

Comments by A. C. Rogers on How to Reduce to the Minimum the Tendencies to Institution Life

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Dr. A. C. Rogers: School for the Feeble Minded. Mr. Chairman. Where there is a general spirit in favor of any particular thing in an institution a person coming into it is apt to imbibe that spirit and be influenced by it. If the institution is organized with plenty of industries they certainly would be of benefit to the epileptic. Of their application to the insane, I am not qualified to speak. The average epileptic is brought up in absolute idleness. He is brought up with the idea that he is not to do anything, that it hurts him to work, he expects to be humored and thus he becomes willful and petulant, irritable and dependent. Nothing is better for him than steady occupation.

Now in regard to this matter of influencing the factors favorably that bring people into institutions, it seems to me we lack definite information as yet. That is our stumbling block whenever we enter the field of prevention. The different factors that have been mentioned this morning by Mr. Brown are all, no doubt, conducive to the conditions that bring people into our institutions, and yet any one of them is a small factor. For instance, the evil of intemperance was spoken off, and it had been discussed so much for many years as the principal factor in the etiology of the feeble-minded. There are probably less than eight per cent of the cases coming into the institution for feeble-minded where there was any use, even, of alcoholic liquors in the part of the parents. Therefore,

intemperance is a smaller factor, even admitting that in such cases the fact of indulgence in alcoholic liquors was the cause of the mental defect.

The matter of ill-sorted marriages is certainly important, and yet how can it be remedied? We have in this state a law that prohibits the marriage of epileptics and feeble-minded and certain other people, but I doubt whether it has prevented a marriage since it was enacted, and if any good could be accomplished along that line at all it seems to me it could be done only by the appointment of a commission. At best this could eliminate certain definite factors only. It might, of course, prevent feeble-minded from marrying, it might prevent other improper marriages, but even if all that could be done we would reach only a very small number of contributing causes. So on in all the things that have been mentioned. The fact of the matter is we know little about heredity, and the factors that are contributing to the filling of our institutions. It seems to me that if there is anything demanded more than another it is the gathering of facts, the studying of the people, their family histories and everything relating to causation, which our positions in institutions give us an opportunity to study. These facts properly classified may finally be of value.

There is one thing in regard to institutionalizing people that perhaps wasn't emphasized, though intimated, where our groups are very large. Where this is the case the person in charge tends to lose ambition and inspiration, which are of the utmost importance for the improvement of individuals under his care. The person who works from early in the morning until late at night in simply caring for the necessary physical wants of his ward loses sight necessarily, for the lack of time, of the broader things, the stimulating things that appeal to the heart and implant hope and ambition in the human

being. It is for that reason, in a measure, that so much stress has been placed, in the institution for feeble-minded, upon school training for all the better grades. Such training by a group of intelligent and educated teachers is worth a great deal for the development of ideals and the formation of character and purpose in the pupils, as well training in definite school lessons.

Dr. A. F. Kilbourne: I should like to ask you doctor whether you have any statistics showing the per cent of cases in which no abnormality is shown in either parent?

Dr. Rogers:

We have many complete answers on the face of the returns covering the etiology of all the cases for whom application has been made for admission to the School for Feeble Minded. So far, as I remember in running over the blanks gathered, we have collated the facts on only some 500 or 600 cases carefully, and there is a very small per cent in which abnormal conditions are specified in the family history; but the difficulty is, they do not state the facts correctly. I have in mind once instance where a mother brought a feeble-minded boy to the institution and the blanks that she left at the time of making the application stated that there was no other case in the family anywhere of a feeble-minded or insane person. In personal conversation with the lady afterwards I found that she already had lost one idiot child and had still another child insane in the south. That is only one illustration of what occurs so many times, in trying to collect etiological data. So I don't think that the first information filed is of much value except to afford a starting place for further investigation.

Mr. Dow: Didn't you make one tabulation of this matter in connection with the Iowa institution?

Dr. Rogers: In about 500 cases.

Mr. Dow: What was the condition there?

Dr. Rogers: Just now I don't have those statistics in mind. The tabulation was made entirely from the papers as first filed without any subsequent correspondence.

Dr. Kilbourne: Isn't it a fact that if you eliminated all about heredity, you would still have a good many feeble minded in the state?

Dr. Rogers: I believe so.

Dr. Tate: [his comments need to be added]

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