

# REFORM THROUGH SOCIAL WORK.

SOME FORCES THAT TELL FOR DECENCY IN NEW YORK CITY.

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT.



ANY one who has a serious appreciation of the immensely complex problems of our present-day life, and of those kinds of benevolent effort which for lack of a better term we group under the name of philanthropy, must realize the infinite diversity there is in the field of social work. Each man can, of course, do best if he takes up that branch of work to which his tastes and his interests lead him, and the field is of such large size that there is more than ample room for every variety of workman. Of course there are certain attributes which must be possessed in common by all who want to do well. The worker must possess not only resolution, firmness of purpose, broad charity, and great-hearted sympathy, but he must also possess common-sense sanity, and a wholesome aversion alike to the merely sentimental and the merely spectacular. The soup-kitchen style of philanthropy is worse than useless, for in philanthropy as everywhere else in life almost as much harm is done by soft-headedness as by hard-heartedness. The highest type of philanthropy is that which springs from the feeling of brotherhood, and which, therefore, rests on the self-respecting, healthy basis of mutual obligation and common effort. The best way to raise any one is to join with him in an effort whereby both you and he are raised by each helping the other. This is what has been done in those factories in Cleveland, Dayton, Pittsburg, and elsewhere, in which the betterment of working life has been aimed at, and partially achieved, through measures beneficial alike to employer and employed.

Any man who takes an active part in the varied, hurried, and interesting life of New York must be struck, not only by the number of the forces which tell for evil, but by the number of the forces which tell for good. Of course most of these are not, in the narrow sense of the term, philanthropic forces at all; but many of them are, and among these there is the widest variety.

In this paper it is only possible to touch upon a very few of the ways in which philanthropic work of worth is being done in New York City. It is necessary to speak of individuals, because otherwise it would be impossible to emphasize the widely different kinds of work which can thus be done. These individuals are mentioned simply as typifying certain phases, certain methods. There are countless others who could be mentioned; it merely happens that these particular men have occupied to advantage certain widely different parts of the great field of usefulness.

Much can be done in downright charitable work, and there are great fragments of our social life in which the work must be in part or in whole charitable. The charity workers do an amount of good which in some cases is literally inestimable. Yet, on the whole, it becomes ever increasingly evident that the largest opportunity for work along the lines of social and civic betterment lie with the independent classes of the community—the classes which have not yielded to the many kinds of downward pressure always so strong in city life. Sometimes this work may take the form of an organized effort to secure greater equality of opportunity. Sometimes the best way to work is the oldest and simplest; that is, by trying the effect of character upon character.

Political and social conditions are often closely interwoven, and always tend to act and react upon one another. It is impossible to have a high standard of political life in a community sunk in sodden misery and ignorance; and where there is industrial well-being there is at least a chance of its going hand in hand with the moral and intellectual uplifting which will secure cleanliness and efficiency in the public service. Politics have been entered by a good many different doors, but in New York City Mr. F. Norton Goddard is probably the only man who ever entered on the career of a district leader by the door of philanthropy. Mr. Goddard, feeling he ought to do something serious in life, chose a quarter on the East Side for his experiment, and he entered upon

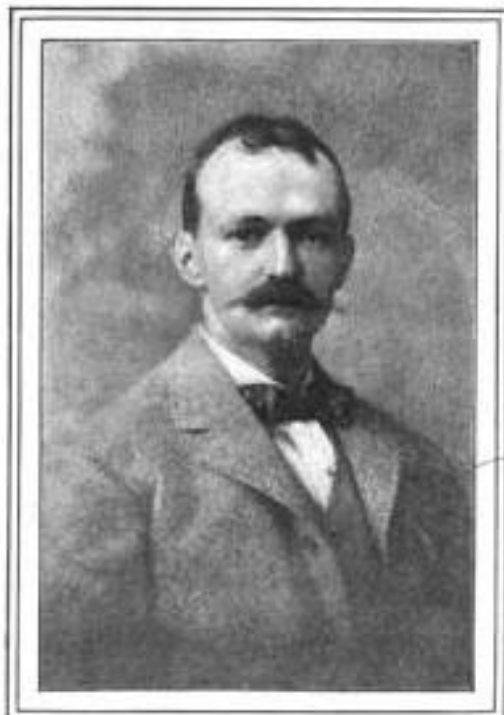
it without the slightest thought of going into politics, simply taking a room in a tenement house with the idea of testing his own capacities and to find out if he was fit to do what has grown to be known as "settlement work." He speedily became very much interested in the men with whom he was thrown in contact, and also became convinced that he personally could do most by acting, not in connection with others, but for his own

hand. After a few weeks he joined a small club which met at first in a single room. From this one room sprang in the course of a couple of years the Civic Club at 243 East Thirty-fourth Street, than which there exists in all New York no healthier center of energetic social and political effort. Very speedily Mr. Goddard found himself brought into hostile and embarrassing contact with that huge and highly organized system of corruption, tempered with what may be called malevolent charity, which we know as Tammany. Every foe of decency, from the policy player to the protected

proprietor of a law-breaking saloon, had some connection with Tammany, and every move in any direction resulted in contact of some sort with a man or institution under Tammany's control. Mr. Goddard soon realized that organization must be met by organization; and, being a thoroughly practical man, he started in to organize the decent forces in such fashion as would enable him to check organized indecency. He made up his mind that the Republican party organization offered the best chance for the achievement of his object. As it then was, however, the Republican organization of the district in question served but little purpose save to deliver delegates in conventions, and was under the control of men who, although some degrees above the Tammany leaders, had no conception of running things on the plane

which Goddard deemed necessary. There were three courses open to him: He could acquiesce helplessly; he could start an outside organization, in which case the chances were a thousand to one that it would amount to nothing; or he could make a determined effort to control for good purposes the existing Republican organization. He chose the latter alternative, and began a serious campaign to secure his object. There was

at the time a fight in the Republican organization between two factions, both of which were headed by professional politicians. Both factions at the outset looked upon Goddard's methods with amused contempt, expecting that he would go the gait which they had seen so many other young men go, where they lacked either persistency or hard common sense. But Goddard was a practical man. He spent his days and evenings in perfecting his own organization, using the Civic Club as a center. He already had immense influence in the district, thanks to what he had done in the Civic Club, and



F. NORTON GODDARD,  
*District leader, philanthropist, and foe of Tammany.*

at this, his first effort, he was able to make an organization which, while it could not have availed against the extraordinary drill and discipline of Tammany, was able overwhelmingly to beat the far feebler machine of the regular Republican politicians. At the primary he got more votes than both his antagonists put together. No man outside of politics can realize the paralyzed astonishment with which the result was viewed by the politicians in every other Assembly district. Here at last was a reformer whose aspirations took exceedingly efficient shape as deeds; who knew what could and what could not be done; who was never content with less than the possible best, but who never threw away that possible best because it was not the ideal best; who did not try to reform the universe, but merely his own

district; and who understood thoroughly that though speeches and essays are good, downright hard work of the common-sense type is infinitely better.

It is more difficult to preserve the fruits of a victory than to win the victory. Mr. Goddard did both. A year later, when the old-school professional politicians attempted to oust him from his party leadership in the district association, he beat them more overwhelmingly than before; and when the Republican National Convention came around he went still further afield, beat out his opponents in the Congressional district, and sent two delegates to Philadelphia. Nor was his success confined to the primary. In both the years of his leadership he has enormously increased the Republican vote in his district, doing better relatively than any other district leader in the city. He does this by adopting the social methods of Tammany, only using them along clean lines. The Tammany leader keeps his hold by incessant watchfulness over every

almost every voter, in his district. Neither his objects nor his methods are good; but he does take a great deal of pains, and he is obliged to do much charitable work; although it is not benevolence of a healthy kind. Mr. Goddard was already, through the Civic Club, doing just this kind of work, on a thoroughly healthy basis. Going into politics had immensely helped with the club, for it had given a great common interest to all of the men. Of course Goddard could have done nothing if he had not approached his work in a genuine American spirit of entire respect for himself and for those with whom and for whom he labored. Any condescension, any patronizing spirit would have spoiled everything. But the spirit which exacts respect and yields it, which is anx-

ious always to help in a mood of simple brotherhood, and which is glad to accept help in return—this is the spirit which enables men of every degree of wealth and of widely varying social conditions to work together in heartiest good will, and to the immense benefit of all. It is thus that Mr. Goddard has worked. His house is in the district and he is in close touch with every one. If a man is sick with pneumonia, some

member of the Civic Club promptly comes around to consult Goddard as to what hospital he shall be taken to. If another man is down on his luck, it is Goddard who helps him along through the hard times. If a boy has been wild and got into trouble and gone to the penitentiary, it is Goddard who is appealed to to see whether anything can be done for him. The demands upon his time and patience are innumerable. The reward, it is to be supposed, must come from the consciousness of doing well work which is emphatically well worth doing. A very shrewd politician said the other day that if there were



DR. W. S. RAINSFORD,

*Rector of St. George's Church, one of the most potent forces in New York City for the social uplifting of the poor.*

twenty such men as Goddard in twenty such districts as his, New York City would be saved from Tammany, and that in the process the Republican machine would be made heartily responsive to and representative of the best sentiment of the Republicans of the several districts.

The University Settlements do an enormous amount of work. As has been well said, they demand on the part of those who work in them infinitely more than the sacrifice of almsgiving, for they demand a helping hand in that progress which for the comfort of all must be given to all; they help people to help themselves, not only in work and self-support, but in right thinking and right living. It would be hard to mention any form of civic effort for righteous-

ness which has not received efficient aid from Mr. James B. Reynolds and his fellow-workers in the University Settlement. They have stood for the forces of good in politics, in social life, in warring against crime, in increasing the sum of material pleasures. They work hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, with those whom they seek to benefit, and they themselves share in the benefit. They make their house the center for all robust agencies for social betterment. They have consistently endeavored to work with, rather than merely for, the community; to cooperate in honorable friendship with all who are struggling upward. Only those who know the appalling conditions of life in the swarming tenements that surround the University Settlement can appreciate what it has done. It has almost inevitably gone into politics now and then, and whenever it has done so has exercised a thoroughly healthy influence. It has offered to the people of the neighborhood educational and social opportunities ranging

from a dancing academy and musical classes, to literary clubs, a library, and a children's bank—the clubs being administered on the principle of self-management and self-government. It has diligently undertaken to cooperate with all local organizations such as trade unions, benefit societies, social clubs, and the like, provided only that their purposes were decent. The Settlement has always desired to cooperate with independent forces rather than merely to lead or direct the dependent forces of society. Its work in cooperation with trade unions has been of special value both in helping them where they have done good work, and in endeavoring to check any tendency to evil in any particular union. It has, for instance, consistently labored to secure the settlement of strikes, by consultation or arbitration, before the

bitterness has become so great as to prevent any chance of a settlement. All this is aside from its work of sociological investigation and its active cooperation with those public officials who, like the late Colonel Waring, desired such aid.

Healthy political endeavor should, of course, be one form of social work. This truth is not recognized as it should be. Perhaps, also, there is some, though a far lesser,

failure to recognize that a living church organization should, more than any other, be a potent force in social uplifting. Churches are needed for all sorts and conditions of men under every kind of circumstances; but surely the largest field of usefulness is open to that church in which the spirit of brotherhood is a living and vital force, and not a cold formula; in which the rich and poor gather together to aid one another in work for a common end. Brother can best help brother, not by almsgiving, but by joining with him in an intelligent and resolute effort for the uplifting of all. It is towards



ARTHUR VON BRIESEN,  
*Founder of the Legal Aid Society.*

this that St. George's Church, under Dr. W. S. Rainsford, has steadily worked. The membership of St. George's Church is in a great majority composed of working people—and young working people at that. It is a free church with a membership of over 4,000, most of the members having come in by way of the Sunday-school. Large sums of money are raised, not from a few people, but from the many. An honest effort has been made to study the conditions of life in the neighborhood, and through the church to remedy those which were abnormal. One of the troubles on the East Side is the lack of opportunity for young people, boys and girls, to meet save where the surroundings are unfavorable to virtue. In St. George's Church this need is, so far as can be, met by meetings—debating societies, clubs, social entertainments,



etc., in the large parish building. Years ago the dances needed to be policed by chosen ladies and gentlemen and clergymen. Now the whole standard of conduct has been so raised that the young people conduct their own entertainments as they see fit. There is a large athletic club and industrial school, a boys' battalion and men's club; there are sewing classes, cooking classes, and a gymnasium for working girls. Dr. Rainsford's staff includes both men and women, the former living at the top of the parish house, the latter in the little deaconess-house opposite. Every effort is made to keep in close touch with wage-workers, and this not merely for their benefit, but quite as much for the benefit of those who are brought in touch with them.

The church is, of all places, that in which men should meet on the basis of their common humanity under conditions of sympathy and mutual self-respect. All must work alike in the church in order to get the full benefit from it; but it is not the less true that we have a peculiar right to expect systematic effort from men and women of education and leisure. Such people should justify by their work the conditions of society which have rendered possible their leisure, their education, and their wealth. Money can never take the place of service, and though here and there it is absolutely necessary to have the paid worker, yet normally he is not an adequate substitute for the volunteer.

Of course St. George's Church has not solved all the social problems in the immediate neighborhood which is the field of its special effort. But it has earnestly tried to solve some at least, and it has achieved a very substantial measure of success towards their solution. Perhaps, after all, the best work done has been in connection with the development of the social side of the church organization. Reasonable opportunities for social intercourse are an immense moral safeguard, and young people of good character and steady habits should be encouraged to meet under conditions which are pleasant and which also tell for decency. The work of a down-town church in New York City presents difficulties that are unique, but it also presents opportunities that are unique. In the case of St. George's Church it is only fair to say that the difficulties have been overcome, and the opportunities taken advantage of, to the utmost.

Aside from the various kinds of work outlined above, where the main element is the

coming together of people for the purpose of helping one another to rise higher, there is, of course, a very large field for charitable work proper. For such work there must be thorough organization of the kind supplied, for instance, by the State Charities Aid Association. Here, again, the average outsider would be simply astounded to learn of the amount actually accomplished every year by the association.

A peculiar and exceedingly desirable form of work, originally purely charitable, although not now as exclusively so, is that of the Legal Aid Society, founded by Arthur von Briesen. It was founded to try to remedy the colossal injustice which was so often encountered by the poorest and most ignorant immigrants; it has been extended to shield every class, native and foreign. There are always among the poor and needy thousands of helpless individuals who are preyed upon by sharpers of different degrees. If very poor, they may have no means whatever of obtaining redress; and, especially if they are foreigners ignorant of the language, they may also be absolutely ignorant as to what steps should be taken in order to right the wrong that has been done them. The injuries that are done may seem trivial; but they are not trivial to the sufferers, and the aggregate amount of misery caused is enormous. The Legal Aid Society has made it its business to take up these cases and secure justice. Every conceivable variety of case is attended to. The woman who has been deserted or maltreated by her husband, the poor serving-maid who has been swindled out of her wages, the ignorant immigrant who has fallen a victim to some sharper, the man of no knowledge of our language or laws who has been arrested for doing something which he supposed was entirely proper—all these and countless others like them apply for relief, and have it granted in tens of thousands of cases every year. It should be remembered that the good done is not merely to the sufferers themselves, it is also a good done to society, for it leaves in the mind of the newcomer to our shores, not the rankling memory of wrong and injustice, but the feeling that, after all, here in the New World, where he has come to seek his fortune, there are disinterested men who endeavor to see that the right prevails.

Some men can do their best work in an organization. Some, though they occasionally work in an organization, can do best by themselves. Recently a man, well qualified to pass judgment, alluded to Mr. Jacob A.

Riis as "the most useful citizen of New York." Those fellow-citizens of Mr. Riis who best know his work will be most apt to agree with this statement. The countless evils which lurk in the dark corners of our civic institutions, which stalk abroad in the slums, and have their permanent abode in the crowded tenement houses, have met in Mr. Riis the most formidable opponent ever encountered by them in New York City.

Many earnest men and earnest women have been stirred to the depths by the want and misery and foul crime which are bred in the crowded blocks of tenement rookeries. These men and women have planned and worked, intelligently and resolutely, to overcome the evils. But to Mr. Riis was given, in addition to earnestness and zeal, the great gift of expression, the great gift of making others see what he saw and feel what he felt. His book, "How the Other Half Lives," did really go a long way toward removing the ignorance in which one-half of the world of New York dwelt concerning

the life of the other half. Moreover, Mr. Riis possessed the further great advantage of having himself passed through not a few of the experiences of which he had to tell. Landing here, a young Danish lad, he had for years gone through the hard struggle that so often attends even the bravest and best when they go out without money to seek their fortunes in a strange and alien land. The horror of the police lodging-houses struck deep in his soul, for he himself had lodged in them. The brutality of some of the police he had himself experienced. He had been mishandled, and had seen the stray dog which was his only friend killed for trying, in dumb friendship, to take his part. He had known what it was to sleep in door-steps and go days in succession without food. All these things he remem-

bered, and his work as a reporter on the New York "Sun" has enabled him in the exercise of his profession to add to his knowledge. There are certain qualities the reformer must have if he is to be a real reformer and not merely a faddist; for of course every reformer is in continual danger of slipping into the mass of well-meaning people who in their advocacy of the impracticable do more harm than good. He must possess high courage, disinterested desire to do good, and sane, wholesome common sense. These qualities he must have; and it is furthermore much to his benefit if he also possesses a sound sense of humor. All four traits are possessed by Jacob Riis. No rebuff, no seeming failure, has ever caused him to lose faith. The memory of his own trials never soured him. His keen sense of the sufferings of others never clouded his judgment, never led him into hysterical or sentimental excess, the pit into which not a few men are drawn by the very keenness of their sympathies; and



JACOB A. RIIS,  
"The most useful citizen of New York."

branch of the city government; whether he is interested in a boys' club up in the country; or in a scheme for creating small parks in the city; or in an effort to better the conditions of tenement-house life—no matter what his work is, so long as his work is useful, he can count on the aid of the man who perhaps more than any other knows the needs of the varied people who make up the great bulk of New York's population.

Half a dozen men have been mentioned, each only as a type of those who in the seething life of the great city do, in their several ways and according to their strength and varying capacities, strive to do their duty to their neighbor. No hard-and-fast rule can be laid down as to the way in which such work must be done; but most certainly every man, whatever his position, should strive to do it in some way and to some de-

gree. If he strives earnestly he will benefit himself probably quite as much as he benefits others, and he will inevitably learn a great deal. At first it may be an effort to him to cast off certain rigid conventions, but real work of any kind is a great educator, and soon helps any man to single out the important from the unimportant. If such a worker has the right stuff in him he soon grows to accept without effort each man on his worth as a man, and to disregard his means, and what is called his social position; to care little whether he is a Catholic or Protestant, a Jew or a Gentile; to be utterly indifferent whether he was born here or in Ireland, in Germany or in Scandinavia; provided only that he has in him the spirit of sturdy common sense and the resolute purpose to strive after the light as it is given him to see the light.

which some other men avoid, not because they are wise, but because they are cold-hearted. He ever advocates mercy, but he ever recognizes the need of justice. The mob leader, the bomb-thrower have no sympathy from him. No man has ever insisted more on the danger which comes to the community from the lawbreaker. He sets himself to kill the living evil, and small is his kinship with the dreamers who seek the impossible, the men who talk of reconstituting the entire social order, but who do not work to lighten the burden of mankind by so much as a feather's weight. Every man who strives, be it ever so feebly, to do good according to the light that is in him, can count on the aid of Jacob Riis if the chance comes. Whether the man is a public official, like Colonel Waring, seeking to raise some one

gave. If he strives earnestly he will benefit himself probably quite as much as he benefits others, and he will inevitably learn a great deal. At first it may be an effort to him to cast off certain rigid conventions, but real work of any kind is a great educator, and soon helps any man to single out the important from the unimportant. If such a worker has the right stuff in him he soon grows to accept without effort each man on his worth as a man, and to disregard his means, and what is called his social position; to care little whether he is a Catholic or Protestant, a Jew or a Gentile; to be utterly indifferent whether he was born here or in Ireland, in Germany or in Scandinavia; provided only that he has in him the spirit of sturdy common sense and the resolute purpose to strive after the light as it is given him to see the light.