

**SOCIAL WORK SERIES.
DISASTERS AND THE
AMERICAN RED CROSS
IN DISASTER RELIEF**

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Social Work Series. Disasters and the American Red Cross in Disaster Relief by J. Byron Deacon

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S O C I A L W O R K S E R I E S

DISASTERS

AND THE
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IN DISASTER RELIEF

By

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PREFACE

JUST as the last proofs of this little book were being corrected came the tragic news of the Halifax disaster, re-enforcing Mr. Deacon's plea for the fullest possible measure of preparedness in advance of such public calamities.

The American Red Cross has administered, during the past fifteen years, millions of dollars for the relief of hundreds of thousands of sufferers from disaster in this country and abroad. Not alone has it met immediate needs, but it has oftentimes, after disasters, devoted months of coöperative effort to the reconstruction of a place and the restoration of its people. In the course of this work, a method and a technique have been developed which deserve to be recorded for the benefit of all who may be called upon to undertake like responsibilities. The experience slowly gained has been locked too long within the personal knowledge of those who have marked out the way, and to the author of these pages we are indebted for a drawing together, for the first time, of the significant things about the different forms of disaster relief. These he puts clearly, forcefully, and in brief compass.

Upon an understanding of the principles and methods herein set down must depend not only the ready administration of supplies and money in times of emergent

PREFACE

need, but also success in the later work of rehabilitation. In these few chapters the essential problems presented in calamities of very diverse types are explained, together with the procedures now known to be best calculated to deal with them effectively.

To the inexperienced reader as well as to the student of the subject, the volume will commend itself by its aptness of illustration and by its combination of common-sense with ready sympathy. To the officers and members of Red Cross Chapters, and to those social workers who are quick and generous in their response to every call for service when disaster comes, it will be invaluable.

W. FRANK PERSONS

Director General of Civilian Relief, American Red Cross

DISASTERS

I

INTRODUCTION

OWING to the fact that disasters are widely scattered geographically and vary greatly in nature and extent, probably very few persons realize the frequency with which they occur, the staggering aggregate of destruction to human life and property resulting, and the huge problems of relief and reconstruction involved. Because of their magnitude and dramatic character, calamities like the San Francisco and Salem fires, the Ohio River and Galveston floods, the Omaha tornado, the Cherry coal mine fire, and the sinking of the steamship Titanic are remembered by everyone. But it is not a matter of common knowledge that, within a score of years, disasters—some of them not so well remembered because they happened when the mind of the public was preoccupied—have cost thousands of lives, have

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affected by personal injury or destruction of property no fewer than a million and a half persons, and have laid waste property valued at over one billion dollars; or that the expectation, based on past experience, is that each year no less than a half dozen such catastrophes will occur in the United States.

Fortunately disaster rarely strikes the same community twice in a generation. Hence when it comes there is locally no established precedent or well matured plan for ameliorating the resultant distress. It is by no means true, however, that the knowledge of relief measures which have been found effective in practice is utterly lacking or that it is not available for the guidance of the hapless communities which find themselves faced with the grim tasks of emergency relief. The chief repository of this knowledge is the American Red Cross, which since 1905 has actively participated in disaster relief operations in many parts of the United States and abroad. Its prestige and quasi-official status, its organization reaching into every part of the country, its equipment for mobilizing aid