to the population, of per-

sons receiving material relief in their homes was very large. This was believed to be chiefly due to the ease with which a living could be had from public-aid. Independence of the working people seemed to be going. Then, in the thirties, when reform was in the air, the famous Poor Law Commission, in order to make public-aid unattractive, laid down the rather famous dictum that the provision of relief for a needy family by public authority should be less than the standard of living of the lower grades of labor. Now that policy was a strong medicine administered to get rid quickly of an ill condition of much of the public mind. But it was, after all, a mechanical treatment — just as truly as the treatment of homeless men in most casual wards has been mechanical. It may have been useful, wise for the time, but it cannot, in the end, be squared with the general principle of individual treatment. The lesson from the English Poor Law of that time which is going to last, is the weakness if not the failure which comes from leaving the administration of charity and correction to persons, however well meaning, who give not one-tenth of their time and thought to it, who give most of their time, thought and interest to other things. A few men, then, such as the secretary of the Poor Law Commission, whose heart and head were given to the matter, saw that fox-hunting squires and even squires who did not hunt, that busy business men and ministers might do many a kind deed by personal service, might be helpful in administration of good works, but that such persons, especially those living in isolated places, were not likely of themselves to bring in and keep up the most enlightened methods of care of dependents, for the prevention of social ills. Out of that Poor Law Commission has grown the Local Government Board of England, whose rules and suggestions go to the local authorities throughout the land, followed up by inspectors and visitors who know what good standards are. That same lesson of the need of expert service is taught here in New England, to-day, in every country public school which is under the supervision only of a cross-road government, whose neglect of course is wholly unconscious, is what should be expected — but is none the less to be deplored. It is shown also in the isolation of many of our charities and correctional agencies, public and private, even in large communities. For this isolation is not necessarily a matter of geography; it is essentially a state of mind.

While no plea can be too earnest for the use of the trained worker, there must be no misunderstanding thereby. We have no wish to do away with personal charity. They who make a calling of this work are not to substitute for true social services by the many. On the contrary, we seek to increase the number of leaders who can make most efficient by their experience the giving and doing of the many which is the greatest resource of true charity and social service. Such charity and service should be the privilege of thoughtful persons! The busy business man who can give but a little time, but can give in it good common-sense, is as much needed on boards of management as is the specialist. There will always be plenty of needed work for the thoughtful to do!

Let there be no misunderstanding, either, of the purposes which may properly lead the worker to enter this field as a chosen calling. The desire to earn a living thereby is necessarily no unworthy element, for most men have to work for a living. Again, to use "good works" as a means of developing one's own higher nature is but to avail of one of the greatest opportunities of life. But there must be the willingness to test the results by the effects on others. We surely cannot help ourselves if our actions tend to drag others down—and we merely enter a plea of ignorance of results. Two elements are certainly indispensable in right purpose. There should be the devotion which comes with the conviction of a high calling. And there should be patience. Patience in learning from the little things the lessons that make up that technique of work which is needed equally with the far sight that gets things in the right perspective. Patience which comes with the knowledge that progress is a slow growth.

At the Conference of 1901 in Washington, I had the honor of presenting a brief resumé of the chief opportunities for systematic instruction and training, by persons who were workers, and for persons not necessarily employees of a particular institution. The most important means spoken of were small classes for study of the growing literature and for some personal work for needy families, under skilled direction; and the Summer School of Philanthropic Work, then in its second year, under the New York Charity Organization Society. Since then, this energetic society has continued this school, for increasing numbers of students, and has added a Winter School. This has just completed its first

year. Details of it will be found in Charities and other publications of the Society. It was chiefly aimed for actual workers in New York; the instruction was given in the late afternoons or evenings, in sessions once or twice a week. Of the 159 attendants, 127 were regularly enrolled students, of whom reasonably regular attendance, carefully kept note books and some original inquiry and reports were required. Over 50 were able to give the time during the winter so as to receive certificates on graduation. Also, in January last, the University of Chicago, by its University Extension Division, opened "a social science center for practical training in philanthropic and social work." The instruction was chiefly in evening lectures by well known specialists, the attendance was largely of employees or volunteer workers in institutions and agencies. Fifty-four persons registered. Some of them took only portions of the course; but eight or ten worked systematically for credit in the University, and twice as many for certificates of creditable work. And now come two announcements for the autumn. In Boston, under Simmons College for Women and Harvard University, with the co-operation of several leaders in the best social work, is to be opened in October next a School for Social Workers. The aim is to give systematic instruction and direction. It is established in the belief that some young men and women, especially those who have had the advantages of college instruction, will wish to give during one academic year, to practical problems of this work, under constant direction of persons who have been workers, the most of their time and their first thought. And the Charity Organization Society of New York is to enlarge the usefulness of both the Summer and Winter Schools. The former is to be more of an institute for social workers of experience, in which they may review their problems and get new points of view. In the Winter School there will probably be a dozen lecture courses by selected experts, besides individual lectures; the general secretary of the society will have general direction; the students will be expected to give practically their time to the work. These with a few fellowships attached to leading settlements, for study and work under judicious direction, are the most significant expressions of the educational movement in social work, in our land.*

* An interesting experiment is announced by Mr. E. R. Johnstone, the head of the New Jersey Training School for Feeble-minded Girls and

In London, for the past few years, lecture courses have been arranged by a committee on social education, under the lead of the Charity Organization Society and representatives of the Universities and the Settlements. Last fall, a School of Sociology and Social Economics was established, with theoretical instruction and some direction in work under co-operating agencies, planned to cover one or two years.

There are two helps to educating public opinion, to making a high calling of social work on which much stress should be laid. First, is the provision and good use of good literature. We have, in this field a growing and valuable literature, standard and current. There is, for instance, the excellent Review published by the Charity Organization Society of London. It should have more than a few scattered readers in this country, for while laws and local customs vary, human nature is the same on both sides of the Atlantic. There is *Charities*, the one general periodical for our particular problems. It is increasing in circulation and influence, but it should be used, as a medium for economizing effort by giving and taking experience, by every institution, agency and active-minded individual worker in the land. Then, within this year, *The Commons*, which speaks especially for the settlement movement, has been enlarged in size and broadened in scope. These are mentioned as the chief periodicals. They cost little. The Proceedings of this Conference for many of the past years can still be bought. They are full of rich material, and should be much more used. Of books, there are a few valuable ones which can be had, and for little money. If individuals cannot buy these periodicals or books, libraries can, or groups of workers may unite to get them. So, all these facilities are open to those who wish to read and think.

The annual reports of agencies and institutions is a fertile field which should be better tilled. How marked is the contrast between the few helpful reports which leading workers eagerly wait for and the many reports which soon reach the waste-

Boys, at Vineland, that a six weeks' course of study will be conducted there this summer, for public school teachers of defective children.

basket, as dealing with superficialities and proving good works only by selected illustrations and anecdotes.

The other help for educating public opinion and building up a dignified and worthy calling, is proper consideration for good employees in adequate salaries and protection from overwork. Some persons may properly in a high cause make a gift of their services, in hard and constant work. Between them and the paid worker no distinction should be raised because they serve as volunteers. In some cases, for good reason, persons of value may work for much less than their services are worth or the positions which they fill should call for. But, as a general rule, when positions are known to be salaried, the payment should be adequate, for the sake of the worker and for the sake of the cause. I have recently gone over with care the salaries paid to the chief salaried workers in the societies for organizing charity and several other societies in twenty-five of our largest cities. These are good illustrations because such agencies are chiefly maintained by money which must be raised by general subscription. Of seventeen societies in fourteen of the cities with over 250,000 population, the executive heads are paid as follows: seven receive between \$3,000 and \$5,000; five receive \$2,400 or \$2,500; four receive \$1,500 or \$1,800; and one receives \$1,200. In ten cities ranging in population from 100,000 to 220,000, the corresponding salaries are one at \$1,800; one at \$1,500; one at \$1,200; three at about \$1,000; and four between \$700 and \$800. Comparing three cities of equal size, in which cost of living cannot vary much, the salaries of the chief executives of societies for organizing charity are as follows. One society pays \$1,500, but the agent, a man of experience, receives considerable extra compensation by serving as a probation officer for the court. In another, a woman of experience receives over \$1,000. While in the third, an important industrial community, a woman of experience receives \$700. Of the other class of officials especially interesting to us, the visitors who come in touch with the needy in their homes, some of whom organize charity in districts, the salaries are mostly from \$400 to \$900, for men or women. A few men get more; while in a few societies the men get as little as under \$500. In one or two, advanced college students are used with small pay. A few societies have a regular scale of wages, increas-

ing with experience. Generally, the wages of beginners is from \$25 to \$40 a month.

From these reports I venture to state one conclusion; that the inadequacy of some of the salaries in some places is due chiefly to the isolation of workers and provincialism in boards of management. There is sometimes lack of wholesome competition among workers and in boards a downright lack of courage for raising money. More interesting than these figures are the words received from several cities. One general secretary included in his list the clerks and stenographers working for from \$400 to \$500 a year, because some of his valued visitors have worked their way up from those positions. We try, he adds, to let paid workers feel that there is a chance for promotion as a reward for intelligent service. Nearly one-half of his large body of workers are college graduates. In one city there has been a revolution in the past few years, in which increased efficiency and aroused public interest is coincident with the employment of an active, thoughtful, efficient head with a reasonable force. The secretary in another city writes that their salaries are steadily increasing; that workers trained in his society are to be found "in the police, truancy, juvenile, rescue and other lines of social work;" and that the public is beginning to realize the importance of capable paid service. Another, recently called to a new field, says that "the work is not yet properly organized, and it is a struggle to get proper financial support, *but progress is evident.*" And though his own pay is not large, he adds, "we hope to increase soon the salaries of the assistants who are miserably underpaid." Another writes that while there has been little advance in the pay of office workers there has been marked advance in that of the field workers, who bear the chief responsibility of placing children in country homes, in the belief that a corresponding gain has been made "in the quality of the people who are doing the work." And the secretary of one board, telling how they had just doubled the salary of its chief executive in order to get "a well known charity worker," says "it is clear that for the best kind of work we shall have to pay a larger amount in the future, and I think our people are ready to accept that."*

* An article in *Charities* of April 23d, gives the result of elaborate inquiries made of 273 workers in a considerable number of philanthropic societies. The conclusion seems to be that no general standard prevails, that many of the under officials are working hard and are underpaid.

Of public officials in charitable and correctional work in our large cities, the salaries vary much also. But the trouble here is not so much the inadequacy of pay, as the lack of that public sentiment which insists that enlightened administration of public aid is a part of good government, and that persons of real experience and devotion to their calling shall be used for it.

There are to-day a number of opportunities for social work of much interest and value, reasonably paid as a rule, which were practically unknown a generation ago; such positions as heads of settlements, instructive visiting nurses, probation officers, social secretaries, and holders of fellowships for research.

Our plea is for workers of the right purpose and preparation. How few they are, compared with the vastness of the field. More discouraging still is the fewness of persons who believe in them enough to work for them and with them. True enough, as a gentle but wise moralist has just told us, the world is yet "full of people who have a faculty which enables them to believe whatever they wish. Thought is not for them a process which may go on indefinitely, a work in which they are collaborating with the universe. They do it all by themselves." And yet, despite fluctuation and even retrogression, here and there, there is every reason for encouragement. More and more, though little by little, right standards are being set up, valuable services are being recognized — isolation is being overcome. Especially is there reason for encouragement when we recall how very recent is the chief progress in other fields of human interest. To take again the illustration of law and medicine, let us recall that men have been using, and so helping to build up, the experience of lawyers and doctors chiefly in order to protect themselves directly from ills. In business, with its keen competition, men of sense pay good workers because it pays, if for no other reason. Most persons are kindly, but comparatively few as yet are they who recognize the interdependence of men, and think and work hard, or even contribute much to maintain thinkers and workers, to remove the causes of ills in others.

An experienced observer and educator has said that the chief marks of this wonderful age in which you and I are permitted to live are the growth of the scientific spirit and method in all fields of human interest, and the growth of true democracy. If he speaks prophetically, and I believe he does, then the increase

of thoughtful, purposeful social workers must be an essential and increasing part of the progress of the age. For that calling is not only an outcome of the scientific spirit but a mark of true democracy. It means that those who think and work and rise by merit will receive recognition. That alone is the open way of opportunity for all. The other notion, which has been so prevalent in our land, especially in so-called politics and so often in charity and correction, the notion that one man "off hand" can do a job as well as another, or well enough, is essentially undemocratic, and should be un-American.

Who will stand for the value of methods based on sound principles, for the value of the experienced worker; who will take trouble to raise money to pay for such work; who will speak the truth in these weighty matters of the spread of true science and true democracy, unless you and I, of this National Conference, will do it ourselves, now and all our days, perseveringly and hopefully! We are privileged to see the beginnings of better things, which those who lived before us looked to see in vain. But there are no privileges to be enjoyed rightly without corresponding duties to be done. Are we doing ours!