

BEFRIENDING THE FRIENDLESS

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Chicago

In the general plan for the relief of our Jewish poor, the Chicago Home for Jewish Friendless holds a rather unique position. As a temporary home for children, it must meet, not only the relief situation, but taking into consideration child needs and child tendencies, it must be at the same time an educational institution. Most of our relief problems are really immigration problems, and while the mother and father are adjusting themselves to American conditions, American standards, and American forms of government, the child suffers through neglect, physical, moral and mental. Sometimes these adjustments, although painful and fraught with danger, do not disrupt the family, but occasionally the result is not only dire poverty, but also desertion, insanity and tuberculosis, with all their attendant demoralizing effects upon the family. The children of these families find their way through one of the various relief channels to the Home for Jewish Friendless, to be cared for physically, and given the opportunity for mental adjustment and spiritual growth, which they so greatly crave and quickly embrace.

This inborn aptitude of our children gives rise to perhaps the greatest reward in the work. The rapidity with which they become acclimated, assimilating not only our forms of speech, methods of action, but also our colloquialisms and current slang, is a matter of recurrent wonder and admiration, not dulled because so often repeated. One of our girls, sent to the Home by court action, because of a tendency that seemed to denote incorrigibility, has been in this country altogether about two years. She speaks a careful English without the slightest noticeable accent, and so far as my short experience goes, her incorrigibility seems to be wholly a matter of stubbornness that needs to be well directed. One of our boys, likewise in our charge through court action because he came to this country alone at eleven years of age and was afterward found to be without proper care, bids fair to be an intensely interest-

ing young man. His original home was in Salonika, Turkey. Although he traveled second class and made the trip all alone, his active mind and powers of observation make his story read like fiction. At the present time he speaks five languages more or less fluently. His English, after two years residence in this country, has only the slightest accent and recently he has formed a rather interesting friendship with our night janitor, because the latter speaks Polish and is willing to teach him the one language his repertoire lacks. A careful and intimate study of each one of our children would reveal just as many interesting facts as these and make our daily tasks a source of constant pleasure.

The children are simply and substantially dressed, yet so well that Mr. Lewis of Kozminsky School says it would be impossible for him to pick out a child from the Home unless he knew him by name and knew that he lived there. When I attended a meeting of the Parent-Teachers' Association at the Kozminsky School, in which several of our little girls took part, it was sometime before I could find our children. They were wholly indistinguishable from the others by their clothes. This could be a source of great satisfaction, because there is no surer way of increasing a person's self-respect than through the medium of good clothes.

May 1, 1913, there were 197 children in the Home; 242 were admitted during the year, making a total of 439 children sheltered. Three hundred and two children were discharged during this last year, leaving on hand May 1, 1914, 137 children. Seventy-two of these were admitted because of tuberculosis in one or both of the parents; six on account of the insanity of the mother; seven because of desertion of parents; eighteen on account of improper parental care; thirteen because of the death of the mother; one on account of the death of the father, and the remaining 125 because of minor illnesses of the mother.

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