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**Are We Going to Meet
Our Obligation
to the
FEEBLE-MINDED**

?

**Prepared and Presented
by the
Hennepin County Child Welfare Board
Room 436 Court House**

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THE PROBLEM OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED

The proper care and treatment of the feeble-minded and their progeny constitutes one of the gravest social and economic problems of modern civilization.

The feeble-minded are a causative factor in the production of crime, pauperism, prostitution and other social diseases. We cannot longer afford to ignore this problem. The loss to society and the economic waste is too great.

LACK OF FACILITIES

The facilities provided by the State for the care of its mental defectives have long been inadequate.

The State Board of Control is about to present its budget request to the Legislature covering its needs for the coming two years. In it there will no doubt be included, recommendations for legislation to relieve the difficult situation with reference to the care and supervision of the feeble-minded which now exists in this State. There are 1900 persons in the State School for the Feeble-Minded at Fairbault, with only room to properly house 1800; and there are 144 other feeble-minded, already committed to the State Board of Control, who cannot be accepted at the State School.

The work of the Hennepin County Child Welfare Board has for a long time been seriously handicapped because of the inability to place

those feeble-minded children and adults of the County, who need immediate care, in the proper State Institution. Seventy-five of these 144 committed cases mentioned above are in Hennepin County, and owing to the congestion in the State School at Faribault, adjustments have had to be made for them in Community Club Houses, Charitable Institutions, with their own families though often undesirable, or in private homes under supervision.

Seventy-five other cases of feeble-mindedness are known to the Hennepin County Child Welfare Board. A number of these are being considered for immediate commitment, but it will be necessary to allow them to remain where they now are, even though conditions be unfavorable, as there are no facilities for taking care of patients immediately after commitment. In a few instances assistance has been given temporarily by Maternity Homes, Club Houses, County Home Schools, and the Workhouse; but these should not be expected to care for feeble-minded patients.

THE SITUATION IN THE MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In the public schools of Minneapolis, there are provided Special Classes for the backward Children. There are at present enrolled in these classes, 405 pupils. A great number of these are feeble-minded. There are also 160 children who are so mentally deficient that they cannot profit by any public school training, and are excluded from even the Special Classes. Three hundred mental defectives have left the Special Classes from the year 1912 to September, 1922, upon reaching the age of sixteen. There are nearly 300 pupils on the

waiting list who should be in Special Classes, making a total of 1165 known mentally defective children in Minneapolis, probably the largest known group of public school children in the State which has been scientifically measured and diagnosed. Many of this group are already grave social problems and as such are known to the Hennepin County Child Welfare Board, but only a small number are in the State School at Faribault. Almost this entire group will eventually need special attention, and many will need institutional care.

THE RURAL SCHOOLS IN HENNEPIN COUNTY

A brief survey of the Rural schools of Hennepin County shows that of the 3051 pupils reported, 157 are considered mentally defective. Twenty-six of these 157 are decidedly low grade. There are 8000 pupils attending the public schools in rural Hennepin County and if the same percentage prevails, there are then in the rural schools in this County 416 mental defectives, of whom 72 are very low grade. As these reach maturity a large number will become a menace to society, and will need such care which must of necessity be provided by the State.

TYPES AND DEGREES OF FEEBLE-MINDEDNESS

There is considerable variation in the degree of feeble-mindedness. Those of the extremely low grade cannot be benefited by school instruction, and of necessity by rules of the Board of Education are excluded from the Public Schools. Then there is the larger number of mentally deficient of the higher type

known as morons. The morons are not so easily recognized as the lower types of feeble-minded as they appear more nearly normal to the average public. Our most difficult problem is therefore with this group. They are a constant menace to society as they are always getting into difficulties and are often preyed upon by unscrupulous persons.

No amount of schooling can eradicate the mental defects of the feeble-minded, although proper training is of great benefit. These defects are often congenital, and may be passed from defective parents to succeeding generations.

It is particularly difficult to deal with the case of the **feeble-minded unmarried mother** who has been committed as feeble-minded, and her baby. Sometimes the mother can be placed at work in the community under supervision, but what of the unplaceable child? It is very difficult to find a suitable home for both the mother and child. Parents or relatives are often unable or unwilling to have both return to the home. Again, the mother may be unable to support even herself so there is the problem of both the mother and child. Commitment is being considered for several such cases but what to do with them after commitment is the perplexing problem.

The **feeble-minded child** is often one of a large family. The mother is over-burdened with the care of the household; there is danger of her becoming a physical and mental wreck trying to take care of the feeble-minded child who is often difficult to manage and needs constant attention. The other children of course suffer and the constant contact with the feeble-minded child is not good for them.

It is often difficult to convince parents, relatives and friends that it is best for the feeble-minded child to be sent to the State School where he may receive some training. After the parents have been convinced and the child has been committed to the State Board of Control, the parents feel, and rightly so, that he should be placed at once in the State School. After waiting a long time they become discouraged and even disgusted because nothing worth while seems to have been accomplished.

The problem of the delinquent defective demands serious consideration. It is known that every year many of this type are convicted of crimes and sent to penal institutions. In several instances where it has been determined before conviction that the person is feeble-minded, he has been committed as such to the State Board of Control, and sent to the State School at Faribault. The State School for the Feeble-Minded is at present not equipped to care for the delinquent defective who needs not only specialized care, but constant guarding, similar to that of a penal institution, where the mental defective does not properly belong.

About a year ago a boy of 18 who had been known to the Juvenile Court for many years was brought into Municipal Court on a charge of petty larceny. When it was found that he was defective he was examined and committed as feeble-minded to the State Board of Control. His parents were anxious that he be given another trial at home and a job was found for him

in a rug factory. He only remained at this work a few weeks, stole several rugs, some money and disappeared from home. Later he was found and taken to Faribault, the parents both agreeing that this was the most advisable procedure. After a few months he ran away from the State School for Feeble-Minded and came home. He begged to be allowed to remain and promised faithfully to work steadily. This continued only about a month as he lost his job through laziness. He became a vagrant and finally was arrested on a charge of grand larceny, having stolen an auto truck. His parents were anxious that he be returned to the State School for Feeble-Minded instead of being sent to a penal institution. He was returned to the State School at Faribault, over the protests of the Superintendent, who insisted that he had no facilities for guarding defectives of this type. The boy ran away again. He is now in the city, drifting from one job to another, and spends most of his time in doubtful company.

Not long ago a man was charged with a serious sex offense against a boy of nine. The community was greatly aroused and demanded that the man be punished. It was found that he was feeble-minded and was therefore committed to the State Board of Control. Since the Institution at Faribault was greatly overcrowded he was sent to one of the Hospitals for the

Insane. He has since escaped and so far has not been apprehended.

In the case of over-sexed boys or girls who have been a terrible menace to the community, it should be possible to place them at once after the commitment, in the proper State Institution, instead of allowing them to return to their homes which is too often the only course possible.

Cases of incest and debauchery of young children by over-sexed boys of tender age are becoming the index of too many feeble-minded persons loose in society, who should be under supervision and segregated by the State under sanitary and enlightened conditions. The feeble-minded woman is a particular menace to society because she is the victim of her whims and of those who prey upon the weak.

A short time ago it was reported by a mother that her daughter, age 19, had disappeared from home. The girl, a high grade moron, had been committed as feeble-minded to the State Board of Control. She had been immoral and had contracted a venereal disease. The parents were very anxious to keep her at home under supervision. She seemed to be getting along nicely until her disappearance. Her mother feared that she had been induced to return to her former immoral companions. After diligent searching she was found by the police, living with a negro who was selling her for immoral purposes. The man was charged with living off the earnings of a prostitute, was convicted and

sentenced to the State Prison at Stillwater.

A high grade moron girl who had been placed in a family to work under supervision, suddenly left her place of employment, stating that she was about to get married. As she had always shunned the society of men, this was at first thought untrue. She was located in another county in company with a man whom she had known a very short time. They were trying to procure a marriage license. It was found that the man was epileptic and of lower mentality than the girl.

With these facts before us the seriousness of the situation and the need for prompt relief becomes self evident.

CONDITIONS AS THEY EXIST

The conditions which exist in Hennepin County are typical to a greater or less degree, of conditions in nearly every other County in the State. From actual investigation made it is known that there are mental defectives in every community.

When we consider the fact upon which experts agree, that feeble-mindedness is readily inheritable and that the subnormal produces more rapidly than the normal, we certainly face a serious situation and one which imperatively demands attention and solution.

The largest part of our problem is therefore, the prevention of the propagation of the feeble-minded, not merely the providing of custodial care. Prompt and intelligent measures

must be taken to prevent the further increase of this unfortunate group.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STATE

The State has a two-fold responsibility. In the first place, it must protect itself from the negative mental influences due to the enforced association of normal children with mental defectives. It must also protect its citizens from personal violence and crimes so often committed by the mentally irresponsible.

In the second place, the State owes a duty to these unfortunate mental defectives, and can only discharge that duty by giving them the proper care and attention which will provide for them the necessary physical comforts and bring out of each individual all that is best. The higher type of feeble-minded can be trained to do many useful things and be made wholly or partially self-supporting.

Segregation of the mentally defective is fundamental at the present time, so that there shall be at least fewer of the feeble-minded in the next generation. Immediate provision should be made to accomplish this. Any delay which will result in increasing this defective class, means additional expense to the State for generations to come.

A great share of the work of the Child Welfare Board, and a very large percentage of the expense is consumed in dealing with problems arising directly or indirectly from this mentally defective group.

HOW SHALL THIS SITUATION BE MET?

In the State of Minnesota, there are, according to estimates by persons who should know, some 10,000 mental defectives.

First: Provision should be made for a separate colony for epileptics, and moron boys. If such a colony be established there would automatically be room for 300 more at the State School for the Feeble-Minded at Fari-bault.

The State has already made an appropriation of \$150,000.00 for the establishment of a new colony or colonies for the feeble-minded and epileptics. Adequate state lands, however, are not available for the establishment of new colonies; hence the State Board of Control must ask this Legislature for an additional appropriation in order to purchase land.

The Legislature should make such provision so that it is possible to place those feeble-minded who need immediate care in the proper institution directly after commitment to the State Board of Control.

The proper care of the delinquent defective needs serious consideration.

Provision should be made for the moron girls so that they may not only be segregated from the lower types, but permitted to live in more normal home environment and at the same time be self-supporting. A plan that has been tried and found satisfactory in New York State is that of the small parental home, housing a group of moron girls. The girls are conducted to and from their places of employ-

ment and are supervised by a competent matron at the home.

The Hennepin County Child Welfare Board, therefore considers that a concerted movement and immediate necessary action be taken, through the support of the general public and their representatives in the State, House and Senate for the appropriation of sufficient funds to provide adequate and proper facilities for the care and training of the feeble-minded in the State of Minnesota.