

B O O K S

FROM CHARITY TO SOCIAL WORK ¹

by

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This study—a volume of some 250 pages—is the story of the beginnings and the development of Social Work in England and the United States, from the 19th Century to the present day.

In the first chapter, the author points out that although the matters studied in this book are old, Social Work, as a profession is very young. Its beginnings are to be found in England, in the Charity Organisation Movement, which developed during the 1860's, and was subsequently transplanted to the United States where under various influences, it progressed considerably ; it was transformed into a state institution and returning to its native country in the 20th century, was to bring with it the examples set by the United States.

Miss Woodroofe also gives an account of the condition of the people in England during the second half of the 19th Century ; she analyses the phenomenon of pauperism, its causes and effects, as a problem for which no solution had been found on the general level. She gives an outline of the economic and social situation of the country, as well as the struggle waged by certain sociologists and philanthropists for the founding of a more humane era. She gives a vivid description of some of these people, particularly Charles Booth whose book "Life and Labour of the people of London" she comments on.

The following chapter is entirely devoted to a study of the Charity Organisation Society, in the field of aid to the workers. Private charity, which played an important rôle but a disordered one, gradually gave way to an action founded on fixed and permanent lines : social cases were studied hand in hand with the needs of the individual and dealt with according to a set plan. As we read on,

¹ Studies in Social History, published by Harold Perkin Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

we see the beginnings of a vast humanitarian work which is eloquently illustrated by statistics.

The third chapter broadens the subject considerably. The author first of all sets out the field of action of what is now called " Social Casework " (which deals with individual cases) ; " Group Work " (which is concerned with giving the individual the benefit of group dynamics which recent studies have shown to be so effective), and " Community Organisation " (which aims to mobilize the resources of the community to meet individual or collective needs).

Working from the observation that Social Work today has inherited the inadequacies as well as the achievements of the period in which it was born, Miss Woodroffe, applies herself to showing " how to overcome the one and to use the other ". In brief, we learn about the arduous but steady rise to prominence of a humanitarian ideal advocated by those who were to be the pioneers of Social work and whose effective ground work took place principally in the United States.

In the States, pauperism, although of less importance than in the Old World, existed nevertheless beneath appearances of wealth, well-being and fabulous prosperity. The author points out the phenomenon, unknown elsewhere, of men from far-off lands, drawn irresistibly by all the reports of opulence, but who were to encounter countless material and moral difficulties. This immigration began in the 17th century, but increased so considerably—a million people per year—during 1905, 1906 and 1907, that it became a drama to which there is no parallel in modern history.

This explains the fact that the Charity Organisation Society in the United States (which took on the philosophy and methods applied by the Charity Organisation Society in England) established first in Buffalo in 1877, was not long in extending its ramifications to other cities ; it used the methods applied in London, but made progressive modifications to them according to the specific needs of the country and the people.

One then looks upon cases and the way to deal with them in a different manner : this is a delicate job requiring of social workers much preparation and profound understanding, which leads to what is known today as case-work. Mary E. Richmond deals with this

very subject in her book " Social Diagnosis ", published in 1917, and which, according to Miss Kathleen Woodroffe, constitutes the first definite formulation of " Casework ". Social action was to take a further step forward by no longer concerning itself only with the material situation of the individual, but also with his psychic state and the right psychology for his surroundings. A current of sympathy and confidence had therefore to be established between social workers and their clients.

The third part describes the progressive transformation of the idea of charity and the fact that aid to one's neighbour gradually changed into a public utility organisation of which the State took charge, thanks to a series of social laws and a national policy aimed at improving the condition of the worker and ensuring his protection. Thus, the agents of Social Work, after 1935, could act within an established governmental structure, organized to meet the needs foreseen. In England, Social Work was given a new lease of life and modernized by American example. Generally speaking, the same problems, the same ideals, the same intellectual and social preoccupations are to be found there.

We have only been able to give a few aspects of a work of real value, but we thought it would be useful to review it, since a large number of National Red Cross Societies take an interest in social work and its development. In fact, they are training social workers in their schools, setting up medico-social centres in built-up areas and are even engaged on creating mutual help and social rehabilitation projects in the big urban areas. They are therefore endeavouring, parallel to social work or within it, to safeguard a certain humanity within the inhumanity and anonymity of the big cities (take the French Red Cross for example, whose preoccupation with this question was published by the *International Review* in its August 1962 issue). The book which we have just outlined, shows clearly the development in certain countries, which has resulted in this idea of everyone's social obligations towards each individual, which the Red Cross realizes at a time when needs are becoming urgent.

J. Z.