

S O C I A L W O R K S E R I E S

BROKEN HOMES

A STUDY OF FAMILY DESF
ITS SOCIAL TREATM

By

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PREFACE

NO LESS thoughtful a critic of men and manners than Joseph Conrad has remarked recently that a universal experience "is exactly the sort of thing which is most difficult to appraise justly in the individual instance." The saying might have been made the motto of this book, for in its pages Miss Colcord—with all the eagerness of the newer school of social workers, bent upon understanding, upon making allowances—seeks that just appraisal to which Conrad refers. Marital infelicities and broken homes are not universal, fortunately, but some of the human weaknesses which lead to them are very nearly so.

To one who brings a long perspective to any theme in social work, *Broken Homes* suggests the successive stages through which the art of social case work has progressed. Twenty years ago the editor of this Series was responsible for the following sentences in an annual report: "One of our most difficult problems has been how to deal with deserted wives with children. . . . One good woman, whose husband had left her for the second time more than a year ago, declared often and emphatically that she would never let him come back. We rescued her furniture from the landlord, found her work, furnished needed relief, and befriended the chil-

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dren; but the drunken and lazy husband returned the other day, and is sitting in the chairs we rescued, while he warms his hands at the fire that we have kept burning."

The passage belongs to the first and what might be termed the "muddling along" period of dealing with family desertion, but the fact that boards of directors actually were willing to print such frank statements about their own shortcomings was a sign that the period was drawing to a close.

This first stage was succeeded by a disciplinary period, in which earnest attempts were made to enact laws that would punish the deserter and aid in his extradition whenever he took refuge across a state line. Laws of the strictest, and these well enforced, seemed for a while the only possible solution.

Then gradually, with the unfolding of a philosophy and a technique of helping people in and through their social relationships, a new way of dealing with this ancient and perplexing human failing was developed. This third way involved a more careful analysis of relationships and motives, a greater variety in approach, an increased flexibility in treatment, a new faith, perhaps, in the re-creative powers latent in human nature. But it is unnecessary to enlarge upon a point of view which these pages admirably illustrate. Desertion laws continue to serve a definite purpose, as Miss Colcord makes clear, but no longer are they either the first or the second resort of the skilful probation officer, family case worker, or child protective agent.

PREFACE

Just after the Russell Sage Foundation published a treatise on Social Diagnosis two years ago, a number of letters came to the author urging that a volume on the treatment of social maladjustments in individual cases follow. But this second subject is not yet ready for the large general treatise. A topic so new as social case treatment must be developed aspect by aspect, preferably in small, practical volumes each written by a specialist. This is such a volume, and Miss Colcord breaks new ground, moreover, in that her book illustrates the whole present trend of social work as applied to individuals.

Grateful acknowledgment should be made to the social case workers who have furnished valuable contributions to the body of data gathered for the present study. Miss Colcord wishes mention made of her especial indebtedness to Miss Betsey Libbey, Miss Helen Wallerstein and Miss Elizabeth Wood of Philadelphia; Mr. C. C. Carstens and Miss Elizabeth Holbrook of Boston; Mrs. A. B. Fox and Mr. J. C. Murphy of Buffalo; Miss Caroline Bedford of Minneapolis; Mr. Stockton Raymond of Columbus; Mrs. Helen Glenn Tyson of Pittsburgh; Mr. Arthur Towne of Brooklyn; Mr. E. J. Cooley, Mr. Charles Zunser, Mr. Hiram Myers, and Miss Mary B. Sayles of New York. Many others not here mentioned were untiring in answering questions and furnishing needed information.

MARY E. RICHMOND

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