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THE JOB OF BEING A TRUSTEE

MONOGRAPH I

TO ACCOMPANY ROUND TABLE PLAN
FOR TRUSTEES OF INSTITUTIONS
FOR DEPENDENT CHILDREN

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The Round Table Plan has been prepared to assist boards of trustees of institutions caring for dependent children in their administrative duties. It comprises eight studies, or round tables, each of which is devoted to a vital problem of institutional management.

To discuss the questions raised, the Department of Child-Helping of the Russell Sage Foundation is preparing a series of eight monographs, one to accompany each of the Round Tables. Monograph II, "Admission and Discharge of Children," by Dr. Hastings H. Hart, is now available. The Round Table Plan and the Monographs can be obtained from the Department of Child-Helping at five cents a copy.

THE JOB OF BEING A TRUSTEE

By Hastings H. Hart, LL.D.

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There is an increasing recognition of the significance and responsibility involved in the trusteeship of institutions for dependent, neglected, and defective children. The helplessness of such children and the fact that nearly all of them are in their present condition through no fault or volition of their own gives them an extraordinary claim upon the fidelity and consideration of those who voluntarily accept the duty of caring for them. When a group of people voluntarily assume responsibility for the welfare, training, education, health, and often for the very lives of a company of little children, their duty is not to be lightly discharged.

TRUSTEESHIP

It must be acknowledged that, too often, trustees are governed entirely by precedent. They transact their business just as their predecessors have done. The institution may have started in a very small way and, in course of time, there have grown up, haphazard, certain habits of carrying on the institution which continue to prevail without anyone's raising the question whether wiser or more efficient methods can be found.

In many cases precedents are established in a will or a deed of gift by the original donor who had little or no practical knowledge of the work to be undertaken. Many boards of trustees are dominated by the personality of one or two individuals of vigorous character who practically dictate the policy of the board while their fellow members do little but to record and give legal effect to their wishes. In other boards the opposite tendency is seen in the distribution of the work of administration among a number of committees which, acting independently, fail to develop a consistent and harmonious policy, with confusion and weakness as a result.

Through many years of observation the writer has become impressed with the desirability of a systematic study of their job by

those who are charged with so responsible and technical a duty as the administration of an institution for children. The following suggestions are offered with a view to promote such a study by the consideration of certain concrete questions relative to the work.

THE PURPOSE OF THE INSTITUTION

This is to be answered by a study of the history of the institution. By whom was it founded? What has been its evolution? What are its purposes as declared in the will of the founder, or the deed of gift, or the charter of the institution, or by acts of the Legislature? For what classes of children was the institution designed, and what does it undertake to do for them? What modifications of the original plans and purposes have been found necessary in the past? Are any other modifications demanded in order to realize in the highest degree the benevolent purpose of the founders?

What is the place of the institution in the philanthropic field of the state, or county, or city in which it is located? Is there an excess or a lack of this particular kind of provision? Could the usefulness of the institution be increased by changing its plans or its scope in any way?

It sometimes happens that through changes in the conditions or needs of the community, or through the development of new methods, or through the creation and endowment of new institutions, an institution ceases to be useful in its present form. In Massachusetts fifteen orphan asylums and children's homes have closed their doors and have either gone out of existence or have changed their plans of work. In Indiana about the same number of county homes for dependent children have been closed because of the development of the plan of placing children in family homes. In the state of New York a number of important institutions have made radical changes in the classes of children cared for and in methods of administration within the last few years.

LEGAL AND MORAL RELATIONS OF THE TRUSTEES

The legal relation of the trustees to the institution is determined by the general laws governing such institutions or by the special act under which their institution may have been created, as defined by the charter, will, or deed of gift under which the institution is

founded. In many cases the law provides for supervision by a state board of charities, or a board of children's guardians, or a board of fire commissioners, or a board of health; and the trustees are subject to the advice and, in some cases, to the orders of such boards with reference to matters coming within their province.

In general, the legal obligations of the board include the faithful and economical handling of funds; the careful conservation of the health, morals, and education of the children under their care, and the conscientious execution, as far as possible, of the benevolent intention of the founders.

The moral obligation of the trustees is broader than the legal obligation. It demands that the trustees shall qualify for their responsibility by careful individual study of the institution and by observation of the organization and administration of other similar institutions. It demands that they shall not only take thought for the health of the children and for their proper clothing, feeding, and housing, but that they shall have regard also to the happiness of the children and their development into wholesome and normal beings. The playground, the bathing pool, and the well-selected moving picture are quite as important adjuncts to child life as the school room, the garden rake, and the dish pan. It is just as important that the board of trustees shall be represented at the annual State Conference of Charities as it is that the directors of a bank shall be represented at the annual meeting of the State Bankers' Association.

The moral obligation of a board of trustees is not restricted to the children only. It extends, as we shall see, to the homes and relatives from whom they come. It extends also to the employes of the institution. It is a part of their duty not only to select faithful and conscientious people, but to see to it that they receive such compensation and have provided for them such opportunities and such living conditions as to enable them to discharge properly the duties for which they are employed.

Trustees must never lose sight of the sacredness of the trust which is confided to them: first, to respect the sacredness of the parental and family relations and to refuse to be a party to the breaking up of a home unless it is manifestly necessary for the safety of the child; second, to guard the interests of every child committed to their care with the same fidelity which they would desire if children of their

own families were to fall in need of such fostering care; third, to bear in mind the relation of their own work to the welfare of the community as a whole,—for the prevention of pauperism, vice, and crime, and for the conservation of education, good morals, and good citizenship.

SYSTEMS OF MANAGEMENT

There are two general plans of government followed by the trustees of institutions. The first is for the trustees to hold themselves responsible for the details of management, either through an executive committee or through the appointment of a series of special committees, each of which shall direct some department of the work. We find building committees, finance committees, house committees, purchasing committees, committees on admission and discharge, on appointment of employes, on china, on linen, and so forth.

The second system is to secure a competent superintendent and to delegate to him or her all of the details of administration, including the selection of employes (subject to approval), the discharge of employes (at discretion), the purchase of supplies and, sometimes, the investigation of applications and the admission and discharge of inmates.

The committee system is a good thing in so far as it represents a sense of responsibility and a vital interest in the work. There should be a well-chosen executive committee which shall be responsible for general matters of administration. It is necessary at times to appoint building committees, or finance committees, or committees to deal with some special emergency. It is an open question as to the advantage of committing the details of admitting children, hiring employes, purchasing, and so forth, to special committees. In practice, boards of trustees composed of women usually assign a great deal of detail work to special committees, while boards composed of men usually adopt the policy of laying the responsibility for details upon the superintendent. Those who favor the former system claim that it promotes efficiency and increases the interest and the sense of responsibility of the members of the board. Those who favor the latter system maintain that efficiency is promoted by increasing the responsibility of the superintendent. They say that the board of trustees can use their influence to secure wholesale rates from dealers and,

when that is done, the superintendent can purchase just as cheaply and more discriminatingly than a committee. They say that if the subordinate employes are appointed by a committee, there is loss of loyalty and proper subordination to the superintendent, and that it is much easier to maintain discipline if the superintendent has authority to hire and discharge employes subject to the approval of the board.

The writer believes that the second method is the preferable one provided the trustees keep in close touch with the work of the superintendent by receiving frequent detailed reports from him and by personal observation.

NUMBER OF TRUSTEES

Many institutions have large and cumbrous boards of trustees selected with reference to the wealth and social standing of their members. It is not unusual to find boards consisting of twenty-four or even thirty-six members.

It is now generally recognized that the best administrative results are secured from a small board of nine, twelve, or fifteen trustees, and that the social and financial benefits referred to can better be secured by creating honorary vice-presidents and other honorary positions without business responsibilities. A large board of trustees is likely to contain ornamental members who do not feel any real sense of responsibility. It is not uncommon for people to be elected with the distinct understanding that they are not expected to attend meetings except occasionally.

INCOME

MOST PROFITABLE SOURCES

It may be fairly questioned whether it is an advantage for an institution to have sufficient endowment to provide the entire income. An endowed institution tends to become perfunctory in its administration. There is a tendency for the trustees, not being dependent upon the support of individual generosity and public sentiment, to become autocratic. There is danger also that the institution will get into ruts and will fail to keep step with the movement of social progress.

It is a fair question also whether it is an advantage to an institution to be entirely supported by a few generous and wealthy donors. There is the same tendency towards fixed methods and autocratic government as in the case of the endowed institution. The writer holds the opinion that, while an endowment to cover a large portion of the expenses is desirable and the generous gifts of the wealthy are not to be despised, yet it is an actual advantage to an institution to have a large number of small contributors. This plan creates a multitude of friends, gives the institution a strong hold upon the community, makes the trustees sensitive to wholesome public opinion, and tends to a progressive and constructive policy.

METHODS OF RAISING MONEY

As to the methods of raising money, the writer knows of no better way than to ask for it, and it is perfectly legitimate to spend a reasonable amount of money in the asking. There are some good people and some intelligent business men who believe that it is immoral to spend money in order to raise money for philanthropy. They believe that the money for such purposes should all be raised by unpaid solicitors. There are two sides to this proposition. When two men, each of whose time is worth $100 per day, spend two or three days in soliciting contributions from their wealthy friends, if their time were capitalized at its actual value it would mean a very fair commission. The solicitors perform a disagreeable task, knowing full well that for every contribution which they receive they are liable to be called on in turn by the donor in behalf of his pet philanthropy. May it not be more economical, as well as more comfortable, to employ a competent solicitor at a fair salary?

The most extravagant and wasteful methods of raising funds for philanthropy are by charity balls and fairs. A careful accounting will show in many cases that the cost of rent, decorations, installations, fixtures, music, printing, advertising, catering, and so forth, will amount to fully 50 per cent of the gross income, and this to say nothing of the amount expended by the patrons for dress, flowers, carriages, and other things.

One can not look with complacency upon a method whereby the patrons of a charity are secured by furnishing a festival and by levying a tax of 50 per cent or more upon their own generosity.

Equally fallacious is the benefit plan under which a professional promoter offers the institution a percentage (usually 25 per cent of the gross receipts) or a fixed donation of $100, $200, or $500 for the use of their name. The promoter proceeds to employ agents and sell tickets in large numbers. The hall is secured at a reduced rate in consideration of its use for charity, the performers serve without compensation or receive a nominal fee; the gross income is $1,000 or $1,500 or $2,000 or more, and the philanthropy receives its quarter or less of the gross receipts.

For several years past the United Hebrew Charities of New York, Chicago, and other cities, have agreed to abstain from all benefit entertainments and secure their funds by direct cash donations. The result has been a large increase in the donations secured and the general approval of the community.

The collection of funds by mail solicitation is a legitimate and practical method. The "begging letter" is not necessarily objectionable if it presents facts and makes a legitimate appeal. A single leaflet sent out by the Boston Children's Aid Society brought in between $5,000 and $6,000. A letter in behalf of children sent out by the New York State Charities Aid Association brought in $8,000. The preparation of letters and advertising material for mail solicitation is an art which requires expert advice.

It goes without saying that self-respecting trustees will not lend themselves to lottery schemes and other gambling devices which are forbidden by law and would be punished if employed by other people. But in the employment of solicitors and in any other methods of raising funds, the utmost care should be exercised not to open the way for any improper or fraudulent method. There is an increasing tendency for commercial bodies in cities to assume the duty of passing upon the merits of philanthropic organizations which appeal for donations. Some such plan seems to be necessary for the protection of the community and the institution alike against the operation of fraudulent enterprises which find it easy to obtain funds in large amounts under the guise of philanthropy. The guarantee of a commercial organization is a protection to every reputable institution. This plan, however, needs to be carefully guarded for the reason that the commercial organization is always under temptation to view things from the commercial aspect and to over-

look the human side. There is sometimes a tendency to emphasize economy at the expense of efficiency. There is danger also that the strong and well-established institutions will prosper at the expense of institutions which are equally important and deserving, but which are as yet undeveloped and imperfectly organized. Trustees should stand firmly for the preservation of a large-minded social spirit among those who thus assume the censorship of philanthropic work.

PROFIT FROM THE INDUSTRIES OF THE INSTITUTION

The board of trustees of a new institution for children recently announced that they expected to make the institution entirely self-supporting with the labor of the inmates. There have been many institutions for children which have organized industries maintained by child labor that have brought in a profitable revenue. This has been done by the establishment of such industries as brush making, box making, knitting, shirt making, and so on—simple industries whose processes are easily learned, but which have no vocational value. In former years it was not uncommon for children from eight to fourteen years of age to be kept at such work for five hours per day.

These lines of industry have been abandoned long since except in a very few institutions. It was found that they interfered with the development of the children physically, intellectually, and spiritually; that they created a distaste for work and a spirit of rebellion; that the children came weary and listless to school.

It is a practice in most institutions for children, to employ the children in the ordinary domestic tasks of the kitchen, dormitory, and dining room. This plan is legitimate within proper limitations, but it can be carried to a length which is distinctly opposed to the interests of the child. For example, it is an injustice to allow a girl to scrub floors for six months at a time simply because she is willing and does not complain. It is a common thing to find in an orphan asylum a group of older girls performing work and service without compensation and without an opportunity for any adequate vocational training. If girls from fourteen to seventeen years of age are so employed, they should either be paid wages, or should be given a high school course, or should receive genuine vocational training.

A legitimate industry which will contribute materially to the support of the institution is gardening. Both boys and girls of all ages from eight years old up should cultivate gardens, and the older children can produce large quantities of vegetables with advantage to themselves. In the New York Orphanage, gardening was formerly a privilege granted to the children, but it is now a recognized part of the curriculum.

COST

METHODS OF PURCHASING SUPPLIES

As has been remarked, the supplies of many institutions are obtained through a "purchasing committee," but it is a question whether it would not be more profitable to appoint a budget committee, allowing the purchasing to be done by the superintendent. Every institution, however small, should have a budget carefully digested at the beginning of the year and adhered to as nearly as practicable. The adoption of a budget tends to intelligent study of the needs of the institution and to economy both in the purchase and the use of supplies. The budget need not be adhered to as rigidly in a private institution as in a public institution, but it can be made to contribute largely to successful administration.

The budget should be prepared, not with a view to niggardly scrimping, but with a view to economical efficiency. There is a great deal of economy that does not economize. It is folly to economize by cutting the necessary repairs and allowing floors and plastering to go into decay, and leaving woodwork and fences unpainted. It is extravagant to buy cheap furniture. The bow-back chair, costing 85 cents, will last only one-quarter as long as the bent-wood chair, costing $1.75; and the bow-back chair will become shabby with three months' use, while the other will be a decorative article of furniture as long as it lasts. A four dollar bedstead will become racked and out of shape with two years' use, while a six dollar bedstead will render good service for ten years.

Arrangements can be made with a reliable department store to furnish, at the end of the season, odds and ends of boys' suits, substantial all-wool suits, for $2 and $3 each, which ordinarily retail for $10. These suits will render double the service that will be rendered by cheap suits, half cotton. In like manner, beautiful

remnants can be purchased at very low rates for girls' dresses, which will be much more durable and far more attractive than the uniform goods that are used in many institutions. Such suggestions as these, and many others, can be obtained through consultation with an efficiency expert, whose fee will be saved over and over, if his advice is followed.

LOWERING THE PER CAPITA COST OF MAINTENANCE

The trustees should criticize carefully the per capita expenditure of the institution for current expenses. Such criticisms need to be made with discrimination. When comparison is made with expenditures of other institutions it is necessary to know the basis upon which the current expenses are computed.

By current expenses are meant the ordinary running expenses of the institution, including salaries, wages, food, household supplies, upkeep of furniture, and ordinary repairs necessary for keeping the buildings, and so forth, in good condition. It is not customary to include in current expenses expenditures for betterments which add to the original value of the property, nor is it customary to include in current expenses any interest charge upon the value of the plant. Such an interest charge ought properly to be made a part of the current expenses, but it would be contrary to the general practice.

There is, however, a considerable variation in the conditions affecting different institutions. The budget of hospitals, infant asylums, orphanages, or technical schools must necessarily vary according to the ages of the inmates and what is undertaken for them. A technical school involves expense for heating and lighting the shops, power, material, apparatus, and for trained teachers who command high salaries. If the institution maintains a high school, that also involves the employment of high salaried teachers. If all of the children are sent to the public school, the institution saves not only the salaries of the teachers, but the heating, lighting, cleaning, and maintenance of the school rooms. If the institution owns a farm, the cost of milk, eggs, and perhaps butter, may not appear in the food expense, though it may become visible in the expense of running the farm. Roman Catholic institutions which enjoy the unpaid services of devoted brothers and sisters, show a very low salary rate; nevertheless, the salaries are earned and are donated by those who do the work instead of being donated by the cash con-

tributors. Many institutions receive large donations of food, fuel, clothing, and other supplies which do not appear in their financial records.

The writer was interested in visiting a large industrial school for children to find that adults were employed not only in the boiler room and in the warehouse, but also in the mending room, although the work of the cottages and a part of the work of caring for the buildings was done by the children. On inquiry he was informed that the institution was intended for the vocational training of the children and that their time was too valuable to be spent upon routine work which had no vocational bearing. This view was unquestionably sound, but it necessarily found expression in the payroll.

INSPECTION AND CO-OPERATION

VISITS BY TRUSTEES TO THE INSTITUTION

As already indicated, the trustees should be closely familiar with the operations of the institution, and their visits should be sufficiently frequent to insure such familiarity. The writer has known trustees who visited the institution almost daily and took an active share in its administration. He has known others who made a specialty of visiting the institution at unexpected times, early in the morning or late at night, in order to assure themselves as to the fidelity of the employes. The advantage of this method is doubtful. The relation of the trustees should certainly never be allowed to take the form of espionage or a lack of confidence in the superintendent. If the board can not trust the superintendent, they would better get a new one whom they can trust.

It is true that abuses sometimes arise and are covered up for a long period only to be discovered, at last, to the astonishment and humiliation of the trustees. But such abuses are more likely to be discovered by trustees who keep in close and sympathetic touch than by those who adopt the methods of a detective. It does not require espionage to discover the moving spirit of the employes. It is in the atmosphere and can be felt by an intelligent and frequent visitor.

One of the most important and valuable periods of institutional routine is in the evening. The rush and hurry of the child's day

are over; the class room recitations, the boisterous outdoor play, the hundred and one tasks that make up the child's daily program are ended, and the social hour ushers in the period of relaxation with the more quiet forms of entertainment. This is the golden hour of the twenty-four for a more intimate contact between grown up and child which may bring inestimable blessings to the lives of both. Music, games, tableaux, story telling, friendly talks upon interesting and helpful topics may be used in turn to brighten the child's life and enrich his whole nature. Yet too often this wonderful chance is neglected; the evening hour drags by unutilized and the children are soon hurried off to bed. If it is vital that the trustee should know what class room and vocational education the children receive, what are their daily tasks and what their hours of energizing outdoor play, is it not equally necessary for him to ascertain at first-hand what means are employed to develop refinement in his wards and afford them wholesome homelike companionship?

It is also most desirable that at least some member of the board should spend a night occasionally at the institution. Opportunity is thus presented to observe the hours of the children's sleep, the ventilation of the dormitories, the bathing and toilet conditions, and the occupations of the early morning hours. In no way can the superintendent and his staff be made more keenly to feel the sympathetic co-operation of the trustees than by an over night visit.

VISITS TO OTHER INSTITUTIONS

The practice among workers with children of visiting similar institutions and agencies has grown rapidly during recent years. Nowadays the executive of a progressive institution receives literally hundreds of visits during the year from those who desire information upon various administrative problems. Progressive superintendents have come to feel that educational service of this kind is a legitimate part of their work, and they are invariably glad to give to other workers any information possible.

Nor is this a one-sided proposition. At a meeting of the cottage mothers in one of the leading orphanages of the country, at which the writer was present, the subject for discussion was whether children's clothing of a better quality and greater variety should be purchased; and the cottage mothers decided, with the approval of

the superintendent, to send a committee to other institutions to ascertain what kind of clothing they used. The writer learned later that as a result of the committee's visit a radical change was made in this respect in their own institution. The last word has not yet been said upon any phase of institutional child-caring and the most advanced authority upon the subject, as well as the least experienced, can often find valuable assistance by consulting the practice of others.

ATTENDANCE AT CONFERENCES OF SOCIAL WORKERS

The same spirit of co-operation which is found today among workers with children has been evinced still more largely by the rapid increase of local, state, and national conferences of social workers. The annual National Conference of Charities and Correction, which met first in 1874 in conjunction with the American Social Science Association, soon attained a separate identity and has increased in size until at the last conference, in Baltimore, it registered over 1,800 delegates. At these conferences are gathered workers in all kinds of social activities. A section of the conference is usually devoted to children's work and the trustees of an institution may hear discussed by leading authorities many problems of child-caring which confront them in their own work. Opportunity is also given to meet personally social coworkers, to compare methods and results, and to obtain through personal interviews further and more detailed advice from experts.

State and local conferences of social workers have developed similarly, within late years, and are invaluable to one who would keep abreast of the best methods of the times in child welfare. The programs include the names of many who through long experience and special training are qualified to speak with authority, while the open discussions which usually follow the reading of papers, invite the presence and suggestions of those who have worked out satisfactory solutions to common difficulties, and give opportunity for asking specific questions with reference to local needs.

Not the least advantage from attendance upon conferences is found in the inspiration which comes to one as he realizes that his own institution is not a separate, isolated philanthropy but forms part of a great national movement for the betterment of children throughout the country.

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