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STATE CARE FOR THE FEEBLE-MINDED*

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In the study and care of the feeble-minded we have entered upon a new era. We talk less of pathology and therapeutics and physiological training and industrial occupations for the feeble-minded and more of eugenics, heredity, segregation and sterilization; not so much of the individual, but more of the larger problem, the group; of prevention—and, in our zeal to push forward to the goal, sometimes of extinction. How convincingly the advocates of certain schemes prophesy as to the wonderful results to be accomplished by their plan is evidenced by the remark made to me a few days ago by a well educated man who asked to what use we will put institutions for the feeble-minded when restricted marriage laws and laws for the sterilization of the unfit are generally adopted.

I would advise those who have the practical care of the feeble-minded in hand to stick closely to the bed-rock of facts we know and insist upon segregation as the one and all-important method of dealing with the feeble-minded. We know there are more feeble-minded than can be cared for in our institutions. We know that feeble-mindedness is an hereditary defect and we know that the segregation of the feeble-minded in appropriate institutions or colonies prevents the propagation of feeble-minded children, at least by those who are segregated. We believe that feeble-mindedness is the basic social problem, responsible to a large degree for poverty, alcoholism, prostitution and crime. We know that the cost of caring for the feeble-minded in hospitals and asylums, in jails and prisons and county homes is greater than would be the cost of their care in appropriate institutions. We know that the value of property destroyed by the crimes they commit would go a long way towards the construction of appropriate institutions. We must get away from the idea, and get the public away from the idea, that our institutions for the feeble-

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minged are institutions simply for the training of feeble-minded children. The care of the feeble-minded is, as is the care of the insane, a problem for the state, not the city or county. The good to be accomplished by the segregation of an able bodied feeble-minded woman is too remote to appeal to the short sighted local guardian of the poor who is too interested in keeping down the tax rate in his district during his term of office and who is too accessible to the family and friends of the one who should be segregated.

The problem of caring for the feeble-minded today is somewhat in the same position as was the problem of caring for the insane a half century ago. The number of feeble-minded is about the same as that of the insane and though their segregation is possibly less imperative it is in the light of eugenics as important, and the cost of provision for their care and of their maintenance is very much less.

Rather than have separate institutions for children and adults, or for men and women or boys and girls, I am of the opinion that large colonies to provide for all classes should be established by the state. There are many advantages in having an institution or colony where all classes of the feeble-minded are cared for. A large proportion of the feeble-minded children under sixteen years of age are extremely helpless. The adult feeble-minded women, as a rule, under direction, make the best possible nurses for these helpless little ones whom they tenderly mother and watch over with a love and devotion greater than it is possible to obtain from paid employees. The adult feeble-minded woman can also be utilized to advantage in the laundry, sewing room, and in the domestic duties throughout the colony. The presence of children relieves the institution of monotony, which makes the institution more homelike and brings about contentment. The adult feeble-minded men are usefully employed upon the farm, in the garden, shops and occupations incidental to colony life. The school with its music and entertainments is the center of institution activity. In an institution where all classes of the feeble-minded are cared for it is frequently found advisable to transfer patients from one department to another on ac-

count of improvement or deterioration, mental or physical. Such transfer can be easily made without formality or expense when the different departments are under a single management. Furthermore, I see no objection to caring for the feeble-minded and epileptic in the same institution. The needs of the epileptic and feeble-minded are similar, and all epileptics who will be cared for in a colony are more or less mentally deficient.

The advantage of the colony over separate institutions for various classes is summed up in the report of a committee of the Thirty-fourth National Conference of Charities and Correction as follows: "The distinction of classes is imperative. The requirements, however, are best met under the same local management by suitable separation in space, variety of buildings, and equipment, and judicious grouping. Under the same management, however, the classification may be complete. The continuity of their treatment and records is preserved. The hopeful and progressive spirit of the school counteracts the tendency to condone the lowering of standards in the custodial departments."

That splendid institution, "Letchworth Village," recently established by the State of New York, may well be taken as an example of the most modern type of institution for the care of the feeble-minded and epileptic, and I would respectfully call your attention to the admirable reports of its superintendent, Dr. Little, the Trustees, and the Committee under whose direction this noteworthy institution was established. New York, after its experience with separate institutions for special classes, in this its newest institution, is providing one in which all classes of the feeble-minded and epileptic, with the possible exception of the moral imbecile or defective delinquent, will be admitted and classified within the institution.

A state colony for the feeble-minded should be planned to provide for between two and three thousand. The location should be far from any large city and rather isolated. It is not necessary to locate an institution where farm land commands a high price. A large tract of from three to four thousand acres, a part of which is woodland, should be provided. Railroad communication for passengers and freight with advantages for side track

to the institution grounds is imperative. It must be borne in mind that to admit of the proper classification such a colony will need more land than would an institution which provides for only one class of defectives.

There is a comparatively small group of the feeble-minded who have been designated by Dr. Fernald as "defective delinquents" for whom possibly a separate institution should be provided, at least in our large states, which institution should bear the same relationship to the colony for the feeble-minded as the hospitals for the insane. Defective delinquents, as a rule, do not come under observation until habituated to vicious practices, and require a closer supervision and more rigorous discipline than can well be carried out in the colony for the feeble-minded.

In our effort to relieve the state of its terrible burden of feeble-mindedness let us not become faint hearted by a contemplation of the large expenditure necessary to put in effect the only means which offers a practical solution of the question, that is the establishment by the state of institutions or colonies for the care of all the feeble-minded who cannot be properly cared for and safe-guarded in their homes. Most of the states are now doing this for their insane, and if the public, and particularly those who control the fiscal policy of the state, understood the importance of segregation of the feeble-minded there would be no question about raising the money. Think of the money the state spends for other less urgent projects! One state for example spending upwards of one hundred million dollars for canals; my own state spent fifty million dollars for roads. One-tenth of this sum would amply provide for all the feeble-minded at large in the state. Think of the cost of a single battleship to protect us against an improbable foe from without! It is not a question of the cost but of presenting the facts to the people, and especially our legislators, may appreciate the importance of segregation and that is the one and only method of coping with the problem.

Restricted marriage laws are no doubt advisable, but, as suggested by Hastings Hart, restricted marriage laws are unavailing because the unfit reproduce their kind regardless of marriage

laws. Sterilization is at best a partial remedy but is restricted in application by public sentiment. It is actually operative in only one of the eight states that have passed sterilization laws. Legislation whereby institutions for the feeble-minded may hold their inmates regardless of the wish of the parents are of no avail unless we have ample accommodations for all of the feeble-minded who cannot be cared for and safe-guarded in their homes.

My program for coping with the burden of the feeble-minded is a simple one: First, have the state provide colonies for all the feeble-minded who cannot be properly cared for in their homes, and then a law providing that any person who is feeble-minded may be committed to the colony as are the insane and not released except by permission of some properly constituted authority.

DISCUSSION

Dr. Chas. Bernstein, Rome, N. Y.: In our state about one million dollars was appropriated for canals and about thirty million for good roads during the last year, but we have considerable difficulty in getting money appropriated to care for the feeble-minded.

Dr. George Mogridge, Glenwood, Iowa: I do not think we will be able to do much in the way of sterilization when only one state out of eight which now have such a law enforce it and my understanding is that that state has practically abandoned it. Our own state of Iowa now has a very crude law. We are not able to operate under it, because the children are sent to us by parents or guardians, in the same way as children are sent to the public schools. We have no legal right whatever in this matter. It is entirely unconstitutional in our state to subject these children to operations except under certain conditions. I am satisfied from correspondence and knowledge gained otherwise from parents that we would depopulate our institution if we acted under this law. Therefore, I do not anticipate anything under it. We can take care of the low grade children, but the so-called morons we would never get hold of. My idea is that we get possibly five per cent.

of the morons, perhaps a few more, but ninety-five per cent. are outside of the institution. The lower types are not troublesome. but to get hold of the morons, especially the high grade, educate and care for them, and keep control of them is a problem. As long as we can keep them, they are safe. I am speaking of my own institution. Nevertheless, if we were able to segregate all we now recognize as mentally feeble, it is doubtful whether our problem would end. I am of the opinion that in a number of years, we would have almost as many as we have at the present time. The study of Eugenics shows us that there is a strain in most families which is liable to crop out at some time or other; an indication of defective germ plasm.

Dr. Bernstein: I like the plan of a large colony containing all types; not segregating the boys in one and the girls in another. Such an institution is more easily administered, the inmates are more contented, and in general it is much more satisfactory than to have separate institutions. I am not in favor of drastic measures in regard to issuing marriage licenses. I do not think it possible to restrict men to the extent such a law would require. The bill requiring physical examination before a marriage license can be issued seems to me to be simply a piece of foolishness. No physician, if he were conscientious, would certify that a man or woman were free from communicable diseases. I could not possibly do it. I can see no merit in it. I do not think it possible to carry it out. In regard to sterilization, I think we should have a law under which the physician could act. There is often a class of children in the community who need such care. We strive in different ways to reach a solution of the problem, in sterilization or segregation. We must educate all thinking men and woman so that they will recognize feeble-mindedness as a condition from which spring so many forms of degeneracy.

Dr. W. H. C. Smith, Godfrey, Ill.: I do not believe that the size of an institution should be so limited. It seems to me that two or three thousand can be cared for in one institution when the possibilities of grading and grouping are so great. Why should we not have towns of them? If the Superintendent is an

organizer, it is a benefit to the State to take care of three thousand in one institution. I would not put any limit to the number that a man can properly handle.

Prof. E. R. Johnstone, Vineland, N. J.: I am interested in the number to be cared for in one institution. I have not gotten beyond the five or six hundred mark as yet. From an economical standpoint, I believe about 750 would be the most desirable size. I have argued against a large number being placed in one institution for that reason. If the institution is not very large, we get good classes. When we put men in one institution, women in another, and children in another, are we not taking away entirely the family idea? Children add so much to the life of an institution. Is it not the family idea, the mixing idea that gives family life its charm, and would this not be practically lost in an institution of 1500 or 2000? Carrying out the same idea, I believe that epileptics ought to be in buildings by themselves. In our state we must follow out the policy that has been started. We have a Training School for Feeble-Minded children and can not care for children of other types. In Pennsylvania there are three institutions, I believe, where they are taking every class of feeble-minded. It will be necessary for them to continue that. It seems to me that we might have segregation in small colonies throughout the state. I believe in sterilization for the morons or dangerous type of feeble-minded. The morons are the most difficult to get hold of and the type that makes the most trouble. If we could get a good sterilization law that applies to them, it would be of much benefit. If we do not let them out of the institution they run away. Would it not be better to sterilize them and then let them out? I believe that the special classes in the public school will give us a better chance to select these children, who up to the ages of eight to twelve are not admitted to be deficient by their parents or teachers. While parents and teachers will not be convinced that these children are deficient, they will prove their own deficiency after they have been kept in the special classes in the public school long enough. Then they will be sent to institutions, and there, if necessary, unsexed. I believe

that sterilization would be a great benefit in caring for this special type if it could be handled by the proper authorities.

Dr. O. H. Cobb, Syracuse, N. Y.: I am heartily in favor of the idea of educating the feeble-minded of all grades. I do not think it safe or well to discharge a large proportion of these cases to make room for custodial cases. The work of Dr. Fernald's, and in fact that of several other institutions for the care of the feeble-minded, has shown that these so-called custodial cases are capable of a large amount of improvement, and that even the lowest grades can be trained to be of great use in the work of the institution. We have found that even the higher grade children who can be trained to do excellent work, are not safe when discharged because of their liability to parent-hood. Within the last few years, attention has been given to the education of the children in the so-called custodial departments, and this is as it ought to be. In the institution in Syracuse, we take only young children for our school, but we keep older men and older women. The older women work in the laundry and sewing-room and thus help to provide their support in the institution. We find this method satisfactory to a large extent. It is a matter of choice with a family as to whether it will send its children to our institution. A large proportion of the children are sent there for the purpose of training in the school. It would be difficult to get them if parents knew it were primarily a custodial institution.

I believe with Dr. Mogridge as to the farm colony. At Waverly, there is a large colony for the older boys, maintained at a much less expense than would be the case if the institution were more limited in ground. In fact, at Syracuse, because of its farm colony, and at Rome and other institutions, the boys who live on a farm colony are maintained at a much lower rate than those at institutions with more restricted ground.

What we need at Syracuse is some measure which will permit us to keep these high grade girls from the more dissolute families, from going out of the institution. If we quit working with them at fifteen or sixteen, dissolute parents come and demand them and we have no way of preventing their leaving.

Dr. Chas. S. Little, Thiels, New York: The question

whether we should have an institution of three thousand or one thousand is perhaps not so important when we consider a feeble-minded child. In planning an institution, I am opposed to a large institution,—I would much prefer six or five hundred each, to one of three thousand. When you run a colony of five hundred or about that number, you know Sam Smith and Will Brown. You meet them at their work, talk to them in regard to the work their teachers are doing with them, and you get a tremendous amount of pleasure and profit that you can not possibly get if you divide yourself up among three thousand. You have an intimate knowledge of each patient, which is practically impossible when you attempt to run a large institution, but whether it is any cheaper, I do not know.

Personally, I would separate epileptics from an institution for feeble-minded. It may not mean that they should have very different care or different training, but those who are interested in the feeble-minded do not like epileptics. If it were our problem alone to handle epileptics, we would favor separating them into different institutions; children in one, women in another and so on. The idea has a pretty strong hold in New York, one is the complement of the other. While the women are darning stockings, the men are planting potatoes. Industrial work keeps the whole institution alive. I believe the majority are in favor of separating epileptics and feeble-minded as in our state.

Dr. A. C. Rogers, Faribault, Minn.: The question of limiting the size of an institution involves particularly two considerations; first, the possibility of bringing into effective co-ordination the various influences and conditions that promote the best training and the largest degree of health, contentment and happiness. Second, economy and efficiency of administration.

It is not easy to draw any hard and fast line concerning size. The population should be large enough to afford the variety of ages and temperament that are found in ordinary life. This promotes education, for the inmates learn from one another often as rapidly or more so than from authorized teachers. It stimulates human interest among the people themselves and affords an opportunity to organize and maintain a larger variety of commu-

nity interests for training industrial occupations, social recreations and amusements than is possible in a smaller community. While it does render it practically impossible for any one person to keep in as close personal touch with each individual as is possible in a smaller institution, this is very largely offset by the opportunity of selecting a greater variety of helpers who by temperament and training can do more, each in his line, than could possibly be done by fewer people trying to do too many kinds of things for some of which they are not well fitted. The qualified specialists in a large institution, serve to stimulate every body to cultivate higher ideals and greater accomplishments and raise the general moral and spirit of the village community above the characteristic *laissez faire*, that so easily governs under ordinary conditions.

Efficiency, whether in a small or large institution, is obviously determined by the executive ability of the Superintendent. It is worthy of note that the Superintendents of the smaller institutions usually recommend that the small limit be maintained. As their institutions grow under the pressure for admission and the reluctance of states to start new plants, they gradually change the view-point. Personally, I have always advocated a limited population, but I am just as frank to admit that the Minnesota institution presents no greater problems or anxieties with a community of fifteen hundred inmates and two hundred and fifty employees, than it did with a total population of five hundred, and we have been able to do some things by virtue of the larger plant that we could not have done otherwise, under our particular governing conditions. The colony idea has added to the efficiency of the larger institution.

In the matter of sterilization, while it is to be discussed at another time on the program, I might say that I do not believe that sterilization law will be as helpful as many anticipate. I agree with those who think we should have the law so that in certain cases sterilization can be had. A great deal of well founded anxiety on the part of parents, as well as institution authorities, could be prevented if we had the legal right to sterilize in

certain cases where there can be absolutely no valid objection to it. I do not see how sterilization can be applied as a general eugenic measure at the present time. Our knowledge at best, notwithstanding many startling contributions to the subject of late, is too limited as to the definite sources of mental deficiency, and the clear differentiation of defective from normal germ plasm, to permit of any very general application of such a law.

Dr. A. W. Wilmarth, Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin: I have seen that matter killed twice in the legislature. One prominent member who voted against it at that time, has since seen the need of it and would vote for it now. I furnished the outline of the bill upon request. I believe there are certain cases that should be sterilized, especially such types as moral imbeciles and degenerates. Such a law should be passed that we might have the legal right to operate where the benefits are apparent. I agree with Dr. Smith that such a law is coming slowly but is coming surely.

Dr. Murdock: I do not wish to give the idea that I am opposed to sterilization, but I do think it is simply a drop in the bucket for supplying a remedy for the great social burden of the feeble-minded.

As to the number of inmates in an institution, it is interesting to look back over the records of some of the earliest work along this line. The size of the classes differed greatly. At one time, a group of six or eight, or even ten or twelve was considered the proper size; a class of fourteen was said to be very large. But the idea was expressed about a half century ago, that it might be possible to have these groups contain as many as fifty or one hundred. At the present time, I do not think we can place any limit as to the size of an institution. Undoubtedly the cost per capita decreases until the number has increased to seven hundred and fifty or a thousand. I believe the difference is less noticeable after that. The cost of caring for two thousand should be less per capita than the cost of caring for one thousand. Surely we have better opportunities for grouping when the larger number is under one management. I do not like the idea of classifying by grouping children of certain ages or heights, but think they should be classified on the basis of mentality, making mental clas-

sification into congenial groups. Special classes in the large schools are doing a great work in the study of these cases, especially as a clearing house, so that children who are not feeble-minded will not enter such institutions at all.