

THE FIRST NEW YORK STATE CONFERENCE OF CHARITIES.

FIRST SESSION.

Tuesday, November 20, 1900.

The first New York State Conference of Charities and Correction was called to order in the Senate Chamber of the State Capitol at 8.15 p. m., Tuesday, November 20, 1900, by Hon. William Rhinelanders Stewart, President of the State Board of Charities and Chairman of the Organizing Committee of Fifty. Prayer was offered by the Right Reverend William Crosswell Doane, D.D., LL.D.

ADDRESS OF GOVERNOR ROOSEVELT.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am glad of the chance of saying a few words of welcome to you this evening. Mrs. Roosevelt and I promise ourselves the pleasure of receiving you to-morrow afternoon at half-past five o'clock at the Executive Mansion.

It has always seemed to me that we are apt to use the words "public servant" in altogether too restricted a sense—as applying only to the public officials. If we use the word in its proper sense it must certainly include every man, every woman, who, whether in public or private life serves the public, whether in an official or non-official position, gives all of the best that is in him or her to that service. More and more as the problems that we face become complicated, it seems to me that the deepest and most important of them can only be solved satisfactorily by the public officials working in hand with those private citizens who make the attending to that problem literally a labor of love. I think that this is peculiarly true of the class of problems which your Conference has met here to consider. They are problems that, after all, strike deepest, that are the most vital problems in our State life, because they are not only civic but they are social. They go right to the root of the family and the home; they deal with the questions that vitally affect the future of all our population.

Now, no single official can by himself work out a thoroughly satisfactory solution of these problems, and I am tempted to say broadly that no group of officials can do it without a very large amount of outside assistance. I make that statement generally, as the lawyers say "on information and belief," but I make it specifically of the Governorship from my own knowledge. President Stewart has alluded very kindly to my interest in your work. Why, of course, I was interested in the work. No man, it seems to me, who is fit for any public position could fail to be so interested. I very early found that if I was going to do satisfactory work, it must be by drafting to my aid many

outsiders. While I have had admirable work from the paid officials of the State, and from the group of public servants who, for my good fortune have served under me, I am almost inclined to say that the palm should be given to the work done by those who, without any pecuniary reward and at great cost and great sacrifice of their own time and money, have done the work purely because their sense of duty made them do it.

Now, I am not going to instruct you. On the contrary, I come here to sit at the feet of Gamaliel. More and more in our modern life, in our highly complex, almost over-civilized, modern industrial life, we realize the need of organization in everything that is undertaken. We see that organization becoming steadily more and more perfect in the world of the wage-worker, as in the world of the capitalist, and it has got to be similarly perfected in the world of what, for lack of a better term, we may call the philanthropist. More and more there must be, in addition to the work of the private individual, but not supplanting it at all, the work of the organization. It offers very often the only means of making good the work of the private individual.

The Bishop, in his prayer, spoke of the need of our working with both tenderness and firmness; of our showing mercy and yet combining it with justice. I think that the men and women who have made the subject of charities their special study in this State are to be congratulated for the steadiness with which they have refused to be led aside into that dangerous path which ends in the soup kitchen and pauperism. They ought to be congratulated for having kept steadily aloof from that kind of hysteric charity which is chiefly useful for purposes of advertisement, and it certainly is worse than useless from the standpoint of doing good. I think more and more we are realizing that in the long run the only way efficiently to help a man is to help him to help himself. There is no man who does not stumble. That includes not only those we are working for but all of us just as well: there is not one of us who does not stumble. There is not one of us who does not need to have a helping hand stretched to him at some time, and woe to the

man who refuses to stretch that helping hand. Every man who stumbles needs to be helped on his feet. But you cannot carry him. If you try you hurt yourself and you hurt him more. If you teach him always to rely upon some one else you have ruined him for all time. It is the end of a man's being of use to himself or of use to any one else.

With the problems of criminology I shall not pretend to deal. The only thing I have to say in reference to that side of the work which you have come here to do is called forth by a terrible tragedy that has occurred recently in a sister State—the fiendish burning of a fiendishly brutal murderer in Colorado. Now, I want to say, in the first place, that I am not in the least inclined to criticise another State. There is any amount to correct here in our own State, and I am a great deal more interested in trying to make things work straight here than in trying to find fault with how others work elsewhere. But I want to point out something that I saw alleged in justification of that murder the other day. I noticed that certain of the people who were defending the lynching stated that the reason it took place was that the death penalty had been abolished in Colorado two years ago, and that they were not going to submit to have less than the death penalty inflicted upon such a fiendish wrong-doer. That, of course, afforded not the slightest justification for their conduct, nor—though I have very strong convictions about it—do I intend here to speak against the abolition of the death penalty; but what I want to point out to all people, not merely those interested in the question of charities, but to all people who are interested in social welfare, in civic decency, is that to permit, either by law or by the non-execution of the law, the wrong-doer to go unpunished is absolutely certain to result in infinitely worse wrong-doing in the future. You cannot afford to exercise that kind of mercy which consists of ill-judged clemency to one at the cost of the welfare of scores, and it may be hundreds, in the future.

One of the greatest blots on American civilization is lynch law. If you study the statistics of lynching you will see that lynching

cases tend—it is not a regular rule, it is a tendency, however—they tend to be most numerous in the States where it is most difficult legally to punish with death a murderer. Where the law persistently miscarries you are certain to have these dreadful efforts to remedy the miscarriage of the law or to anticipate its miscarriage by remedies far worse even than the disease. We must put down lynch law; and as a first step we should provide for the swift and sure and heavy punishment of the worst offenders; above all, those crimes which are the crimes of fiends. If we could only remember that exactly as justice must be tempered with mercy, so we must not let justice be overthrown by a false spirit of mercy! It is not true mercy of course; for the feeling that prompts men to let a criminal escape from paying the penalty of his misdeeds is mere sentimentality, mere shortsightedness. It is not mercy as mercy should rightly be understood. Any man who has been an Executive here, sees enough to give him some serious food for reflection in the conduct of those people who appeal to him all the time to exercise his prerogative of pardoning criminals, usually on very insufficient grounds and sometimes on grounds which are positively immoral. A murder case once came before me for pardon; a man petitioned me on utterly trivial grounds for the pardon of the murderer, and incidently mentioned that he had originally wished to lynch the same murderer! He did not see that one attitude was just as hysterical as the other. He had wanted, in a fit of brutal anger, to anticipate the law by a crime, but he was not willing that the law should, with sorrow but with sober resolution, be enforced so as to prevent similar crimes in the future. If there is one thing more than another which we do not wish in our civic and national life, it is hysteria in any form.

Ladies and gentlemen, I shall only say in closing that all good citizens must feel deeply grateful to you for coming here; deeply grateful for what you have done in the past in endeavoring to come to some kind of a working solution of the most serious problems with which we are confronted as a Nation. If we do not deal with those problems, we are going to go down. We

must deal with them. No material prosperity will save a nation if a nation is rotten—if it is morally corrupt. That corruption can only be prevented by just such incessant work as is done by those people whose representatives I see before me to-night—by the man who intelligently works in private charity and who intelligently works in public charity; by the man or woman interested in a university settlement, the man or woman interested in the reform of juvenile delinquents, in the newsboys' lodging house, in the reformatory school. I do not care what the work happens to be so long as it is worth doing, and is pursued in a sane, wholesome, resolute spirit.

I thank you for having given me the privilege of greeting you, and in the name of the State of New York I wish you God speed in your labors.

The Chairman.—We have listened with interest and pleasure to the words of Governor Roosevelt. Let me now present to you a gentleman who, we are glad to know, is using the influence of his official position to secure improved conditions in the municipal charities of this city, Hon. James H. Blessing, mayor of Albany.

PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

NEW YORK STATE CONFERENCE

OF

CHARITIES AND CORRECTION

AT THE

FIRST ANNUAL SESSION,

HELD IN THE

SENATE CHAMBER, ALBANY, NOVEMBER 20TH, 21ST AND 22D, 1900

EDITED BY,

ISABEL C. BARROWS.

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