

**THE SCIENTIFIC  
SPIRIT AND  
SOCIAL WORK**

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The scientific spirit and social work by Arthur James Todd

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**ARTHUR JAMES TODD**

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# THE SCIENTIFIC SPIRIT AND SOCIAL WORK

BY

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## PREFACE

Three facts have conspired to overcome a natural hesitation to commit the enormity of another book in these disturbed times: First, the exigencies of social reconstruction demand that some threads of policy be offered to those who grope through the labyrinth. Second, the unparalleled official recognition of social work by the government—by President Wilson, Secretary Baker, Secretary Daniels, Secretary Lane, the governors of various States, and others—puts social workers, new and old, upon their mettle. The very proposals of statesmanlike social workers which were formerly stigmatized as visionary, revolutionary, or immoral are now embraced wholesale as the social creed which alone can save a country in its hour of crisis. Hence, social workers must practice the humility and modesty of science; they must also make good and justify by their works the new faith placed in them. This means a constant effort to refresh their own mental outfit and to improve their equipment by every possible means. Third, the enormous war-time extension of various forms of social-welfare activity has called into service hundreds and even thousands of men and women, some of them only partly trained, many of them utterly untrained. Whether they elect to seek professional training or whether they enlist only as volunteers and amateurs, if they are to become permanent assets instead of liabilities to scientific social work they must somehow or other get the scientific and professional attitude toward their work.

Now a profession is distinguished from a trade by several marks. A trade is based on practical rules and

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Parks, 1.57

is followed for a livelihood. A profession is based on principles, a thoroughgoing knowledge of contributory sciences, and a definite code of conduct. One lives *by* a trade but *in* a profession. Membership in a profession includes the obligation to extend the boundaries of one's science while maintaining the scientific attitude toward each day's problems. Alfred Russell Wallace once published a book which he called "Studies Scientific and Social." Was this a covert slap at *social science* as distinguished from *scientific science*? Rather, I think, an attempt to show that the same rigorous scientific mind could compass the problems of both exact science and human society. Social science and its applications must share the spirit, if not the strict technique, of the exact sciences. The elements of scientific approach and scientific prevision must be back of all social reform which hopes to weather the storms.

Since most of real social reform must be carried out through detailed administrative methods by social workers, the main part of this book has to do with their problems. But it seemed advisable to restate the philosophical and psychological principles upon which I believe sound social work is based and by which it is justified. Moreover, social workers as well as other people are prone to become so absorbed in the routine of their daily work, so entangled in the details of individual cases, that they are likely to lose all sense of perspective and to become unable to see the woods for the trees. Hence two or three chapters on the trend of social movements are offered as a means of orientation. Since the frontier of the social case worker joins that of the reformer and propagandist, surely no one will object to including some cautions to social reformers, particularly when they may be taken with equally good grace by the social worker. If the inclusion of such concrete problems as why workers and agencies go stale or how to reduce labor turnover in social agencies seems to de-



stroy the placid flow of our philosophical brook, or if the introduction of crabbed graphs and statistical tables jars upon delicately tuned æsthetic nerves, the justification must plainly be that science is not only an attitude but a method. The scientific spirit will justify itself in social work only if it can reveal the hidden potencies of individuals and agencies, evoke their energies most effectively, and point the way not only to solving methodically each day's problems but to taking an appropriate place in the whole forward movement of humanity. However the argument may seem to stray, it comes back constantly to one central theme, namely, what is the social worker's part in the movements for enlarging the charter of human liberties, and on what terms can he serve that cause most effectively? Since, as we shall discover, the scientific spirit signifies loyalty and coöperation, it behooves me here to tender my heartiest appreciation to all those friendly social workers whose challenge has evoked these pages, and particularly to that large group whose patient self-analysis made possible Chapters VI and VII.

ARTHUR JAMES TODD.

Minneapolis, February, 1919.



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