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## A CASE IN SOCIAL MEDICINE

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Not infrequently the writer is asked the question, "Why Social Work Education?"

If there is room for a question such as that one, it is not strange that now and then one hears, "What Is Medical Social Work?" Hence, under the impact of this latter question, the case of Mrs. Nardelli comes very strongly to mind. This case carried in a Medical Social Service Department for several months had not been an easy one. Several workers had all but recommended that it be closed, but Miss James had carried it on, and in so doing, she had let herself in for some long months of hard case work. All her skill, her patience, her understanding were needed. Added to this she prayed and prayed to God for the golden graces of tolerance and gentleness.

This patient, Mrs. Nardelli, suffered from the primary obstacle of not wanting to be a patient, she resented it. Even more difficult, she was afraid of it. Mrs. Nardelli, besides being troubled with ills that have their roots in economic and social factors, was suffering from cancer. She was afraid of the disease, afraid of the guessed-at symptoms, alarmed by the present, staggered by the imagined future. She was in fear of doctors, in fear of clinics, in fear of the bewildering machinery of hospitals. Mrs. Nardelli was

afraid of herself as a patient, afraid of being treated, afraid of herself as an invalid. And now, for many long months she had been afraid until slowly the care and attention and thoughtful efficiency of a skilled medical social worker had allayed fears, brought her into doctors, put a hospital to work, and finally, a fearful woman back on her feet.

The case had not been an easy one, but the medical social worker carried on, and now the case was closed. Because a young woman with an alert mind could see another person's point of view, could appreciate fear, show good judgment and be patient, and in addition, because she was trained to understand the nature and implications of illness and the complexity of the hospital organization and treatment, because she had been taught to work with the doctor in a scientific way, to interpret him to the patient, and to make the patient see self and the doctor—because she could do this and a thousand other things, one more human being was brought back to usefulness, and Mrs. Nardelli could look on life with some degree of serenity once more.

One could add, too, that because this particular social worker had the humility and healthy piety to bend her knee to God and ask for strength and light toward a good use of her gifts, any one, who

would want to see, might observe the grand blending of natural and supernatural charity with the scientific training that goes out to do good as we know it today.

Is there need for demonstrating this last point? Apparently there is. At least, so this writer has found out to his surprise, especially when he hears it asked so often: Why Social Work Education? Especially, too, and even more surprisingly when he meets the larger questions and the even more curious ones: What Is Social Work? Why Social Work at all? I just mention in passing, that they are curious because it seems impossible that questions like these can be asked in this day and age. I have been asked them. Even more surprising, I have been asked them by people in professional fields—by laymen who have seen their share of illness, by lawyers, by doctors, by priests. What makes the question so surprising is not only the fact that we have so many problems and ills these days and know so much more about them, but that we have had many writers and great men everlastingly calling our attention to the ills of the social order and to the necessity that we be aware of these. After all, we Catholics have lived with Pius XI, and I hope have not forgotten the writings of Leo XIII. Both these great Pontiffs unceasingly called our attention to the need for greater justice and charity in our social dealings with men and to a greater understanding of the social problems

amongst men; and just as unceasingly they urged training, study, scientific knowledge to go into our big-heartedness, as some people like to think of charity, and our humanitarianism. They did not stop there, as they obviously could not, for as Pius XI expressed it, when supernatural charity is missing "the wisest regulations come to nothing. . . . Then will it be possible to unite all in harmonious striving for the common good, when all sections of society have the intimate conviction that they are members of a single family and children of the same Heavenly Father."

Sometimes, when facing the questions, "Why Social Work", "What Is Social Work", and all the rest of the states of mind that these questions seem to imply, I cannot help but wonder whether or not we understand the pleas of men like Pius XI for reparative charity and justice which are so badly needed in society as we know it. Above all, one wonders if we have understood at all the grandeur of preventive charity and preventive justice that require understanding, learning, scientific treatment.

Any doctor would tell us that it is good medical practice to repair broken bodies, bring back to health, conquer disease, but above all it is sound wisdom to do all in our power to prevent disease. Big-heartedness and simple kindness are wonderful things, but the charity and justice that are required today, that fashion men's

minds and hearts and souls to get at the causes of ills and prevent these causes—these go further.

In an interesting little booklet published by the American Association of Schools of Social Work, we read:

“There was a time when a helping hand, extended in a haphazard sort of way by some ‘Lady Bountiful’, or by the church with an occasional basket of food, or by a neighbor, was considered sufficient. Later, social agencies, staffed by people with good intentions but little or no special training, took over. Today, along with the concept of society’s responsibility to the individual and the individual’s responsibility to society, has come organized social work.”

That last sentence is important, and the greater the realization of the truth in that sentence in both its aspects, namely, the reciprocal responsibility of society and the individual, then the better off

society is going to be. One might add, too, that there will be less asking the question, “Why Social Work”, or “What Is Social Work”, or “Why Social Work Education”, and their many other peculiar counterparts.

Today trained people are meeting and facing and quite often conquering human ills, in Catholic Charity organizations, in Departments of Public Welfare and Assistance, health departments and hospitals, bureaus of social insurance public recreation centers, juvenile courts, prisons and correctional agencies, child guidance and adult clinics, settlement and neighborhood houses, family welfare and child welfare societies, community chests and councils, institutions for the handicapped, school systems, community centers, “Y’s”, the Red Cross, and the United Service Organizations.

They are answering the questions posed above, and surprisingly posed, by too many people even in this day and age.

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CHRISTIANITY has not been tried and found wanting;  
it has been found difficult and NOT tried.

—G. K. CHESTERTON

