Address by

Miss Ida M. Tarbell

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A number of years ago I found myself in a little town in the mountain region of Pennsylvania where a malignant fever was raging. There was perplexity among the people of the town as to how this thing could have happened. They could find no explanation of it. Of course, water was suggested, but they pooh-poohed at the idea. They had a perfect water supply; it could not be possible that the fever had come from that. Finally, a committee of citizens was appointed to look into the trouble, and I was asked to go on the investigating board with these citizens. We tackled first the water - though nothing could be the matter with that. It was a wonderful water supply, pouring out in a great stream from the mountain from which it was piped down into the town. We began at the top. It seemed perfect. We followed it along and could find no trouble. We came into the big reservoir. It was a noble piece of stone work. Somebody suggested it had better be drained. There was great objection to that. But, it was drained, and there in the bottom we found an accumulation of poison which was being carried constantly to the city. The fever was easily explained once the reservoir had been drained.

Again and again in the years since that

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little experiment, as I have gone about in my work in cities and towns of this country, my mind has harked back to that reservoir. As nearly as I can make it out, my friends, a great deal of the trouble in this country comes from the fact that everywhere, in the town and in the city, we have reservoirs of human evil that we are not draining. It is not only in the cities. If you know New England you know there is scarcely a township in all New England that has not somewhere a little settlement in it where all the dregs of the community accumulate and out of which there goes constantly a criminal and degenerate stream. It may be only a trickle, but it goes constantly. You find such spots in our towns, and O so many of them in our cities. If it were only adults that we found in these little centers of crime there might be some hope, but the tragedy of it is that they are peopled largely by children. They may come in ever so pure. I will not argue with you whether the child coming into the world is a perfect being or not. But the most perfect child coming into one of these places of evil does not long remain a pure and wholesome thing. It cannot do so because it can never know anything but evil. From its start its life is made familiar with evil. Take these homes in such a district as we have been talking about tonight. The child is hardly born before it begins to have some kind of contact with that thing which is at the bottom of so much crime everywhere, - drunkenness. There is scarcely a family in the criminal district that is not familiar with liquor in some sort.

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You find in these families where liquor is such a familiar thing that there are not many children who grow up without knowing the taste of beer and wine andeven stronger things. Mr. Hearn was telling me only the other day of going out in the small hours of the night to rescue four or five boys scarcely in their teens drunk on poison liquor. A common thing, probably not surprising to their family, certainly not surprising to their neighborhood.

But it is not only liquor. It is profanity and obscenity of every kind these children are acquainted with. So there is no shock to them. They learn words without learning their meaning, and when they come to know the meaning they say "Oh, it is the way of the world." It is all they know. And thieving! Oh, how many of these little people in this great city of ours are being taught from the start to steal, and are being applauded for their skill in it. I don't think we realize how much a trade theiving is in a place like Manhattan, how many little children, boys particularly, are being taught that trade.

Only a few months ago, over in New York, in my apartment, I had an experience with a little Italian boy being trained to be a thief. I wasn't intelligent enough, I wasn't experienced enough or thoughtful enough to realize what was happening until my watch disappeared. The watch was a little matter, but if I had only known a little more, as much as I do now about this sort of thing I might have saved him. He was being trained to be a thief. That thing is going on all the time in this city of ours. And they have no sense of the wrong of thieving.

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Mr. Hearn told me a remarkable incident that illustrates this. In connection with the Goodwill Center there is a summer camp up at Cornwall-on-the-Hudson He was going up with a group of his people one summer and they passed the prison at Sing Sing. It was pointed out to the little people. "Oh," said one of the little girls "my father lives there." And said another, "Well, my brother is there, too." Out of the group of nine, five had relatives in that prison at that moment and it was a matter of pride and interest with them. No shame, no regret. That was the way of their life. Prison?- that happened sometimes. You were caught sometimes when you took things that didn't belong to you. But that was part of the game, that was the way of your life. Thieving wasn't such a bad thing if you carried it off successfully. You had food and you had clothing and you had pleasures you wouldn't have had if your brother or your father had not carried out successfully a job of thieving.

And not only that, there are worse things. Girls grow up surrounded by all forms of lust and vice, unconscious of what it means. Is it any wonder that out of everyone of these criminal centers we have a constant flow of recruits for the street? That is what they are used to. And even worse things. Murder itself is a formality in these districts. A child came rushing in to Mr. Hearn's office and said, "I have seen a man killed." It is excitement. Wonderful thing! One of the great events of this world. And when Mr. Hearn said, "You should not stay around when anything like that is happening," the

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child said, "Why, I have seen three murders." Great boy! There were not many other boys who had seen three men murdered.

The terrible and shocking thing about all these centers of crime is that it makes evil a natural thing to them. They grow up in it and know nothing different. And since this is a fact is it any wonder that every morning's paper is the tale of horrors that it is. If you read from start to finish what a display of vice and crime it is. Bootlegging - the commonest thing; reckless driving; slaughter of children; robbery; thieving of all kinds; girls disappearing; murder, even murder of little children. I was over the other night in this neighborhood so close to you, where Goodwill Center lies, and they pointed out to me a house, just an incident in passing, "There is the place where a little girl was murdered the other day." Our daily papers have become something to make every serious-minded person ask himself with great self-examination, "What does all this mean? Where do I come in? What is my relation to this thing?" Do not say, "I am in danger." No, but say, "How far am I responsible for this thing?" for somebody is responsible. It could not be without it. These things exist. We tolerate them. Out of every such district there is a constant flow of young life contaminated. It may have flowed into that district pure and wholesome but it comes out - you know how it comes out. What are we doing about it?

Of course, we are supporting prisons. You

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know what a prison is to those in the criminal district. It is a place where they go when they must, not such a bad place if you don't have to stay too long. It doesn't shock your family that you have been there; it doesn't shock your friends that you have been there; it is the way of your world, and when you come back you are welcomed as if the whole thing were just a part of life. And little girls exulting, "My father is there! My brother is there!" Talking about it as one of your children going up the Hudson might say, "My sister is at Vassar." The same relation - that is their world and that is yours. Of course, we support churches, we support Sunday Schools, we try to force these children into the schools, we try to draw them into the churches. But think for a moment, my friends, what relation the school and the church has to these children. Have they any sense of belonging to that organization. Is it anything that takes hold of their life? Is it anything that means anything in their life? I doubt it. How difficult it is to make the thing that is unfamiliar to us, that is not a part of the world as we know it, to mean anything in our lives.

Not many months ago I was in a cooking school, a very beautiful kitchen with all of its beautiful white appointments, a wonderful place. It was near a slum district and there was a group of girls from the slums there while I was making my visit. I said to one of them, "Do you do these things this way at home?" She looked at me in surprise and said, "Of course we don't.

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We don't have anything like this at home. We just do this in school." That child had no idea that what she was being taught ~~xx~~ had any relation to the home to which she belonged. It was a far cry indeed to the kitchen she was accustomed to, that beautiful white place where she was being trained.

Oh, I am afraid that to great bodies of the youth in such quarters as this of which we are talking tonight the church and the school seem to have little relation. They are things they are taken to, but it never gets under the skin. My friends, I don't believe there is any other way to get under the skin, to teach these children that have neverhad anything but evil contacts, than to go right down in that reservoir and stay there and live with them. They are never going to find out that goodly thing, that right living is a possible thing for them until they see it going on about them day after day. They are never going to know that good living is possible to them until it is worked before them day after day.

And how are you going to do it? You know somehhing about how they are doing it at Goodwill Center. Ten years ago there used to be a little church down in that neighborhood. I suppose a good many people went there. Now a church, I think we are all agreed, is established to overcome evil. But down in this quarter evil seems to have overcome the church for the audience, the congregation, the supporters finally fled. It wasn't respectable enough, perhaps, for them, so they went away and left the building standing. The church overwhelmed by evil! And the poor

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little church - it's a nice little church, stood as I am told a long time vacant and then Mr. Hearn and the City Mission Society and others saw that the only way you were ever going to overcome evil is by bringing good so close to it and staying so constantly by it that finally the evil would have to retire. They said, "We will go into this church. We will not go for a service once a week or twice a week. We will go there and stay. We will go there and live with them. We will be their friends. No matter what the emergency, no matter what the trial, no matter how criminal or dreadful this place is, we will stay." They have stayed. They have stayed for ten years. I don't know the history of Goodwill Center ~~hmx~~ to know how the first contacts were made with that body of riotous youth. I know that that youth, when Mr. Hearn first came down there, frequently followed him and jeered him in the streets. I don't know how he caught them first. It is a great problem. Supposing anyone of us should find it in our hearts to give ourselves, not our money, not our talk, but ourselves, to this struggle for overcoming evil and should go down into a place like this neighborhood, how would we begin to hold them? Idon't know how he did it at the start. But I know one way he is doing it now. For you must remember that this quarter is so full of this criminal youth that you have to practice this catching process all the time.

If you will go down there some Saturday afternoon you will find outside of the gates of that old church such a crowd waiting to get in as I wager never once stood outside of it in the days of its respectability.

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Children! Children! Children! By the hundreds, sometimes even up to a thousand. Children, many of them without any kind of headgear, children with pale faces and many and many a one with sad eyes. They pour xxx in until they fill the church. I have seen some pictures taken of the crowd. Across the front are perhaps twenty-four. I looked at these pictures under a glass very carefully the other day. There wasn't a pair of trousers that didn't have a hole in them or a patch. There wasn't a pair of stockings that didn't have a hole. There wasn't a coat or a wrap that was made for the wearer. Little ragamuffins,, you might say. Many of them looked as though it had been a long time since they had a bath. But there they were looking straight ahead. What brought them? A moving picture had caught them. They had come to hear some talk, some music. That may be the first time. Then what happens? They hear from some boy that goes there regularly that there is a thing called a boys' club. What happens in a boys' club? Nothing that ever happened in their world. Games - football, basketball, and always a warm bright place to play them in. If you lived in that worldyou would know how much it means many a day to have a warm place to go to, a bright place. Finally these children come around and say, "Couldn't I get into a boys' club?" If there is money enought to support them - and I am afraid there always isn't - they begin to learn to do something and they don't run the streets so much. Then they xxx begin to wash their faces - and that is a great upward step. Then they learn another thing and another

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thing, and you will find that instead of going to pool-rooms, instead of running the street, instead of watching the alley for the last word of crime they are over at Goodwill Center. Staying late - which is a great thing. There is a wonderful woman over there, they tell me about. She seems never to want to go home. Just so long as a boy will stay she stays and plays a game. Sometimes it is twelve o'clock. Why? Because if he goes out at ten o'clock he goes to a poolroom. If he stays there until twelve or one he is safe, he will go home and go to bed. And the life of this good woman is evidently to stay and see that that boy doesn't get to a poolroom or any other place. This boy learns that - and many other things. May be he learns that to lie and to steal and to swear and to drink and to do the things of his world are not the best things. Slowly that seeps in on him and when it does there is always someone at Goodwill Center to help him along. They know where the home is by this time. They never push their way. They seem to have extreme wisdom. They have learned this from the shy people, And when the time comes they edge their way into that home. What do they find? Suppose they find a poor, worn-out woman, a baby at the breast, a husband in Sing Sing, she earning a living for the poor little family. I think Mr. Hearn will tell you that just such cases are found often enough. They will say to that mother, "We have a nursery where you can bring your baby. You can go and do your work without worrying." What a relief. Another baby comes into the nursery and the woman comes to find

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it at night looking as it never looked before in its life. Slowly her suspicion is broken down and she finds there are things there for her. Possibly she knows very little English and she knows the need of it, and they tell her she can be taught. Perhaps she knows how to sew but little. "We will teach you." You know every case, every human being has its own need and Goodwill Center exists to find the particular need of each boy, man woman and girl, and tries to meet it. It may take many months to accomplish things, but this little family comes up, takes on a new look. It is cleaner, happier, a new life has come, and every hour that that boy, girl, mother and baby can possibly get away from home they spend in Goodwill Center. Then the father who is in Sing Sing comes back. I don't know what will happen. But this thing I am sure of, he will have a much harder time to make a thief out of that boy than he would have had if Goodwill Center had not done its work with him. The chances are he will never be able to make him a thief, but possibly the boy will make an honest man out of the father.

One might go on and on. You cannot calculate the possibilities, you cannot number them. Work of this kind , work of men and women for men and women, by constantly living with them, trying to build them up by kind deeds and by thoughtfulness, cannot be measured - it is like the sea, or the sands. You don't know what Goodwill Center is doing. You only know that it is redeeming that neighborhood, redeeming much of the youth of that neighborhood. It is the only way, my friends, that the reservoirs of evil are going

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are going to be cured. Men and women must go down there and live with these people, as Mr. Hearn and his friends are doing. Give themselves! It is nothing in the world but the power of good will, the strongest thing on earth, that will redeem these spots. They have the faith, these people, to believe in the truth of that. They read their Bible and they know that peace on earth is promised only to men of good will, and so they have the patience and the devotion to give themselves for the children, and for society, and for you and for me.

And what are we to do in return for what they are doing for us? They give themselves. What can we give? I think that is a serious question for everyone of us. We give our sympathy. We can try to give our understanding. We certainly should do that simplest and easiest of all things - give abundant material support. It is worth your while, my friends, it is worth your while. This thing is the realest thing, it is the only fundamental and sane thing for this old world, this living the doctrine of good will.

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