

Mary E. Richmond—The Practitioner

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FOR DECADES Mary E. Richmond has been thought of as the pioneer of professional social work; for years many people looked upon her as the perfect model of the social caseworker. The centenary of her birth (she was born on August 5, 1861), provides an appropriate occasion for considering the nature of her actual social work practice as well as her enduring contribution to the field.¹

According to present-day classifications of social work method, the one that Mary Richmond used least was social casework. She entered the profession through the door of public relations and fund raising, and moved directly into administration and community organization. Early in her career she engaged in research, group leadership, social action, and in-service training. The latter half of her professional life was devoted primarily to research, writing, and teaching.

Mary Richmond viewed casework from the standpoint of the efficient administrator, the eloquent interpreter to the lay

public, and the stimulating supervisor who inspires the giver of direct service to do a superior job; she lacked the type of perspective gained from substantial experience in the subtleties of one-to-one treatment relationships with clients. Although the total number of cases Miss Richmond carried is not known, the recollections of her contemporaries suggest that most of her casework practice was undertaken sporadically on a volunteer basis, and that she never worked with more than three or four families at a time. The major part of her direct casework activity took place during her earliest period in the charity organization movement, under the tutelage of an aristocratic board member.

Mary Richmond repeatedly said that she got into social work "by accident." At the age of 27, after 11 years of self-support at a variety of clerical tasks, she was a bored, frustrated hotel clerk and bookkeeper. One day while she was idly glancing through the classified advertisements in the *Baltimore Sun*, the following notice caught her eye:

THE CHARITY ORGANIZATION SOCIETY desires the services of an educated Lady or Gentleman of good social position and well acquainted in the city to COLLECT ITS SUBSCRIPTIONS AND EXTEND ITS MEMBERSHIP AND A KNOWLEDGE OF ITS METHODS AND AIMS THROUGHOUT ALL CLASSES OF THE COMMUNITY. A minimum salary of \$50 per month will be paid, which may be increased by successful work. Answers must be in handwriting of applicant, give their age, residence and previous occupation, and contain satisfactory references as to capacity and character.²

¹ This article draws on previous reports by the author: For a detailed treatment of Mary Richmond's early life and professional development in Baltimore, see *Mary Richmond and the Rise of Professional Social Work in Baltimore*, University Microfilms Publication No. 17,076, Ann Arbor, Michigan; for an evaluation of her place in professional history, see "Mary Richmond: Product and Modifier of Her Time," *Newsletter*, Committee on the History of Social Welfare, May, 1961.

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² *The Sun*, Baltimore, December 16, 1888.

The files of the Baltimore Family and Children's Society contain 21 letters from unsuccessful applicants for this position. They illustrate the prevailing impression that anyone with energy and a kindly disposition could become a charity worker. Included were letters from ex-teachers, salesmen, a cigar maker, a dressmaker, young physicians (one of whom explained, "I have four to seven hours each day that I might use better than I do"), and a 30-year-old woman with "a right good education" but a "social position you might style as only medium." The letter from the successful applicant is missing, probably destroyed in a fire that consumed all important administrative records of the agency. The qualities she presented have to be deduced from what little can be discovered concerning her background.

Early Life

That Mary Richmond was born in Belleville, Illinois, was also more or less accidental, for her blacksmith father had gone there to earn high Civil War wages making gun carriages. Within two years her parents were back in their native Baltimore, which remained "home" for Mary until 1900. The second of four children, she was the only one to survive infancy. Her mother died of tuberculosis before she was four, and the responsibility for her upbringing fell upon her maternal grandmother and two maiden aunts. Her father, who remarried and never had much to do with her, died of tuberculosis when she was about seven.

She grew up in a working-class neighborhood in the Baltimore of Civil War and Reconstruction days. In the cheap rooming house her grandmother operated, there was a constant flow of erratic personalities. Spiritualism, antivivisection, women's rights, race relations, and the novels of Charles Dickens and Maria Edgeworth were the subjects of constant, heated discussion.

Her Grandmother Harris was much opposed to the routine methods of public primary education then in vogue, and taught precocious Mary at home until she was 11 years old. As an adult, Mary could

not recall when she had not been able to read. Throughout her childhood she was allowed to investigate whatever caught her interest and to express her thoughts in her own style. When she was nine, she wrote an aunt that "last Saturday I heard of Dicken's death but it was good news when I heard that his Book was in the hands of the Editor, so I expect to read it."³ An essay in her 1872 copybook declares the following:

The original constitution of the U.S. had seven articles, but they have fifteen amedments [*sic*], so, as you will see, their is very little of the original constitution left. . . .

From what I have heard, the wimmen are trying to get a sixteenth amendment, which is to give wimmen the right to vote, I do not pretend to say that all wimmen go in to this movement, because a larger portion of them set their whole hart, and soul against it.

In spite of its casual nature, home instruction provided a sound educational foundation, for Mary Richmond was able to complete all of the requirements for graduation from grammar school in two years, in time to enter high school at the minimum age of 13. At that period only a small proportion of girls entered high school, and few indeed graduated as did Mary Richmond. Baltimore's Eastern Female High School served a heavy academic fare, one somewhat comparable to that of a modern junior college. Judging by the long examinations,⁴ a solid mastery of each discipline was expected, so that it was little wonder that only 30 out of Mary Richmond's 303 classmates as freshmen found themselves on the commencement platform in 1878. Of her eight teachers, Mary Richmond's favorites were a Shakespearean specialist and the teacher of English composition. Her science teacher later recalled, "Even at the early age of her graduation she was unusual in mental attainments, in grace of manner, in high ideals, and in the humanities."⁵

³ MERA. Spelling and punctuation in all quotations from MERA are as in the originals.

⁴ Preserved in *Annual Reports*. Archives of the Board of Education, Baltimore.

⁵ *The Sun*, Baltimore, July 8, 1922. Letter to the editor after Miss Richmond had received an honorary degree.

According to her confidences to friends, she then would have liked to have taken up teaching, but there were insuperable obstacles. She recalled publicly, "The only respectable thing . . . a woman could do was to teach school and almost in every case it was necessary to have political influence. I had none."⁶ For a few weeks the new graduate worked in a factory; then she joined her aunt in New York City, where they lived together in a furnished room. She did routine clerical work and some proofreading for a publishing house that catered to unpopular and radical causes. The aunt soon returned to Baltimore, leaving her young niece in strange surroundings. Miss Richmond described this period later:

I have been thinking of the time when as a girl of sixteen . . . I went up to New York . . . and took a very subordinate position at purely mechanical work, in a publishing house at an almost infinitesimal sum. . . . For two years, I think, I lived as lonely a life as a woman well could live, for I knew no one, and . . . you cannot be so lonely as in a large city. . . .

I craved, just as every girl does who is lonely, affection and friends.⁷

Mary Richmond tried to overcome loneliness in the best ways she could afford, attending Cooper Union lectures and Henry Ward Beecher's church. She developed a severe cough for which complete rest was recommended, but when the discouraged young clerk protested, an understanding doctor suggested deep breathing while riding to work on the Brooklyn ferry. She gradually improved, but a case of malaria forced her to give up work and return to Baltimore. From 1880 to 1887 she was bookkeeper and saleswoman in a stationery establishment, attaining top salary for a clerical worker. During this period she was an avid reader and assumed leadership in a literary club. Much of her leisure time was spent in libraries doing laborious research for club essays, and she experimented with the writing of poetry.

About 1886 Mary Richmond visited the

⁶ Address, "Attitude of a Working Woman toward Working Women," April 30, 1897. This address is included in *Report of the Proceedings of the Third National Convention of Working Women's Clubs in Philadelphia*. MERA.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Unitarian church and began taking part in its evening activities for young adults. She taught Shakespeare in classes at the church and in a club for working girls. One young man wrote, "When our interest began to lag, or when we became inattentive and forgot the purpose for which we assembled here, you always devised some new scheme which should revive our interest." Another commented, "When I look back and see in how many ways you have helped me during the past year, giving a few words of hope here, and encouraging me there . . . I hardly know how to thank you."⁸

During the rather brief period of her employment in a hotel, Mary Richmond continued to develop her interest and talent in teaching and in leading groups. She learned how to draw out the ideas of even the most hesitant person, and seems to have had an unfailing sense of when to use the authority of scholars and when to rely on the haltingly expressed reactions of her pupils to the material under study. Participation as a board member in church and YWCA groups helped her learn how organizations could focus their activities and carry on their business. In 1890, after she had been employed by the Baltimore Charity Organization Society (COS) for a year, she represented the Baltimore YWCA at a national convention of working girls in New York City.

Public Relations and Friendly Visiting

Mary Richmond began her new job as assistant treasurer for the Baltimore COS on February 1, 1889. With the encouragement and financial assistance of friends in the Unitarian church, she had spent a week in Boston. There, under the guidance of Zilpha D. Smith, executive of the Associated Charities, she had observed the work of that agency and had noted especially its fund-raising methods.

Owing to an interregnum in the executive leadership of the Baltimore agency following the resignation of Amos Warner, Miss Richmond was introduced to her duties by John Glenn, chairman of the ex-

⁸ Selected from a collection of letters from the Shakespeare classes. MERA.

ecutive committee. A semiretired lawyer and business executive, he devoted almost full time to the work of the struggling little society. Scholarly in his interests, he kept up with the social and political ideas current in Europe and America, and blended a kindly human approach to individual people in trouble with an objective appraisal of those forces that might be responsible for their immediate difficulties.

Mary Richmond always regarded John Glenn and Zilpha Smith as her two most influential teachers, but she acknowledged the impact of many other board members. The COS was closely linked with Johns Hopkins University, still in its nascent period of intellectual ferment. Daniel Coit Gilman, who was president of both, believed firmly that philanthropy would become a profession based on scientific knowledge. Dr. William Hurd, professor of psychiatry in the Johns Hopkins Medical School, stressed the case approach in research and the therapeutic value of friendly visiting. Charles Bonaparte, a socially prominent lawyer who assumed a highly responsible attitude toward the distribution of his vast inherited wealth, took the position that extenuating circumstances in each individual case should always be considered, and that gossip and popular opinion should have no influence in determining whether or not a person was to be helped.

The themes that each of these influential leaders impressed upon Mary Richmond in the early days of her association with them are reflected in the directions of her later efforts to develop the major aspects of case-work theory. These central ideas were the application of scientific knowledge from many sources, the making of new discoveries by exhaustive analysis of individual cases, and the consideration of the nature of "social evidence."

Mary Richmond frequently remarked that she and her contemporaries had had to learn social work and do it at the same time. A modern student field work instructor would gasp at the thought of sending out on assignments a person with one week's training, as was reported in the agency's bulletin for March, 1889: "Our Assistant Treasurer has addressed a series

of meetings . . . on the subject of charity organization work. . . . On the 28th [she] lectured to an audience representing all the prominent churches in northwest Baltimore, on 'Practical Church Charities.'"

She reported having made "some thirty" addresses by the end of nine months. Her most time-consuming assignment during the first two years was keeping the accounts of the incoming contributions and personally interviewing people who did not renew their pledges. The way in which she explained the agency is indicated by notes of her speeches and by her annual reports. For example:

"If you don't give direct relief with all this money, what do you do with it?" . . . we are sometimes asked. . . . We furnish the whole time of seven experienced charity workers, who shall consider and do their best to find relief for every possible form of need, and shall make their seven offices centers where the distressed and unfortunate may be brought into friendly relations with the more fortunate, where an organized corps of volunteer visitors may follow up these cases and make them, if possible, self-supporting, and where a free register may be kept of work wanted and workers wanted, for the mutual benefit of employers and employed.⁹

After a few months she persuaded John Glenn to permit her to become a volunteer friendly visitor. As she recalled her initial experience, she revealed the widely held conviction that the poor must be manipulated into accepting better conditions as viewed by the visitor's standards rather than stimulated to attain the kind of life pattern they would like.

In the first family I ever visited the mother, a colored woman, had been bedridden for thirteen months. According to her own account she had been "conjured," and at first the mention of a hospital made her hysterical. She consented to let a doctor, who was a friend of mine, see her, and he pronounced her disease sciatic rheumatism. He said she could never get well at home with four small, noisy children, and, besides, the walls of her house were damp. After two months of persuading, I got the mother into a hospital and the family moved into a dry house. Among the arguments that won her were my own acquaintance with the hospital nurses, and my promise

⁹ "Report of the Assistant Treasurer," *Annual Report*, Charity Organization Society, Baltimore, 1890.

to visit her frequently while there; and my further promise to see that the children were well cared for while she was away. But the argument that tipped the scale was the promise to take her away to the hospital in a carriage with two horses.¹⁰

A number of the churches were accustomed to giving relief in food and clothing to families who attended their church meetings and Sunday schools. Often several churches were found to be aiding the same family, and such impulsive and irregular assistance was the target of much COS criticism. Miss Richmond organized several groups of such recipients into "mothers clubs." Much as she had taught Shakespeare, she led discussions in child-care methods, home economics, and family problems. After executive responsibilities forced her to give up a group, she received a letter from a former member:

I am now in the depths. . . . I think of you often. . . . It has always been a source of regret that our little club did not grow and prove to be all you hoped and wished it to be but I know and can truly say it was a help to me and often now in helping Sister with her children your talks and teaching come back to me and by adopting your advice and doing what you said come out all right.¹¹

The need to explain the work of the agency in speeches and individual solicitation constantly pushed Mary Richmond to inquire of other volunteer visitors just what it was they were doing. Although she was thoroughly imbued with the dogma of the charity organization approach, intellectually she was beginning to see many inconsistencies and the lack of any foreknowledge of what the results might be in a particular case.

General Secretary

Mary Richmond's opportunity for widened responsibility and influence in the charitable field came with the resignation of Charles Lee Smith as general secretary,

¹⁰ Mary E. Richmond, *Friendly Visiting Among the Poor*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1899, p. 102.

¹¹ L. N. M. to Mary Richmond, February 5, 1892. Archives of the Family and Children's Society, Baltimore.

effective at the end of 1890.¹² While Mary Richmond had been absorbed in extension and fund-raising work, and had been devouring the literature of philanthropy, Smith's efforts had been directed primarily toward work with the board and with other community agencies. Like Amos Warner and others who had held this position, Smith was university trained.

John Glenn had become more and more impressed by Mary Richmond's personality and accomplishments, and he used his influence to persuade other board members to promote her to the position of general secretary, despite her sex and lack of college training. The personal attributes Glenn sought in an executive may be inferred from what he had said a few years before about Amos Warner:

We were very fortunate in getting an able man who had the two qualities of the sympathetic and the detective, two qualities absolutely necessary in any one connected with charity. If the detective is superior, the poor get too little help; if the sympathetic is in exuberance it is demoralizing.¹³

The assistant treasurer assumed the responsibilities of general secretary in January, 1891. During the previous two years, a period of time roughly equal in length to that now required for professional education in social work, Miss Richmond had familiarized herself with most of the literature of philanthropy and, along with her assigned tasks in community organization, had tried her hand at casework and group work.

Mary Richmond combined the qualities of a detached student and observer with tremendous drive and ability to assay a situation and take decisive action quickly. She had a rare knack for listening intently, drawing other people out, and then presenting the gleanings from this wide, vicarious experience in an orderly but tentative

¹² Charles Lee Smith, a fellow in history and politics at Johns Hopkins, succeeded the much more famous Amos Warner as general secretary of the COS early in 1889. He obtained his Ph.D. in 1889 and resigned from the COS in December, 1890, to become a professor of history and political science in William Jewell College, Liberty, Missouri.

¹³ *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction*, Press of George H. Ellis, Boston, 1889, p. 239.

form at small committees where they would elicit thoughtful additions. "You learned from every question she asked," one of her earliest colleagues commented.

She always spoke with enthusiasm and assurance, using many homely metaphors. People were impressed with her air of unruffled self-possession and her brilliant ability to quote and comment on many subjects. In June, 1892, a newspaper report of floor discussion at a meeting of the National Conference of Charities and Correction included the following: "Many valuable suggestions were added to what had already been said by Miss Mary E. Richardson [*sic*] of Baltimore whose long experience in charity work although but a young woman has given her a peculiar knowledge of charity's every demand."¹⁴

Mary Richmond was attractive physically, with bright-blue eyes and a slow, appreciative smile that increased as conversation progressed. Her magnetic charm converted many indifferent or skeptical small contributors into active supporters of her programs.

In the early nineties the role of the administrator in a social agency was poorly defined. In the COS movement generally, and certainly in Baltimore, the board of directors and key committee members still tended to think of the paid staff as "agents" to carry out the bidding of well-to-do contributors. Some strong executives were already describing a more creative function of acting as a specialist in the field of administration and actively directing policy formation. Miss Richmond was familiar with the administrative theories advanced by Charles Loring Brace, of the New York Children's Aid Society, and by Franklin Sanborn, secretary of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, both of whom saw the administrator as a leader and innovator.

Mary Richmond proceeded cautiously at

first, since her teachers were her employers, but she immediately began to strive toward more efficient and integrated operation of the board and semiautonomous districts and committees. By giving vivid descriptions of some particularly puzzling or successful cases, or by cogent presentation of two sides of an issue to be settled, she made board and district visitors' meetings so interesting that attendance increased markedly. People who had had only nominal attachments to the organization were given specific jobs and were to report back to the central bodies; thus volunteers and paid staff alike could be aware of what was going on, could appreciate each other's specialized contribution, and could understand the way in which agency funds were raised and dispensed.

It was during these first few years that Mary Richmond came to the conclusion, which she never abandoned, that every agency will secure the support it needs if it uses the talents as well as the financial backing of its constituency. To increase understanding of the way COS worked, she began developing many ingenious forms of publicity and experimented with effective interpretations of the needs of clientele and community. For example, a booklet in the shape of an attractive lady's purse contained COS referral slips with the explanation that referral was the best way to stop street begging and at the same time to start the process of "reconstructing" the beggar. It was suggested that this booklet be carried in the lady's handbag at all times.

By 1895, when John Glenn was no longer active, Mary Richmond's advice was being sought and listened to, and she was in full charge of the minutiae of operations. Much of her thought and energy was channeled into inter-agency co-operation and social planning. In keeping with the original constitutional purpose of COS of preventing duplication and promoting co-ordination of the work of all agencies, she initiated community conferences, urged more general use of the COS Registration Bureau (later the Social Service Exchange), and campaigned for better investigation of applicants for relief and service. When a community group discovered a widespread problem or a conspicuous lack in commu-

¹⁴ *The Colorado Sun*, June 24, 1892. A factory worker who had known her (beginning in 1888) said in an interview in 1955, "She was a smart girl and she made every one know it, the way she could talk." Zilpha D. Smith wrote in 1899, "Mr. Bancroft came home from Baltimore enthused (a cold Bostonian!) over the general secretary there,—speaking specially of her great facility of expression." MERA.

nity facilities, she sought out COS board members and interested them in drafting new legislation and seeing it through the legislature, and in raising money for new agencies. Sanitary reform measures, prohibition of street begging and prostitution, improvements in the local almshouse, and better child-care facilities were some of the causes she spearheaded.

The Beginnings of a Scientific Approach

As Mary Richmond attended meetings of the district case committees, at which full-time, paid agents made their reports of investigations and the committee members decided what kind of treatment was indicated and assigned a "friendly visitor" to carry it out, one of the first things that struck her was the difference in the approach used by each district and even by each visitor.¹⁵ Although visitors were similar in their grandiose descriptions of what they were trying to do, they were quite dissimilar in how they did their work and the degree of success they achieved.

At first Mary Richmond decided that what was needed was more background knowledge of household economics, child-care methods, and health measures. As a result, an in-service training program was developed for agents and visitors. The agents under her immediate authority were the ones who could be induced to try out new methods and apply theories consistently, and her attention was directed primarily toward them. Since their major task was to investigate, her earliest studies were naturally focused on investigation. She called in agents and outstanding visitors for long individual conferences, and

¹⁵ The Baltimore agency followed the standard COS practice, in which a committee composed of volunteer visitors was responsible for handling all cases in each district. After the basic facts in the case had been uncovered in a thorough investigation by a paid agent, the committee considered all ramifications, decided what treatment should be instituted, and assigned one of its number as friendly visitor to carry out the recommendations. In theory, all treatment was carried on by the volunteer visitors, and an agent had to become a volunteer in order to do treatment. In practice, the shortage of volunteers and their frequent unavailability resulted in the agents' doing some treatment. In this discussion, "visitor" relates to the person doing treatment, whether volunteer or paid, while "agent" refers to the paid person who performed the initial investigation.

she urged them to tell her minutely just how they had gone about their work. Then she began to require daily written reports, and from this practice detailed record keeping on a case-by-case basis developed.

All during this time, Mary Richmond moved ahead as an observer looking at casework from the outside. She had the gift of visualizing what really happened, through the descriptions given by others, without the emotional involvement of actual participation. She decided that a more systematic training method than a mere recounting of experiences would have to be devised if the general level of performance were ever to approach the point reached in those occasional cases where spectacular family improvement had occurred. First she had small groups of visitors talk over their major problems with her; then, based on these indications of their needs, she organized formal classes in which she, and sometimes an agent, lectured.

Mary Richmond's book, *Friendly Visiting Among the Poor*, was a compilation of what she had found useful in these training sessions, and it remains one of the best descriptions of high-standard work during the friendly visiting period. Meanwhile, Mary Richmond was slowly coming to see that some of the most creative work was being done by the agents, and she began to advocate that they, rather than the volunteer visitors, treat the most complicated situations. This proved to be a major step in the professionalization of caseworkers: as a result of her subtle hints, the board, volunteer visitors, and the community at large began to recognize that full-time experience, concentrated reading, and regular attendance at discussions produced a specialist whose competence could be trusted.

As early as 1893, in a moment of discouragement after a long evening of reading a batch of agents' humdrum reports, Mary Richmond decided that what was really happening in the agency's efforts to help families was a haphazard, intuitive experimentation that she always referred to as "blundering." She resolved to study "blunders," and she continued that effort throughout her stay in Baltimore. Each case was to be considered step by step "as

though it were a new one." Many small comparative studies of seemingly similar cases were initiated, and agents were urged to watch for similarities and differences, for any hint of what occurred uniformly. She began to sense that the feeling visitors showed toward clients had something to do with the progress made, and she constantly urged visitors and agents to find out what it was. A chance comment about a minister who had been one of the most effective friendly visitors—that he had the "kind of sympathy that made one strong"—caught her imagination. She begged visitors to try to pinpoint its characteristic components. Another favorite quotation was this: "The word investigation means such different things in the mouths of different persons. In one it means . . . a personal exercise of thought and interest, of patience and ingenuity. . . . In another it means a word or two of reference and a label of 'deserving' or 'undeserving.'" ¹⁶

As she became more and more frustrated over not being able to identify what it was that made the difference between failure and success in "character reconstruction," Miss Richmond turned to the details of content in investigation. She was convinced that the reason for failure must be the lack of some obscure but vitally significant information about the client. She urged agents and visitors to accumulate more and more facts of many different kinds in the hope that somehow the "key" one would emerge.

Thus, in these earliest fumbling research efforts to discover and describe the core elements in giving help effectively, the future author of *Social Diagnosis*¹⁷ had come very close to recognizing what we today see as the central component in the casework process—relationship. This potentially rewarding avenue was not pursued because she was diverted into a much more mechanical approach, the assembling of information needed to determine what to do rather than how to do it. It seems reasonable to conjecture that this shift in objective was at least partly due to her

limited familiarity with actual process and consequently greater ease in guiding fact-finding procedures in which she could utilize those skills she had already perfected in her early literary research.

Meeting a New Challenge

In 1900 Mary Richmond accepted a position with the Philadelphia Society for Organizing Charity. Before she left Baltimore, her colleagues asked her to rewrite the agency manual to incorporate her latest ideas, and the Philadelphia agency asked her to be thinking about what principles should govern the giving of relief. The manual was thus her first attempt to develop an over-all view of social work.

In this manual Mary Richmond included her philosophy about administration, supervision, casework performance, research, and social action. Her premise was that the goal of every charitable organization should be to render itself unnecessary. In a family agency, help from relatives and friends close to the needy person should gradually be substituted for private relief funds. The goal for recipients was to increase their physical, mental, and moral activity in order to give them a larger and fuller life. Treatment consisted of using the "best ways" of helping a family, and "we cannot know the best way until we know all the resources within and without the family." She proposed a classification by which resources could be selected. "The sources that lie nearest not to us but to the family life are the best." She foresaw that one of the next tasks in social work would be to determine the qualities of a good home, and she realized that the internal environment of a family was the area in which the caseworker should concentrate his social study.

In Philadelphia Miss Richmond was confronted with a different type of agency. The Baltimore COS had made relief investigations and had recommended the giving of relief by other agencies or private individuals, but it had had no large relief funds of its own. In contrast, the Philadelphia agency regularly raised sizable sums for direct relief; it placed less emphasis on service and more on economic rehabilita-

¹⁶ Attributed to "A London Worker," *Charities Record*, Charity Organization Society, Baltimore, May, 1893.

¹⁷ Mary E. Richmond, *Social Diagnosis*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1917.

tion. Each district office was like a separate, small agency. Co-operative arrangements with other agencies were not as well defined, and there were many more agencies to be dealt with. The board consisted of well-to-do businessmen who took a sentimental, somewhat condescending interest in the poor, but who were much less interested in social theory and a broad philosophic approach than was the Baltimore clique influenced by Johns Hopkins University.

Although she did not abandon her interest in the development of casework philosophy, the new Philadelphia executive was forced to turn more of her attention to problems of administration, interpretation, and fund raising. Securing a capable staff became much more of a problem, and she sought ways of interesting young college graduates in her training program. She recruited many new volunteers, but it was always difficult to obtain enough manpower to meet the requirements of the personalized approach that she envisioned.

Mary Richmond's literary ability, which had been outstanding in high school and in adult club activity, now came to the fore. Her case stories were widely copied by agencies in other cities because they clearly demonstrated the need for highly skilled personnel and adequate relief funds. During the 1907 panic Mary Richmond also exerted wide community leadership in meeting disaster, working with officials and businessmen for planning on a city-wide scale. Work with families continuously revealed that one of the most effective methods of long-term prevention of social ills was to give opportunities to the children of the present generation. Mary Richmond and her staff colleagues in Philadelphia took active leadership in securing laws to limit child labor and to compel school attendance.

Subsequent Developments

Such time as Mary Richmond was able to devote to casework analysis was used to perfect methods of investigation. The first decade of the twentieth century was a period of experimentation, much of which seems naïve and pointless to today's caseworker who is steeped in psychological and

social science methodology. Mary Richmond became so compulsive about insisting that every obtainable fact concerning the client's past and present be unearthed that some of her visitors recalled feeling almost like policemen.

Nevertheless, the client and his needs were never wholly obscured, however much emphasis was placed on the way in which information about his life experiences was to be assembled. For example, in one lecture to trainees for paid visitor positions, Miss Richmond suggested that as much information as possible be obtained from official records, neighbors, landlords, or employers without involving the client or his close relatives, since interrogation might be upsetting.

Recording of cases became more detailed. Mary Richmond and her associates had regular discussion groups in which they tried to develop an orderly way of arranging and assessing the mass of information they were collecting. Increasingly she felt that relief should be regarded as a tool rather than as a regrettable but unavoidable necessity. If opportunities for self-advancement were lacking in the community, she showed her board how essential it was that a farseeing agency help expand facilities or create additional ones.

Board members recalled how stimulating it was to be in the midst of such a fever of practical and theoretical innovations. They were proud of the national prominence their executive was achieving and much impressed with her book, *The Good Neighbor*, which sought to describe social agency organization as a modern expression of humanitarian and religious impulses toward aiding one's fellow man.¹⁸

Before she left Baltimore, Mary Richmond had been an ardent advocate of founding a training school for people who planned to make a career of philanthropy. In 1899 she had lectured in a summer school started by the COS of New York. During the next decade she conducted classes at the new training schools in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. She drove herself to try to formulate principles and orderly descriptions of method so that there would

¹⁸ Mary E. Richmond, *The Good Neighbor*, J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, 1907.

be an easily transmissible core of knowledge to be imparted to new recruits. She took pains with her lectures and experimented with ways in which existing knowledge could be made understandable. She found that detailed case records provided some of the best material for discussion and that she herself learned much from the records of other agencies.

The idea of exchanging case material, publicity leaflets, and reports was proposed at an informal meeting of the staff members of charity organization societies, at one of the annual meetings of the National Conference. Mary Richmond took responsibility for seeing that the collected contributions were circulated. Newly formed societies in smaller cities constantly wrote for information and advice. Out of this activity grew the Field Department of *Charities* magazine, with Miss Richmond as editor. The first project was a series of small essays by prominent caseworkers on various aspects of investigation. The executives of those agencies that took part in the exchange got together whenever possible; and it was this group that formed the nucleus of interested participants in the National Association of Societies for Organizing Charity—later to become the Family Service Association of America—when it was established in 1911.

By the close of her nine years in Philadelphia, Mary Richmond's interests were becoming concentrated on research, teaching, and writing. She had become a recognized authority in the effort to systematize and improve family social work. Hence it was natural for the Russell Sage Foundation to turn to her in 1909 to set up a Charity Organization Department to conduct research and extension in that field—the program to which she devoted the rest of her life.

Contribution to Social Work

Mary Richmond's permanent contribution to social work, and to casework in particular, can only be judged as one evaluates the state of the field when she first came in contact with it. At that time there were broad goals, such as helping people to help themselves and prevention of pau-

perism. There was the institutionalized good intention of the volunteer, guided by any factual information an untrained agent might assemble. Intuition, common sense, a sympathetic feeling for people in difficulty, and the encouragement of other visitors was all that a new visitor had at his command for guidance in each new situation.

Mary Richmond brought to bear on social work a logical, trained mind and a personality that could not stand "sham" or "blunders." She was not content to discover, as an isolated visitor, that success with one of her clients depended more on securing a team of horses than on securing a trained doctor's services. She had to generalize, to know why people—both visitors and clients—behaved as they did. She was convinced that the day would come when successes would be consistently duplicated and the degree of success approximately predicted. This conviction drove her to try to identify the component parts of the helping process and to organize these parts into a systematic procedure that could be repeated. She saw investigation as the first part of the process and dealt with it as a scientifically minded perfectionist, determined to overlook no detail.

Given the miscellaneous collection of superstition, scientific and philosophic hypotheses, and personal experiences of agents and visitors that then characterized family social work, progress in the field probably could not have been made if someone had not undertaken the ordering and sorting out that Mary Richmond did. In this task, only a person who had the capacity to be both a detached onlooker and an inspirer of daring but systematic experimentation on the part of others could push the profession forward. It could not be done by any one agent or visitor who had a full-time caseload. Perhaps because Mary Richmond never had total responsibility for treatment of many cases, she did not get bogged down in extraneous detail and she was able to spot essential similarities and combine the experiences of widely different personalities. From her first chats with fellow volunteers in 1889 to her last Russell Sage Foundation institute in 1922, she was always looking

for ways of combining chance results with scientific knowledge, and then of testing the combination by orderly experiment.

Her limitations, or, as she said of the work of her own elderly colleagues, those things she left for a later generation to tackle, were also related to her years of practice. Although she was committed to a philosophy of activating people to help themselves and to an ethic of confidentiality, she was still influenced by John Glenn's idea of the ideal agent as a detective. Hence she never saw the contradiction of an investigation that proceeded without full client awareness of steps being taken; nor did she comprehend that, far from saving a client the strain of much questioning, investigation without his knowledge gave him a feeling that his privacy and urge to self-motivation were being violated.

To a large extent the form and content of a case study as she developed it has remained the classic model, with details added or subtracted as each new generation tests the validity and usefulness of each item. More than any other single caseworker, she changed the purpose of a social study from a means of protecting donors against imposters to a way of determining what factors can be utilized to help the client.

Although she is thought of now primarily as a caseworker, she constantly stressed the

idea that in working with each troubled individual the professional person has to utilize the skills, resources, and knowledge available at that moment, and at the same time has to co-operate in reform efforts to remove widespread causes of distress and to try out new approaches that may make his current skills obsolete. She confidently expected that her own formulations would be replaced as professional techniques were perfected. Her long-range, all-embracing comprehension of the profession's future possibilities was always illuminated by pertinent events she herself had witnessed as administrator, teacher, group worker, casework investigator, or community organizer. The profession of social work is fortunate to have had one of its early theorists exposed to so many facets of professional usefulness.

Those of us who never knew Mary Richmond personally may still respond warmly to the evaluation of her influence given by a former president of the Philadelphia Society for Organizing Charity:

I shall never forget our Board meetings at Eleventh and Walnut when she taught us all month by month. It was a lesson in what social activity could really mean and the response was immediate. It carried us all along for many years and is still the inspiration to turn to.¹⁹

¹⁹ Quoted by Helen Foss Wood at a memorial meeting for Miss Richmond in Philadelphia, 1929. Original of letter and tribute in MERA.