THE EFFECT OF ECONOMIC CONDITIONS ON COLONY AND PAROLE PLANS FOR THE FEEBLE-MINDED

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Madam President and Friends: I am glad to have an opportunity to come to Minnesota once more. I have not been here for a number of years, and when I was asked to come I did not think much of it. I am enjoying this beautiful city and the fine weather and, while we have weather something like this in New York state, we do not have so fine and dry a climate as you have here. We have fog.

Regarding this problem of caring for the mental defective, for the past thirty years or more it has continued to loom larger and larger as the number to be cared for has increased. As the cost of living has increased, the demand for state care for many more of the defectives has become very pressing. As we have studied various groups, we have found that each association or organization or group working with any particular class of defectives has felt that feeble-mindedness was a very large underlying factor in their work, and that if they could be relieved of the care of the feeble-minded they would be relieved of anywhere from forty to sixty per cent of their problem. That was in the early days. As we have grown to understand the problem better and to study larger groups, and as we have had more expert advice, we have found that while mental defect was a factor in a very large per cent of the agency's problem, it is not more than ten or twenty per cent of their problem today because the number of delinquent and dependent who are not feeble-minded has vastly increased with our redistribution of population and resulting changes in social status. But even at that it is still a large problem with them, and if they could be relieved of all feeble-mindedness they would be greatly assisted in their work.

We have attempted to enlarge our term for feeble-mindedness. In New York state we use the broader term, mental defective. I notice you all say mentally deficient. The English group always says that. Whatever we call it, we must think in terms of the larger group. We used to think of the feeble-minded as idiots and imbeciles. Later we were told that there was a group of individuals who were neither idiots nor imbeciles and yet were not normal, so they called that group morons. Even then we found we had not covered the entire field. We found a certain percentage of maladjusted persons in schools, institutions, and so forth, who, by any mental test—psychological test—they showed no mental deficiency from the standpoint of intelligence, but they did show a very marked mental deficiency from the standpoint of trying to live with them. They were peculiar in their reactions. Families might put up with them if the other children could get along with them, and agencies might put up with them for a time, but agencies soon found that these neurotic, peculiar, irritable individuals could not live in family groups very well. So they broadened the term "feeble-minded" to "mental defective" or "mentally deficient."]

Dr. Bernstein combines a human sympathetic interest with a high order of professional skill and administrative ability. It has been my good fortune to have known Dr. Bernstein for many years and to have visited his school and some of his colonies. He was one of the first to recognize that the great majority of the feeble-minded do not require institutional care, and he is perhaps best known for his work in providing industrial colonies where mental defectives can be inexpensively housed, relieving the central institution of those not requiring special care, training and treatment.

I take great pleasure in introducing Dr. Charles Bernstein, Superintendent of the Rome State School.
ought to be relieved of the task of taking care of them. I would not say it in a custodial way. They are subject to training to be more cleanly and orderly, so that even they may be improved somewhat.

When we come to our imbecile group, they need considerable training. If they are trained along manual and industrial lines, they will be able to do considerable work around the institution. They will not be able to do much outside the institution or homes, but many of them can go back to the family. You would be surprised how many of them can find niches somewhere in very modest families where they want some heavy work done about the place, or perhaps a companion for the aged grandmother, or a helper in the home.

The moron group is one which we are hopeful of training and making quite useful outside the institution. Dr. Davids, in his book on "Social Control of the Feebleminded," accentuates that work outside the institution has a stabilizing influence. After all, the treatment is better. If we can render assistance to these various families by making it possible for them some care and attention and wants association with others, and there are many there may be a paralytic child, or there may be an old grandmother who needs to have to be burdened with them to any greater extent than they are with the working people, if you will.

Welfare organizations, the charity departments, or the public welfare departments, as normal people live if he is capable of doing that thing, if he is not so delinquent following these individuals to go from the custody of the state, thus interfering with adjustment. The girl coming into the house meets that situation.

Again, I think we should consider the humanitarian situation from the standpoint of attempting to rehabilitate these people in the community and making them useful somewhere, by establishing a colony at Hamilton we have made it possible for the professor's families to have the service. A few other families have it also. They have learned to depend on these girls for work by the hour, the day, or the week or the school year. They know they can turn to that colony at any time and find help. At first with Dr. Cutten, president of the University, there was some question as to the advisability of having a group of feebleminded colored girls in the community. He was not sure what would happen to the students. He was not prepared to be so successful that it was considered as an essential part of the University. It serves to make the professor's families happy and to keep them from being maladjusted because of inability to secure such domestic help as they may need.

We have a population of 3,400 inmates in Rome. Of this number 1,100 are living in colonies, and another 500 are on parole status. The work for the colonies for boys has gone on since 1906; for girls, since 1914. We now have thirty-two boys' colonies each accommodating about twenty inmates. We have some colonies which are 100 miles or more from the institution. These colonies accommodate from 700 to 750 boys. About a third of these boys will pass along each year to the status of parole. They live in the colonies about three years. About four or six of the boys are older and they form a sort of nucleus for the rest. The boys can spare about half their time in which to help the neighboring farmers plant their crops and harvest them. They also help to care for the stock and cut wood during the winter. They work by the hour or by the day or by the week. In this way they contribute towards their support. And, moreover, they learn to stand alone and they learn to meet people outside.

We rent these farms; we do not buy them. We put in charge an experienced farmer attendant whose wife acts as the house mother. About four or five of the boys help around the house. One boy helps in the kitchen; another helps in the dining room; another helps in the dormitory; there is one general helper; if there is a baby in the family one boy helps to take care of it. If the boys who work outside, one handles the team; another takes care of the pigs; another looks after the chickens; another takes care of the cows. Eight or ten of the boys work around
committed direct to the State Board of Control. Miss Thomson took me over
York state. of $2,500 per bed for this number, This is what it costs to build these days in New
caring for 1,100 inmates in those farm colonies, and we are saving the state the cost
colonies do not move along quite so fast as they did before. However, we are
year, we are now earning only $37,000 a year. We find that the boys from farm
work. However, here again we found the people wanted domestic help. Formerly
wage they were able to pay, these boys and girls from the surrounding country did this work, but, because of the low
manage, and we cannot introduce such girls into a household to-
touching the farm. They produce all the vegetables they need themselves and have plenty
for the institution. They produce milk and eggs. These boys are so trained that
not only help the farmer but they also help the farmer’s wife and she likes
It. She says: “I like Johnny. He does not hesitate to help me do the washing or
do the washing or make the beds.” And the farmer says: “I like Johnny. He is as helpful as any hired man, and he can even do some of the old harnessed.”
clerks to twenty-five dollars a month, depending upon his ability when on parole. He will help the woman of the house as well as help the farmer.
In addition to the farm work they are trained to make baskets and to cut down trees and make splints for baskets, etc. We try to make these boys useful generally
about a small farm where a farmer is working without machinery, and to make
her and will live on a level with her. We
have sixteen colonies for girls and they care for 450 girls. Some of the colonies
are located as much as 180 miles from the institution at Rome; the colony at Glovers-ville and the colony in Richfield Springs are sixty miles from Rome. Four or five
of the colonies are located right in Rome, where we can watch the reaction of the
girls. We used to depend upon the mills to furnish employment for these girls at some of the colonies. We still have two colonies in mill towns. At another
one they take in sewing, washing and ironing and that sort of thing, but they do not earn anywhere near their cost these days.

The work at Gloversville, with all this depression, has not fallen off, and we have been able to continue the number of girls there at domestic work. At first
we thought these girls would work making gloves, but we were able to place them
domestic work in the families whose members are making gloves. As a result there is just as much demand for the girls there today as there was four to eight years ago.

We have had a colony for from twelve to fifteen years in East Aurora, where the
Royalcroft shops are located. Local people are employed in the shops, so if we
thought our boys and girls might go into the shops and do the same kind of work.
However, here again we found the people wanted domestic help. Formerly
boys and girls from the surrounding country did this work, but, because of the low
wage they were able to pay, these boys and girls from the countryside do not longer do that kind of work, and none of them will stop at East Aurora. They go on to
Buffalo or Rochester, where they can get five dollars a day. The people living in East Aurora wanted domestic help at the time the colony was organized, and the
demand for girls does not cease, although we do not get as much pay as formerly. Whereas five or six years ago the colonies were earning from $75,000 to $90,000 a
year, we are now earning only $37,000 a year. We find that the boys from farm
colonies do not move along quite so fast as they did before. However, we are
caring for 1,100 inmates in these farm colonies, and we are saving the state the cost of $2,500 per bed for this number. This is what it costs to build these in New
York state.

I wish we were able to carry on as you do in Minnesota, where your cases are
committed direct to the State Board of Control. Miss Thomson took me over
to see the Clubhouse in Minneapolis. They have a wonderfully fine home there and
are apparently quite happy.

In general the question arises, Wouldn’t these boys and girls be happier in
an institution? When we see them about the institution they are a happy group. The
boys and girls living in the colonies live in the open; they have an opportunity
to go to church, to the picture shows; they go on the street alone with their colony
friends, and no one jeers at them, and they are happier; they are contented; and
their being able to earn money has a decided stabilising influence on them. Dr.
Davies accentuates the fact that they are happier because they have the satisfaction
of doing something for somebody.

We pay rentals for these girls’ colonies out of the earnings. For the boys’
farm colonies our rentals are paid by the state of New York. The boys turn in
enough foods — vegetables, milk, eggs, fruits, etc.—to offset the cost. It
costs about $4,000 a year to run one of these colonies for twenty boys, including
the cost of $400 to $500 for rental and $1,500 for the salary of the manager and
his wife. In good years they turn in enough so that we are able to play even.

It is very questionable whether a number of children whom we are getting
from the social agencies are feeble-minded or not, but they are maladjusted in the
family and the boy or the girl is becoming delinquent. Dr. Brown, of the State
Board, said: “Why don’t we take them?” They will go to the reformatory if we
don’t. We will approach them in a psychiatric way, keep them a little while until
we get over this depression, then they will go back.”

We are planning to take a little place of twenty acres about four or five miles
north of Rome, on which there is a fine house, barn, and a place for the cow, pigs
and chickens. We are going to take twenty little girls of school age—between
eight and twelve, maybe fourteen—and there will be fourteen older girls to assist the
mature do the work. We are going to send the brightest of these girls to district
school. In the barn we are going to make a good gymnasium and have a manual
training school. We are going to have our own master and our own physical
director, and we are going to invite the children in that little school to come over
to our manual and physical training school. I am going to see if we cannot socialize
this little group in this community. We are to pay seventy-five dollars a month
for that place. There is another place of the same kind near Oneida, where we are
going to take schoolboys. The children will be given a little spending money.
Each colony is allowed to spend twenty-five dollars a month for little extras for
diet, clothing, etc.

For the past ten years we have been running juvenile colonies in which we
place these brighter children, but they have never before attended the school or
district school. We have eight of these juvenile colonies in which these younger
children are living, with a man and his wife to manage things. One teacher does
the work of two. She teaches at one colony in the morning and at another in the
afternoon. They have a scout master and a physical director, and the girls receive
training in domestic arts.

There is one other point: We do not expect to rehabilitate all of the boys and
girls who do not come to us until they are fifteen or twenty years old, who have
intelligent quotients of sixty to seventy. Many of these are of the unstable group
which we must handle, and we cannot introduce such girls into a household to
do common work, nor can we put the unstable boys on farms. They won’t stay
there. If we use that kind of boy or girl around our institution and let them do
the work, and then let the other stable ones go out, we can rehabilitate many of
our cases outside, and if many get only their board and their bed at first, even
if we have to furnish the clothing, we should feel well satisfied.
Dr. Vaux, who has taken charge of the Institution for the Feeble-minded at
Newark, New York, recently reported that he was receiving money from the
state of New York to pay the board of children in private homes. He has eight boys
and girls living in homes in the town of Newark, who are going to public school.
The state furnishes clothing and medical attention. That thing has worked out
so successfully that the budget commission is going to give the State Department
of Mental Hygiene $25,000 this year to further extend this new project. He has
also started another plan in Wolcott, a place of two or three hundred people. He
is getting families there to board older men and women, two or three in a family,
and Dr. Garvin, of the Binghamton State Hospital, has sent two chronic insane
persons to board in this way in this same town to demonstrate whether or not the
chronic insane can also be boarded out successfully. Dr. Parsons, director of
the Department of Mental Hygiene in New York, is very anxious to have it given
a trial. If these individuals can be thus boarded out successfully, Dr. Parsons feels
that we will have made a big stride and will save the large overhead expenditure
for construction at the rate of $5,500 per bed or, in some instances, even larger
casts where a whole new institution must be expected.

Mrs. La Du: We wish to thank you, Dr. Bernstein, for this very interesting
and enlightening talk on the colonization of the Feeble-minded. We have a long
way to go before we can anywhere near approach your project. With us coloniza­
tion is in its infancy. We haven't the same system that you have in New York,
but I am sure we are always very glad to have people, especially specialists, from
other states come to us and discuss some of our common problems. You always
bring a new point of view, new thoughts, new ideas, in connection with our work.

Dr. Murdoch is also a specialist in this line of work. He has charge of the
School for Feeble-Minded in Minnesota. Dr. Murdoch spent many years in this
work in other states before coming to us, principally in the state of Pennsylvania.
We also have Dr. Frederick Kuhlmann, director of the Division of Research of
the State Board of Control, who is a specialist in this work. He is known nationally for
the work that he has done in this field. Dr. Kuhlmann, after receiving his degree of
A.B. at college, specialized for three years in this study, making his special field abnor­
mal psychology, including the feeble-minded. He has been instructor in the subject
of psychology in a number of universities—Clark University, the University of
Wisconsin, the University of Illinois, and the University of Minnesota—but during
the past several years he has been connected with the state department in charge
of the Research Bureau. Formerly he was stationed at the School for Feeble-Minded
at Faribault, but for several years now he has been connected with the central
office in St. Paul, and has a staff of workers under him to carry out his plans and his
research work in this field. Dr. Kuhlmann is going to speak to us this morning on
"Progress in the Care of the Feeble-minded." Dr. Kuhlmann.

A CENTURY OF PROGRESS
By F. Kuhlmann
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I visited the Chicago Fair a few days ago, and when I came back I changed
the topic of my paper to "A Century of Progress." The contents, however, will
be the same.

A few hundred miles from here a great and modern city is attempting to tell
the story of a hundred years of change. Progress is the keynote. It is not only
in evidence it is overwhelming. Even the most informed visitor finds himself
rushed out of date. It is not within the power of any single mind to keep pace
with progress. But this great exhibit selects its material. Not all phases of our human
existence can present such a glorious record. History has long noted that in the
social and political fields we move with a much more uncertain step. Here our
total progress over a period of time may be revolutionary, or very little, or nothing,
or even represent retrogression.

Our subject today is feebleness. What changes have a hundred years
brought in our views, and in our roads towards the feeble-minded? We have
not time to present a history. But let us try to look in on the past at approxi­mately
quarter-century periods, and briefly view the high lights of each.

Let the curtain rise on 1850. The care of the feeble-minded had already
passed through some notable history. Even the ancients did not neglect them. They
threw them into the river. Thus for about eighteen centuries they raved variably,
according to whether they were regarded as the gods possessed of the Devil, or as special messengers from Heaven, or as just interesting tools designed
for the amusement of kings. 1830 found a few gathered into asylums, together
with the insane and crippled, by Christian Charities of the time, the first manifesta­tion of the purely charitable idea that we still have with us. Thirty years
before Irwin had demonstrated that the idiot was teachable, and thereby laid
the foundation for a truly new era. Two years before Dorothea Dix had organized
as a school for idiots, followed by St. Vincent in 1831, and in 1837 Seguin started
his private school for educating the idiot. It was the beginning of a new interest
in the feeble-minded, limited for a while almost entirely to a few physicians and
educators, with vision enough to have faith in the correctness and value of Irwin's
results. The aim was to develop the mind of the idiot; in a word, to cure wholly
or in part by a specialized method of training and education. The interest spread.
Private schools arose throughout Europe. Details of procedure were elaborated.
Results inspired public attention.

We may slip to 1880. News of the success met by private schools and some
public institutions in Europe in educating the feeble-minded spread to America,
where the idea of educating all children in public schools was universally accepted
and most generally practiced. A few private schools for feeble-minded were in
operation into which the European methods had been transplanted. The first
state school for feeble-minded, established at South Boston, was two years old.
New York followed in 1851, after one legislative failure an even sterner
experience of such a magnitude. From this point on the relative importance of the
private schools rapidly faded into the background, and we will limit ourselves to
public attempts to care for the feeble-minded. The problem at that time was simple,
as conceived even by the optimists. They had yet much to learn. It was a problem
merely of special education, in special state schools, such as the regular public
schools could not furnish. After a brief period of years in the state schools, the
feeble-minded were to return to their homes, cured in various degrees up to com­plete
restitution to a normal condition by special education. Let us not, however,
look down on these pioneers from the magnificent heights of our 1930 perfection.
Today we do not always bother to take them into state schools. We give them
a little special training in the public schools, little enough related to their future
needs, and then let them go on as though they were quite normal.

In 1890 the feeble-minded were not regarded as a burden to the public. No
one even calculated the numbers. And the very few of social problems they could
give rise to had not yet dawned on even the best informed. The plan for state schools
was made in the interests of the feeble-minded, not for the public interest. And the