HOMER FOLKS

PIONEER IN SOCIAL WELFARE

HOMER FOLKS

PIONEER IN SOCIAL WELFARE

WALTER I. TRATTNER

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW YORK 1968 LONDON

Walter I. Trattner is Associate Professor of History and
Social Welfare at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 67-29169
Printed in the United States of America

FOR MY MOTHER

MINNIE TRATTNER

PREFACE

ALTHOUGH concern for needy members of the community has been expressed in some form for many centuries, the terms *social work* and *social welfare* are of recent origin; they came into existence in the twentieth century. These terms, as we know them today, differ in their content and values from *charity, philanthropy,* or *correction,* terms which preceded them historically. Whereas the older philanthropy was, on the whole, characterized by private or voluntary care for those in need, the newer social work or social welfare includes also public action, preventive efforts to eliminate the causes of distress, and constructive measures to create a freer, more secure, and fuller life for all citizens. In other words, social work and welfare contribute to the building of a sound social structure as well as the remaking of lives, to the improvement and reconstruction of not only individuals and families, but also the neighborhood.

In enlarging their services and placing a new emphasis upon the interdependence of the well-being of the individual and the welfare of society, social work and social welfare underwent many changes during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some of the more important ones included the reform of the almshouse and the removal of children and the insane from this catchall of social refuse; the adoption of foster homes rather than institutional care for dependent, neglected, and delinquent children; the removal of children from the jurisdiction of criminal law and punishment and the establishment of children's courts and probation systems; the condemnation and reduction of child labor; public aid or "pensions" for dependent mothers; the introduction of decent standards of living for the recipients of re-

lief; the introduction of prenatal and postpartum care, visiting nurses and health education for expectant or recent mothers; the prevention of mental illness and the promotion of mental hygiene; and the infusion of social work into medical treatment and public health, including the great movements for combating communicable diseases, especially tuberculosis. Homer Folks was in the forefront of most of these major advances.

From his early work with dependent, neglected, and delinquent children Folks learned that in most cases dependency and delinquency resulted from the breakdown of family life, which in turn was caused by poverty—poverty rooted not in personal failure, but in social and economic conditions, especially sickness, invalidism, and the premature death of the family breadwinner. He was certain, therefore, that health and welfare were inseparable and that the solution to most social problems involved the abandonment of the false dichotomy between them in favor of a vigorous and whole-hearted cooperation among all citizens interested in the public welfare. Folks was one of the first social workers (1) to realize that the social well-being of children depended upon the foundation built for the preservation of the family and the community through reducing all preventable hazards to life and good health, and (2) to recognize the vital importance of mobilizing the entire community—public officials and private citizens, health officers and social workers, physicians and laymen—in the war against illness and insecurity. As a result, he turned from his narrow interest in the protection of needy children through foster homes as opposed to institutional care, to the larger and more important concern for maintaining the family and the home in its totality.

Keeping abreast of progress in all fields, and working alone or with others through many public and private organizations, Folks repeatedly brought to public and official consciousness practical ways to help those in distress. In addition, he helped draft and promote sound public health, mental health, and social welfare legislation, creating new machinery to alleviate and prevent human suffering. Folks, therefore, not only communicated to many the great need for reform, but also played a large part in the practical task of getting bills passed in

the New York State legislature in Albany and elsewhere to fill that need. His eminently successful efforts to prevent tuberculosis and other communicable diseases, improve the administration and expand the range of public health services, and fuse the public and private benevolent forces of society into a working team, helped to make the fruits of scientific medicine a common possession and to bring preventive medicine into the organized social welfare crusade of the era. He also helped to extend the scope of social work, thereby making it a valuable addition to the economic and political machinery organized for the improvement of the entire community.

Folks was modest and unobtrusive but knowledgeable in the ways of practical politics. As a result, he attained a unique position of confidence and influence in matters concerning public and mental health and welfare. In fact, gifted with a fertile mind and a heart dedicated to humanity, he became somewhat of a legend even while he lived. No mere follower, but a leader who shaped events, Folks occupied a broad stage. Though primarily concerned with conditions in New York State, he gained national and even international influence as a social statesman devoted to the public welfare. Recent generations, to whom his name is unfamiliar, live happier and healthier lives because of Homer Folks.

This, then, is basically a study of the life, thought, and achievements of a humanitarian whose wide-ranging social work, although of great significance, has been neglected. While it is mainly an effort to paint a clear picture of one reformer and thus concentrate on the broad process of social change concretely, it is, to a degree, both biography and history; the two cannot be entirely separated—personality cannot be divorced from history and history cannot be divorced from personality. For that reason, I have on occasion mentioned the major political and social developments that Folks's long, productive life spanned. However, mindful of the fact that such words as *Progressivism* and *New Deal* have been used in so many different ways that they, and others, have lost all clear meaning except as a designation for a particular time period (and even that is debatable) or a particular political program, I have used these terms sparingly. Nevertheless, as this study shows, in

advancing—sometimes along with his colleagues and often ahead of them—from the negative policy of relieving distress to the more generous one of preventing it, and finally to the more constructive and positive task of creating possibilities for a more secure, abundant life, Folks made immeasurable contributions to the central program that most Americans wanted, and have accepted, since the 1930s, including the present so-called Great Society.

Also, while by virtue of Folks's wide variety of interests and activities this work covers a large part of the development of modern social work and the "welfare state," it is not a history of either. Hopefully, however, it enlarges an understanding of these, as well as the reform process, by presenting within the context of both an account of one of the major figures in America's social experience. By so doing, perhaps it can along with similar studies begin to serve as a jumping-off point for more insights, interpretations, and generalizations about the dynamics of reform in twentieth-century America.

WALTER I. TRATTNER

Milwaukee, Wisconsin
August 1967

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

SINCE this book grew out of my doctoral dissertation completed at the University of Wisconsin in 1964, I refer the reader to that study for a list of the many libraries, schools, public departments, and private agencies to which I am indebted for making their resources and facilities available to me. I would, however, like to acknowledge once again the unfailing courtesies and helpfulness shown me by the staffs of the Columbia University School of Social Work Library and the New York State Charities Aid Association. Mrs. John M. Bermingham and Mrs. Jacob B. Hoptner of the Columbia University School of Social Work provided me with countless bibliographical suggestions, more than ample work space, and allowed me the freedom of the school's library. The same is true of Gordon E. Brown, executive director of the New York State Charities Aid Association, which, on May 3, 1967 changed its name to the State Communities Aid Association. Not only did he put at my disposal the entire agency, but he also gave me the benefit of his rich knowledge in discussing the problems involved in my research.

In addition, many people who knew Mr. Folks were kind enough to grant me interviews. They patiently endured questions and generously shared their valuable information, thus making vital contributions to this study. Their names can be found in the bibliographical essay at the back of the book.

I owe a special debt, however, to Mr. Savel Zimand and the late Mrs. Zimand, and Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence M. Orton, Folks's daughters and sons-in-law. They answered frankly innumerable questions, shared their knowledge of Mr. Folks and his many activities, and provided

much personal material unavailable elsewhere. In addition, they opened their homes to my wife and me so that we could meet and talk with their ailing father before his death on February 13, 1963. In these, and many other ways, they made the task of research and writing an enjoyable experience.

Grants from the Russell Sage Foundation, the History of American Philanthropy Project, the University of Wisconsin Graduate School, and Northern Illinois University provided funds for conducting the original research and completing the book. For this financial aid I should like to thank Dr. Donald Young and Dr. Orville G. Brim, Jr., former president and current president, respectively, of the Russell Sage Foundation, Professor Merle Curti and Professor Irvin G. Wyllie, directors of the History of Philanthropy Project, the Summer Fellowship Committee of the University of Wisconsin History Department, and the Council of Academic Deans, Northern Illinois University.

For reading one or another version of the manuscript and making valuable suggestions I am grateful to Tom K. Barton, the late Mrs. Savel Zimand, Marvin H. Trattner, Alfred E. Young, and Freeman Cleaves.

I owe my greatest debt to Professor Merle Curti of the University of Wisconsin, under whose supervision this work was originally conducted. It was his suggestion that gave rise to the study, and the advice, constructive criticism, and encouragement he gave me throughout the work cannot be fully acknowledged; they went far beyond the bounds of a teacher.

Parts of Chapter 2, Chapter 4, and Chapter 9 appeared, respectively, in *The New York Historical Society Quarterly,* in *The Journal of American History,* and in *The Social Service Review.* I wish to thank the editors of these journals for allowing me to use this material.

Finally, I am deeply obligated to my wife, Joan D. Trattner, who in so many ways gave her patient help. Her confidence and good cheer, as well as editorial assistance and typing and retyping of the manuscript, added much to the production of this study.

W. I. T.

CONTENTS

HOMER FOLKS

PIONEER IN SOCIAL WELFARE

1

EDUCATION

IN the spring of 1853, James Folks, the twenty-three-year-old son of a Methodist minister, accompanied by his young wife and their newborn baby, boarded ship to cross from England to America. Unhappily, the child died at sea, and Mrs. Folks, after being hurried to a hospital as the ship reached New York, also died, a victim of grief and fatigue. Alone and bereaved, James headed west to join a group of English immigrants who already had settled inland. The tiresome journey had its end in Jackson County, Michigan, where, in southwestern Hanover Township, James Folks staked out his frontier homestead.[1]

Inhabited by settlers from Massachusetts, Vermont, and New York, Jackson County had been organized by the Governor and the Council of the Territory of Michigan in June 1832. The Township of Hanover, in the western part of the county, came into existence in 1836, a year before Michigan gained statehood and only four years after its first white settler arrived. Situated in the highest portion of southern Michigan, this excellent grain-producing area was one of the finest agricultural sections of the county which, by the 1840s, along with a steady growth in population, boasted of brick homes, a railroad station, large church structures, and many other signs of urban life.[2]

It was within this township, on the site that in 1870 was to become the village of Hanover, that James Folks settled in 1853. And the village of Hanover, wrote an historian in 1881, was "deserving of particular notice on account of its rapid growth and the enterprise of its citizens."[3] Within ten years the ground on which it stood went from a cultivated field to a wide street lined with numerous stores and fine dwellings, a brick schoolhouse, Methodist and Universalist

churches, and a Quaker meetinghouse, as well as many prosperous commercial firms.[4]

Hanover became a large center of trade when it captured the Fort Wayne division of the New York Central Railroad in 1870. Its ambitions for a second railroad were fulfilled when the Cincinnati and Mackinaw line was extended to Hanover, but instead of benefiting the village the new road ushered in its decline. The railroad established trading points east and west that soon absorbed most of Hanover's trade, and when a fire destroyed about half the village in 1884 it never recovered from the disaster. At the turn of the century, aside from its schoolhouse, Hanover's attractions were a few residences, a weekly newspaper, two grain elevators, and but a dozen stores.[5] By the middle of the twentieth century Hanover could list a population of only 377. The village was maintained by its enterprising farmers rather than, as predicted earlier, its commercial firms.[6]

Unlike his preacher-father, James Folks maintained the farming tradition of most of his forebears. The hardships of frontier life and the burden of caring for his dependents, including his elderly parents who left England in 1857 to join him, allowed little time for educational opportunities for this quiet, thoughtful, steadfast believer in the Christian religion who "exhibited in his life the fruits of the spirit." Despite his lack of formal education, however, James, one of Hanover's pioneers, became one of its most highly esteemed citizens. By his industry and foresight James Folks, always spoken of by his neighbors as a man of "good judgment," rose to a position of responsibility in the community. It was said that "his name," would be remembered as "a synonym for absolute uprightness and fair and honest dealing." Cast in the role of counselor to an unusually large circle of relatives, friends, and neighbors in need, he gave freely both of his time and aid. But it was always as a friend, never simply as a giver, that James Folks's memory lived in the community.[7]

On June 1, 1855, two years after settling on his land, James Folks married Esther Woodliff, daughter of a farmer in an adjoining township. Esther, third in a family of fourteen children, was born in 1836 at Grimsby in Lincolnshire, England. She was a young girl when she and

her family arrived in this country; five years later, at the age of nineteen, she married.[8] This tall, good-looking young woman, like her husband, was known to be a kind and helpful neighbor. Some fifty years later one of her sons fittingly recalled the heritage his good-Samaritan mother had left him: "I have never been at a loss to account for my own interest in social work whether it be an inheritance or the result of early training, or both."[9]

James and Esther Folks enjoyed life on their farm. Hard work, fertile soil, and good weather usually, although not always, brought abundant crops. The Folkses, like a majority of rural Michigan's inhabitants after 1854, took their Republicanism as well as their religion seriously. Abolitionism and Methodism were well entrenched in the area. Hanover, however, a tolerant and broad-minded community noted for standing "foremost against slavery, the saloon, and for all sane reforms," welcomed all comers regardless of their beliefs. The social responsibility of the church, not theology, was emphasized by its residents, whose creed was simple and whose gospel was one of love, "right living," and charity.[10]

It was into this community that Homer, the fourth of James and Esther Folks's seven children—all boys—was born on February 18, 1867. Young Homer lived the busy and rugged life of a small farmer's son. When the rural one-room ungraded school was not in session he helped with the household tasks and farm chores, and there was the usual play, between school, work, and church. At the age of twelve, having never been absent or tardy for five consecutive years (an amazing feat since he had to walk three miles to school), Homer finished his elementary education in 1879 as a "model scholar."[11]

Young Folks entered Hanover High School and fell under the influence of its principal, A. Frank Burr, a man of Christian character and a devoted teacher. Burr, whom Folks later called "A Modern Michigan Saint," seemed at home in all subjects. An innovator in education, he introduced his young students to "heresies" not found in textbooks. Often paying for school equipment out of his own money, Burr "began a lab for teaching chemistry, insisted that botany had to do with growing plants rather than books, and that geology was to be

studied in the fields." [12] Burr was a man of exceptional endowments —moral, spiritual, and pedagogical—and in his hands the Bible and education came to life. He was to have a great influence on the maturing but still impressionable Folks.

Homer Folks was a model scholar in high school too, where he earned excellent grades in a wide variety of subjects. More significant than grades, however, were Homer's high school compositions, which showed a remarkable degree of thoughtfulness and social consciousness for his age. "Liberty," which is "founded on equality," he said in one essay, "is an inherent right of every man." In another paper on the "Evils of the Age," young Folks questioned the prevalent belief of inevitable progress. "The state of society on the whole," he declared, "is little if any better now than it was in the primitive Oriental nations." [13]

Ranking above all his other early themes, however, was a brilliant essay on the "Sources of Happiness," written at the age of fifteen. At a time when the twin gospels of wealth and individualism were thought to be sacred by most Americans, this paper testified to Homer Folks's feeling for mankind and his early awareness of man's social responsibility. Happiness, defined by Folks as a feeling of satisfaction and enjoyment, comes not to those who sit idly by and do nothing for themselves or others. It is achieved, rather, through work and education, including the study of nature, where the mutual dependencies and the complete gradation from the lowest to the highest forms of life are clearly seen. Another source of happiness, he wrote, is a consciousness of having done right. But by far the greatest source of happiness "is doing good to others." Folks continued, "He who, taking little thought of his own welfare, is constantly seeking for opportunities to do good to others, giving liberally according to his means even though he is not searching for happiness is sure to find it." Sensitive and thoughtful, he ended by asserting that "all the riches of this world cannot purchase happiness, it comes only through doing good." [14] Giving and helping others were means of achieving contentment and personal fulfillment to this young boy reared in a home where charity was not only preached, but practiced. He reasoned and felt that the individual who has no desire to help his fellow human beings remains isolated. From

this fountainhead of idealism would flow Folks's devotion to the public good and his desire to correct whatever injustices he might see.

As each of James Folks's boys finished high school, he offered them the choice of a piece of land to farm, or tuition for a college education. Homer (and one other, his youngest brother) chose college. He did not, however, continue his schooling immediately. College was put off for two years while he taught school to earn extra expense money, returning home several miles by foot each weekend to help on the farm.[15]

Although the age in which Folks grew to maturity was characterized chiefly by business and laissez faire, it was also an age of farm agitation and, to an extent, radical upheaval.[16] Frequent and prolonged depressions and financial panics provided the ingredients that produced various philosophies and programs that promised many a better life. Jackson County, whose farmers suffered a great deal as a result of the depression of 1872 and the panic of 1877, was not immune to these developments. The community ultimately remained loyal to the Grand Old Party, but Greenbackism and Free Silver, for example, had their day there.[17] As a youngster, then, Folks witnessed, and no doubt later remembered, desperate farmers casting aside their long-professed reliance on self-help in an attempt to attain security through organization.

It is also worth noting that Jackson County's first historian saw fit to describe the poorhouse which, he related, "exists in this prosperous county." The fact that the maintenance of the poor cost the residents of the community over $3,000 a year clearly indicates that many in the area did not share in any prosperity. Equally important is the fact that the "inmates [of the poorhouse] are healthy and appear well fed and contented, and differing in no particular respect from those outside [the institution]," [18] suggesting that perhaps Jackson's citizens, unlike most nineteenth-century Americans, did not view idleness as a sin and pauperism akin to crime. Folks was reared in a community that seems to have softened the harsh but prevalent notion that in America, where labor was scarce and land cheap, poverty was evidence of improvi-

dence, shiftlessness, or criminality—a myth to be exposed only several decades later.

In 1885 Folks entered Albion, a Methodist college seventeen miles from his home. Years later Folks recalled that he "went to Albion on the general principle of getting further education after high school, but for no particular kind of work." [19] Founded by a Methodist minister in 1843 as Albion Wesleyan Seminary, it became a college of liberal arts sometime between 1854 and 1864. President George B. Jocelyn, Albion College's second of a long succession of Methodist minister-presidents, aptly described the educational plan of the small liberal arts college when he said,

> It is not the design [of Albion] to . . . prepare students for any specific destination in life. It is designed, however, to require students to prosecute a thorough and systematic course of study—such as is approved by the best educators of the country—to secure that mental discipline and development which alone are worthy of the name of a collegiate education.[20]

Sixty years later one of its most distinguished graduates unwittingly attested to the fact that Albion indeed did hold true to its design when he remarked, "I finished four years at Albion without having clearly seen exactly what would interest me most. It was a general liberal education that I had." [21]

Actually, the four years that Folks spent at Albion were more profitable than he realized, for the small midwestern college was gifted with an unusual number of outstanding scholars and teachers. The presence on the faculty of such men as Samuel Davis Barr and Delos M. S. Fall spoke well for Albion. Barr, a graduate of Williams College and professor of mathematics, came from the East to Albion with a distinguished reputation as an educator. Before serving as deputy superintendent of New York State's Department of Public Education, where he progressively reformed the state's entire educational system, he originated and developed several new mathematical theories and formulae. The professor of chemistry, Delos Fall, was a frequent contributor to the scientific literature of the country. In addition, after coming to Albion in 1878, he was an active member of both Michigan's

State Board of Health and the American Public Health Association.[22] A tradition of public as well as private service was therefore well entrenched at Albion.

Other faculty members helped mold Folks's development. Ransom Lewis Fiske, Albion's fifth president, was both a minister and a natural scientist, an unusual combination for a nineteenth-century rural sectarian college president. A graduate of the University of Michigan and of a theological seminary, he also attended the Lawrence Scientific Institute at Cambridge. It was written of President Fiske that he was "a ripe scholar, a polished writer and speaker, a safe counselor, a popular college president and a gentleman of wide influence and extended usefulness in every department of life." [23] Frederick Lutz, a man of German lineage who came to America in 1870, was another notable member of Albion's faculty. In 1876, after graduating from Baldwin-Wallace College in Ohio, he entered Harvard and then stayed on there for seven years to serve as an instructor in German. He was called to Albion as a professor of modern languages in 1885. Besides publishing some scholarly pamphlets Lutz was an enthusiastic and successful teacher.[24]

Folks's college essays, like those written in high school, reveal the wide range of his interests, his religious feelings, and his idealism couched in realism and practicality. It was Fiske's influence (and perhaps Barr's too) that led Folks to conclude that "the inevitable law of change will bring . . . new problems, whose like is not found in history, books, etc., but is only to be reached by original investigation pushed by the highest powers of the human mind." The fact that Folks was aware of and friendly to the higher biblical criticism, maintaining that it only "leads to a grander view of spiritual truths," also speaks well for Albion and its minister-natural scientist president.[25]

Folks had a keen awareness of reality. He knew that man must take the sad along with the pleasant, the wrong with the right, for he felt, "He who looks only upon the bright side sees little more than half of life." [26] But he still reminded his classmates in the pages of an essay, one that scarcely could be improved upon later in his life as a statement of the values he held to be essential, that "the only successful life

is that which raises the fallen, sympathizes with the unfortunate, relieves the toiling, cheers the disconsolate, and by so doing fulfills the will of its great Creator." [27]

Homer worked hard at college, where his courses included Latin, Greek, chemistry, history, English, philosophy, biology, and political science. It was not all study, however, as a glimpse at his diary reveals. Such notations as "Invited to leap year party," "practice Shakespeare, Henry IV," and "Go for sleigh ride," abound throughout its pages. Folks played tennis and baseball, debated, read a great deal, was a member of the choir, and so enjoyed a varied life at Albion.[28]

Religion occupied much of his collegiate career. He attended prayer and missionary meetings and preached evening sermons. "Attended a revival meeting tonight" was frequently noted in his diary along with "Elected a delegate to the Y.M.C.A. State Convetion" and "Just five years ago today I was converted." He also was an active member of the Prohibition Club and, no doubt, one in good standing: "Ride to Hanover and put in my first vote for Fisk and Brooks and a straight Prohibition ticket." [29] He endorsed Prohibition, however, not on moral grounds, but as a measure aimed at eliminating the poverty, insecurity, and family troubles, which he felt resulted from alcoholism.[30]

During his junior year in college Homer met a girl student, Maud Beard, an Albion resident and the daughter of a Methodist minister. Frequent dates and visits to the Beard home followed, and a year and a half later, just prior to commencement, Homer could write in his diary: "I visit Maud. In the twilight I ask her to share my lot in life and she consents. . . . I am a happy boy." [31]

On the other hand, there was little happiness at home on the farm during school vacations. Homer's aversion to farm work could not have been been stated any more explicitly than by the following succinct phrases:

June 25, 1887—Mowed and drew hay all day, Hard work, tired and sore. Awful glad that tomorrow is Sunday.

June 27, 1887—Mowed all day. Sore. *Ah me.*

June 29, 1887—Drew hay all day, tired more and more. Thermometer 90 in the shade. Finished the 47 loads from the 20 acres at noon. *Awful glad!*

June 30, 1887—Dragged all day again in the same field in the same way with the same sameness.[32]

Back at Albion during his senior year, Folks's thoughts turned to the future, and the ministry. It is, of course, not surprising that Folks considered entering the pulpit. His more secular-minded instructors, however, whom he greatly respected, felt he could be more useful to society in an academic rather than a priestly position and strongly suggested teaching as a profession. This idea he felt was at least worthy of consideration, especially when they hinted that a position as an instructor of modern languages at Albion might be available to him. Professor Lutz suggested that another year's preparation, at Harvard, would be invaluable for a future career in teaching. He even offered to lend Homer the necessary funds when his parents were not fully sympathetic to the idea of their son's enrolling at Harvard for further study.[33] More education would not only be expensive and further postpone employment, but eastern urban life might corrupt the morals so carefully inculcated in rural Michigan.[34] His parents, however, finally consented and at the end of his senior year agreed to advance him a loan of $200, which, with the small scholarship he won, would allow him to enter Harvard in the fall.[35] Content with his future plans, Homer returned home after graduation to work on the farm, visit Maud, become engaged, and prepare for his trip to Cambridge.

On Monday, September 16, 1889, after the usual parting sorrows, Homer Folks left home for the uncertainties of Harvard and Cambridge. The journey from Hanover to New York (Jackson–Ypsilanti–Detroit–Erie–Buffalo–New York City), from where he proceeded to Cambridge, was carefully recorded in his diary: four days after leaving home he wrote, "The trip down the Hudson [is] the most magnificent thing I have ever seen."[36] After spending several days in New York City and Connecticut, Folks finally arrived at Harvard on September 24, and immediately recorded approval of his new home: "I am very much pleased with Cambridge." A day later, however, he would write, "Have a little cry, P.M.," and, he went on, "am very homesick some of today."[37]

That the shy and reserved lad from rural Michigan was both scared

and homesick during his first days at Harvard is easily understandable. The difference between Harvard and a smaller college, in a small town, at that time, was the difference between living in a big city and living in a small town; and in 1889 that difference was great. Harvard was the reflex of Boston society, and Boston was a far cry from Hanover: "Harvard only reinforced the influences of my Boston upbringing," remarked one of its graduates, for, "after all, Harvard is stamped with Boston."[38]

Harvard's leadership in the collegiate world in the 1890s was clearly established. With such eminent teachers and *savants* as Royce, James, Norton, Channing, Hart, Taussig, Shaler, Palmer, Peabody, and Santayana, a body of scholars known throughout the world, no other undergraduate institution could compete with its fame and prestige. Moreover, in President Eliot Harvard had the undisputed leader of American education.[39]

Cast in a strange environment, and in many ways an intruder in a place to which others were born, Folks became homesick. Little did he, at that time, imagine that many years later the class secretary would write: "We had many men of eminence in their varied professions. I think that in the opinion of the majority of our class members, the name of Homer Folks would head the list."[40] In any event, from the start, he made it plain that he had come to Harvard for an education, not to have it serve as the vestibule through which he could enter society. It is revealing that one young man who attended Harvard with Folks would, in retrospect, write of the venerable President Eliot, "We were awed by him and his rectitude."[41] Folks, on the other hand, only a few days after arriving at Harvard, confided to his diary, "Attend lecture . . . by President Eliot. A forcible talk. He does not recommend total abstinence to all. Some very good sense and some very bad."[42]

Harvard, Cambridge, Boston, and the surrounding area offered opportunities to Folks that Michigan was unable to provide. Taking to foot a great deal, he made the most of them, despite the fact that after the first day of classes the Harvard senior recorded that his professors "give out very much work."[43] As his diary indicates, Folks, among

other things, "went through Aggasiz and Peabody museums"; "visited Botanical gardens"; "visited Commons, Tremont Temple, Bunker Hill monument"; he went "to Trinity Church and hear[d] Phillips Brooks preach"; he "hear[d] Lyman Abbot preach again"; he heard Richard Henry Dana speak on "Political Reforms and How Obtained," "watch[ed] Harvard-Princeton football game," "attended opera Faust," "visited the Longfellow house," "State capitol, Faneuil Hall," and so on. Folks attended many lectures, visited the theater often, exercised frequently in and out of the gymnasium, read a great deal, and managed to get mostly A's in his courses.[44]

Folks took four courses at Harvard. In preparation for his future profession, two were language courses. Two others he "took because they sounded interesting." It was the latter two, a course in the philosophy of ethics, taught by Geroge Herbert Palmer, and a course in the ethics of social reform, under Francis G. Peabody, that proved the more valuable. These two courses and the influence of these two brilliant minds, as much as anything else, led Folks to abandon his earlier plans and choose a new kind of teaching career—social service, where he would teach a way of life rather than foreign languages.[45]

Francis G. Peabody, "Harvard's Theologian of the Social Gospel," was a lecturer in ethics and professor of theology from 1880 to 1912. An educational as well as a social reformer, he was the first American theologian to introduce the subject of social reform into a divinity school curriculum. Preferring to deal with facts and experiences based upon observations rather than the subtleties of metaphysics, Peabody made his students keenly aware of the problems raised by industrialism, teaching them that every citizen had a moral duty to himself and to his community to contribute to the common good by helping to soften the evil effects of the new order. For him, in the last analysis, the social question was a question of ethics, and its solution lay in charity and Christian cooperation.[46]

Although an optimist and reformer, Peabody was never able to rid himself of the social conservatism of his Boston upbringing. "Go slow in social reform" was his message; gradualism was his byword.[47] Peabody emphasized the conservative approach to reform, and he tried

to show his students the limitations of utopian and revolutionary answers to social problems. The gradual but persistent efforts of education, legislation, and, above all, spirituality were the agents of social progress, an inevitable but slow process.[48]

It was in Professor Peabody's famous philosophy course that Folks "began to hear about things that were going on that people might get a hand in," and which, he recalled at the age of eighty-two after a distinguished career,

> appealed to me very much as things that I'd like to know about. . . . We heard about Charity Organization Societies, the Settlement houses, improved housing, and things that were practically being done to make life more comfortable and possible for people with small means. It seemed to make a very strong impression on me as an attractive thing to have a hand in.[49]

Philosophy 11, described in the Harvard catalogue as "The Ethics of Social Reform; The Questions of Charity, Divorce, the Indians, Labor, Prison, Temperance, essays and practical observations," but known among the undergraduates as "Peabody's drainage, drunkenness, and divorce," was the inspiration that directed many young men into the path of social work. In fact, it produced many of the profession's outstanding leaders. At least seven men who assumed leading roles in social work came out of Harvard and its Philosophy 11 course in the short period between 1885 and 1893: Dr. Richard C. Cabot, Homer Folks, Sherman Kingsley, Robert Woods (all of whom became presidents of the National Conference of Charities and Correction), Charles Birtwell, William H. Pear, and Harvey Baker.[50] One could add the two political-social reformers, W. E. B. DuBois and Roger N. Baldwin, to that list, along with countless others.[51] Apparently Peabody's students responded to the challenge their professor issued when he ended his course with the exhortation, "Putting to practical service the principles here laid down is the happiest result that could be wished for by your instructor or the university that sends you out."[52]

Peabody frequently arranged evening meetings for his class, bringing in speakers from Cambridge and Boston to talk on such topics as charities, child welfare, housing, and social legislation. On one occa-

sion, the great public servant-philanthropist and one-time president of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, Robert Treat Paine, addressed Folks's class. Another speaker was a gentleman who later became one of Folks's most intimate friends and stimulating influences, Charles W. Birtwell, executive secretary of Boston's Children's Aid Society. These were evenings Folks never forgot. Greatly interested in what these men were talking about and impressed by their sincerity and concern for those in need, he already began to decide against inflicting French and German upon students at a little fresh-water college. In addition, as a result of an essay he wrote in Peabody's course—"Homes of the Poor"—for which he spent many evenings visiting the Boston tenements, Folks began to find classroom work no substitute for first-hand studies.[53]

George Herbert Palmer, professor of philosophy at Harvard, was another long-lasting, constructive influence. Palmer's course on ethics, known as Philosophy 4, was officially announced as "A Theory of Ethics Considered Constructively—Lectures, Theses, and Private Reading."[54] This course, which Palmer taught to Harvard students for more than twenty-five years, was devoted not to metaphysics and epistemology, but to a critical analysis of human conduct. Palmer, who liked to refer to himself as a "moderate idealist," taught that morality had no meaning apart from society, a society whose claims were paramount. Man is essentially a social being and a single isolated individual is an empty fiction, wholly abstract and unreal. The real man is only he who stands in living relationship with his fellows. Self-sacrifice, then, for Palmer, was simply the effective affirmation of the supreme worth of selfhood, and was, therefore, the highest form of rationality. Service to the social and infinite self became, by definition, virtue. It was also the supreme principle of rationality in the realm of deeds, for it brought order out of the chaos of conflicting aims.[55] At his death it was agreed that "Palmer's chief contributions were written in the souls of men, wrought in the lives of the thousands of students whose eyes he opened to the meaning and the possibilities of life."[56] George Herbert Palmer could, without doubt, list Folks as one among those thousands.

The new year found Homer Folks "A Senior at Harvard studying French, German, Ethics-pure and social reforms. I am enjoying it fairly well here," he wrote, "but waiting for the time to return to Michigan."[57] But loneliness and thoughts that turned to a fiancée a thousand miles away did not slow Folks's busy life. He visited the birthplace of Margaret Fuller, the Transcendentalist, attended more ballgames, won a prize in a bowling tournament, saw performances of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet,* heard lectures by Fiske, Channing, and Theodore Roosevelt, and avidly read through Wordsworth, Carlyle, and George Eliot.[58] Most of the time, however, his thoughts confronted the future. After turning down a teaching position at Albion, he was faced with the matter of finding a job.

A position at the Children's Aid Society of Pennsylvania came to Folks's attention and although he immediately turned for advice and counsel to Palmer, Peabody, and Birtwell, the outcome was inevitable. His youthful altruistic instinct possessed him, and on the way home to Michigan after commencement Folks stopped for an interview at the society's central office in Philadelphia.[59] In the meantime, Professor Peabody addressed a letter to Mrs. James C. Biddle, president of the Children's Aid Society, in which he wrote of his student's "high distinction" at Harvard. "He is a serious, vigorous and scholarly man," the letter continued, "and I should expect of him the best of results in such work as you propose."[60]

Palmer, known for being especially "gifted in the capacity of reaching objective estimates of personal ability,"[61] joined Peabody in recommending Folks for the job. His letter is worth quoting at length:

> Of course I have no knowledge of his special qualifications for such a post [as general agent for the Children's Aid Society of Pennsylvania]. But I should like to testify to the universal excellence of his work with me in an advanced course of study in Ethics and at the same time to my admiration of him as a young man of power, modesty, industry and intelligence. I am confident he will succeed best in work where he has sacrifices to make and needs of others to consider. There his peculiar nobleness will be discovered. And I believe one so intelligent as he will quickly acquire a

mastery of the details of a subject with which he has previously had no acquaintance, if by so doing he can help those who require help.[62]

Impressed with Folks's "earnestness" and "with the remarkable testimonials from the Harvard professors," Mrs. Biddle offered him the position. He wired his acceptance at once, to which she replied, "I am profoundly thankful that you are coming [to Philadelphia]. You won't regret the venture." [63]

There were many reasons why Homer Folks accepted the call to Philadelphia and entered into the venture he indeed was not to regret. Folks's family tradition of doing good and his formal training under a series of exceptionally able and devoted teachers, whose doctrines fired their students to constructive labors, help in large part to explain that decision. No doubt his agrarian heritage also played some part in Folks's choice of a career. Hard times on the farm, which occurred despite diligent work, acquainted Folks with the impersonal causes of poverty and probably helped lead him into organized charity work aimed at ameliorating the conditions of those in need. But there were other reasons as well.

Folks's visits to Boston's slums, where he discovered firsthand the poverty, wretchedness, and human misery attacking the nation in the wake of industrialization, urban growth, and large-scale immigration, also helped him decide on a career in social service. He developed a compassion for the unfortunate, thus strengthening the emotional as well as the intellectual bases of his convictions. After seeing people so desperately in need, he found it impossible to turn his back on their problems and retreat to academic life.

And, as Reinhold Niebuhr once pointed out, many Americans entered social work because it seemed a logical way to express a sense of mission to mankind which had been nurtured by the religion of their youth.[64] Social work offered to many a practical substitute for a religious vocation, one that was void of theological doctrines and ritualistic practices; a life of practical helpfulness to the needy gave them more satisfaction than was afforded in the often vague and not generally applied idealism of religious devotion.

This was certainly true of Folks, who was acutely conscious of the paths which lay before him and the reason he chose one rather than the other. "It was the appeal of the subject matter," as he recalled it, that led him into social work. "It had a quality of definiteness. Somehow it appealed to me, whereas the ministry itself seemed a shade vague. I was a person," he continued, "who wanted to see how a thing worked; if you could get somewhere, if you could measure results in some way or other." [65] He would not be happy as a minister or a college professor, for he wanted to do things rather than talk about them. Searching, then, for a meaningful religion and a way to satisfy his sense of responsibility through service, tired of theory and eager to experience the real world, Folks found social service irresistibly attractive.

Evangelical religion, nineteenth-century faith in progress, and the democratic belief in the right to be free, all coalesced to produce a crusading zeal which swept a large number of Americans into various reform movements designed to perfect their country's institutions.[66] Some of these sensitive men and women decided to attack the social evils created by the new industrialism by becoming social gospellers, or university teachers, or muckrakers, while still others chose the path of political radicalism. Folks decided upon social service as a career because of a passionate belief in the obligation of society to help those in need, a social mindedness which was the product of inheritance and formal education, and an interest in action rather than speculation. The newly emerging field of social work seemed to be the best area in which those passions might, for him, find their most worthy outlet.

On August 14, 1890, Folks, at the age of twenty-three, once again prepared to leave Hanover for a trip eastward. To paraphrase the words of one who knew him well, Homer Folks, brought up with a Methodist background of the straight and narrow, was about to begin his efforts to keep the straight but widen the boundaries of the narrow.[67]

2

CHILD WELFARE—THE APPRENTICESHIP

WHEN Homer Folks arrived in Philadelphia on August 15, 1890, to assume his duties as general superintendent of the Children's Aid Society of Pennsylvania, the city, bounded by the Delaware river on the east and the Schuykill on the west, had outgrown its limits and a number of suburbs had sprung up around it. With about one million residents in 1890, Philadelphia was outranked in population by only New York and Chicago.[1]

The City of Brotherly Love was a quiet place. In spite of its large and growing foreign element the early Quaker influence still prevailed. Unlike most American cities, Philadelphia was known for its extremely regular streets and neat brick houses with white wooden shutters and marble facings and steps, which gave the city a look of primness. The tenement houses and cheap flats already characteristic of New York and Boston were notably absent. As an early urban historian wrote, Philadelphia was not without the squalor, misery, and crime that is found in all large cities, "but the proportion is smaller than in some other cities, and the aggregate amount of domestic content, owing to its many comfortable homes, much greater." Nevertheless the city had more than 800 agencies and countless persons engaged in aiding its poor and unfortunate.[2] Homer Folks now joined the ranks of the many engaged in this work.

The Children's Aid Society was one among the city's 109 child-caring agencies.[3] Unlike most of Philadelphia's other private social agencies, however, the Children's Aid Society was not engaged in alms-giving, nor was it attached to any institution that housed and cared for

youngsters. Devoted entirely to dependent, neglected, and delinquent children, the Society consisted of little else than a couple of office rooms and a small but devoted staff. Yet this group of people was in the midst of an interesting experiment, which, under its new leader would help revolutionize the care of dependent children in the United States.

Many Americans in the nineteenth century were suspicious of charity and public relief. Because of the supposed "pauperizing influence" upon recipients (adequate aid would encourage idleness) as well as the widespread opportunities for corruption in its distribution, assistance was thought to be more harmful than good. This distrust, especially of public relief, went back to the English experience—there, the "upper classes," who were also the governing classes, believed that public relief was the root of many evils and that such assistance, especially when given in the home ("outdoor relief"), should be abolished entirely. This theory was accepted by large numbers of competent and generous people who belonged to the well-to-do classes in America. Wanting to be givers and to help the poor, but concerned with corruption and alarmed over the possibility of pauperizing the needy, they preferred offering advice, private charity, and, at best, public relief on an institutional basis. Because of the insufficiency of wise words, the uncertainty of private charity, and the argument that home or outdoor relief was expensive, pauperizing, and corrupting, an era of building poorhouses followed. By the 1830s many state legislatures had passed acts making it the duty of each county within their jurisdiction to support its dependents, erect a poorhouse, and create a new body of relief officials, county superintendents of the poor, to manage the institution. With the creation of poorhouses (or almshouses) and county responsibility, the general trend toward "indoor" or institutional relief as opposed to "outdoor" or home relief was established firmly.[4]

For various reasons, in part financial and in part the prevalent belief that the destitute were a disgraceful and even a criminal class of people who solely through their own sloth and lack of far-sightedness were in need, the poorhouses soon became vile catchalls for victims of every

variety of misery, misfortune, and even misconduct. As Robert Bremner properly summed up the situation, the "old and the young, the vagrant and the abandoned, the feeble-minded, insane, and disabled, were all herded together in buildings that were poorly constructed, foully maintained, . . . wretchedly furnished," [5] and, making matters worse, run by officers usually appointed for their political affiliations rather than for their ability or concern for the needy inmates.

By mid-century the shocking abuses resulting from the indiscriminate herding of dependents in almshouses led to pressure for the proper classification and segregation of different types of destitute persons. This demand for better care of the almshouse poor received great impetus with the creation (beginning in the 1860s) of State Boards of Charities, whose functions were to inspect, report upon, and make recommendations for improving public welfare institutions. And although unsegregated almshouses still existed in parts of the country at the end of the century, most of their glaring abuses were remedied before that time.[6]

Child welfare was the first, although perhaps not the most successful, focus of the movement to reform the poorhouse. Humanitarians long had demanded special institutions for dependent, neglected, and wayward youths. During the 1860s the first of a series of laws for the removal of children from almshouses was passed. Nevertheless, by the turn of the century only one fourth of the states had passed such laws, and even in these states they were not fully enforced.[7]

A natural result of removing children from poorhouses, where that did occur, was the encouragement and growth of child-caring institutions. These institutions, often large and of the congregate (as opposed to the cottage plan) type, were mostly private and sectarian in nature. Quite commonly they were aided by public funds, but public officials had little or no control over them. Although they were, on the whole, superior to the almshouses as a place for child care, they too had many defects and limitations.[8]

As a result, the growth of child-caring institutions dismayed some reformers who preferred family care to institutional treatment. The

first child-placing agency in America was the Children's Aid Society of New York City. Founded in 1853 by Charles Loring Brace, a twenty-seven-year-old minister who opposed institutional care, its avowed purpose was to rescue children from "the haunts of vice and crime" and provide homes for destitute and neglected children. Convinced of the futility of "saving" many of the children except by transplanting them to new environments, Brace began his placing-out work in 1854 when he transported a party of forty-six children from New York to new homes in Michigan. A controversial figure, Brace nevertheless popularized home care for dependent children.[9]

Despite its obvious potential advantages over institutional care, placing-out had gained little ground before 1890. Except for a few notable exceptions (like the Children's Aid Society of Pennsylvania and the Boston Children's Aid Society, under the leadership of Charles W. Birtwell), most charity workers opposed child placement because of the inadequate attention usually paid to the foster homes and the "placed-out" children. Supervision of the children was haphazard and left largely to volunteers living in the vicinity of the foster home: very few of the children were properly safeguarded. Moreover, when practiced even on a limited scale, placing-out was confined almost entirely to the dependent and neglected, ignoring other types of disadvantaged children, as the noted Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe pointed out as early as 1864.[10] It was not until the 1890s, when young reformers, led by Homer Folks, started to concentrate on the question of method and administrative technique of family care, that many others rapidly began to see its value—not only for neglected and destitute children, but also for those in need of correctional care.

After 1883 Pennsylvania children were forbidden by law to be placed in almshouses: the county was charged with providing for the care and support of these dependents. The Directors of the Poor, usually three in each county, had charge of dependent minors as well as the distribution of outdoor relief and care of almshouses. County supervision of dependent children in Pennsylvania was, on the whole, haphazard and poorly administered except in the counties where the "Pennsylvania Plan" developed. This Plan, a cooperative effort be-

tween the state's Children's Aid Society and the Directors of the Poor, included the placing-out of children in private families under the Society's supervision.

The Children's Aid Society, the largest child-caring agency in Pennsylvania, was organized in 1882 solely to provide for homeless children by placing them in foster homes. Most of its work had been in cooperation with the county Directors of the Poor, who, it recognized, were unaccustomed to child care and not fitted for their task. The Society conducted a responsible placing-out system by taking children out of the many institutions throughout the state and putting them in private homes.[11]

In 1890, however, just before Folks joined it, the Society began a unique experiment in child welfare. While it and a few other agencies had been active in placing-out dependent and neglected children, no agency had successfully implemented Samuel Gridley Howe's idea of extending the system to delinquents and defective children. The Pennsylvania Society now pioneered in the placing-out of children convicted in courts of crimes; children who had gotten themselves in trouble were rescued by the Society before they were committed to correctional institutions and were placed instead with private families in the hope that a home atmosphere might be more conducive to good behavior than a penal institution. The Society, however, suffered from a lack of financial resources and leadership, which threatened to end its useful services.[12]

From the start, Homer Folks's days in Philadelphia were busy ones. He had little time to prepare for his first professional job, as his diary makes clear. "See Mrs. Biddle, Pemberton and Hancock. Run out to Germantown. Visit County Prison with Miss Pemberton. Interview 5 boys. Visit office of the press and YMCA rooms." All this, and more, amounted to a hectic initiation into social service for the recent college graduate. Looking through the Society's files, reading back correspondence, meeting many people, and keeping track of 330 children under the Society's care kept Folks busy into the late hours of night. He often took work home from the office and found it necessary to work all day on holidays. He came in touch with the city administration, police, and

courts, and other public and voluntary welfare groups. He ran the office, visited various child-caring institutions, called on children the Society had already placed-out, wrote an endless number of reports and newspaper articles, and attended innumerable board meetings.[13]

Despite his lack of experience, from the start Folks made a most impressive manager. He tirelessly concentrated with a definite, clear, and methodical earnestness upon the problem of looking after the children in the Society's care. He and several members of the society's staff traveled almost constantly. He insisted that the Society not only consider each child but also keep track of his relation with the foster parents, who also needed training and supervision. As a result, they investigated families who applied for children, took the children to or from their new homes, and then reinvestigated both the children and families involved. From one to five personal and unannounced visits each year to such homes became standard practice. No task was spared for the welfare of the children. As one entry in Folks's diary indicates, regardless of the circumstances, contact had to be maintained with those who either accepted children from, or gave their children to, the Children's Aid Society for disposition: "Look up Riley case. . . . Call on Mr. Riley at a 'speakeasy' in eve." [14]

The Society's experiment with delinquent boys was not always successful. Only a week after he began work Folks was informed that two of the "model boys" placed-out by the Society stole money and ran away from their new homes. In his own travels he experienced similar cases. These, however, were the exception rather than the rule, and they did not discourage Folks, who as a boy had written an essay on the need to accept some bad along with the good. The few failures only seemed to convince him of the need for more thorough investigation and supervision of the children and the homes in which they were placed. The real work of the Society, he was convinced, was out in the field. Conscientious in his attention to the business of his office and wards, Folks quickly won admiration for the way in which he conducted the Society's affairs. Only five weeks after he arrived, Folks had so impressed his co-workers and superiors that none other than the Society's president, who usually spared her compliments, expressed the