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THE WISDOM AND FEASIBILITY OF THE PERMANENT ISOLATION OF THE DEFECTIVE DEGENERATE WHO ARE INCOMPETENT AND INCORRIGIBLE.

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THE WISDOM AND FEASIBILITY OF THE PERMANENT ISOLATION OF THE DEFECTIVE DEGENERATE WHO ARE INCOMPETENT AND INCORRIGIBLE:-

MORAL IMBECILES. By Dr. A. C. Rogers,

In my brief discussion of this topic I wish to present a few cases illustrating the childhood and youth of a class of persons who are a constant menace to society when left at liberty, and who form small but constant percentage of the population of our institutions or feeble-minded and our hospitals for the insane, and who are by nature criminals requiring permanent custody to prevent the committal of any crime that would send them to the penitentiary. The mental efficiency of many habitual criminals has long been recognized, and the diagnosis of the criminal tendency in certain feeble-minded children deserves special attention in order to secure for such cases the best training to counteract, if possible, vicious tendencies, and lessen their eventual power for evil.

There are many children who fail to develop a moral sense, or if such sense is developed at all, it is too feeble to become a sufficiently powerful motive to induce the child's resistance evil. Small children are incapable of making ethical discriminations except as they are taught by or observe others, but the power of discrimination develops in normal children under favorable environments with their intellectual faculties. In the moral imbecile either this faculty of discrimination does not develop, or, as stated above, the moral sense is not sufficiently keen to stimulate the child to resist that which it knows to be evil. Whichever may be the philosophical explanation of the condition, the results are the same. The child's impulses for wrong-doing are either entirely uncontrolled, and it is openly aggressive in doing violence to the person or property rights of theirs, or if its actions are controlled, they are simply directed to accomplish its objects by cunning and deceit.

I beg to present the following cases chosen purposely from the records of an eastern institution to illustrate this small but important content of all schools for feeble-minded throughout the country:

Case 1. Boy; 12 years old; epileptic, ignorant, undisciplined, and a runaway. Has no respect for anything or anybody. Language and actions most foul and vile, of which there are frequent outbreaks without the slightest provocation. Can sing a few vulgar songs. Is a great egotist; hard to manage, brutal and cruel to other children; destructive, a liar, and a thief. Unable to read or write. Can render slight assistance in dormitory work.

Case 2. Boy; aged 11 years; small for his age, epileptic, untruthful, vulgar, profane, cruel and brutal; and adroit thief. Heedless of danger and insensitive to pain, he climbed out of a third story window and fell to the ground, striking his head, but was only lightly stunned. Knew alphabet, and could sing, dance, and pray; could repeat long Latin prayers, cross himself, and make vulgar remarks and swear, almost in the same breath. Absolutely devoid of the moral sense, it was impossible to teach him to obey or to keep him out of mischief.

Case 3. Male; aged 22, with a deprecating almost pathetic expression of countenance, soft voice and gentle confiding manner. A sneak, and absolutely untrustworthy. When fully aroused, may be violent and even dangerous. An excellent worker in dining room and laundry, understanding thoroughly the machines in use. An adroit thief and an accomplished liar. On one occasion when he was preparing for a visit home, a twenty-dollar note belonging to one of his attendants disappeared. Prior to leaving the house the boy was carefully searched, but nothing was found. Within ten minutes, on his way to the station, he was recalled for another examination and stripped his shoes and stockings, I even running my hands over the latter without detecting anything. As he left the room, with tears and protestations of innocence, he could not resist giving me a sly, shifting look and a glance at his leg. Turning down the stocking, there, plastered to the leg, the money was found.

Stamps, papers, pens, and pen-holders disappeared from my desk and could not be traced. Some eight years after, searching his box for something, these were found securely packed away under a false bottom. The singular part of all was that my office was inaccessible, and in all these years he never had been seen anywhere in the building. These are only examples of his many depredations.

Case 4. Boy; 14 years old. Under training became quite efficient in household service; but disobedient, hard to manage, and an incorrigible thief, stole even from himself. Thus, some eight years ago he came into possession, to his great delight, of a tow - a little rubber toad. In a few minutes however, the toy disappeared. He screamed, cried, and protested that some one had stolen it. Upon investigation it was discovered securely tucked away in his glove. He had secreted it - stolen it from himself - simply to create excitement.

Case 5. Boy; aged 13 years. Brown hair and eyes and prominent teeth; enunciation distinct and good vocabulary. Choreic movements of face. Recognizes form and color; can read and count a little. Capable of self-help and can aid in dormitory. In training class learned to knit intricate patterns which fortunately keep his mischievous fingers employed. Absolutely without affection, he is vicious, vulgar and brutal, delighting in screaming and yelling at the top of his voice for hours. An adroit thief and a clever schemer, he tells lies with such an air of truth that it is hard not to credit what he says. We have not attempted to educate him, assumed that every mental acquirement would be prostituted to evil purposes, and there is no hope of reformation, for there is moral sense to appeal to.

Case 6. Boy; aged 10 years. Stout and sturdy build. Head rather large. Blue eyes and light hair; sight and hearing good, but speech imperfect. Quite affectionate but untruthful and untrustworthy. In kindergarten learned to use his hands quite well, and to read, but was lazy, inattentive, disobedient, and sullen. Transferred to school, improved, but teased the younger children. Trained in housework, began to steal, putting

the blame always most adroitly on other. Articulation improved, acquired an excellent vocabulary, and developed a good singing voice; learned to play on cornet, and member of the band, became less sullen and appeared to improve generally. At 16 years of age the cloven foot again began to show itself, and once more he was lazy, disobedient, dishonest, and untruthful, and in addition he became a sexual pervert, in filthy practices utterly shameless. Tried in various trades, he did very well in cooking class, and as a kitchen scullion. Deft with hands, he proved a turn a fair baker, tailor, gardener and house painter; but everywhere lazy, untrustworthy, and tricky, was finally transferred to a custodial building. Here, absolutely amoral, his record at the end of three years is "a moral imbecile of the most pronounced type, of middle grade; and accomplished liar, and adroit thief, a sexual pervert, brutal and cruel in every respect." This at 19 years of age. His capabilities as an aid, had, notwithstanding this, gradually procure for him a certain amount of liberty, although under general supervision.

This same year a fire occurred, evidently the work of an incendiary; a large barn filled with hay in close proximity to the buildings. The children gathered in the large hall, were engaged in their evening games, when S. suddenly ran in and gave the alarm of fire. The larger boys, quickly detailed as a bucket brigade, rendered efficient service. In the midst of the excitement as I passed S. he gave a furtive glance and stepped back with an air of concealment which aroused my suspicions, as there was no reason why he should have avoided me. The following day one of the men told me that he had seen S. near the barn just before the alarm was given. Interrogated, the boy denied all knowledge of the affair, first weeping and then indignant that he should be suspected. His vociferous denials however, had not the ring of truth, so I placed him in a room adjoining that of a comrade and stationed an employee on guard to await developments. The confession was overheard; how he had found an explosive match - probably dropped by a chance visitor; how he had guarded it for days, and finally watching his opportunity, struck it and threw it into the barn, fanned the flame and closed the door when the hay began to burn; how he then sat on the bank until he was sure it was well ablaze, and then gave the alarm. When confronted with this statement, he broke down and made a full confession. Removed to an insane hospital, he was after several years released, and is now a tramp, capable of perpetrating any act of violence.

Case 7. Boy; 13 years old. Capable of discriminating between right and wrong, but generally prefers wrong. Restless and undisciplined to the verge of savageness. An ego-maniac, will scratch and bite himself to create sympathy, and will do anything to attract attention, especially in the presence of strangers; will often throw up his hands and say, with the tears he can always summon at will: "Oh doctor, I do want to be liked"; in another minute he will be laughing. Has the nasty habit of spitting on his hands and rubbing them over his face. A lord of misrule in the school, he was transferred to a custodial building. Here with less to excite him, he has improved mentally; learned to knit caps, scarf's, and shawls, but will destroy them if not watched. A desperate liar, and adroit thief, a clever pick-pocket, and mischief-maker, he is always fighting. Cruel, brutal, and extraordinarily jealous, he is, when roused, very dangerous to other children. Ordinarily defiant, impudent, and disobedient, he can be at times sweet-mannered and engaging, but his moods change quickly and he is treacherous and untrustworthy. His teacher one day charged him with a message to his attendant to the effect that for some misdemeanor, he was to be disciplined by having only bread and mild for his dinner.

Knowing the woman to be devoted to birds, he told her that the teacher had sent her word that she had a beautiful bird in a wire cage for her, and went on to describe both cage and bird so graphically that she gave him an extra good dinner for his good news. When confronted by his teacher and the woman to whom he had lied, he denied point blank ever having delivered any such message; nor could threats nor bribes bring him to a confession.

A knowledge of reading and writing would materially increase his power of evil doing. A capable worker, either as a farm laborer or in household service, he will nevertheless always be a fire-brand, wherever placed, and should always be under strict custodial care.

Case 8. Boy; aged 15 years, and 12 when entering Training School. Brown hair, gray eyes, sight and hearing hood; had engaging manners, but proved sulky, brutal, cruel and dangerous, sly, untruthful and an adroit thief. His redeeming trait was his fondness for animals, to which they responded - his influence over them being truly wonderful. I have seen him handle with entire immunity from harm, a raccoon that would bite savagely at anyone else; he simply hypnotized squirrels and constantly carried snakes in his pockets; his special favorite, a large black snake, was over 4 feet in length. Powers of attention, imitation, and memory fair. Learned to read, write, and cipher. Has a good tenor voice and played well on the drum in the band. Absolutely fearless, he would do anything to accomplish a purpose. If detected in wrongdoing he would make humble confession with promises of amendment and would immediately proceed to carry out his designs perhaps on other lines. A runaway, he had delusions of persecution, and gave much trouble generally.

Under training in shoe-shop did very good work, but as time went on became more brutal and untruthful. Finally withdrawn from our care by his mother who had married a second time (a feeble-minded man), the mother and son within a few days made an attack upon the husband, and beating and disabling him, literally threw him out of the house and then walked round and round him shouting, screaming, crowing and flapping their arms like wings, for the delectation of their neighbors.

Later C. enlisted, during the Spanish-American War, but his defect soon discovered, he was discharged. He is now a tramp, wandering over the country, has been in custody more than once, and will always be a menace to society.

Case 9. Girl; aged 14 years. Came to the school in her sixth year. An attractive child with blue eyes and yellow hair. Willful and obstinate at first, but soon responded to influence. Quick to imitate; did well in kindergarten, and later in school learned to read and write, to sew and embroider, but began to deteriorate morally and after her eighth year never ceased to give trouble. Using her acquirements for evil purposes, she was, at 16 a thief, a liar, and a nymphomaniac who could not be trusted alone, and would pass notes to boys in the most ingenious fashion. An expert in thieving, she could lie with the most unblushing effrontery and apparent innocence. Could be clean in speech and circumspect in conduct, but at times in both language and actions was most vile. Had wonderful influence over girls of lower grade and used them s tools.

In her twenty-fifth year, having grown to be an attractive and even handsome young woman, she was yet so unmanageable that she was transferred to an insane hospital. From there, through the ill-advised efforts of some sentimental philanthropists, she was released with the idea that she was capable of self-support.

Since then she has drifted naturally downwards, and having given birth to an illegitimate child, is now in the syphilitic wards of a charity hospital.

Case 10. Boy; came to my notice when he was 12 years old. A child of attractive personality and engaging manner, yet seemed absolutely destitute of natural affection. When 5 years old he found a pistol under his father's pillow, and shot his sister in the face. The little girl recovered, but with slight hemiplegia, and it is thought that the incident had a bad effect upon the boy, who was much excited at the time.

He could read and write and distinguish color and form. Was musical, developed and excellent voice and did fairly good work with the cornet and drums. An egoist, he was fond of attracting attention and praise, and would do all manner of nice things to win them. In school, was ready and clever in recitation, but impertinent to teacher's self-willed and disliking correction, was a bully where he dared to be. Much given to bombast and braggadocio, dishonest, brutal, malicious and untruthful, he was thoroughly disliked even by those boys to whom he was generously disposed.

In his sixteenth year was put in the shoe-shop where he might have done excellent work but for his unconquerable indolence. Becoming more rebellious, troublesome, and disorderly, his attacks of temper were ungovernable.

Going out into the world in his seventeenth year, he wrote many letters from various places, giving always glowing descriptions of himself and his adventures. Within a year he presented himself at the school to solicit our patronage, pretending to have learned the trade of repairing musical instruments. Later joining a theatrical company, he got into some trouble, was in jail and wrote, begging me to bail him out.

Case 11. Boy; tall, slight, dark, choreic and languid. With manners deferential and cringing toward superiors, he was habitually domineering and disagreeable to all others. Perfectly conversant with the proprieties of life, he was yet addicted to many filthy habits, and would even spit in boys' plates at the table. Would refuse food, but at the same time would steal fruit or meat from the dish. With an abundance of fine clothing and supplied with every toilet luxury, he yet loved to crawl away in dark corners, even into coal-bins, to lie in dirt and filth.

At school learned to read and write, and cipher, and was greatly benefitted by the military drill which he cordially disliked. Was disobedient, willful, and insolent. Had a violent temper and once made a homicidal attack with a scythe on a man. On one occasion was found bombarding with rocks a house, in which he had securely confined a female attendant.

The father, a member of the wealthier class, was willing to expend any amount for his comfort and improvement, and his stepmother, who lavished much affection upon the boy, was repaid only by abuse. Removed in his twenty-first year, found intolerable at home, he was placed in the convalescent wards of an insane hospital. Impossible to determine how much of the apparent incorrigibility is due to misgovernment and how much to a lack of moral sense or other deficiency in the child. After that, while the moral imbecile may and usually does demand a disproportionate amount of attention, the indications for his treatment are simple, and are as already alluded to. How to control them after they ignore moral restraint and the limited physical restraint of the school for feeble-minded and before they sin against the community, is the problem at issue.

I have long believed in the advantage to society in the commitment of such cases to life guardianship by legal process. The place of detention in that event would depend

upon the degree of difficulty involved in control and might have to be provided for the manner slightly different from that which at present characterizes our state institutions. The indications are for wide liberty within positive limitations. One could easily imagine that deportation to some beautiful island of the sea might be provided to exactly meet the required conditions, or a more practical and feasible arrangement might be commitment to the reformatory on the indeterminate plan, which in practice would amount to life guardianship.

The advantage of legal restraint is in the fact that any outside liberty would be had, if at all, only under parole and strict surveillance, and thus the machinery of government would operate perpetually to adjust the degrees of liberty and restraint, to meet the indications of the case, without the interference of the transgressor's schemes or misdirected sympathies of friend.

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