

SOCIAL WORK AS A PROFESSION

By Oscar Leonard

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, a new profession is being developed—the social worker's profession. It is not yet fully unfolded, but it is growing. It has not yet developed standards. It has not yet begun to receive the recognition that will come in time. There was a time when the rabbi was not considered a professional man. He was a sort of necessary attachment to each community. For, is there a Jewish man living who cannot deliver a sermon, or read a service? Need one be specially trained to pray? One need not have special training to look after his own spiritual welfare, as it regards his own relations with the Infinite. But when a person is set aside to look after the welfare of a community, the thing passes from the individual to the social. One then begins to need special training and qualifications to fill the place. There is more than prayer and sermonizing to be done.

So in less than a generation, communities have come to recognize the rabbi as a professional man. With the recognition of his profession came everything that such recognition implies. The communities are the better for it. The rabbis surely are. For, unless they have the proper recognition, they could never wield the influence they should wield.

Turn now to the social worker. He is slowly emerging. He has not yet reached the standard he is going to reach. Communities do not yet fully realize the communal value of the social worker. In some places he is still regarded as a sort of necessary attachment to communal life. He is perhaps thought of as a "good man in his place." But we must come to realize that his place is everywhere in our communal life. We must begin to understand that as a professional man the social worker must be given the same recognition which is given to the other recognized professions.

I do not mean social recognition. That must be gained by the individual through his individuality. I mean professional recognition. Among non-Jews this has come much faster than it is coming among Jew-

ish people. To be sure, it is coming among us too. But it is not here yet.

Take the medical profession for instance. We all know a smattering of medicine. We read medical journals—some of us—we look up some of the popular medical books, and peruse articles written by physicians in our popular magazines. It is well that we should do these things. It is easier for the physician to make us follow instructions when the time comes. But while we gather this superficial knowledge we know we are amateurs. We never try to prescribe for the ills of others, or for ourselves. When serious occasions arise, we call in the doctor. We carry out his suggestions—whether we like them or not—if we have any intelligence. We may occasionally call for a "big doctor," but the point is that we always follow the instructions of some professional medical man. We tell all volunteers to step aside and say to the trained man, "You are the doctor."

That is because we have come to recognize the practice of medicine as a profession. Whether we have faith in the individual physician or not, we have faith in the profession as such.

Have we reached this stage in social work? Surely not. Here the amateur, the volunteer, often wishes to overrule the professional social worker. Here the amateur argues and frets. Is there a Jewish man or woman living who does not know how to do charity? Are we not a charitable people since the dawn of Jewish history? Is not charity bred in our bone? It is. Therefore we need the professional worker so that he may protect society from "charity."

I do not mean to underestimate the services of the volunteer worker. He or she is often necessary and useful. But the volunteer worker can only be truly useful when he, or most frequently she, works under the direction of the trained professional worker. The volunteer should always remember that she is an amateur and that a mediocre professional—in any profession—is better than a talented amateur.

Of course, with the advent of the trained worker a change is coming fast in this respect. But it is not coming as fast as might be desired. The time must come when the community will give the same recognition to the social physician it gives now to the physician of the body.

To be sure, we social workers must do our share to hasten that day. We can do it by fitting ourselves for our profession

as physicians do for theirs. We, of this generation, are the pioneers, the builders. We must see to it that the foundation we lay is good and strong. If we do our share today, those who come after us will have a solid foundation for their superstructure. While we have the hardships of the pioneer, let us remember that pioneering carries its advantages with it, in that it makes for growth of valuable qualities.

SETTLEMENT WORK IN COLUMBUS

M. N. Putterman

• Since time immemorial, the aim of every right-thinking Jew in America has been to teach his brethren from the other side the principles of Americanism. Today, there are a great many Jewish institutions in the United States which devote their energies to that end. The kind of activities in any one of these institutions depends largely on the character of the Jewish community respectively.

The Jewish Educational Alliance of this city, formerly the B'nai B'rith House, was established three years ago by the local organization of the B'nai B'rith. Like all other new enterprises it made but little progress at first. It required time and a great deal of energy to make the present institution what it is. The many unselfish workers for the Alliance have spared none of their valuable time and efforts to aid in every possible way in its growth. The writer will be justified in stating that about 90 per cent. of the Jewish immigrants to this city, during the past two years, have benefitted directly from this institution.

The various activities of the Alliance are the following: Night school, civil government class, public lectures, entertainments, library, reading room and game rooms. The following clubs meet regularly: the Young Men's Hebrew Association, the Young Women's Hebrew Association, the Jewish Dramatic Club, and the Nordau Zion Society.

The night school consists of three classes with a trained teacher in charge of each. The English language is taught to young and old alike. Over a hundred have been

registered this year. As a result of the good work done in that department, many of the pupils have already secured better positions; it enabled some to go into business for themselves, while others have been prepared for advanced courses.

The object of the civil government class is to teach the Jewish immigrant the principles of the United States government with the aim of preparing them for good citizens. This branch has done some good work this year, and is well worth mentioning.

The public lectures usually cover questions on every day life. They are always well attended. It is the pleasure of many prominent and educated people to lecture to the men and women at the Alliance.

The library contains nearly seven hundred volumes of the English and Yiddish language. These books are used by 226 regular subscribers. It is evident that the number of books is comparatively small. The writer hopes that in the near future many more volumes will be added through the kind friends of this institution.

The reading room is well supplied with periodicals of all kinds. There, as well as in the game rooms, many spend their idle hours. Many are thus prevented from the many evils which may befall an unoccupied mind. The Clubs as well are doing excellent work.

It is only a matter of a limited time when this institution will become a still greater factor in the community with a wider scope of activity.