

SERIES B—NO. 1

WHAT IS
ORGANIZED
CHARITY?

TEN
PERTINENT
QUESTIONS
BRIEFLY
ANSWERED



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WHAT IS ORGANIZED CHARITY?

WHAT IS AN ASSOCIATED CHARITIES?

IT is a society which believes that poverty is a far different thing from the crushing destitution which destroys so many families. In other words, it believes that in destitution there is nothing normal, and that when a family asks relief for the first time every effort should be made to put all its members beyond the need of asking relief again.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

IT goes to work with principles much like those of a doctor, or of a business expert who is called in to find out why there are leaks in some big establishment, for destitution is due to a complication of causes which are, in many instances, removable. In taking this position, the society and the indi-

viduals who work through it are treating poor families much more humanly than those who used to think of them as hopelessly dependent. It is true that a minority of the poor may never be anything else, but many can and will struggle up to independence and a normal standard if we give them half a chance.

WHAT IS THE FIRST STEP?

A FAMILY is referred to an Associated Charities by a private individual, by a church, or by some other organization. A visit to the home is made immediately, and any emergency distress is relieved *at once* from the nearest grocery store and the nearest coal bin. Then follows an investigation.

WHAT IS AN INVESTIGATION?

IT is not an attempt simply to separate people into worthy and unworthy. It finds out the causes behind the immediate situation and so furnishes the basis upon which to work systematically and persistently for the improvement of the condition of the

family. Investigation means not only visits at the home, but visits to relatives, employers, school teachers, ministers, friends, and others who have viewed the family from different vantage grounds. The visits are made not only to gather information, but to get suggestions for, and help in carrying out, a plan for betterment.

Thus, a man who got on pretty badly with his last employer may prove to have a good industrial record with another and older employer. The older employer may be persuaded to give another trial perhaps, and, back at the work in which he was first successful, the man may do well again.

Or, to take another instance, the school teacher may testify that the children always come to school well cared for and in good condition, and this may have a distinct bearing upon the care of the family because of the pride taken in the children by their father and mother. At least there is more to build on where such pride exists.

Or, in still another case, the man's relatives and those of his wife may recall happenings in the past which throw a flood of light on his recent desertion,

and suggest, moreover, which means will succeed and which fail in bringing the couple together once more.

Or, from the old neighbors of a family which has since moved may be gained corroborative evidence to the fact that the parents, now seemingly respectable, are really placing their older children in moral danger, by reason of their frequent carousings.

In other words, it is necessary to obtain information regarding a family from a number of different people, if the real truth is to be revealed and the real way out to be indicated.

WHAT FOLLOWS INVESTIGATION?

TREATMENT follows investigation, just as treatment follows diagnosis in the case of the physician. As everyone knows, a large part of treatment must be worked out by the patient himself; the physician can only help and suggest. So it is here; we must work *with* not merely *for* the family. A plan for the rehabilitation of a family must be carefully considered from all points, and, to be successful, must

include ways of winning the co-operation of the family itself and of private agencies, city departments or individuals, perhaps, all working towards the same ends.

We say ends, because usually there is more than one problem involved. It may be necessary to secure employment for the oldest girl, to arrange for a course in domestic science for the wife, to secure the co-operation of the truancy department for the wilful boy who shirks school, to ask the aid of the health department in abating a bad sanitary condition in or near the home, and to provide a certain amount of relief until the husband is able to return to work. A single family may present all these separate problems and more than these. They are best worked out in relation to one another, and this means co-operation, obviously, on the part of all interested.

WHAT IS CO-OPERATION?

CO-OPERATION is becoming the watchword in the business world, but has been very little developed in the charitable field. People have gone on the assump-

tion that it was the easiest thing in the world to deal with human beings. As a matter of fact, it is the hardest thing in the world. The best way to deal successfully with destitution is to have as many as possible of the individuals, societies and churches that are interested in the charitable work of the community *allied together* in the committees of the Associated Charities.

These committees, after obtaining full data from the trained workers of the Associated Charities, will agree as to the plan to be followed out and the part to be played in that plan by the different societies or organizations, including the paid workers of the Associated Charities itself.

Thus, in the case of a self-respecting widow who is struggling to support her three small children, the plan may involve the agreement of a church to give a pension of \$2 a week on the understanding that another organization may agree to give another \$2. At the same time, an individual may agree to find the kind of employment which will take the mother out of the home only a part of the week or a part of the day, leaving her time to look after her own house-

hold. This arrangement will mean the co-operation of the day nursery to keep the children under school age on the days or at the hours when the mother is away. Or it may seem best, if she is frail, to keep her at home altogether, by increasing the pension. It may involve also the question of giving special training to the young girl in the family who is near the working age and shows ability. She may be sent to a business college and may, as the result of a little expenditure of money at this time, be able later on to help quite materially in the bringing up of her brothers and sisters. Plans like these are under daily consideration in the society's work for families. In many cases the problems are more complex.

It must not be imagined, because the illustrations given so far refer to families in which the way to positive improvement is plainly indicated, that severer measures have not to be used in other cases, even though these measures involve incidental misery. One of the strongest principles of the work is that every one in a family or related to it must assume his full moral responsibilities, and that these should not be borne by the community as a whole.

WHAT KIND OF RESPONSIBILITIES ARE ENFORCED?

THE kind of responsibilities indicated above is best illustrated by the shirking of family duties by the deserting or non-supporting husband and father. The society takes no middle ground with reference to him, or the lazy adult son who refuses to support his mother. It absolutely refuses, and gets others to refuse, to support a family of this sort until criminal proceedings have been taken against the husband or son, or until he has been induced by milder measures to assume his burden. It believes, if worst comes to worst, that rather than encourage desertion and non-support, such families should be broken up. On the other hand, it agrees with alacrity to spend money to bring back a deserting husband from another state and punish him for his crime. When once it has a hold upon the deserter or non-supporter, it will do its

best to reestablish the family. This policy may seem to entail suffering upon innocent people. If, however, these radical measures are not taken, the family will suffer cruelly; the severer course is the more merciful one. This is but one illustration, in rough outline, of one of the many ways in which the Associated Charities strikes at the roots of family disintegration.

WHAT IS PREVENTIVE WORK?

IN connection with the treatment of cases it inevitably develops that an Associated Charities has to do what is called preventive work, though there is no hard and fast line of separation between the curative work which we have just described and prevention. Preventive work is the elimination of those causes of destitution over which families themselves have no control; it is the elimination, in other words, of unjust conditions.

Thus, the wretched condition of some city houses so undermines the health of their inmates that societies all over the country are interesting themselves in passing better housing ordinances and

in seeing that they are enforced. In the same way, they are encouraging educational campaigns in the tuberculosis field; campaigns, that is, which are teaching the community how to prevent the spread of the disease, how to treat it, and how the patients should act when it is present. Or, to take another illustration, a society discovers that many of the children now growing up in the city's poorer neighborhoods lack special training, and so it backs with energy the movement for the introduction of a proper system of manual training in schools. Or, equally as a result of contact with bad conditions, it backs a movement for pure milk and for the consequent reduction in mortality, more especially in infant mortality during the summer. Or else, as certain crowded neighborhoods reveal instances of criminal tendencies in their boys, it urges the need of playgrounds. These are all illustrations taken from the field at random. Each society will have its special problems, and each will sooner or later be dealing with the eradication of causes which are unfavorably affecting and too heavily bearing down upon individual families.

WHAT IS A REGISTRATION BUREAU?

THIS ninth question is the first about machinery, but it involves a great deal more than mere office method. The registration bureau of an Associated Charities serves as a confidential exchange into which is gathered information about particular families, in order that it may be placed instantly at the service of any society or individual interested and about to take action. Such a registration bureau reveals duplication, overlapping of relief, and fraud. This is but the smallest part of the service which it renders, however. It saves both the stamina of families and the money of the charitably disposed, but its service to the charitable is not so great as its protection to the poor.

For instance, in one case a society was tempted to take the children of a mother away because she seemed to treat them cruelly. Reference to the registration bureau revealed the fact that another agency had several years before dealt with the same family. This agency reported, upon inquiry, that its own ex-

perience with the mother had led to the belief that she was devoted to her children, and that it could not understand the change. This led to further inquiry, with the result that the mother was examined by a physician. It was then discovered that she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, and practically insane for the time being, though she soon recovered under treatment.

Registration may reveal that a certain plan has already been tried with a family. For instance, it may reveal that an apparently lazy and slothful family had been set up in a new neighborhood six months ago, with new furniture, etc., in the hope that the father and mother would strike a better pace in new surroundings. Now, however, they are back in the old neighborhood with a few old sticks of furniture, sad survivals of what was brand new six months before. Without registration, a church in another part of the same city would have tried precisely the same plan with the same result, instead of devising another method of treatment. Where there is registration, the Associated Charities will often endeavor to bring all the people interested together to plan

out a method of joint attack, which may mean, in cases such as the one just cited, a temporary breaking up of the family.

HOW IS THE WORK CARRIED ON?

IT is carried on by a paid secretary, with one or more assistants, as a center. This staff makes all of the investigations, and does the immediate thing required in each family. Behind it are the committees of the society, formed of representatives of charities and of charitable individuals. The committees meet periodically and decide upon plans of treatment; the paid workers, the charitable agencies and others interested carry these plans out. A number of volunteers serve with the Associated Charities in doing the many things which do not belong particularly to one society or to one individual.

THE AIM RESTATED

TO sum up the foregoing and to illustrate it by an anecdote: The proprietor of an English hospital for the insane is in the habit of showing visitors one room

which contains nothing but a cemented floor and a large water cask, of which both the top and the stop-cock are wide open. New inmates, it seems, are given the filling of this cask, as a preliminary test of their mental condition. If they continue for hours patiently to pour water in at the top without trying to close the stop-cock near the bottom, it is inferred that they are in need of treatment in the institution.

As applied to the sanity of charity work, this test is a searching one. Are we not still too often guilty of pouring in at the one end what we helplessly permit to flow off at the other? The Associated Charities thinks that we are, and strives through an adjustment of taps and faucets to rehabilitate neglected family life and pour into it those healing streams of sympathy and endeavor which else would trickle helplessly to waste.