

35-PFM-JJD
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THE PROBLEM OF THE FEEBLEMINDED

The Ramsey County Probation Office assumes responsibility for probation services in the following Courts: District, Municipal and Juvenile. In the Juvenile Court, cases of neglect and dependency are supervised by private agencies which in many instances have originally initiated the court action. In the event that feeble-mindedness is apparent, the supervising agency cooperates with the Child Welfare Board in securing commitment. Approximately 475 delinquents appear yearly in this same court. The social information known to the schools and social agencies is readily made available to the supervising probation officers. The probation office frequently refers such children to the State Research Bureau in order that plans may be made for their commitment. In cases of doubtful mentality the psychiatric study made by the Wilder Child Guidance Clinic has been most helpful. During a period of a year, a part-time psychiatrist has been employed by the Juvenile Court. He has devoted his time to work with boys, especially those boys who have been living at the County School for Boys.

If the problem of feeble-mindedness seems of minor importance when considered from the angle of the Juvenile Court, the reverse is true in the Municipal Court. The maximum period of probation is fixed at one year while the average period is probably eight months. A case load of 125 for an officer is not conducive to very intensive work. Consequently only the most obvious cases of feeble-mindedness are given attention. The probation cases represent a very small proportion of the total number of cases appearing yearly in Municipal Court. The habitual drunkard or petty thief may have listed against him anywhere from 15 to 25 appearances in Court. Such individuals are frequently sent to the workhouse, often spending a few days in the community before committing another crime.

The situation in District Court is affected by the fact that two avenues are open; either probation or incarceration in a penal institution. In the majority of cases, an investigation is requested previous to the granting of probation. Mental deficiency or mental disorder can thus be determined and appropriate action taken. During the past year, the judges of the District Court as well as of the Municipal Court have displayed interest in the matter of psychological tests and have asked that such information be secured on certain persons appearing before them. Unfortunately the state does not have adequate provision for the care of defectives who may have criminal tendencies. If I may make a suggestion, it would be that a special institution be provided for the criminal defective. In the event that the number of such a person does not warrant a separate institution, care, and control might be provided in an already existing institution. At all times and in all events special attention should be given to the protection of society.

Such protection to society could be increased if certain services could be made a part of the judicial machinery. If a psychologist could be assigned for service in all the

courts, some interesting material on feeblemindedness would be brought to light. If psychiatric service could also be made available, delinquents and criminals might be planned for on a somewhat scientific basis.

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