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Memorandum: Brooklyn talk

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Main idea of this talk is around relations, one thing leading to another. George Eliot, attacking the heartlessness and wealth of the world, said once that the instinct of helpfulness should be developed in men and women until it was exercised as unconsciously and immediately as one stretches out his hand to save himself when he trips.

It may be that this instinct of helpfulness is native to us, I do not know. But if you consider a child when it first comes into the world, helpless, by necessity at every turn, it is obvious that instinct is not awakened. There is no call upon it. Frequently children all through their younger years, up in fact to young manhood and womanhood, are bolstered about with service, attention, help. No call is put upon them to serve others. If young people are selfish, self-centered, it is largely due to the elders, who in a passion of tenderness, or desire that they have happiness, ease, opportunity for development, cuts them off from one of the most developing factors in the education of men and women and that is, the call, the responsibility, the obligation to serve others.

We do not in our systems sufficiently awaken, whatever instinct to serve is in us. Life, itself, is so hard for many young people, children, that they are obliged from the start to stretch out this hand. It is a matter of the commonest observation of those who go much among the poor - among the distressed, - that the children are instinctively helpful. The little mothers, the
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boys out at six, seven, eight, with newspapers - hard, yes - but
developing too. If it does not cut them off from school, if
they are not too centered by want in their homes. We will all
of us grant that the life of a child should be precarious, but
it does not follow that hastening its sense of responsibility
towards those about him who are in want, or in trouble. Should it
As a matter of fact, it gives a certain uplift to a child's life
to know that it is of some importance to others. I can remember
now, when as a very little girl, not more than four or five, a
baby came to the household. We were short-handed for service
and I was asked to fill the glass with fresh water, to help my
mother hold it, put it to her lips and never had I in my life
had such an uplift as came from that chance to do a service.
That is, what I am trying to say is, that we are in danger in
our anxiety for children to do them a great wrong, first, by not
awakening in them a sense of responsibility towards those that
are suffering. Second, training until the desire to serve becomes
an instinct, like saving themselves when in danger.

This must be the work of women largely. We are the ones
in this strategic position, in regard to the child. We should not
wait in this training until life outside has taken hold of him.
Wise people say that you can do nothing for a child after he is
seven, that then it is life. In the earlier years
it is the father and mother, the home and the child, because
necessarily he is found in that circle. Women in committees,
organized as you are, for all sorts of mental purposes have a great work; a great opportunity, I should say, in the arousing of this feeling among other women, to see to it that boys and girls get this element of education, from, say, babyhood up. It is interesting to consider the position of such women as yourself in a community. You think of yourselves as important only in this district of Brooklyn, where you function, but as a matter of fact you are related in the most vital way to the nation. We should not think of the nation as something in Washington, which is good or bad, according to the Administration in Washington. As a matter of fact the Administration in Washington has comparatively little to do with the real health of this country. What help, physical, intellectual, moral, social, is made by people like yourself who make communities? The Nation is made up of groups, little groups, of the activities of national life and national life is orderly or disorderly, criminal or law-abiding, according to what these units are. It depends on what you send out from the community, the first stream of life what this country is to be in the future. That is more valuable than any other contribution that you can make to the soundness of the United States of America is the contribution that you make in building up a healthy community. Another important point, the most important point, we may say, is in the kind of youth you send out to the nation. I do not have to insist with you women, I am sure, that
in every community of this country we have a wave of crime, a wave of destruction. The crime wave would soon subside, die out, if it weren't that in getting no such contributions from the villages, districts of cities, the country corners of this country. It would be like our business life, our industrial, our educational life. We depend for the fresh zest, not on the city, but on the country. It is easy to establish, that the fresh life, fresh ideas, the fresh energy that comes from outside of the city. I wish everybody would read what A. E. Russell, that great and wise Irish poet said the other day when he landed in America, "That America must remember that it is the country upon which she must depend for her future, that cities did not reproduce many great members, only in collected spots. The virtues, the energy, the fresh wave of mind and ambition that is needed to carry the world farther and farther upward. It all is saying, that for whatever element of progress you wish to see in American life, see stronger, better understood, fixed as one of our national characteristics. That thing you must cultivate in your little community, your unit. Take this matter of stopping crime. You must get down to the child, the little child. You can do precious little by punishment, precious little by reform schools, by probation courts. It is too late then. Every possible approach will awaken a child to an interest and an understanding of decency. It will arouse enthusiasm, something
that appeals to the better nature in him, must be cultivated in such units as yours. Certainly one task to training this young child, never too young to begin it, is to what we call social service. Now what is social service? It is something more than our old charity, something more than our old philanthropy. It is a recognition of the fact that we, who are comfortable and happy are thrown more through circumstance than through our own merits, (that immeasurable) come as a rule from evil circumstance, circumstances that society has not yet been able to root out. I think we may take it as certain that if a child, a family, knows nothing but evil, evil ways, evil thoughts, they will do nothing—but evil. The old philanthropy recognized little or no responsibility towards causes of crime. It gave this gift with a sense of superior virtue. always worked with charity. Today we are a little more advanced, a little wiser, not too wise or understanding, but we see that the streets of Manhattan are filled with men and women who are victims of a badly managed industrial system. They were doing their part. Those who were running the machines speeded beyond their power to control. We have had a terrible method, failed to perceive signs of disaster, failed to be ready for disaster, that the philanthropy we are giving out today, the help—should be given to those who have escaped disaster with a sense of guilt or at least of humiliation that we are working under a system which we handle so badly that we can get ourselves into a situation as we now are. I think we all should
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do our best to understand certain things we might have done to help avoid this disaster. Drop out for the moment whatever part gold had in it and it has undoubtedly something.

Drop out for a moment the condition of the world. There are certain obvious things which seem to me, that if we had been a little wiser we might have done to be ready for the crash we have taken and which was impelled long before we entered the tragedy.

Nothing is better established as an amateur than that the thing we call prosperity moves in a cycle - the business cycle. We come to periods when everything seems to be moving smoothly and perfectly, but it is an imperfect world. Men are liable to go too far. We have the speculators, swindlers, the mountebank, the charlatan always with it. Moreover we are very ignorant of the very mechanism of business and finance. It still is a thing in the making. Bad situations come about, often more through ignorance than stupidity, than through calculated wrongdoing.

All of these things are sure gradually to slow up. Business is on a high plane. Depression begins. Now how are you to treat these inevitable depressions in a country like this?

Face the fact that we probably will have them repeatedly for a century or two, say every ten years. And be ready for them.

Eight years ago I served on an Employment Conference in Washington. The President of the United States was the Chairman. At that time plans were laid for exactly such handling out of the depression which the Conference agreed would probably come again
after a peak of prosperity, in ten or twelve years. The wisdom of the Conference said, "Let us now when minds are aroused to the dangers and misery of unemployment, let us get ready for that time. Have work ready to throw out everywhere at the moment that it shall come." And the plans—which we have been hearing comes—out from Washington this last few months, in which many people have supposed to be well, were laid out in detail at that time. The Federal Government was to vote a large amount of money to be held in the Treasury for dull times. It was to be given over to road building, given over to the building of public buildings, for making necessary repairs. The money was to be ready, the plans were to be ready, materials were to be in sight and as soon as depression came the Federal Government was to throw that money on work into the decline, holding up, so to speak, the cycle—never allowing it to reach the low peak of where we are now. What the Government was to do, each State was to be asked to do, each County, each town, so that always we would have ready many plans for an emergency, such as we are going through now. This would fully sent out in an admirable report, signed by Herbert Hoover eight years ago. A permanent committee was established to educate the people to the need of this thing, that kind of need of doing something of that sort was admitted, practically every man at the same time under the impulse of this commision, a scientific economist went to work to demonstrate the business cycle—in so far as it is possible to work out the causes of the peaks, ups and
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downs. The business cycle was demonstrated and the people who had members were asked to go out and urge upon the country the necessity of preparing, not only for that emergency and carrying it through, but to be ready for the next one, that is, the one we now are in. But having laid the plans, demonstrated its needs, shown all the impractical mechanism for carrying it out — as soon as this depression of 1922 was over, everybody seemed to have forgotten about it. Little or no money was laid aside, the bridges were not planned, the big buildings were not planned, road-making was carried on, of course, but with the eye on today. I do not remember either that President Hoover in his inaugural address called the country to attention to this fine undertaking — was duty to be ready for the inevitable depression. I do not remember that he asked Congress to pass these laws, which he, himself, fathered at the time of that Commission, that is, it did not seem possible two years ago that this thing, demonstrated as inevitable sooner or later could ever happen. And one of our reasons for our present difficulty is that incorrigible, unthinking, unscientific optimism, which had seized the country and which, at the time of the inaugural of Mr. Hoover, seemed to be our permanent impregnable position. All the laws were forgotten. When the depression came, this demonstrated depression, we were not ready as we might have been, if we had been forehanded. It was like having something in the stocking, savings account, that rainy day fund, which all of us who are wise, try to build up.
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The country did not have it and now we have nothing to do but feed the country. But the present situation endows something much more important even than feeding the hungry. We'll do that. It is to impress upon ourselves that we must make preparations in this country to prevent unemployment, that is, to take better care of it when ten or twelve years from now, what we are going through now repeats itself. We have many serious duties now of which this consideration of the business cycle is one. Our immediate duty is, of course, involves reaching down into the individual family, which has been overtaken by crime, sickness, unemployment and so far as possible, getting out the evil, corruption, building it up, putting them on their feet. That is what social science means. That is what all of our great charity organizations are attempting to do, curing the individual sufferer, societies maladjustment. This is the way by some faze of it which you are interested. What you want to do is to get at the individual family, build it up. It is a slow problem, particularly when the seeds of crime are in that family, the seeds of maladjustment particularly where there is illness on the heads of the family, but patience, humor, sense of responsibility to the conditions, a sense of the dangers to the future of your community in allowing shiftlessness, immorality, thieving to go on anywhere. All of this you must consider as part of your fundamental social work—a thing laid upon you, because of the more fortunate condition in which you are in—a condition which
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is due, much more to circumstance than I have already said, than to merit.

And if you are going to have embedded in your community this attitude of mind towards all forms of misery, whether physical, mental, spiritual, if you are going it, face the thing. You got to begin with the child in your homes - you have to begin, not by sheltering him from the world but by teaching him what the world is - arousing in him a sense of the vast ills of the dangers of society, which you by chance have escaped, that must live beside him. His good fortune should arouse him a sense of responsibility to aid in correcting this evil thing which surrounds him. Noblesse oblige was aristocracy motto. Opportunities, good fortune obliges, should be democracy's motto. The child who is born in comfortable homes, educated, won by love, should by that fact, be made to feel that he has an obligation. He should grow up with it. He will do so if he finds that attitude among his elders. Sharing is a thing to be taught. I know of one of our great American families of great wealth in which the responsibility of sharing has been taught from childhood, lessons in giving, its obligations, regularly. - Like putting in the winter's coal, keeping a reserve in the bank, which is a steady, natural part of that families operation as instinctive as anything in their lives. If we are to have competent social service in our community the child must have this training.
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Opportunity obliges. First - to an understanding of causes - the relation of effect - the inevitableness of certain evils, if certain causes exist. Take the present conditions. Why are men walking the streets? What are you going to tell your child? There is one lesson, I think that we may very well press upon him as a cause, at least one cause, of what we are going through. It is a great time to teach him the character of speculations and its dangers. He can understand if you if you are clear that multitudes of men and women today are down and out, as we say, because of an attempt to get something for nothing, because they forgot the law of God, which says, "That if we eat it shall be by the labor of our hands." I owe to my father a healthy contempt for speculation, that is for an attempt to get something that I have not earned. When I was a girl of ten or eleven the town in which I lived - an oil town - which supported largely an oil exchange, went through a period of excitement which in its way was as hectic as what we saw last summer and early fall of 1929. It is a fact that such was the fever that our schools were closed. - on one particular day, because all the teachers were at the exchange. One or two, at least, made enough money to retire. Many more lost all their savings before the thing was over. But the excitement was at its height. One of my schoolmates had risked one hundred dollars - had turned it into five hundred. When I went home eagerly to my father to say, "Won't you lend me a hundred dollars, so I may make five? I'll pay you back." I remember
to this day the righteous indignation of that gentleman, as he explained to me the evils of gambling. If I ever have been tempted to risk my savings on the stock market, in a speculative period, always comes back to me the stern voice and righteous words of this honest man. You have the opportunity to teach now to your children a vital cause of depression and it is one of the most important things in building this up child of yours to do real social service.

Second - you have a chance now to explain to him in simple tongue the business cycle - how over regular periods in this country we have good and bad times and that the wisdom of men and women should be to always prepare for that rainy day. - have something in the bank and he has his raincoat ready. I do not know a better chance for teaching thrift, foresight, than just what is going on before the child's eyes today and which you should make him understand something of the instability - the risks of life.

Third - What better opportunity will you ever have to arouse in him the instinct to share for helping than what can be seen all about us every day? This training in sharing what you have cannot begin too young. I know one family of good wealth in this country where the giving has been of unusual intelligence in which regularly, weekly, from the time the child was able to understand words, there was instructions in the responsibility to give a regular percentage of the income. That has become an instinctive, natural responsibility in the young of that family as a wise investment.

Fourth - The child should not share money alone. He should be called upon for some personal work in relation to those who
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today are in want. as a means of re-agitation -
still more to lose the chance to arouse his sense of responsibility -
his individual part in things. You will signify his life.

I have told you my own experience when I was but four
or five years old in being pushed into service, during the illness of
my mother. You say it was hard on me. It is one of the greatest
of my early experiences - the pride - the dignity - the new meaning in
life that came from the opportunity to help, something was aroused in
me that might easily have been atrophied. Your little mothers - your
boys peddling newspapers to help in the family income - hard enough, but
again and again there are cases in which it is a source of
development.

Do not be afraid of educating your child to real social
service - a service which deals with the actualities of life - with a
first-hand study in individual cases of the relation of causes to
effect. Do not be afraid to call upon him to act, not only with money
but with his time - his thoughts. You may give him a more real
education than any possible school ever could give. For you are dealing
here with the very stuff of life and our sheltered child has too often
little opportunity to know the stuff of life.

These great campaigns are on in the field - have long
been on for that matter - they are moving steadily forward in spite
of temporary defeat, of great casualties. and the production and the distribution aims to see that all men
and women of all countries have food, shelter, education for their child.

uplifting of crime correspond - in some kind of a practical
substitute for war. All of these demands, not only our efforts, that is the efforts of They demand that we look to the teacher and give to the child that understanding, that basis for action, that plea for helpfulness. We must see that it is rooted in the child. It is the knowledge of causes. It them with responsibility for evil and instinctive helpfulness.