

In our day we ought to easily agree that the child is entitled to more than the mere necessities of life. Let us then be logical and welcome all that makes for him a fair and equal chance in life.

I do not wish for a moment to suggest any substitute for parental care and responsibility. Any device to supersede parents in general would have all the disadvantages of artificiality as against nature. The experiment was tried in the French Revolution and failed. But, as the best physical organism is open to disease, imperfection and unfitness for certain hard conditions, so is the parental institution open to decay, imperfection and unfitness to battle efficiently for the child against some phases of modern poverty or danger, and means must be devised to assist or even replace it. The advantage of the child should be the first rule. The plea is almost always the sacredness of the right of the parent. The parents, it is true, have a profound right to be considered, on their own account, in so far as such consideration does not interfere with that of the child. Their sacrifices and pains are a debt due by the child; but in considering the one right against the other, where they conflict, it should be remembered that the child has been the unconsulted, enforced party to the arrangement, and where the arrangement is really, on the whole, against his interest, it is unjust that he should be held to it. The parents in fact, in bringing him into the world, have contracted the obligation of maintaining and bringing him up. They have contracted the obligation of doing so, well and efficiently; and the community or the State is bound to see that contract carried out.

The position of the parents, in fact, is that, not of owners of the child, who may work their sweet will upon him, but of *trustees for the child itself*, bound to do for him, as his agents, what he would do for himself if grown up. The true point of view is that the *parents are trustees*; if they fail in their trust, they should be forced to fulfil it so far as they can; if they cannot be made to fulfil it, it should be taken out of their hands; if they are unable to fulfil it, their efforts should be supplemented by the State, for the law of *need* is a moral law incumbent on the State as much as on the parents. The first right to consider is, not that of the parents, nor of the State, but of the child. The State and the parents may fight out their precedence of obligation