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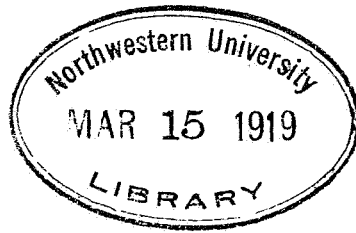
ONE THOUSAND
HOMELESS MEN

A STUDY OF ORIGINAL RECORDS

BY

ALICE WILLARD SOLENBERGER

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DEDICATED

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE
CENTRAL DISTRICT, CHICAGO BUREAU OF CHARITIES,
WHO SERVED DURING THE YEARS 1900 TO 1904, AND
WHOSE INTEREST AND STEADFAST SUPPORT MADE POS-
SIBLE MUCH OF THE WORK DESCRIBED IN THIS VOLUME

FOREWORD

THE untimely death of Mrs. Solenberger in December, 1910, after she had practically completed this work, but before it was ready for the press, has made a Foreword seem necessary. It had been Mrs. Solenberger's intention to write a preface and to add one more chapter summing up her conclusions. Since she was not able to do these final things, it is left for another to tell briefly the circumstances that led to the study herein presented, and to indicate the probable message of the unwritten last chapter.

In 1900 Mrs. Solenberger (then Miss Willard) was given charge of the Central District of the Chicago Bureau of Charities. The territory in the South Side of the city which it covered included within its borders what is called the "loop district" and the very important lodging house section that lies just beyond it. The general office of the Bureau, which was situated within the loop, referred all homeless applicants to the Central District office, as did later the four other South Side districts. For these reasons about one-third of the applicants dealt with at the Central District office were homeless men. Mrs. Solenberger found that they were being treated in an

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inadequate manner. Accepting the conditions in the district as they were, she, with her associates, gradually evolved a new plan of treatment of the men. This consisted in applying to them the methods, with certain adaptations, used in the investigation and treatment of families. These methods became the practice of the office. Such was the genesis of this study.

It was in no superficial way that Mrs. Solenberger undertook her responsibility. Intensively and extensively it led her on until she had at her command all the remarkable data contained in this book. During the first three strenuous years not much was thought of beyond the way to increase the efficiency of the work. Not only did this mean greater care, greater skill, greater sympathy in dealing with applicants, but an ever enlarging knowledge of conditions in that sordid, dirty, and unpleasant South Side lodging house neighborhood,—a neighborhood possessing, however, a curiously quickening and vibrant atmosphere for those who, like Mrs. Solenberger, really knew it. Here and there, scattered throughout this book are references to volunteered clues not only from the police, but from lodging house keepers and guests, which resulted time and time again in assistance that enabled her to trace men and boys and to learn the whole unvarnished truth about them when that truth vitally affected treatment. Her very quests, the splendid spirit of her work,—intelligent, not to

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be hoodwinked, but human, natural, and discerning,—promoted a mutual understanding, failing which no one may hope to get very far with that most elusive and impulsive creature, the homeless man. Indeed, Mrs. Solenberger's point of view in dealing with the men themselves has been so fundamentally subjective that her account of lodging house conditions, partly drawn from visits with health officials later, does not seem to belong to the main body of the study, and will be found in a separate chapter in the Appendix. Valuable as it is, it is not a part of Mrs. Solenberger's peculiar and unique contribution to the subject of homeless men. Others could have performed this service; no one else is yet equipped to give us the far more significant message.

How soon Mrs. Solenberger herself realized the values of the gradually accumulating knowledge whose written record lay in the case histories in her district office, no one can say. The writer's recollection is that as early as the autumn of 1902 she was seeking advice in the preparation of tentative schedules for this study. Then, as well as later, she regretted that she did not know at the beginning of her work what she could learn only from experience; namely, the importance of certain lines of inquiry in connection with homeless men, not alone for purposes of social investigation but for better constructive work. She has frankly indicated in the text where the absence of such knowledge in certain instances has reduced

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the significance of her conclusions. Nevertheless there may be an indirect benefit in the limitations of these earlier days. For, take it in the large, the amount of constructive work done for homeless men from one end of these four years to the other, —a work based merely upon knowledge and insight,—is so far ahead of that performed by many similar agencies whose equipment is perhaps greater, that it is worth while to be able to assert that only an ordinary desire efficiently to perform the task at hand supplied the impetus, and an ordinary district staff provided the equipment. At the beginning of the work there was no long look ahead to its possible uses as a study and interpretation.

From Mrs. Solenberger's retirement from the Central District in 1903 to this year of grace 1911 may appear to some a long lapse of time. But her contribution to her subject was steadily growing in these years; no year was wasted. During them, among other things, the subsequent careers of many of these men and boys have been traced, and the results of different kinds of treatment in permanency of improvement or the reverse, have been clearly revealed. To have accepted as final the knowledge of these men's lives as they stood at the end of 1904 or 1905 or 1906, would in many instances have considerably increased the margin of possible error.

Then again, there has been the steady, intensive work of drawing out of the silent, pregnant records

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the wealth of human illustration, which so vividly backgrounds and justifies Mrs. Solenberger's more general statements based upon the statistical analyses. And through it all has been the steady persistent purpose to read into the records of these men only that which could be read into them, the critical scrutiny, almost as if by another, of each statement, to test whether it was exaggerated or was securely and properly based.

Turning now to a more detailed consideration of Mrs. Solenberger's methods, it should be said that she applied herself to her task with but one preconceived idea and one prejudice. She believed that the personality-by-personality method of the charity organization movement had been too little used with homeless men and boys, and that until we employ this method with them, neither our theories regarding vagrancy nor our efforts to reduce it will be based upon a solid foundation of knowledge. Our social responsibilities toward individual wanderers and toward the families from which they come, will also remain unfulfilled. The writer distinctly remembers that Mrs. Solenberger early indicated this principle as the central purpose of her study. She had no thesis to prove; her discriminating analysis of facts reveals this again and again. But she marshalled these facts so as clearly to show that the homeless man problem could in no way be treated differently from the problem of the family. Certain factors, it is true, peculiar to these men require attention.

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Mrs. Solenberger has recognized these at their full value. For instance, she has by no means minimized the far-reaching results that will flow from the closing of the railroads to the brake beam or freight car dead-head. Nor has she minimized the need of inter-state agreements if no inter-state law be possible, to prevent "passing-on." On the other hand, she has shown us through the biographies of these very real men and boys, how interwoven into them are all the social and individual causes of deterioration which are found in the family itself. Because the same moving forces exist among men, the same method must be used, though naturally with some variations and some additional agencies. How strikingly she reveals the blameworthy principle upon which some wayfarer's lodges and woodyards are run, the principle of assuming that when a youth or a man is given and accepts work (made for him) that there the agency's responsibility ends. Here we learn the bitter lesson that activities like these are encouraging some men to break still further away from the responsibilities to which they should return. In so far as no reputable charity organization society would consider that it had dealt adequately with a family by giving the man work and going no deeper beneath the surface of his need, just so far should it and every other agency dealing with homeless men consider that they have failed, when they do this and nothing more for the wanderer. For in this last case the improbability that mere

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work will be a means of the wanderer's rehabilitation, is indicated by the very homelessness of his condition.

It is altogether probable that some such purport expressed in much more felicitous phrase would have been Mrs. Solenberger's message in the summing-up chapter never written.

The genesis and the message have been given. A word as to the scope. One thousand records of homeless men have been carefully analyzed for all that they have to show as to the causes of homelessness, the characteristics of the homeless, their individual treatment, their environment, and the social remedies. In addition, certain broad questions touching the problem of all the homeless are treated sometimes with sidelights from sources other than the author's own experience, but at no time without illustration from this particular regiment.

Among Mrs. Solenberger's papers were found rough drafts of two paragraphs which she evidently intended to include in a preface, and which are given with slight annotations:

"The writer acknowledges valuable advice and assistance in the preparation of this volume received from Mr. Francis H. McLean, Field Secretary, Charity Organization Department, Russell Sage Foundation; Mr. James Mullenbach, Superintendent Chicago Municipal Lodging House (now Assistant Superintendent United Charities of Chicago); Dr. William A. Evans, Commissioner

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of Health of Chicago (1910); Mr. William C. Ball, Chief Sanitary Inspector, Chicago Health Department; Dr. Adolf Meyer, Professor of Psychiatry, Johns Hopkins University; Dr. V. H. Podstata, Superintendent (1909) Illinois Northern Hospital for the Insane, Elgin, Illinois; Dr. O. C. Wilhite, General Superintendent (1909) Cook County Institution, Dunning, Illinois; Mr. John Koren, Expert Special Agent, United States Census; and many others to whom she wishes to extend thanks.

"A very large amount of help has also been given by the charity organization societies and associated charities of cities from one end of the country to the other. The writer is especially grateful to the secretaries and agents of these societies who with invariable courtesy and promptness have upon request made recent investigations and reported all that could be learned at the present time regarding some five hundred of the one thousand men whose cases are here considered. Without this help given by more than fifty different American and Canadian societies many of the facts presented in this study could not have been secured."

It is difficult adequately to value Mrs. Solenberger's work. Consciously limited as it is in scope, it is accurate in that field. It portrays clearly where society has failed, where the individual has failed. Inevitably, further light must alter or amend some of her conclusions, but this light must come from studies as intensive, as painstakingly accurate as hers. The book is alike valu-

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able to him who has realized the problem and to him who has not. It should develop a discerning interest among those who have scarcely thought of the homeless man. It should serve as a most useful guide for any one who is seeking to further by whatever means a more normal life for these wandering atoms of society. Offering no general panacea, Mrs. Solenberger has yet indicated varied ways in which progress lies. Her work speaks with the convincing and compelling power of truth.

FRANCIS H. McLEAN

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(Eight full-page illustrations preceding Appendix B, p. 314)

A ROOM IN ONE OF THE "IRONSIDES"

Room 6 by 7 feet high, one of few having outer air and light. Wire netting above, supplemented by newspapers. Sides of corrugated iron.

CUBICLE LODGING HOUSE

Third floor. Main aisle, showing cross aisle at end leading to fire escape obstructed by stove. Space between stove and corner of rooms 22 inches. Main aisle 30 inches wide.

CUBICLE LODGING HOUSE

One of cross aisles obstructed by posts. Space between posts and wall of rooms 20 inches.

A DARK ROOM IN A "FLOP"

Top (fourth) floor. Majority of windows boarded up and otherwise obstructed. Reasonably clean; no bedding, only bare boards.

INTERIOR VIEW OF A "FLOP"

Third floor, showing new arrangement of beds (?). Clean, well lighted and ventilated. No bedding is provided.

TOILET FACILITIES IN A "FLOP"

First floor, showing wash room with cement floor, wash sinks, and shower bath. Taken after enforcement of Health Department regulations.

A ROOM IN A CHEAP LODGING HOUSE

Room on second floor containing four cots. No communication with outer air or light; very dark and dirty; air foul.

DORMITORY LODGING HOUSE CONDUCTED BY A RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION

Fourth floor. Aisles 30 to 36 inches wide, space between beds 6 to 36 inches. Windows on both ends. Air space less than required by Illinois law.