From Benevolent Individual to Professional Agency: Personal Service to the Poor, 1880-1910

David Harry Robinson
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FROM BENEVOLENT INDIVIDUAL TO PROFESSIONAL AGENCY
- PERSONAL SERVICE TO THE POOR, 1880 - 1910

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

David H. Robinson
1976
This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

David H. Robinson
Author

Approved, August 1976

Philip J. Frangella
Edward P. Csapo
James J. Thompson, Jr.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the development of a personal service to the poor in the United States and to determine what part, if any, the volunteer played in the rise of a professional body of "Social Workers". In particular the study examines the movement from implicit faith in the innate value of the volunteer to the belief in the effectiveness of the full-time worker. The importance of factors operating towards change within the charitable organisations are compared to external factors imposing themselves upon the volunteers.

The thesis of the study is that the much maligned "friendly visitor" actually played a not inconsiderable, if unintentional, role in the establishment of the social work profession. This role lay largely in the fact that friendly visiting recognised the desirability of contact with the poor in what was in many ways a hostile environment. Similarly, however modified and reshaped, certain of the techniques of friendly visiting were in fact retained by the new "profession".

It is also argued, however, that ultimately factors external to the charities were most important in the rise of a profession of helpers. Rapid alterations in the social and economic structure of the United States in the late 19th century severely exposed the shortcomings of the "amateur" helper and prompted the search for new methods and fresh approaches.

The subject of this study is principally the urban poor, for, by and large it is with this category of "client" that the friendly visitor worked. By "poor" is meant those living within economic margins so narrow that the slightest alteration in economic conditions resulted in a disproportionate distress to the breadwinner's family. The term "new poverty" refers to that quantitative growth of urban poverty from the 1830s onwards brought about largely by the problems of immigration and urbanisation.
FROM BENEVOLENT INDIVIDUAL TO PROFESSIONAL AGENCY -

PERSONAL SERVICE TO THE POOR, 1880 - 1910.
INTRODUCTION

In its treatment of its poor and unfortunate members the pattern established by early colonial society was that largely based upon the principles of the Elizabethan Poor Law. The fundamental assumption of this policy, which had received its legal codification in 1601 in England in the form of the Poor Law Act, was that it was the individual's prime responsibility to provide for himself, his family, and his near relatives.

Inadequate individual effort was in certain instances supplemented by a governmental responsibility to relieve want and suffering. Such a policy was administered locally through a small group of substantial householders in each parish and involved the classification of those in need and the provision of the appropriate kinds of relief. Financing of this was achieved through local forms of taxation with the qualification that the burden could be spread to other parishes in certain cases. The gusto with which such a system was adopted in the colonies was remarkable and little attempt was made by them to adapt the system to the very different conditions of the New World. The Law of Settlement, for example, which came on the statute book in England in 1662, determined that a person unable to support himself would only be given relief in his original parish of settlement. This obviously made it much more difficult for persons of small means to travel around the country. Although inappropriate to frontier conditions in the colonies where the pioneer had his
special role to play, this law was also rigidly enforced in colonial America. Indeed as the Pumphreys have pointed out, "The colonial period was marked by the transfer to America of familiar institutions and concepts, often without consideration of the adaptations which might be needed in the primitive conditions of the New World. So extreme were the early deprivations that sheer survival was dependent upon mutual aid - compulsory at Jamestown, voluntary at Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay. But once the colonists were past the initial period of settlement, they unquestioningly put into operation the established laws and customs of the homeland for meeting the needs about them."

The view has however been put forward that the problem of poverty in America is one largely a product of the "industrial revolution" of the mid-19th century and that its existence was slight in colonial years. From evidence furnished by one important colonial settlement, that of New York City, it appears that the issue of the relief of the urban poor was one of constant concern to the city leaders. According to the researches of Raymond Mohl, New York City's expenditure on poor relief in accordance with poor law principles consistently comprised the largest item in the city's budget.

2 See, for example, Robert E. Brown, Middle-Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691 - 1780 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1955).
Despite this poor law administrators were compelled to make frequent pleas for increased financial assistance. This assistance came forth grudgingly, if at all, due to the contemporary conception of poverty as being purely a moral failing. Immorality, idleness, and intemperance were thus viewed largely as the cause of poverty and pauperism, and not as some were later to suggest, inevitable by-products of deprivation. The poverty problem in New York City in fact worsened as the 18th century progressed. With continued heavy immigration, the machinery for poor relief became totally inadequate resulting in the "unexampled poverty and distress" of large sections of the populace by 1800.

The example of New York City which used the parish as the administrative unit of relief and the principles of the poor law exemplifies the colonists' attitude towards the issue of poverty. It was indeed during the colonial period that concepts were laid down which formed the basis of attitudes prevalent in American social welfare history to the 20th century. The most important of these concepts were that each person was primarily responsible for himself and his family, and that governmental activity in certain approved instances could intervene to provide relief. Those in conflict with the group or failing for whatever reason to fulfil their own obligations were usually punished severely. It is in fact true that most settlements not only copied but adhered more strictly to the Elizabethan Poor Law than was the case in England itself. Frank J. Bruno has commented perceptively on this point, "We were the children of England and like so many countries that started as colonial offshoots of an older and more stable nation, we held to the older traditions longer than they survived in the parent state."

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4 *Ibid*, p.27.
This had the effect of establishing a rigid system of welfare administration for the forthcoming generations and for years represented a solid bulwark against those working towards change of any kind.
CHAPTER I

PERCEPTIONS OF THE POVERTY PROBLEM IN THE EARLY NATIONAL PERIOD

It will be appreciated, then, that colonial America tended to employ an essentially moralistic attitude towards its poor and engaged a system which failed to cater sufficiently for those whose poverty was no fault of their own. This situation to a large degree persisted into the first half of the 19th century, the early national period of American history. However, various changes affecting the structure of society, notably rapid immigration, industrialization, and urbanization, led to the development of what one social historian has termed the "new poverty" in this period. The apparent quantitative growth of poverty, now more visible than ever in the crowded urban areas across the nation, revealed the real shortcomings of purely locally based welfare administrations. In turn demands increased throughout the period for the states to assume new roles as regulatory units in welfare administration. Equally, private individuals and the charities responded to the changing situation by offering their own observations of the poverty problems and the ways in which it could best be remedied. The early national period thus witnessed an acceleration of structural change which necessitated both the private and public welfare sectors to review their operations.

[6]
The increased pace of urbanisation after 1800 congregated thousands upon thousands together with the result that the poverty and degradation in the midst of cities began to impinge themselves on the national conscience much more than in the past. The amassing of human beings into cities made the problem of poverty and individual distress more visible to observers and studies of the actual living and working situations of the poor became more commonplace.

Perhaps the most important of the early studies and one which stressed an environmentalist solution was that made by Dr. John Griscom in a work published in 1845. This study pointed to the evils of the tenement house system, particularly the system of tenage, under which the tenement dweller lived. Griscom suggested that landlords were unrestricted in their demands on their tenants, and their motive, which was to maximize profit, meant that the health and comfort of tenants were of little concern to them. The outcasts of society, Griscom claimed, "should be regarded not as such by choice, so much as by compulsion - as the creatures of circumstances beyond their control." Griscom thus decried the scapegoating of the immigrant populations, many of whom were to be found in tenement dwellings, and suggested that immigrants did not enter the United States with bad intentions but that American society actually imposed degradation upon them. He asserted, "We are parties to their degradation inasmuch as we permit the inhabitation of places, from which it is not possible improvement as a condition of habits can come".

8 Ibid., p.23.
9 Ibid.
Dr. John Griscom was one of the first to point to the fact that to provide a proper system of wholesale housing and sanitary reform would be in society's long-term benefit; by relieving the sickness and high mortality rates such as existed in the slum tenement areas. In making his point Griscom relied not merely on subjective bias but on research into the reports of physicians which suggested that the degradation and 'inefficiency' of individuals may be built into the system rather than lying within the direct influence of the individual himself.

A further study at this time similarly suggested the powerlessness of many working men to influence their own situations to any appreciable extent. Through an analysis of the budgets of workers Mathew Carey sought to focus attention upon the extremely narrow margins which millions of workers had to cope with. Indeed, his analysis of canal labourers' budgets suggested the likelihood of annual deficits.

On the basis of his calculations Carey criticised the political economists of his time who labelled as worthless those workers who failed to save enough out of their wages to support themselves in time of scarcity. The main point which Carey struggled to get across was that only a very small percentage of the population were in that category labelled "worthless" by certain influential sections of society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 months at 10 dollars</td>
<td>$100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 months at 5 dollars</td>
<td>$10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suppose the wife to earn half a dollar per week</td>
<td>$26.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$136.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoes and clothes for self and wife each 12 dollars</td>
<td>$24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing at the canal, 6(\frac{1}{2}) cents/week</td>
<td>$3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoes and clothes for two children each 8 dollars</td>
<td>$16.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent 50 cents per week</td>
<td>$26.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soap, candles etc. 6 cents per week</td>
<td>$3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel at 12 cents per week</td>
<td>$6.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat, drink, vegetables etc. etc. 8 cents per day each for wife and children</td>
<td>$87.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$166.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficit</td>
<td>$30.21</td>
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From an examination of the records of many public and charitable bodies operating in the period 1815-1861 Benjamin J. Klebaner has suggested that "intemperance", "extravagance", "improvidence" and "indolence" in that order were the most commonly held causes of poverty. Similarly, the view persisted from colonial times that a sharp distinction needed to be made between the "honest, industrious but unfortunate poor" and the "idle and vicious". Private charity, however, was regarded as the most appropriate form of relief should relief be deemed necessary for, it was felt, "to substitute the arm of the state for Christian charity was fundamentally wrong. Private philanthropy turned the rich into better Christians while binding them to the poor". As such the public viewed public and private relief in very different ways. Public relief was at best a necessary evil whilst private charity served the function of a "protective fence to save the individual from falling into the gulf of public pauperism".

The early 19th century discussion on the necessity of relief and the operation of the poor laws was quite fierce and views ranged from those with environmentalist views, such as Carey and Griscom, to those who advocated a totally laissez-faire approach. The emphasis remained however on the individualist interpretation of poverty and a pessimistic view of the nature of man. Consequently, the pauper continued to be treated with the utmost suspicion. As such the most important result of the poverty debate of these years, Klebaner suggests, was "the impetus it gave to the movement to institutionalise assistance, so characteristic of American relief

13 Ibid., p.392.
14 Ibid.
practice for most of the 19th century. Organised charitable societies with fixed rules of procedure became the custom in the private sphere; in the area of public relief, in many localities the poorhouse replaced informal outdoor aid.\textsuperscript{15}

The approach taken by Griscom and Carey was a 'total' one which viewed the poverty and squalid living conditions of millions as being largely due to factors beyond the individual's control. This view was however a very radical one at this time and was commonly regarded as a threat to the very fabric of society. More easily acceptable suggestions than those made by Carey and Griscom were those made by the private charities. Aided by the attitude of society as outlined and with growing numbers of "visible poor" and the large influxes of propertyless immigrants, the private charities and self-help groups underwent a resurgence in the early national period.

Most charitable organisations in these years operated on traditional lines and adopted a 'two tier' system of operation involving the private philanthropist on the one hand and the direction of funds for relief by the charity's administration on the other. Some charities, however, sharply criticised the granting of indiscriminate relief practised by certain bodies and, in their efforts to influence the poor, espoused the need for personal contact through the co-ordinated use of volunteers. Similarly, some charities noting the common difficulties faced by the various

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, p.399.
charitable organisations in any one city, (fund raising, administration costs, etc.) worked for the association of charities to pool their ideas and avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. Much of the pioneering work in both these fields was undertaken in Boston by Joseph Tuckerman who was probably the first American to make service to the poor a full-time occupation. His establishment in 1835 of the Association of Delegates from the Benevolent Societies of Boston, initially representing twenty-six societies of that city, emphasised the importance of co-operation amongst independent and previously jealous organisations. The Association held monthly meetings which allowed the voluntary workers to discuss common issues and develop new approaches to their work.

More than anything Tuckerman, as President of the Association, stressed the negative results of the mechanical method of giving material relief and as such expressed the need for a more "scientific" basis for charity - a plea which was to be made time and time again in the next generations. The use of the "trained" volunteer as an instrument in influencing the poor assumed much greater importance amongst charities after the 1830s with the surfacing of the "new poverty" and consequent dramatic rise in relief expenditure. This method stressed an individual approach by workers visiting those in poverty or in need of guidance. In this manner the emphasis was squarely placed on the social re-education of the poor and moral suasion through individual influence.

The approach began by Tuckerman was developed further by the large charity, the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, established in 1843 with Robert M. Hartley as its influential secretary. Hartley became a main protagonist of the
use of volunteers in charitable work with the main emphasis being on the sympathetic, non-critical attitude of the visitor. The N.Y.A.I.C.P., in fact, established a program for briefing its visitors to the poor and Hartley issued "Confidential Instructions" to visitors which embodied the philosophy of the charity. The main principle upheld by the instructions warned of the dangers of allowing material relief to serve as an end in itself and asserted that despite the fact that public relief was often insufficient this did not in any way justify intervention by the charitable body to supplement public efforts. All too often, however, the reality of the situation was such that counselling gave way to relief-giving as the primary activity of the charity.

The development of the notion that charities had certain problems common to them all and the use of the personal influence of the volunteer in charity work were significant departures in the history of charitable societies and, in the long term, were important in the development of a professional body of social workers. More important at this time, however, was the birth of what became known as the "charities creed", the philosophy adopted by the great majority of charitable organisations. The bête noir of charities became the administration of unorganised and indiscriminate charity which it was felt was hurtful to the poor by encouraging dependence. Accordingly the guiding principle of charities became the belief that the arrest of crime and degradation could only be accomplished through educational and disciplinary measures and not by furnishing indiscriminate relief to encourage idleness. The view that the

amount of pauperism kept pace with theamount of relief organised by society became firmly entrenched in the thinking of charities and greatly influenced their operation. The history of the "charities creed" in the second half of the 19th century is very much related to the development of "social work" in its professional sense.

In the field of public welfare too the increasing numbers of impoverished coming to the attention of the welfare authorities brought about some changes. The weakness of the locally based administrations for relief and the problems of maintaining relief institutions became more apparent than ever after the vast upheavals of the Civil War and the state governments found that they could remain aloof no longer. In 1863 Massachusetts became the first to establish a state-wide organisation to deal with relief matters when the Massachusetts State Board of Charities was created. This body became a watchdog of the public purse in Massachusetts and was empowered to, "inspect, report on and suggest improvements in public charities, especially reformatories, asylums and almshouses".17

Previous to this the separate institutions dealing with health, penology, mental disease, and dependence had applied individually to the legislatures for cash with little co-ordination between them. In addition, the Board was to supervise the laws concerning the settlement of paupers in the towns and cities of the State. A number of states, notably, Connecticut, New York, and Wisconsin followed this lead soon afterwards.

The federal government, however, maintained its strong non-interventionist tradition towards welfare issues throughout this period. By applying a "strict constitutionalist" approach in his

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veto of the Dix bill in 1854, President Franklin Pierce not only denied federal intervention to assist in the provision of state hospitals but effectively ruled out federal involvement in the wide range of welfare activities. In declaring charitable activities to be a function of the states President Pierce effectively established the pattern for federal-state relations in the sphere of public welfare for two generations. It was thus in such a climate, as the United States entered an era briefly influenced by philosophical confirmation of non-intervention through the ideas of the social Darwinists, that the private and public welfare organisations were operating at this time.

At the time of the Civil War administrators in public and private welfare alike were just beginning to awaken to the vast nature of the poverty problem in the United States. The charities responded to the situation by employing full-time administrators and by experimenting with rudimentary visiting services. Equally, the public bodies began the movement which eventually resulted in state regulation of local welfare activities. The Civil War itself speeded this movement considerably for the major upheaval it produced added thousands to the ranks of the impoverished and further emphasised the inability of many to influence their own situations.

Despite this situation, however, American society was not ready for the environmentalist or economic reform approaches of Griscom, Carey, and their like and was unprepared to accept wholesale change on a national basis. In such a climate the leaders of public and private welfare agencies sought their own national and district organisations and the rise of these organisations in the 1870s provided forums for the debate of all manner of welfare issues, their philosophy and their practice. The development of social work to the end of the 19th century is inextricably bound up with
the influence such bodies exerted in the establishment of the administration and practice of welfare work as specialisms in their own right.
CHAPTER II
THE ERA OF THE "FRIENDLY VISITOR"

No less than on the national political scene the years after the Civil War were ones of debate, appraisal, and re-appraisal in the field of social welfare. The ravages of the Civil War emphasised the problem of pauperism and led to the development of important national and local welfare organisations. The establishment of such organisations provided a much needed focus for the social welfare debate. These years, too, witnessed a rapid increase in one particular means of influencing the poor - the use of the "Friendly Visitor". Unlike the practice of the past the emphasis moved slowly towards a "scientific" approach to social situations and, while the 1870's and 1880's remained largely conservative ones in the sphere of social welfare, they similarly witnessed a good deal of experimentation in the provision of a personal service to the poor.

In the mid-decades of the 19th century the spearhead of the movement to provide a visiting service to the poor was the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (A.I.C.P.) and the pattern established by this agency was that which dominated the American charity scene. The A.I.C.P. organised its affairs by the division of the city into districts corresponding to the city wards. Each district was then administered by an advisory committee of local citizens, led by a paid district secretary and with a board of managers bearing ultimate responsibility for the district. The advisory committee directed a corps of volunteer visitors who operated under the general rules of the agency but with little direct supervision.
A crisis in the New York Association in 1865-66 following a dispute by the district secretaries over salary led to the dismissal of all district secretaries in 1866 and with this the virtual collapse of the district advisory committee system. This drastically affected the channels open for the initiative of the individual citizen. In an attempt to remedy the situation, Robert Hartley, Secretary of the Association, personally undertook recruitment and training of volunteers from a central office, but with only four hundred volunteers in the 1860's, Hartley recognised that there was little which could be done to cope with the problems of mass destitution. The Association thus suffered a drastic decline in efficiency and on Hartley's retirement in 1876 the N.Y.A.I.C.P. abandoned volunteer visiting in favour of hiring paid agents whose role ironically lay largely in handing out monetary relief.

The decline of the Association in the late 1860's has been attributed to the failure of the leadership to capitalise on the experience of its visitors and the failure to pull these individual experiences into a workable whole. As Dorothy Becker has suggested, the Association's downfall was largely due to an "inability of its leaders to give up their preconceived notions about cause and treatment of poverty. . . . Their frame of reference was fixed and arbitrary, and, while some aspects of agency practice were forced to change in response to drastic shifts in the economic and social climate, these new approaches were dismissed as temporary expedients." "The observations of volunteer visitors derived from their experience were never woven into any new pattern of thought and action that would lead to conceptualisation. Just as the capacity to conceptualise is the mark of professional competence, it may also be an index of agency vitality", wrote Becker.¹

¹ Dorothy G. Becker, "The Visitor to the New York City Poor, 1843-1920", Social Service Review, 35 (Dec., 1961), 393.
Although operating under general instructions, visitors of the Association received little direct supervision and were left largely to place their own interpretations on the diverse situations they found. From communications of visitors to the secretary of the Association it is apparent that visitors distinguished between the "worthy" and "unworthy" poor on the lines of the poor law system of old. As such the ability of the visitor to determine need and react appropriately was very much blurred by moralistic considerations. The lack of training received by visitors perpetuated such interpretations. The correspondence of one visitor writing to Hartley amply illustrates the distinction made between clients of the Association. Describing a visit made to one inebriate woman in the category of "unworthy poor", Michael Hahn, Association visitor, wrote, "The room dirty and in disorder, with some like companions sitting around a table with a large pitcher or can of ale or beer, and perhaps already half drunk, I make known my business and of course under the circumstances tell them that I cannot give them any assistance. Then Sir, you may be sure abuse of the first order is heaped on the poor visitor who finds himself in such a plight".

In contrast, Hahn outlined in the same letter the circumstances of a visit to a "worthy" applicant. "I go direct to the room of the applicant and find everything clean and neat, with a pleasant woman perhaps at a sewing machine to work, with three or four small children around her," he wrote. "Stating my business her eyes brighten with the prospect of some help . . . I give her about one dollar per week up to about April, and exert myself to get her some better work.

When I tell her in April that I am obliged to discontinue the relief she looks very sorrowful, but thanks me kindly and hopes God will reward me for what I have done for her and her children during the winter.  

The lack of co-ordinated training provided for visitors meant that the organisation proceeded on haphazard lines with much left to the individual bias or prejudice of the visitor. In addition the visitor was left largely on his own to cope with the basically paradoxical nature of visiting. Thus, while the N.Y.A.I.C.P. espoused the view that poverty could be ascribed to moral weakness, visitors day by day encountered situations where individuals desired to be independent but were simply unable to maintain themselves through no fault of their own. As Becker has commented, "The result for the visitor was a superb intellectual muddle. It produced the paradox of relief that was deliberately designed to be insufficient."  

The temporary demise of the N.Y.A.I.C.P. in the 1870's coincided with a major development in the field of private welfare provision in the United States - the rise of the Charity Organisation Movement. Borrowing from techniques already established in Great Britain, Reverend S. Humphreys Gurteen established the first Charity Organisation Society in the United States in Buffalo, New York, in 1877 in an attempt to bring order to the apparent chaos of private welfare in that city. Gurteen's aim was to link together the various charities into one organisation which would serve as a centre

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3 Ibid., p.392.
4 Ibid.
of intercommunication between the diverse bodies offering a charitable service. The Society also sought to investigate thoroughly the cases of all applicants referred to the overseer of the poor for official relief and all other applicants for charity referred for enquiry. The Society thus aimed to offer a comprehensive service by obtaining from the appropriate charities or individuals suitable relief for deserving cases, by providing visitors, counselling those needing advice and by procuring work for those capable of being wholly or partially self-supporting.

The guiding principle of the Buffalo agency was that the Charity Organisation Society itself gave no relief but that the case be transferred elsewhere with an accompanying suggestion of the best plan to adopt which would avoid "pauperising" the recipient. In this manner the movement aimed to prevent the indiscriminate relief-giving policies of overlapping agencies and to stimulate volunteer "friendly visiting" as a substitute for alms. Friendly visiting was administered through the establishment of neighbourhood district committees of local residents and charity representatives.

The philosophy of the Charity Organisation Movement may best be seen in the writings of its leaders, particularly those offering advice to its "friendly visitors" on how to establish a helpful relationship with the poor. In his Handbook of Charity Organisation Gurteen spelled out his interpretation of the Society's aims: "The basic axion, the cardinal principle of the 'Charity Organisation Society' is diametrically opposed to all systems, all institutions, all charities, all forms of relief whatsoever, which avowedly or tacitly adopt the creed of Charles Lamb to 'give and ask no questions', or which is worse, that systems of injudicious questioning at the door, or on the street which leads the beggar on to invent additional
falsehoods. The fundamental law of its operation is expressed in one word, "INVESTIGATE". Its motto is: "No relief (except in the extreme case of despair or imminent death) without previous and searching examination". Gurteen clearly felt that the most appropriate way to tackle pauperism was by means of the use of the individual influence of a friendly visitor.

Similarly, the advice of the Reverend R.E. Thompson to the visitors of the Philadelphia Society for Organising Relief and Suppressing Mendicancy followed the lines of charity organisation. He pointed out that the majority of persons in poverty did not require financial assistance for this was purely symptomatic of a general feeling of hopelessness. The best means of influencing the poor was therefore through personal influence and moral suasion. It is, however, interesting to note that Thompson in his manual to visitors did not see this as the only means of assisting the poor. He acknowledged the importance of the environmental aspects influencing an individual's situation and suggested that visitors should acquaint themselves with aspects of the law, for example, sanitary legislation, and to seek the redress of grievances on behalf of the poor.

The bête noir of the organised charities, then, became unsupervised, uninvestigated relief and, as the public agencies tended to apply less than stringent methods of investigation, they were castigated by the charities. The charity workers clearly felt that careful relief and public relief were antithetical. Thus, almost all permanent societies applied the

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work test as a condition of relief in which the "paupers" and "idlers" could be sorted out. Applicants for help were thus expected to undertake work not only as a measure of their need but also as a measure of their worthiness for help. In addition, the persistent fear of the charities that relief would dull initiative led to the stringent enforcement of the principle of "less eligibility". By enforcing this relic of the Poor Laws charitable societies offering relief sought to ensure that the condition of any recipient of relief was "less eligible", that is more miserable, than that of the lowest-paid labourer. The work provided was designed to be so hard and dreary and the wages so low that the recipient was stimulated into finding better employment as soon as it could be found.

The result of this situation was that stress tended to be laid on the effects of poverty, as manifested by dependence, rather than on the condition itself. This to some extent blurred the avowed goal of charity organisation, namely that the problems of mendicancy and relief ought to be systematically studied with the view of ascertaining the causes of pauperism and of applying the best methods of aid.

Besides the principle of "less eligibility" a further aspect of Poor Law philosophy, the belief that the individual and the family had firm control over their own destinies, was broadly held by charity organisations. In part this reflected the notion held by many in the United States, particularly the middle and upper classes, that there was a high degree of social and economic mobility in American society. This suggested that should an individual assert himself then there was little which could not be achieved. There was thus common acceptance of the fact that, in times of crisis, the only association which could be considered a legitimate resource
was the family. As such family members were frequently held responsible for caring for all dependents, regardless of age, ability, or inclination to do so.

This belief in the necessity for mutual help within families was so strong that any individual unfortunate enough not to have a family was looked upon by charity workers with suspicion and as a potential pauper and imposter. Needless to say this doctrine resulted in a good deal of hardship.

The tendency of the charities to seek a causation of poverty within the individual and their respect for the "scientific" examination of the problems which confronted them rendered attractive those writers suggesting the hereditary causes of pauperism. As such the timing and content of Richard Dugdale's study of the "Jukes" family of rural New York had a great impact. Dugdale, in fact, traced six generations of the Jukes' family and found that eighteen members had kept brothels, 128 had been prostitutes, 76 were convicted criminals and over 200 had been recipients of poor relief. This study was published at a time when many educated Americans adhered to social Darwinism. This was a theory of social evolution which acknowledged the existence of "natural" inequalities among individuals and accepted that this resulted in a rigidly stratified and "natural" social organisation. Dugdale's work appeared to fit in well with the presuppositions of social Darwinism and was accepted by many as "scientific" proof of the importance of hereditary factors in the causation of criminal or depraved behaviour. For a time this view was reinforced by the importation of criminal anthropology from Europe, notably the

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work of Cesare Lombroso, which theorised that there existed a definite criminal type which could be distinguished from the normal both anatomically and psychologically. 9

The years after the Civil War then witnessed a movement by a sizeable group seeking to attack the poverty problem by means of applying rigorously systematic principles to charitable work and by the use of the personal influence of the volunteer. As Robert H. Bremmer has commented, "Their objective, in keeping with the spirit of the time, was to make philanthropy a science - the science of social therapeutics". 10 Accordingly the constant aim of charity organisation was to dissociate itself from religion and to regard the operation as a business scheme on "scientific" lines. This 'method' of charity organisation was soon accepted as the most appropriate means of bringing order to the chaos of private charity. By 1883 twenty-five charity organisation societies operated in the United States. This number increased fourfold within the next decade.

Given these general principles, then, what effect did the 'method' of charity organisation have and how did the friendly visitor approach her task of influencing the poor? Recent research into the operations of one large charity organisation society, the Philadelphia Society for Organising Charity, has suggested that the society was operated by "... a coalition of diverse groups of upper socioeconomic status whose motives, goals, interests and environments varied". 11 The visiting

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corps of the society however was composed entirely of women and in 1880 there numbered 763 such visitors.\textsuperscript{11}

From an analysis of the 1880 federal census schedules for Philadelphia which listed all persons affiliated with the Philadelphia society Julia Rauch points out the similarity of background from which those having face-to-face contact with the poor came, "Almost without exception, visitors lived in single-family homes located in wealthy neighbourhoods, 77.4\% had live-in domestic servants. Of the census-identified visitors, 62\% were listed in the 'Blue Book', a guide to the city's social elite".\textsuperscript{12} Equally, visitors were identified as leisured persons, few being in employment. Visitors, too, judging from their reports back to their agency, employed a view which blamed the poor for their plight and emphasised the role of inherent defect in the causation of poverty.

That women carried out the visiting function of the agency clearly reflects the contemporary perception of the role of women. Middle and upper-class women were relegated largely to functions involving the home, marriage, and motherhood and there was a belief that their particular characteristics of tact, patience, and sympathy were especially suited to visiting the poor.

Following her analysis, however, Rauch concludes that the visitors "... as foot soldiers of the war on pauperism co-operated in an effort of the dominant classes to defend laissez-faire capitalism. As beneficiaries of the class system, visitors

\textsuperscript{11} Julia B. Rauch, "Women in Social Work; Friendly Visitors in Philadelphia, 1880", Social Service Review, 49 (June, 1975), 2111. This article was taken from a wider work by the author; "Unfriendly Visitors: The Emergence of Scientific Philanthropy in Philadelphia, 1878-1880", (Ph. D. Diss., Bryn Mawr College, 1974).

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p.2118.
were deeply conservative. At the same time, visitors, as women were members of a caste system embedded within the class structure. Paradoxically, this provided motives which were egalitarian in their thrust. The crux of Rauch's thesis that the "friendly visitor" flourished, in Philadelphia at least, not through the burning desire of citizens to eradicate poverty and work with the poor but more because "feminist impulses coincided with class interests".

The fact that the societies stressed a "scientific" approach and the need for the painstaking investigation of individual cases while at the same time using the volunteer to effect its policies has evoked much comment from social historians. The societies themselves saw no incompatibility in this state of affairs and, as such, the "friendly visitor" was expected to provide the guidance required to stem the pauper's slide into dependency. The "friendly visitor" was placed, however, in a basically ambivalent position. Historian Roy Lubove, for example, has suggested that the visitor... intervened in the lives of the poor by virtue of a presumptive wisdom and superiority yet was to conceive of her charges, as personal friends.

In line with Rauch's thesis, Lubove suggests that the emphasis of poverty causation on individual rather than on economic or social factors was the response of a middle-class leadership of charity organisation to a common threat provided to them by the masses of

13 Ibid., p.250.

14 Ibid., p.256.

the poor. Its leaders he claims, "imposed a blend of Malthusianism, Manchesterian economics, social Darwinism, romanticism and the crude hereditary biology of McCulloch and Dugdale upon the Christian love and brotherhood which theoretically inspired all benevolent efforts. The result was a vast amount of rhetoric concerning the importance of a thorough understanding of the background of each case of dependency, combined with a series of preconceived moral judgements and presuppositions about the character of the poor and about human nature".16

The purely palliative function of charity organisation and the "friendly visitor" is one similarly stressed by Kathleen Woodruffs.17 In a survey of the development of social work in the United States and Great Britain, Woodruffe closely parallels the role of charity organisation in both countries. Charity organisation is viewed as the liberals' attempt to temper the worst excesses of capitalism in order to protect the middle and upper classes. In addition, due to the prevailing philosophy of social Darwinism in the United States and society's belief in the ease of social mobility, the doctrine that the poor could be categorised as "deserving" or "undeserving" was even more persuasive in the United States than in England.

There is however, evidence to suggest that generalisation concerning the role of the friendly visitor in this period is dangerous. It is important in considering the criticism of the volunteer to avoid the stereotyped image of "Lady Bountiful". Similarly, one should not ignore the "non-interventionist" context

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16 Ibid., p.12.
of the times in which the visitor worked. As such, it is perhaps some of the concepts embodied in friendly visiting rather than the actual practical achievements of the visitor which should concern us in determining the roots of professionalisation in social work.

One commentator has suggested that although there were similarities with the A.I.C.P. visitor of a previous generation, there were also important differences between friendly visiting in the 1880's and the 1890's. Although in fact both relied on establishing a personal relationship with a family and the administration of approved relief, charity organisation construed the goals in a different manner. As such, "The quality of that relationship had changed from authoritative "guardianship" to a friendship based upon example rather than precept; suitable aid to the poor meant character reform rather than relief . . . ."18

In this manner then it is possible to view friendly visiting as a social force of some importance in the development of a profession of personal helpers, for despite its very limited scope, "scientific philanthropy" required each family to be looked at as presenting unique difficulties. To some degree this resulted in a questioning of stereotyped notions about the "poor", the "pauper", etc., and replaced these with hard data in the form of family histories. Similarly, the work of the volunteer in preparing his social histories and the meticulous records maintained by charitable agencies provided the raw material for research into the situations of those receiving assistance from the charities.

The collation of this data over the years suggested that the poverty problem was wider in scope than one of individual character defect.

The period from the 1870's through the 1890's was indeed one of experimentation in the field of private welfare provision and through charity organisation the practice of friendly visiting was established on different lines. The major forum of debate on social welfare issues in these years, where the philosophy of the newly emerging service was forged, was the National Conference of Charities and Correction. This body originated in 1874 when representatives of the state Boards of Charities met to form a Conference of Boards of Public Charities in response to the increasingly difficult tasks faced by the locally based public welfare organisations. From the outset, however, other bodies from the private charities were invited to the annual meetings and the Conference soon became dominated by the interests of the private agencies. This is reflected in the fact that the Conference spent as much of its time discussing the provision of a personal service to the poor as it did considering methods of institutional care and the provision of outdoor relief which were the prime concern of the public bodies.

Nevertheless, despite the gradual take-over by the private agencies, the state Boards of Charities in establishing the Conference took a vital step in the history of social work practice. One of Socialwork's foremost commentators, Karl de Schweinitz, has summed up their contribution, thus, "In initiating an organisation... the state Boards of Charities had begun the institutionalisation of social work. They had asserted responsibility for an area of funded knowledge and special practice. What would grow to be a profession had been born".19

It is in fact in the debates of the National Conference of Charities and Correction that the first reference to the term "professional" is made in connection with the practice of social welfare. At the 1881 Conference George S. Robinson, president of the Illinois State Board suggested that, "The care of the unfortunate is really a profession; it might almost rank with the learned professions, so great and varied is the information on all subjects required for its highest development". This statement constituted a very early recognition of the wide range of skills and knowledge required for the successful execution of any aspect of social welfare. Personal service, however, was in its infancy at this time and, on the whole, "friendly visitors" possessed little expertise and exercised a minimal influence on the condition of the poor.

It would, however, be a great mistake to assess the activities of the charities and the volunteer visitor in these years in terms of practical achievement alone. In establishing a method, albeit a restricted one, the charities did attempt to bring order to the previously chaotic practice of private welfare. As de Schweinitz has suggested, "If social work owes its origins to the actions of the state boards in starting the National Conference, it was the Charity organisation societies which, sharing with the state boards a concern for the development of social policy, gave to social work its characteristic integration of a philosophically orientated programming with a systematic, methodologically based practice . . ."21


Given the social Darwinist context of the times the progress made by the charities in firmly establishing the desirability of organised intervention in the lives of the poor was not inconsiderable.

The conservatism of the charities, however, was such that emphasis continued to be placed throughout these years on the innate virtues of maintaining the "amateur" status of their field work personnel. This situation existed despite the fact that visitors operated in a rapidly changing society which increasingly required both training and personal development if they were to comprehend fully the needs of individuals living within that society. Thus, while an important initial breakthrough had been made by the charities, the actual effectiveness of their visitors left a good deal to be desired. The complacent attitude of the charities in failing to react to the important socio-economic changes of the late 19th century eventually resulted in a wholesale re-appraisal of the role and effectiveness of the volunteer as a visitor to the poor.
CHAPTER III

THE ENVIRONMENTALIST CHALLENGE

By the early 1890's the charities - through the Charity Organisation Movement and the various deliberations of the National Conference of Charities and Correction - were focusing on two main lines of development. The main focus continued to be the search for a "scientific" approach to the particular reasons behind social breakdown in any given family. Increasingly, however, a trend developed which was more concerned with investigation into the notion that the chief causes of poverty lay outside the control of the individual. It is nevertheless true to state that, although the decades of the 1870's and the 1880's were ones of experimentation, the charities on the whole clung to individualistic and moralistic interpretations of the causes of poverty. In the last decades of the 19th century, however, the socio-economic structure of the nation underwent fundamental change and more and more families became subject to the potentially powerful forces of an urban-industrial environment. This was subsequently reflected in an increased concern with the environment in many spheres, particularly in literature, religion, the development of social surveys, and the growth of the neighborhood settlement. Unfortunately most charities failed to appreciate the implications of the changes taking place around them.
In order to appreciate the increased interest in the force of external influences in the lives of the common people it is necessary, initially, to consider those changes occurring in the socio-economic system in the last few decades of the 19th century.

The development of the 'industrial revolution' was certainly the outstanding feature of American economic life in the years after 1860. Many historians ascribe most of the changes occurring after 1860 to the impact of the Civil War. Harold U. Faulkner, for example, has commented, "whether we approach the Civil War from the point of view of economic, political or social history, it is difficult to over-emphasise its significance. It marks a definite break midway in the development of the nation. Its effect upon our industrial, financial and commercial history were profound..."\(^1\)

The role of the Civil War in the economic development of the nation is however subject to a good deal of debate among economic historians. Faulkner's simplistic traditional view of the Civil War as a watershed in economic development is now largely rejected. Insights provided by the "New economic history" and statistical analysis suggest that the acceleration in economic activity had occurred in the decade prior to the Civil War. Thomas Cochran criticises Faulkner's failure to set the Civil War period in the context of important long-run indexes of industrial growth.\(^2\)

One such index actually indicates that the Civil War retarded the rate of economic growth.\(^3\)

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Despite this debate the fact of the United States' remarkable performance in terms of the world economy in these years is indisputable. In the years from the Civil War to World War I manufacturing output, for example, expanded so rapidly that the United States became the leading industrial nation, controlling approximately one-third of the world's manufacturing capacity. All major indexes of economic activity in fact point to the beginnings of a massive shift of emphasis in the American economy away from the agricultural sector and towards the industrial-commercial sector. Taking 1899 as a base year of 100 in manufacturing output one major index shows the year 1860 as standing at a mere 16; by 1910 it had grown to 172, and by 1913 to 200. Growth of steel production, was even more staggering, rising from a mere 19,000 tons in 1867 to 10 million tons by 1900. Coinciding with this industrial development was the evolution of a system of financial intermediaries performing the function of channeling the savings of Americans into industry thereby developing the long-term capital market and facilitating the whole process.

The story of this economic expansion is also one of rapid technological advancement and a massive increase in the size of many businessmen's scale of operations to meet demand. This was accompanied by the full exploitation of entrepreneurs of a prevailing laissez-faire philosophy which created an environment hospitable to such development.

Economic expansion had two major accompaniments of great relevance to the social historian. Firstly, the acceleration in economic activity was matched by an almost equally spectacular urbanisation of society. Classing "urban" population as those

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5 Ibid., p.116-17.
living in communities of 8,000 or more, 16.1 per cent of the total population lived in an urban environment in 1860. By 1880 this figure had reached 22.7 per cent and by 1900 it stood at 32 per cent. Urbanisation thus proceeded at a pace hitherto unparalleled.

Equally, immigration to the United States continued at an extremely high level and immigrants played a large part in both the economic growth of the nation and the swelling of the urban populations. The actual numbers of arrivals bore close correlation with periods of prosperity and depression. The three peak years alone during this period - 1873, 1882, and 1892 - provided between them almost two million new arrivals to the nation.

The process of rapid urbanisation and the continued flow of immigrants into the country produced even greater problems of communal living than had existed previously. The physical growth of cities and of "slumdom" compounded by the conglomeration of persons of vastly different cultural backgrounds led to the subject of the poor becoming a matter of wide concern. Towards the end of the 19th century the pursuit of publicising the plight of the poor became a more popular one as writers and social commentators grappled with the problem of finding the best way to present the condition of the poor to the public. The importance of such writers and commentators in reaching the masses and in educating the public to the environmental causes of pauperism and poverty has probably been under-emphasised in the past. One recent commentator has suggested that it is in the writings of such literary figures that is found, "The very genesis of a philanthropic compassion out

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of which new attitudes were born and new social responsibilities were defined.\(^7\)

Of all those preaching reform in the late 19th century, Jacob Riis probably produced the most outstanding denunciations of the evils of the tenement and the slum. His vivid portrayals of the "other half" of society and the need for state action in reform made a great impact, particularly his depictions of the pathetic specimens of childhood produced by the environment of the slum. Riis suggested that the state should intervene in the situations of the poor because the America of tomorrow was dependent upon the health of its children in the present. His down to earth plea for aid to the poor is well summed up by his assertion, "Philanthropy we call it sometimes with patronising airs: Better call it self defence".\(^8\)

In line with contemporary trends Riis believed in the use of statistical evidence to support his assertions. The figures put forward in his most famous denunciation of the poverty of the cities were those taken from the official figures of the New York C.O.S. which suggested that in the first eight years of the society's existence 135,595 families in that city were registered as asking for or receiving charity. This implied that of a population of one and a half million, at least one half million were driven or chose to ask for or accept charity at some point in the eight year period.\(^9\) The figures of the New York C.O.S.

\(^7\) Francesco Ordasco, Jacob Riis Revisited (New York, 1968) xv.

\(^8\) Jacob Riis, The Children of the Poor (New York, 1892) quoted in Ordasco, Jacob Riis Revisited, p.125.

suggested a far greater degree of want in society than did official publications. The Eighth Census of the United States for instance reported that there were only 88,665 public paupers (0.2 per cent population) in the whole of the United States in the year 1880.\(^\text{10}\)

In the field of fiction, although most writers continued to cling to the sentimental myths of the romantic era, some literary figures such as Theodore Dreiser, author of *Sister Carrie*, and Stephen Crane, creator of *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, moved into an era of naturalism with their literary expressions of life as experienced by the lower echelons in the big cities. In this way too, then, the role of the environment in influencing the lives of individuals became disseminated to a wider audience than hitherto, despite the fact that initially many publishers found this type of literature unacceptable.

While some writers, such as "single tax" proponent Henry George and the utopian Edward Bellamy, attacked aspects of the socio-economic system itself, no coherent social or political movement arose amongst the poor and lower paid themselves. Unlike Great Britain where socialistic ideas resulted finally in the formation of a political party representing labor, the union movement in the United States maintained a policy of strict non-political affiliation at this time. In addition the union movement tended to be elitist in nature and operated largely to the exclusion of the less well-paid and immigrant workers who formed the largest part of the poor of the cities.

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\(^{11}\) See, for example, Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (New York, 1886) and Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backwards 2000 - 1887* (Boston, 1888).
Lacking leadership from the trade union movement, a vehicle for expression of social criticism developed in a movement which came to be known as "the social gospel". The genesis of this movement came with the recognition by many Protestant ministers in the 1870's that their urban churches were failing to keep pace with the rapid developments occurring within society and that they were, in fact, losing all contact with their congregations.

Historians Glaab and Brown have pointed out the dramatic erosion of the drawing power of the Protestant church in one section of New York City, "On Manhattan Island, the area below Fourteenth Street gained 250,000 people between 1868 and 1888; during the same years it lost seventeen Protestant churches".12

In this atmosphere of declining congregations some ministers, notably Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden, desperately sought ways to revive their failing churches. In an attempt to get closer to the people these social gospel ministers went among the poor conducting rudimentary social research, including house-to-house surveys of their neighborhoods. Such surveys were published widely by the "social gospel ministers" and were important in enlightening contemporaries about the social characteristics of the American city, in particular the extent of urban poverty and the mixture of ethnic types. Moreover, a new first-hand realisation of the extent of the problems encountered by the poor cast severe doubts upon the old Protestant belief that there was a direct correlation between failure and vice. As such, sections of the Protestant church became convinced that the health of the church was dependent upon some form of social action and, "the 'institutional church', with its lodging houses, reading rooms, adult education classes, and recreation centres, became a fixture on the urban scene".13 A form of environ-

mentality thus began to influence the thinking of the Protestant church and with it the recognition that it required much more than sermons to influence the condition of the poor.

On a more "scientific" level the last two decades of the 19th century witnessed the rise of the use of the social survey. In the late 1880's Charles Booth employed a systematic house-to-house survey method in the East End of London to determine the living conditions of the population. Following this research Booth estimated that a massive section of the population of the city of London (approximately 30 per cent) was inflexibly condemned to poverty - "poverty" being defined as the inability to earn enough to maintain physical working efficiency. Booth claimed that his investigations were characterised by a scientific detachment and that he had managed to avoid the sensationalisation of his subject matter in spite of the controversial issues involved.

Despite Booth's tendency to use unflattering descriptions of those persons in the lower echelons of the eight "classes" of society he described, his study was important in providing precise information of social conditions and this had a profound effect on upper- and middle-class opinion. Booth showed that the most important causes of distress were low wages and irregular employment rather than thriftlessness and drunkenness. Inspired by Booth's work, economist Seebohm Rowntree employed a similar method to a study of the provincial city of York which involved a survey of 11,560 families. Rowntree found that poverty, based again on the inability to maintain sheer physical efficiency, existed on a scale similar to that evident in London.

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The impact of Booth's work was as great in the United States as it was in Great Britain. In fact, soon after Booth's study was made, a number of pieces of important social research were published in the United States. In the first of such studies Marcus Reynolds investigated the notion that the type of accommodation habited by the working classes was directly dependent upon the amount of wages at their command rather than related to personality or character factors. Using statistics from the Sixteenth Report of the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, Reynolds cited a number of workingmen's family budgets which illustrated the very small margin between the total spent on essential items and the amount of wages at the disposal of the families. In fact, in Reynolds' sample an average of 89.27 per cent of total expenses was spent by the families on the four items of rent, subsistence, fuel and clothing. A mere $50.00 to be used for emergencies, savings, or small "luxuries" separated the average annual income of the families ($803.47) from their average annual expenses ($754.42). Some families in the sample existed on a much smaller margin than the $50.00 referred to.

The importance of Reynolds' study lay in the broadness of its interpretation. From the results obtained Reynolds looked beyond character failings in his explanation of the degradation of the slum. The exhorbitant rents paid by many families living in the slums, coupled with the inadequacies of total income, resulted in many families taking in boarders with consequent gross overcrowding. Reynolds suggested that practices such as these were instrumental in the destruction of family life and the human ties upon which the

Marcus T. Reynolds, The Housing of the Poor (New York, 1892).
stability of society depended. Similarly, overcrowding contributed to high sickness rates, thereby drastically impairing the efficiency of individuals as productive agents of society. Reynolds emphasised that his study was one which did not merely deal with poor individuals but rather those evils "inseparably connected with the tenement house system affecting the wealth, morality and the very being of the nation".17

Two years later in a monumental work dealing with the slums of four large cities Carrol D. Wright, the Commissioner of Labor, provided vast amounts of statistical information on the condition of the slum dweller.18 To illustrate the particular character of the slum Wright adopted a method which compared the whole of each city with that of a "canvassed slum district" within it. The research showed that the degree of illiteracy, numbers of criminal arrests, numbers of saloons, and numbers of persons living per unit of accommodation were much higher (calculated as a percentage of population) in the "slum district" than in the respective city taken as a whole.

Wright's work is perhaps the best primary source which deals with the characteristics of late 19th century American slumdom. It showed statistically the amount of degradation existent in the midst of American cities and suggested that this degradation, if allowed to flourish, could, like a cancer, eat at the vitality of the more healthy parts. In this sense Wright considered the slum in the context of the totality of society, a standpoint hitherto sadly lacking, and in doing so suggested the importance of reform

17 Ibid., p.29.
in terms of every member of society. In conjunction with other environmentalist views surfacing at the same time this comprehensive survey hinted at the inter-dependence of society and looked at the slum poor in these terms.

In spite of these developments the voluntary worker of the charities continued to concern himself largely with an individualistic interpretation of personal difficulties. This brought the charities into conflict with a developing group of "social workers"—the settlement workers. More in tune with environmentalist views the settlement workers used the neighborhood or community as their basis of operations and very quickly the British Toynbee Hall settlement model was adapted to many American cities in the 1880's.

Of the many successful settlements established in the 1880's, Hull House inspired by Jane Addams and Helen Gates Starr, led the way in the settlement world. Hull House, which was supported entirely by private donations, provided much needed community services, such as kindergartens, day nurseries, and an employment bureau in a deprived area of Chicago. Indeed, the many pioneer projects of social reform inspired by settlements such as Hull House were eventually taken over by local governments, once their worth had been demonstrated. As historian Hay Ginger has observed, "Hull House was continually organising a desirable activity, then calling upon the government to take it over".19

In the early years of the settlements there was a tendency for the settlement worker to be confused with the voluntary worker of the organised charities. This is somewhat ironic, particularly in view of the fact that the settlements actually began as a protest

against the methods and philosophy of the charities. The reform orientation of the settlements brought them into conflict with the charities and this conflict often became open hostility.20 This is adequately documented in the debates of the National Conference of Charities and Correction in the early 1890's.

As a group the settlement workers differed considerably from the voluntary workers of the charities. They were on the whole youthful, college-educated persons who realised the helplessness of many of those living in the slum neighborhoods and the need of the poor for help and support in the organisation of their basic rights. The settlement worker regarded his role in much broader terms than that of the charity worker. Jane Addams suggested the multiple functions of the settlement worker in her account of the early years at Hull House: "We early found ourselves spending many hours in efforts to secure support for deserted women, insurance for bewildered widows, damages for injured operators, furniture from the clutches of the instalment store. The settlement is valuable as an information and interpretation bureau. It constantly acts between the various institutions of the city and the people for whose benefit these institutions were erected".21 Settlement workers, by actually living in a neighborhood and identifying strongly with it, sought to understand their community and employ an essentially pragmatic approach to rectify the problems they found.

The last decades of the 19th century then witnessed the acceleration of an already established socio-economic trend towards

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industrialisation and urbanisation. With the increasing domination of economic life by big business interests and an increased use of the large unit of organisation in production, more and more families became subject to impersonal forces in society. Equally, the actual rate of urbanisation and immigration was so furious in these years that the period is characterised by a vast expansion of tenements, slums and ghettos in the industrial cities across the nation. The dramatic nature of the changing economic and social structure was such that the problems of the slum poor became "visible" to many for the first time and this attracted the attention of a wide range of socially conscious citizens. Indeed, the influence of the environment on man's functioning became so apparent that even conservative institutions such as the Protestant church were compelled to review their operations.

In the field of personal service the heightened interest in the environment was illustrated by the settlement worker who regarded the community, not the individual, as the basis of his work. His recognition of the fact that the poor felt strengthened by belonging to a viable, "living" neighborhood gave him a commitment to the development of pioneer social projects in the slum and tenement. The charity field worker, however, continued to rely on a one-to-one method of influencing the condition of the poor and, on the whole, individualistic interpretations of that condition predominated. With few exceptions the field workers of the organised charities maintained their "amateur" status and carried out the business of their agencies as unpaid volunteers with a degree of training largely out of touch with the complexities of a rapidly changing society. It required the first real crisis of the "new order", the violent trade cycle downswing of 1893, to shake the organised charities into making a meaningful appraisal of the effectiveness of their activities.
CHAPTER IV

THE IMPACT OF DEPRESSION - CHANGING PERCEPTIONS AND METHODS

By the early 1890's the charity organisation societies were firmly established on the American philanthropic scene and theirs was the accepted method of administering charity. Their philosophy, based upon the belief that relief without full investigation 'pauperised' its recipient and that the principle of "less eligibility" should be applied rigorously, went largely without challenge in the welfare field. The result was that most charity organisation societies lapsed into complacency over their effectiveness and the general feeling was that in the years to come pauperism would not pose such a serious threat to society. The depression of 1893, however, revealed the grave shortcomings of "scientific philanthropy" and gave a severe jolt to the leaders of the charity organisation movement.

The tragic consequences of the depression began a movement within charity organisation circles which appraised the very cornerstones of the movement - the practice of rigorous investigation, the granting of relief, and the non-interventionist attitude towards politics and social reform.

While it is commonly recognised that approximately two-thirds of the years from 1870 to 1910 were ones of "depression", the economic crisis of the year 1893 stands alone in this period in terms of the severity of its impact upon the life of the common man.
The major cause of the crisis was a lack of business certainty about American policy over the gold standard which led to large withdrawals of foreign capital. A general contraction of the money market ensued resulting in the failure of six hundred banks in 1893 alone. In addition 15,242 commercial enterprises collapsed, railroad construction ceased, and eventually mines and factories were compelled to discontinue production. Similarly in the agricultural sector, poor harvests resulted in widespread distress. By 1894 there were an estimated three million men unemployed. The depression, in fact, lasted for nearly four years with prices reaching their lowest point in 1896. The bitterness of the presidential election of that year may be attributed largely to the extreme economic difficulties of the times.

The depression of 1893, then, resulted in widespread distress in an era without social security provision and at a time when the economic margins of millions were perilously close to the "poverty line". A survey in 1893 by police patrolmen in New York City revealed that 614,495 families, comprising a total of 205,515 persons, had one or more members out of work. The result was that charity organisations received applications for relief which greatly exceeded their funds. In order to counteract this 'temporary' imbalance the charity organisations had to supplement their usual method of fund-raising, annual subscriptions, by other methods such as newspaper appeals, letters to special groups, and extraordinary appeals to regular subscribers for additional funds.

Little of the additional money received was in fact given in direct relief to families. By far the largest proportion was in

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fact invested in projects such as woodyards so that the "work test" might be applied as a condition of relief. Similarly, the principle of "less eligibility" continued to be enforced in that the work was designed to compel the recipient to find better employment elsewhere as soon as it became available. At the National Conference of 1895 Phillip W. Ayres, general secretary of the Cincinnati C.O.S., resolutely defended this policy and warned of the dangers of any relief work which was not both very hard and underpaid. Throughout the depression the charities steadfastly maintained their hostility towards public work relief although increasingly recognised the fact that private resources alone could not cope. As early as 1893 however relief programs instituted by the charities were far in excess of those provided by the states or municipalities.

After the initial impact of the depression of 1893 was absorbed the leaders of social welfare took stock of the situation at the National Conference of 1894. The proceedings of the National Conference for that year illustrate that many felt that they were coping admirably with the widespread misery which depression had brought. It is clear however that this interpretation was one largely based upon a preoccupation with moralistic considerations rather than the practical effectiveness of their interventions. As one commentator has indicated, the organised charities at this time continued to be "more concerned with the effects of relief upon men's souls than with the effects of malnutrition upon their bodies". Apart, then, from causing minor


alterations in charity organisation programs, such as increased efforts to recruit subscribers, the depression of 1893 had little initial impact upon the majority of charity organisations.

In the minds of some, however, the mass misery of 1893-96 raised grave doubts about the effectiveness of the existing system. It was evident, for example, as the depression wore on that the efforts to co-ordinate charity activities in the large cities were breaking down under the economic crisis. Similarly, many investigations into the social situations of applicants were undertaken hastily and inefficiently by volunteer workers. Perhaps most significantly the realisation slowly began to be accepted that during the depression more than the depraved and the tramp applied to the charities for relief. The Annual Report of the New York C.O.S. for 1894 pointed to the fact that many families, "heretofore self supporting or living on small savings and on loans secured at the pawnshop who had reached the end of their resources had been compelled by the suffering of their wives and children to disclose their needs."

The depression, then, did begin the questioning of many of those aspects of the "charities creed" which had been held dear by the private sector of social welfare for generations. It was in fact only when the severe economic crisis resulted in some questioning of the operation of the charities from within their own ranks that they began to take note of the swelling tide of criticism from without. The mass destitution caused by the depression turned the attention of charity workers away from

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individual fault theories of poverty towards the results of research which suggested the importance of unemployment, low wages, bad housing, and sickness. In 1900 the conservative New York A.I.C.P. reflected the changing perceptions with a statistical study which emphasised that lack of work and illness were the two main causes of poverty.⁵

Such a realisation began a reappraisal of the nature of 'cause and effect' in the problem of poverty. Previous to the new thinking the apathetic nature of the poor was regarded as one of the main reasons for their degradation. In an analysis of the social structure of a tenement street, two-thirds of the population of which were dependent upon the charitable agencies, Alvan Sanborn singled out the apparent apathy of the inhabitants as the main feature of life in "Bullfinch Street". "The saddest feature of the life is, oddly enough, the very thing that makes it superficially bright - the perfect content with a low standard of living which springs from an extreme poverty of ideals".⁶ After witnessing the dire straits of thousands of "respectable" persons who had no choice but to succumb to powerful environmental factors, more were willing to accept that degradation, imposed by factors outside the control of the individual, was actually instrumental in undermining the confidence and energy of the individual.

After the close of the 19th century, the individual causation argument of poverty was heard less frequently and the terminology of the charities became much more precisely defined. Even before the depression there were those who criticised sharply the tendency to

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⁵ New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, Annual report, 1900-01, p.26-27.
place thieves and rascals in the same category as the man who
struggled to become self-supporting. Jacob Riis criticised the
public agencies, too, in this respect for, by naming the public
relief machines, Departments of Charities and Corrections, they
were instrumental in robbing men of their self-respect and dignity. After the depression however, the term pauper was used in a far
more restricted sense and limited to those purposely evading work
and dependent upon charity for their existence.

This change in attitude is well illustrated by the fact that
as early as 1895 Jane Addams could write, "As charity workers
slowly began to understand and sympathise with people who were
poor but not paupers the use of "poverty" and "laziness" as
synonyms declined. Money is still respected but its possession
is by no means assumed to imply the possession of the highest
moral qualities." The depression in fact acted as a catalyst
in awakening the charities to those views on the nature of poverty
and society which were already being expressed elsewhere. In the
end the charity workers found that they had no alternative but to
alter those methods of their philosophy which had developed in a
very different economic and social climate to that of the late
19th century.

The individual fault argument, equally, came under attack in
the late 19th century from a very different source. The work
of the German biologist August Weismann gave birth to the modern
science of genetics and largely discredited the previously
influential studies of Richard Dugdale and Oscar McCulloch.

7 Jacob A. Riis, "Special Needs of the Poor in New York City",
The Forum, 14 (Dec., 1892), 476-491.

8 Jane Addams, "The Subtle Problems of Charity", Atlantic
Monthly, 83 (Feb., 1899), 113.
Weismann's theory, that heredity is a question of the continuity of the germ-plasm and that acquired characteristics cannot be transmitted to descendants, helped to free charity workers from the constraints of crude biological determinism. Heredity thus became secondary to environmental factors in the debate on the causation of poverty and opened the minds of many to take a broader view of the individual in relation to society. Charity workers increasingly recognised that much of the poverty earlier ascribed to causes within the family situation, was, in fact, created by external forces.

The movement away from the belief that the individual had almost complete control over his own destiny led to an important reassessment by the charities of the "method" employed by them. Not long after the worst excesses of the depression became evident that first principle of charity organisation - the virtue of thorough investigation - began to be regarded in a different light. The view held formerly, that the prime function of investigation was to detect imposition, changed slowly over the last decade of the 19th century to one which viewed the 'in-depth' study of an applicant's situation as solely to determine the best means by which that applicant might be assisted. Investigations thus became increasingly defined in positive terms and applicants were approached more in a spirit of helpful enquiry than one of interrogation to uncover past failings. In this broadening of the concept of investigation lay the basis of the practice of social casework.

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9 See for example, Josephine Shaw Lowell, "The True Aim of Charity Organisation Societies," The Forum, 21 (June, 1896) 498.
Equally, the broader perception of the poverty problem necessitated a review of the whole question of the granting of relief by the charities. Clearly the old punitive notion of "work or starve" was felt by many to be totally inappropriate now that the shortcomings of the economic system in failing to provide work for all had been highlighted by both the catastrophe of depression and by social research. As such, the granting of relief was felt justified by the charities if that relief was a means to "rehabilitation". Thus under a new frame of reference the granting of financial or material aid was regarded as legitimate if it was felt that in the long-term the receipt of that aid would lead to a family or individual becoming self-supporting.

For the first time then, and after years of debate, the charities accepted a broader interpretation of relief to include assisting the needy in their own homes. Implicit in this was the acceptance of some responsibility to those unable to maintain standards of living accepted by the community as adequate. The shift was away from being moralistic to being realistic for, increasingly, "workers came to understand that the commitment of children or the breaking up of families on the basis of poverty alone was far more pauperising than receipt of alms".10

One important result of the changing perceptions was the way the charities came to regard the pursuit of social reform as a legitimate aspect of their activities. As early as 1895 one member of the National Conference emphasised to his colleagues that, although helping individuals one by one was important, the charity organisation societies should do all in their power "to abolish all conditions which depress, to promote measures which

raise men and neighborhoods and communities". In this respect the charities moved slowly towards the stance taken by the settlement workers who regarded agitation for reform as one of their most potent weapons.

The reform orientation of the settlement workers meant that the tragedy of depression merely confirmed their belief in the power of the environment whereas it had prompted a brand new way of thinking for their colleagues in organised charity. The movement of the organised charities towards the thinking of the settlements is illustrated well in the deliberations of the National Conference. The open hostility of the settlements and the charities of the early 1890's relented with the inclusion of a whole section to the interests of the settlements in 1896. In 1904 a new department was created and built into the Conference entitled "Neighborhood Improvement". Ultimate acceptance of the respectability of the settlement method came in 1909 with the election of settlement leader, Jane Addams, as president of the Conference.

This narrowing of the rift between the two "methods" of social work has been described by Jane Addams herself. "In the earlier years of the American settlements", she wrote "the residents were sometimes impatient with the accepted methods of charitable administration and hoped, through residence in an industrial neighborhood, to discover more co-operative and advanced methods of dealing with the problems of poverty which are so dependent upon industrial maladjustment. But during twenty years,

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the settlements have seen the charitable people, through their very knowledge of the poor, constantly approach nearer to those methods formerly designated as radical.  

The entry of the charities into the reform arena began in earnest with the action of the New York C.O.S. in establishing a tenement house committee in 1897. Appalled by the fact that the committee's recommendations were ignored by city officials, Lawrence Veiller, secretary of the C.O.S. committee, organised a tenement house exhibition which opened early in 1900. This exhibition, which was a masterpiece in the presentation of statistical and illustrative evidence, revealed that the tenement problem in the city was worsening as buildings were being erected comparable in every way to those which had been in existence for half a century.

One visitor to the exhibition, Governor Theodore Roosevelt, was so impressed by Veiller's work that he pledged his support to the scheme. Roosevelt's help was a key factor in the creation of a new investigating body, the New York State Tenement Commission, in 1900. As secretary and leading figure of the new Commission, Veiller was responsible for most of its proposals. Upon investigation of the twenty-seven largest American cities Veiller found that New York had the worst housing conditions in the nation, followed closely by Boston, Cincinatti, Jersey City, and Hartford. One of the major reasons for this situation, Veiller concluded, was the existence of the dumb-bell type of tenement which excluded even the minimum

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12 Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull House (New York, 1930), p.306.

The Commission's most important step was the outlawing of the dumb-bell type of tenement and the institution of a revised code which replaced the dumb-bell shaft with a court, to vary in size with the height of the building. Veiller was also successful in obtaining a separate tenement house department for the city. With the tact of Robert de Forest at its head and the driving force of Veiller behind, the Tenement House Department rigorously enforced building regulations and began the collection of data on tenement house conditions.

The action of the New York C.O.S. in pressing so hard for reform marked a break with past charity organisation tradition in that practical action on a mass scale was placed above individual moral considerations. Roy Lubove has pointed out Veiller's approach in which "the ability to draft a workable housing law, push it through the legislature and ensure its proper enforcement was infinitely more useful than any amount of social theorising." Lawrence Veiller, in fact, headed the housing investigations made for the Pittsburgh Survey in 1907-1908. Funded by the Russell Sage Foundation this survey investigated a wide range of complex social problems, revealing a mass of sociological data which stressed the interrelated nature of poor environmental conditions and deviant behaviour. Other studies initiated by fieldworkers in the early twentieth century, such as Louise More's study of Wage Earners' Budgets, emphasised that even in so-called

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16 Louise Boland More, Wage Earners' Budgets (New York, 1907).
prosperous times many families existed within extremely narrow economic margins.

One major impetus to social reform in the early 20th century was the Supreme Court decision in the Muller v. Oregon case of 1908. The "Brandeis" decision, as it came to be known, supported the constitutionality of an Oregon law limiting the hours of labor of women in laundries. The acceptance by the Court of the principle that some 'freedoms' could be curbed for the protection of the majority made social reform efforts feasible. Following this decision social workers redoubled their efforts in their use of politics and government to achieve their objectives. Social workers were in fact very influential at the White House Conference of January 1909 which discussed the care of dependent children. The Conference was followed by the establishment of the United States Children's Bureau which represented a major break with the concept that the federal government should remain aloof from social welfare issues. A major principle agreed upon by the Conference was that children should not be removed from homes on the grounds of poverty alone. As such the concept of preventive work was firmly endorsed.

Heartened by the victory of the "Brandeis" decision and the gains made at the White House Conference social workers were more willing to enter the political arena and, in fact, were very active in the Progressive party campaign of 1912. Through a committee on Standards of Living and Labor established by the National Conference social workers formulated the main social planks of the Progressive party platform. The campaigns for a "living wage", reasonable hours, abolition of child labor, and social insurance for
old age and sickness were endorsed by all shades of opinion in social welfare.

Allen F. Davis has pointed out that traditionally the presidential campaign of 1912 has been viewed by historians as a debate between the New Nationalism and New Freedom, with the Progressive party largely representing the personal revolt of Theodore Roosevelt.17 As far as social workers were concerned, however, the New Nationalism and the charisma of Theodore Roosevelt were very much secondary to the fact that, "the Progressive party, made possible by Roosevelt's bolt from the Republican convention in June 1912, seemed to be the great cause they had been seeking... They supported the party not because of Roosevelt, nor because of the New Nationalism, but because of the social and industrial planks of the Progressive party platform which they played a large part in drafting".18

Despite their commitment to reform, few social workers felt that the Progressive party would emerge victorious from the 1912 election. They did feel, however, that the Progressive party was an opportune vehicle for educating the public to the need for social reform and to prepare the ground for the election of a Progressive president in 1916. Many social workers, in fact, "compared the Progressive party in 1912 to the Republicans in 1856. They expected to replace the Republicans as the Republicans had replaced the Whigs and to win in 1916 as the Republicans had won in 1860".19

18 Ibid., p.673.
19 Ibid., p.683.
Initially, indeed, defeat in 1912 merely strengthened the social workers' determination to work for reform. To this end a complex nationwide organisation, entitled the National Progressive Service, was established by social workers to spread the reform gospel. Within two years, however, there was widespread disillusionment with the Progressive party, and particularly within the social work section of it. Roosevelt seemed to rely more and more upon his most conservative advisors, especially George Perkins, a partner in J.P. Morgan and Co., whom the social workers distrusted. After the 1914 Senate elections in which most Progressive candidates were defeated, many social workers deserted the party to support Wilson. In any event social reform as a major political issue was doomed after August 1914 when events in Europe turned public attention towards international affairs.

The twenty years from the depression of 1893 to World War I witnessed several important changes in the orientation of the organised charities. The impact of economic crisis coupled with a massive upwelling of social research material revealed the grave shortcomings of charity organisation practices. Previously held views were re-appraised, particularly the more punitive aspects of policy, now that the individual fault theory of the causation of poverty held less credibility. The charities began to take a more liberal view of the purpose of 'investigation' and the granting of relief and, through the National Conference, supported a wide-ranging program of social reform. Despite this, however, one commitment remained intact - the belief in the legitimacy of 'one-to-one' contact as a powerful means of influencing the poor. What failed to remain intact, after the lessons of the 1890's had been learned, was the haphazard manner in which "friendly visitors" were allowed to approach their task.
CHAPTER V
THE DEMISE OF THE "FRIENDLY VISITOR"

The impact of changing perceptions of the causation of poverty on methods adopted by charity organisation leaders was remarkable. The leaders of the charities realised that it was unlikely that the accepted views of generations would alter overnight and it was clear that in the case of many visitors the required adjustments in approach to the poor would be made slowly, if at all. The depression of 1893 emphasised the complex socio-economic structure of American society and many leaders of social welfare came to the realisation that, to appreciate the nature of society - and to assist individuals in adjusting to that society - required more than a part-time commitment to the work. This realisation did not bring the end of the "friendly visitor" but marked the beginning of the end for the unguided "amateur" field worker. The recognition of certain areas of required expertise in visiting and the reorganisation of the structure of many charitable agencies led to an increased status for the paid staff of agencies, the "social workers", and a corresponding diminution of the status of the volunteer.

At the time the charity organisation societies were established in the 1870's and 1880's the role given the friendly visitor was such that she was the key figure in the organisation. Although expected to consult with the volunteer district committee
for her particular area, the friendly visitor was largely autonomous and was commonly regarded as the only person capable of making a comprehensive diagnosis of a family's situation and acting appropriately upon it. However, the number of friendly visitors always fell short of the numbers required and, in times of economic difficulty, charity organisation societies had to recruit more paid staff. In 1893, for example, the New York society had to increase its paid staff by around one-third to cope with the huge number of applications for relief.

Such paid agents were expected to conduct the initial investigations only and to keep the records of the society. In practice, however, the pressures of work resulted in agents undertaking greater responsibility for the actual field work of the agency so that the charity agent gradually became recognised as an "expert" within the society. As agents acquired expertise in case treatment as well as case investigation, "it was increasingly difficult to maintain the fiction that a volunteer visiting a few isolated cases, whether on a sporadic or sustained basis, could hope to match the treatment given by an agent . . . Friendly visiting was still considered the ideal service method, but the volunteer visitors were beginning to turn their attention to raising funds for projects like work-rooms and laundries which they established and then administered".

The chronic shortage of funds and the mass misery of the 1890's placed a premium on efficiency in both administration and field work practice. It came to be recognised that the paid agent, with his full-time continuous experience, might be in the best

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position to identify needs and suggest remedies. The undercurrents of change beginning to influence the policies adopted by many of the leaders of charity organisation at this time were ones which required a high degree of adjustment on the part of the visitors.

Attitudes to the granting of relief, investigation, and towards poverty itself were undergoing rapid reappraisal at this time. Given the middle-or upper-class status of most "friendly visitors" and their otherwise rather sheltered existences, many found it difficult to come to terms with anything other than personal fault theories of poverty. Now that the ability to perceive man within his social and economic environment was deemed much more important many volunteers whose approach was purely punitive or condescending fell by the wayside. It is indeed true that, "in practice, many of the visitors were unable to live up to some of the intellectual demands of friendly visiting theory".  

The changing conception of the role of the friendly visitor is excellently illustrated in the speeches of one of the leaders of charity organisation, Mary Richmond. Immediately prior to her appointment as general secretary of the Baltimore Charity Organisation Society in 1890, Miss Richmond addressed the annual general meeting of that agency with 'friendly visiting' as her subject matter. Speaking of the increasing inequality in society, Miss Richmond warned her audience, "Do not hope to right the evil by material gifts. You are only adding fuel to the fire. But a much simpler thing would do it - a thing so simple that I am afraid you will not believe in it - simple friendliness . . . Through all the alleys and by-ways, through all the miles of wretched commonplace and squalor, into each miserable semblance of a home,

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it would bring a new standard of decency, a new hope and expectancy to which the poor would slowly but surely rise. As such, Miss Richmond pleaded with her audience to, "put out the fires: put out the fires of hopeless misery, of intemperance, of wrong relations of man to man and plant God's sunlight there in place of them."

The theme of Miss Richmond's address of 1890 was that the main requirement in friendly visiting was a Christian commitment which on its own could produce remarkable results with the poor. No mention was made of the need for guidance or the supervision of such well-intentioned actions. Seventeen years after her Baltimore speech Miss Richmond gave an address at the National Conference of Charities and Correction, also entitled "Friendly Visiting". In contrast to her crusading zeal of 1890, the main theme of this address was the harm which could be done to both visitor and visited if no guidance was given to volunteer visitors. In particular Miss Richmond spoke of one visitor who knew who had become disillusioned after a bad experience in visiting: "Not only had she had no success but she had brought away from her failure a new set of prejudices. The visited families may have suffered a similar disillusionment, and all of this was due, probably, to the absence of guidance..."

Miss Richmond then asked a vital question which she answered herself, "what have volunteers a right to demand from the agencies with which they ally themselves as visitors? First, knowledge of the conditions that surround the families visited and knowledge of


4 Ibid., p.42.

the probability of success or failure. Second, interpretation of the visitors' experiences which should be patiently related to the neighborhood, to the city or town, and to the widest social issues. Charity societies however good their intentions, have no right to meddle with the lives of the poor unless they can better them . . . . The responsibility is a serious one, and visitors are justified in refusing to associate themselves with charities in which it is not seriously taken.6

Clearly then Miss Richmond took a very different view of friendly visiting in 1907 from her stance of 1890. By 1907 she was emphasising the responsibility of the agency in educating volunteers to the needs of individuals in society. Equally, stress was being placed upon the close supervision of volunteers as an aid to their personal development. Miss Richmond, along with most other leaders of charity organisation, had realised by this time that friendly visiting was not necessarily beneficial purely because the activity had its origin in good intentions. The bias was now placed firmly upon the effectiveness of the service and the irresponsibility of allowing inconsistent, haphazard patterns of visiting.

Discontent with the largely "amateur" organisation of the charities, and the realisation that friendly visiting in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was a complex task, led to a demand for training in social welfare. Although each agency had its own training schemes, specialising in the particular activity of the agency, there arose frequent difficulties in inter-agency communication. To offset this, it was argued that charity workers should undertake common training in the general principles underlying the practice of social welfare as well as encountering the work of other colleagues in a learning situation.

6 Ibid.
In 1897 Miss Richmond made her famous plea to the National Conference for a 'Training School in Applied Philanthropy' when she compared the emerging breed of charity workers with their counterparts in the medical profession. Miss Richmond's commitment to the need for training in the principles of charity work was total. She declared, "What an incalculable gain to humanity when those of us who are doctoring social diseases in many departments of charitable work will have found a common ground of agreement and be forced to recognise certain established principles as underlying all effective service".  

The year after her plea to the National Conference the New York Charity Organisation Society established a six week summer training course for thirty charity workers. In 1903 a winter course was added and in 1904 a one-year course was begun by the New York School of Philanthropy, the forerunner of the New York School of Social Work. The Chicago Institute of Social Science began giving courses in social welfare in 1903 as part of the extension division of the University of Chicago. A year later the School for Social Workers in Baltimore commenced its operations under the sponsorship of Simmons College and Harvard University.

The initiation of full-time training away from the agencies helped develop the original work of the volunteer into a less moralistic, more dynamic approach to dealing with individuals and families in need. The emphasis was increasingly placed upon a 'method' of visiting based on facts and objective judgement of the client in his social situation, rather than on prejudice. Training helped eliminate patronising overtones in visiting and stressed

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7 Mary Richmond, "The Need of a Training School in Applied Philanthropy", The Long View (New York, 1930), p.101. This paper was first given at the National Conference of Charities and Correction in 1897.

8 A detailed account of the establishment of social work education in the U.S.A. is available in John E. Hagerty, The Training of Social Workers (New York, 1931).
enlisting the client's help so that the worker did things with the client and not, simply, for the client. The attempt to provide insight into the unique individuality of clients and the need to view them in their social environments were the first stages in the development of social casework, which later became recognised as the particular 'method' of the social work profession. The commencement of full-time education in social work marked the acknowledgment of the complex nature of dealing with the individual and the society within which he lived.

An important feature of early social work education as established by the charities was the conscious attempt to formalise training away from the agencies themselves. This, Roy Lubove has suggested was inspired by the fact that, "Professional training was not viewed merely as a substitute or alternative to apprenticeship but as a concrete demonstration of the "scientific" character of social work and a turning point in the transition from vocational to professional status".9

In addition to their intellectual content the early training courses acknowledged that the desire to have contact with those in need often sprang from less than altruistic motives. It was recognised that some visitors, indeed, had unhealthy motives and volunteered merely to project their own personal inadequacies upon those who were, apparently at least, less adequate.

In view of this, one aspect of training, considered as important as the grasp of the sociological content, was the process of one-to-one supervision by which a visitor could discuss those prejudices and emotions which might blur objectivity. Thus, as well as the

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need to appreciate the academic aspects of the work, visitors were increasingly asked to undergo self-scrutiny, a practice which many found very painful. The development of this "professional subculture" by the emergent profession played almost as large a part in the long-term exclusion of the amateur as the formalisation of training itself. "The assumption that social work demanded not only scientific and technical skills but certain personal attributes emerged as a second limitation upon the spontaneous will to serve. In both cases an effort was made to restrict membership in the practitioner group to those qualified by training and indoctrination." 10

The restrictions which began to be placed on the activities of the volunteer visitors were certainly reflected in the membership of the early training courses. The full-time paid workers of the charities, in fact, played the major role in these courses both as students and teachers. Although invited to the majority of courses the volunteer was expected to make a minor contribution only. As one commentator has suggested, volunteer visitors attending the 1904 winter course of the New York School of Philanthropy were, "expected to learn only enough about the field to exercise 'intelligent discrimination' in providing the agency with 'financial' and 'moral' support". 11 By this time the paid agent was becoming the "social worker" and expected to carry out ongoing work with the client as well as undertaking the initial investigations. Vastly increased responsibilities led to a corresponding increase in the status of the paid worker vis-à-vis the volunteer.

10 Ibid., p.156.

Once the full-time agents had begun to establish their new role in case treatment, the agencies, now more important as employers, rather than mere co-ordinators of field work personnel, began to turn their attention towards their own methods of organisation. Increasingly, the charities rejected the informal systems of old in favor of more formal, bureaucratic management systems in the quest for organisational efficiency. Such developments, however, were anathema to many friendly visitors whose previous involvement with the agencies had been based upon highly informal arrangements. Suddenly, the administrator's need for efficiency, and the social worker's quest for professionalisation, rendered informality impracticable and contributed to a diminished role for the volunteer. Dorothy Becker has pointed out, "As her tasks grew increasingly complex and demanded professional training, the paid worker devoted her attention to staff standards and salary. Although the process of job displacement from volunteer to professional caseworker was well under way, volunteers were too disinterested and paid staff members too preoccupied with status concerns, to make any effort to study the effect of changed conditions on the use of volunteers".  

In practice most agencies adopted a system of "selective voluntarism". Volunteers, far from being key persons, were now expected to conform to the demands of the agency and accept guidance from that agency. Many volunteers, however, were clearly not prepared to accept this reversal of role and turned their attention to other activities.

Given the inflexible attitudes of generations, many volunteer visitors to the poor found great difficulty in coming to terms with views accepted by many leaders of charity organisation at the beginning of the 20th century. Once these new views were translated into different methods of 'treating' the poor many friendly visitors found themselves at variance with their agencies. Equally, the desire of agencies to educate their visitors formally, along with close investigation of the visitor's motivation to work with the underprivileged, resulted in further disenchantment. Finally, the 'bureaucratization' of agencies was instrumental in completing the reversal of status between volunteer and paid worker.

Despite these developments those "friendly visitors" who remained committed to the work of the agencies continued to be regarded as extremely important resources. After 1900, however, the basis of their association with the agencies was much more restricted and clearly defined than ever before as the interests of the "profession" became uppermost in the minds of the paid "social workers".
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout history there has always been the desire on behalf of certain of society's members to assist those deemed less fortunate than themselves. In the 19th century in America there arose an organised method of mobilising and administering such 'goodwill', known as charity organisation. The "friendly visitors" recruited through this method attempted to change the lives of those they visited through human contact and personal influence. How far, then, did this influence extend and was this influence of a 'reactionary' or 'progressive' nature?

Superficially, the upper- and middle-class backgrounds of the great majority of friendly visitors, supplemented by their individual fault theories of poverty, suggests the purely palliative function of friendly visiting. It is often argued that the friendly visitor commonly undertook her service as a mere sop to her own conscience and without regard for the effects of her involvement upon the recipients of her service. Similarly, it is pointed out that the degree of training given visitors was minimal and that friendly visitors made no attempt to impart other than middle-class values upon a large group of persons to whom such values were alien. In short, this view attacks the Whig interpretation of social welfare history and stresses that far from being a force of democratic
advance the friendly visitor was involved in a conspiratorial plot against the masses. By preaching the need for adjustment to the standards of a middle-class society, visitors, it is claimed, sought to preserve their own vested interests.

In part this study agrees with such an assessment but seeks to warn against a totally cynical view of the friendly visitor. The purely critical view does in fact tend to ignore the historical context of the time in which the friendly visitor offered her service to the poor. Disregarding any ulterior motives which may have been held by certain visitors and the limitations of philosophy held by the agencies themselves, the charities did in fact attempt to provide some form of personal service in an era dominated in industry by the "robber barons", and in philosophy by Social Darwinism. Emphasis upon the potential of the individual and his ability to progress through his own efforts was tremendous in the 1870's and 1880's and a non-interventionist spirit was widespread. In such a climate the achievement of charity organisation in firmly establishing the respectability of some form of organised intervention in the lives of the poor was not inconsiderable.

When the crunch came, of course, with the depression of 1893 the organisation of charity was shown to be on much too narrow an economic and philosophical footing. The depression and the vast upwelling of social research of the 1890's amply illustrated the fact that American society had changed dramatically from that when the "charities creed" was formulated. The widespread distress of the 1890's drove home the fact that environmental factors by far outweighed individual ones in the causation of poverty. As such, the leaders of charity organisation were compelled by external influences to appraise their operations and this led to new approaches
towards 'investigation', the provision of relief and the use of politics as a reform weapon.

More than anything else, however, the decade of the 1890's was a watershed for the friendly visitor. Recognition of the complex relationship between the individual and society led to a new acceptance of the full-time, trained officer as the basis of charity organisation. An almost complete reversal of role ensued in which the friendly visitor was relegated to a restricted function. That function was now determined by the demands of the "profession" which curtailed the activities of the "amateurs" who were regarded as potentially dangerous, both to their clients and to the profession itself.

By 1910, then, the movement was well under way by which the new "social workers" sought to strip their predecessors of much of their involved contact with clients. It is a well-known feature of the social work profession, however, that it has, until recently, tended to ignore its own heritage. This has resulted in under-estimation of those methods of the past which survived professionalisation. One comparison of the present day social work method of casework, for example, has pointed out that those deeply cherished bases of casework - objectivity, the individuality of each client, and the need for self determination on the part of the client - are all to be found in the debates of the National Conference of the 1880's and 1890's.¹

The fact that many of the field personnel of the agencies were ill equipped to carry out the propositions put forward by the leaders of charity organisation should not blind us to the fact that the basis of what would later become the principal tool of the profession, social casework, was being formulated prior to 1900. Once the depression of the 1890's illustrated

the inadequacy of volunteer personnel, the introduction of training and more full-time officers allowed a greater commitment to such concepts on behalf of actual field staff. This led to the gradual development of that distinctive social work method, known as social casework, which in the end, far outlasted the passing interest of fieldworkers in social reform.
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