

CHEER UP, FOLKS! IN FIFTY YEARS UNITED CHARITIES MAY GET RESULTS

"There's no use trying to help the individual; he may not be worth helping, he may be getting just what he deserves. Our aim is to collect statistics on what causes poverty and perhaps in twenty-five or fifty years from now we may know enough about the situation to be able to cope with it. But at present we are collecting statistics."

That statement was made by Ernest Bicknell, then superintendent of the Bureau of Charities, which later became the United Charities. Bicknell is now national superintendent of the Red Cross Society.

It was made to a nurse who had appealed to Bicknell to assist one of the most pitiful cases that had ever been brought to her attention.

The nurse is not temperamental, she is not sentimental; she is a very well balanced woman whose long experience has taught her to take a very practical view of things.

"But really that case was awful," she said to me. "In a round about way we had received word that a man was dying of tuberculosis in a basement.

I went there and had quite a little trouble finding him, but finally located him in a room in the rear.

It was in the winter, the thermometer was below zero; he was lying on a mattress and he had no covering but the rags he wore. There was no heat in the place. He was in the last stages of tuberculosis.

"Accustomed as I have been to suffering, there was something terrible in the man's condition, in his isolation, in the abject misery that made one almost feel as if God had forgotten him, too.

"I called up my superior and she advised that I get in touch with the United Charities.

"I got Bicknell on the 'phone and I told him the story as it had impressed me.

"Oh, you mustn't be so sentimental," he said. "You cannot expect to help the individual," and then he made the speech of which I have told you, adding:

"How do you know but that the man deserves just what he has got? He may have been a drunkard or a loafer that wouldn't work. That's what we have got to find out—what causes poverty, before we can do anything with it. That's why we are collecting statistics now. Some day we can lay our finger on the cause and then remove it, but we can't do it now."

"And the Bureau of Charities did not lend me any assistance, but my superior got the man in a Home for Incurables."

Bicknell's attitude seems to have been a prophecy of the future work of the United Charities—it is a collector of statistics on poverty. It is an amateur scientist making microscopic studies of what causes poverty, and how much it hurts, and how long the patient is able to endure and what the sufferer will do when he reaches the limit of endurance.

On one of their records that I read was the statement that a woman, mother of three children and expectant mother of a fourth, had come to the office of the U. C. for assistance almost a week after she had been given a dollar to support herself and family, and that "when we gave her another 50 cents, she became hysterical with gratitude."

And yet, why should the United Charities bother collecting statistics on why poverty exists? It has been with us since Christ spoke so many centuries ago: "The poor ye have always with you."

And if the United Charities wants