

92-RFC-ACR
 Print to 1920-Adm
 State Inst Gen-Rogers

REPORT OF FIVE CASES OF MENTAL AND MORAL ABERRATION AMONG THE FEEBLE-MINDED AT THE MINNESOTA SCHOOL FOR FEEBLE-MINDED.

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If our institutions were only called upon to educate the typical feeble-minded and care for and protect the idiotic, their operations would be comparatively simple; but when they must recognize early in the lives of some of their wards certain pernicious tendencies, especially susceptible of development and liable to become the predominant characteristics of such individuals, to check which is their manifest duty, their responsibilities are heavily increased. When they must receive into their population such children after their abnormal tendencies have already become developed under the influence of pernicious surroundings or injudicious training, their added responsibilities are still more serious.

I will present five cases out of quite a number of similar ones that are, or have been, connected with the Minnesota School for Feeble-Minded, because they illustrate each a particular type of aberration.

The first is a case of arrested mental development with insane complications.

The second, of arrested mental development, but of higher grade, in whom destructive and immoral tendencies predominate.

The third, arrested mental development with immoral and cruel impulses, associated with or possibly influenced by epilepsy.

The fourth is a case of moral imbecility; the moral sense lacking or very weak, while the intellectual faculties are sufficiently active to suggest great possibilities for evil.

The fifth is a case of arrested mental development with various eccentricities and a strong propensity to be cruel and do mischief for the pleasure which pain and annoyance to others give him.

CASE I. C., Ad. No. 61.—American-born, of good family. Family history good. Injured at six months of age by a fall, causing curvature of the spine. Described by parents as "easily excited" and having "high-strung nerves," though the early history is rather meagre.

She was at one time sent to a sanitarium for treatment. While there a baby

sister was born at her home. When she learned of it she manifested great displeasure and said she would kill the baby. When she returned to her home she tried to throw it out of the window. She never recovered from this dislike for her younger sister, and it was necessary to protect the latter from her until she was old enough to take care of herself.

Admitted to the institution at eighteen years of age. In school she was nervous and would cry if anything did not please her. Could read half a dozen words; could not write or trace unless hand was guided by teacher. The crying paroxysms were often cut short by the tact of the teacher in avoiding all apparent notice of them and making humorous remarks, to the influence of which she was especially susceptible. She frequently entertained herself by asking questions, and then, in a changed voice, answering them. She would often take a book and pretend to read, or perhaps act the part of a teacher to an imaginary pupil. She always signified her approval or disapproval of the answer received, and in the latter case would scold vehemently and threaten punishment. She nearly always preferred to be alone, objecting especially, with one or two exceptions, to the presence of other children. She often gave the attendant trouble to find her, hiding behind doors or in out-of-the-way places where no one would think of looking. Sometimes she would be sitting quietly by the teacher's desk, when she would suddenly start up, scolding, and rush out of the door or to a distant seat, where she would mutter for a while and then, perhaps, quiet down again.

She had her own names for the officers and teachers, often using words which had no resemblance to the correct names.

She did not sleep well at night, and would spend the time dressing herself in the clothing of her room-mates, sometimes appropriating that of two or three at a time. She was very tenacious of her assumed rights in such matters, and could only be induced to relinquish them by being told that the articles were not good enough for her, as she possessed considerable pride and had been accustomed to the refinements of a good home.

In her nervous paroxysms she often manifested an astonishing degree of strength, breaking and throwing chairs and such objects as were in her reach. She once kicked the panel out of a door at one blow.

She possessed a mania for swallowing indigestible articles of all kinds. She would frequently create a sensation by crying and telling the attendant that she had swallowed a breastpin, nail, screw, or some other object; and an examination of the throat generally revealed the presence of the same, if it was too large to pass into the œsophagus. I remember some instances in which the objects were removed with great difficulty. At one time we removed a rectangular pine stick about three inches long and a half-inch in its transverse dimensions. Another time a brass escutcheon from a drawer-pull had become so thoroughly embedded that repeated efforts were required for its successful removal. A third time a steel wire with a hooked termination could be removed only by tearing its way through the tissues.

She would sometimes plan for her wedding, spending considerable time in planning her trousseau, addressing her assumed affianced as "John," "Tom," or "The butcher's man."

Again, she would assume that she was dead, lying down with her hands

folded across her breast, but manifesting enough life to give directions about her burial, always specifying a *white coffin*.

She sometimes spoke of seeing persons in the room whom she recognized as members of the family or acquaintances. Occasionally she would complain that the devil was after her.

She would often refuse to eat altogether or insist on having something different from the others. She finally announced that she had swallowed a "box," and could apparently eat no solid food, vomiting whenever she tried. She would take milk, provided she went to the hospital to drink it. If given to her at the table she would not retain it. An inspection of the fauces and throat revealed no foreign body, but the repeated assertion that she had swallowed a "box" and the apparent irritation of the stomach led us to believe that she had swallowed something. She lived several weeks in this condition and then died. We performed an autopsy, fully expecting to find a foreign body in the alimentary tract, but nothing of the kind could be discovered.

CASE II. M. D., Ad. No. 220.—Born of American parents. Paternal grandfather insane. Child born at seven months as the result of a fall on the part of the mother. Deficient animation at birth; "fed on brandy and crackers for two weeks," afterwards nourished by mother. Parents noticed nothing peculiar until she was about five years old, when she was observed to pick at her clothing and do other things not characteristic of children of her age. Had an attack of "brain-fever" when four years old. Described as a very "nervous child," subject to periods of excitement, when she would talk in a loud voice and scream. Obedient and trusty only at times. From early childhood would tear her clothing badly. Went to public school some; learned to read and write while there, and was useful at home in washing dishes and simple operations of housework. It was very difficult to keep her attention long upon one subject. As she grew older she became more difficult to control, and was finally removed from the public school and placed with the "Sisters." They could not control her, and she was sent home again, where she stayed until her destructive tendencies compelled her committal to a hospital for insane, there being no institution for feeble-minded in the Territory where her people lived at that time. When admitted at Faribault she was fifteen years of age. She was especially characterized by frequent fits of anger, during which she would scream, swear, and destroy property *ad libitum*. In coming among strangers her first efforts were directed towards impressing them with the extent of her physical power and her ability to do dreadful things that were too wicked for any one else to undertake. It was not long before her companions were thoroughly inspired with awe when she was present, though it has always been characteristic of her that she would seldom strike or injure a child. An attendant or teacher that she thought her physical inferior found life a burden, for M. constantly reminded her that she (M.) would do anything she liked. She frequently informed those about her that she was not afraid of the superintendent, attendants, or any one else.

To demonstrate her lack of respect of any law or authority, one of her first acts after admission was a deliberate destruction of nearly all the lights

in a long window, by means of a stick of wood. I had known of these tendencies and of the trouble she had caused at the Hospital for the Insane, where she domineered over the other patients, but I had hoped that the surroundings of the school would stimulate some ambition to excel in good conduct. She was in school about fifteen months, and in both the literary and industrial departments her teachers labored faithfully with her with very meagre results. Her mental abilities were very sluggish in the way of systematic acquisition, though she was often quick at repartee, and would often surprise one with a manifestation of her unexpected knowledge. She lacked continuity in manual work fully as much as in mental operations, and she never could be depended upon to do sewing or any kind of housework carefully. When for a very short time she really willed to do anything well, she could do it, but she generally lacked will in this direction.

She tired of anything quickly, and a scene followed every attempt to compel her to do what she did not wish to do. Appeals to her pride or ambition were without effect further than a verbal assent,—they seldom affected her actions. Severe punishment alone kept her within reasonable bounds, and only then when she thought there was some authority near who could administer such punishment. If it came to her ear that the superintendent was absent from the building, this information was the signal for an outbreak. She was finally placed in the custodia, where her influence would do less harm. As the circle of her influence has decreased her outbreaks of temper are not so frequent. She attempts to terrorize every new attendant that has charge of her, but if the attendant manifests no fear all goes well in that respect.

She is addicted to the secret vice and practises it at every opportunity. She generally sleeps in a camisole. She tears her clothing and bedding so that she is frequently naked, when, if possible, she will stand in the window for the observation of passers-by. She delights to tell of imaginary intrigues. She never looks one in the face, and generally drops her head, turning her eyes entirely away when spoken to, especially if she has been in mischief. We now seldom attempt to punish her, because it is useless, unless followed so rigorously that, in my opinion, the end does not justify the means, and her proper management is to-day the problem of our institution.

CASE III. Ad. No. 476. E. D., *æt.* 18 at time of admission.—Brought from a Philadelphia orphan asylum to Minnesota when thirteen years old. Not much family history obtainable, but thought to be "peculiar" from birth. Possessed rather a handsome face, and when feeling well was very pleasant in speech and manner, though he used a large vocabulary of slang words and phrases. Speech rather drawling and sometimes lisping. He was an epileptic, but his peculiarities were not at all of the nature of epileptic mania.

What characterized him most in institution life was his dislike of its restrictions, and his persistent planning for and occasional attempts to escape. His influence in inciting insubordination among the school-boys was such that he was very soon placed with the custodials. This was particularly irksome to him, and so upon his faithful promise that he would not attempt to run away or talk about it to his companions, he was again given the

privileges of the school department, with the hope that these very privileges and opportunities for escape would develop some sense of honor. But this confidence was misplaced, and in a short time he had a new insurrection started. This experiment was repeatedly tried. When he did succeed in escaping, he filled the ears of those whom he met with horrible stories of the abuses to which he had been subjected.

Upon the matron, supervisor, and attendants who came in daily contact with him, he impressed himself as being thoroughly *wicked* and *depraved*.

He often employed himself in telling vulgar stories to the boys. As these boys were far below him in mental acumen, his stories were not fully appreciated, and he would manifest his displeasure by kicking, slapping, pinching, and otherwise abusing them, with remarks about their being "such fools."

He delighted in this treatment of the boys at all times when he could indulge in it, often tripping up the more helpless ones and spitting in the faces of those who passed near him.

Attendants who corrected or restrained him would receive a volley of oaths and impudence exceedingly exasperating to endure. He often said that he expected to be just as bad as he could be, and make so much trouble that he would be given his liberty.

When brought to the office he was generally very plausible, sometimes admitting his wrong and promising to do better; at others maintaining that the attendants abused and pounded him.

In one instance that I recall especially, he maintained this so persistently and plausibly that I feared there might be something in it. Investigation, however, gave no evidence of anything of the kind, and, as he was under the care of a very trusty supervisor who is noted for his kindness, I was fully satisfied that he had either lied or was deluded in the matter. E. was a person who impressed himself upon casual observers as intellectually normal, and it was sometimes remarked by employees that he ought to be at the reform school. In one of the matron's reports I find this sentence: "He does not seem to be feeble-minded, but more like a *thoroughly wicked* boy who had never been controlled or had a 'bringing up.'" It was noticeable, however, that after he had planned very shrewdly some means of escape, he would always do some foolish thing to frustrate his own plans.

E. was an epileptic, and that this disease influenced his intellection along moral and emotional lines is evident from the fact that the immediate sequence of each spasm was a moment of apparent anger, during which he would talk very rapidly and excitedly but coherently, evolving a mixture of profanity and obscenity perfectly appalling. He would pass out of this stage very much as victims of *petit mal* pass out of light spasms, and, with a look of mingled surprise and apology on his face, would remark that he could not help acting that way.

We were never able to interest him long in any useful employment, though he was regularly detailed to the shop for a short period when well enough, and he seemed to manifest pride in what he accomplished. This was not sufficient, however, to induce him to seek the same employment again.

His death from pneumonia finally solved the problem of his care and protection so far as our institution was concerned.

CASE IV. J. D., *æt.* 11.—Nothing whatsoever known of family history. Was living with or visiting a lady who was killed in a cyclone. Was then sent to the school for indigent children, where his peculiarities, mental and moral, were so marked that he was transferred to the institution for feeble-minded.

When he first arrived, all who came in contact with him were impressed with his bright face and quick perceptions. In school he is very restless, but learns quickly when he applies himself. He reads in the "Model Second Reader" very intelligently, excels in spelling in his class, and does nicely in geography and in arithmetic. Will readily draw a map of the school-room. Can compose a very readable letter with little or no assistance, but is inclined to be careless with his writing.

His efforts in drawing are very typical of his character generally. In these he is quick to discover the relations of objects, but he is unable to draw a straight line without a ruler. So he is quick to comprehend a situation and take advantage of it, but it seems to be impossible for him to follow a straight course of conduct unless held to it by a superior force.

He has acquired quite a fund of information for one of his age. Can talk at length about the habits of animals and the nature of plants. Is familiar with the simple transactions involving measure and can make change quickly up to one dollar.

In disposition he is cruel and sly, and disposed to appropriate anything he wants if he thinks he can do so without detection, for he has learned by experience that certain evil acts are liable to be followed by punishment. In the day-room he keeps the children in a constant uproar, teasing and tormenting them if they do not promptly obey his dictation. When corrected, he displays remarkable ability in concealing his own errors and in testifying against those about him.

His conception of right seems to be that which he wishes to do and which he can do without detection. Wrong is to him that for which he feels sure he will be punished. A combination brass lock was placed upon the door of a lumber-room from which numerous articles had been missed. J. was seen to pound this lock open with an axe. He was tried, convicted, and punished by the proper tribunal, and he promised the court that he would never try to break open another lock. A few days later he fell into the toils for some entirely different offence. When arraigned, he insisted upon waiving the present charges and maintained as his defence that he had not tried to break any more locks. He seemed to feel that great injustice would be done him if this negative conduct concerning the lock was not accepted as positive proof of innocence in all matters forever afterwards.

To any one who shows confidence in him, he can be perfectly angelic so long as this confidence is supplemented by a succession of special privileges and favors, but the leading plank in his platform of principles is "good behavior for revenue only."

Having become convinced that it was a mistake to keep him in school, I placed him with a class of boys that do fatigue duty about the grounds, instructing the attendant to furnish him with physical employment of a light nature suited to his strength. I soon found that J. was thoroughly capable of selecting *light employment* for himself, for he was observed overseeing the

other boys who were loading up a wheelbarrow, taking good care to avoid the shovel, and when the loading was done, very coolly climbing upon the load and riding to its destination.

His ill treatment of other children does not seem to arise so much from any pleasure it gives him as from a disposition to domineer over others regardless of their sensibilities.

CASE V. Ad. No. 380. L. B., æt. 15. (No notes of family history here.)—This case is interesting more because of his eccentricities than for well-marked symptoms of either insanity or moral imbecility. He contrasts strongly with the other cases in that he possesses more self-control, and there is exhibited more continuity of action, especially in the way of manual training. He has learned to sew very nicely, and to deprive him of the privileges of the sewing-class and exercises is to inflict upon him a severe punishment. He is very destructive to property, especially his clothing.

He manifests a mild mania for the possession of tin-ware. When he came to the school he brought a tin cup to which he was devotedly attached. As he used it principally in pounding the other children's heads, it was taken from him.

His most profound pleasure is in witnessing others in pain and suffering, which may or may not be caused by himself, or in perpetrating some low trick that will cause trouble or annoyance.

He delights in witnessing epileptics in convulsions, pushing helpless children down, or in pinching and sticking pins into his playmates. He will often work patiently for a long time to accomplish some miserable piece of work that will be annoying and exasperating to somebody.

One day he seemed to be suddenly inspired with a new scheme. He would frequently laugh and clap his hands together in great glee, occasionally remarking that he "knew something; he was going to do something." That night he took a slop-bucket and deliberately poured its contents upon the different beds in his dormitory. This is an example of the kind of acts in which he delights. The fact, however, that he is thoroughly interested in constructive occupations makes his case more hopeful than the others mentioned.

I present these cases not so much for the purpose of assigning them to a particular scientific pigeon-hole as to stimulate a consideration of the best measures of treating them.

Interesting as a scientific study of such cases is, and whether we say they are cases of moral imbecility, juvenile insanity, or depravity, the plain fact remains that they are morally incapable. The problem is, how to protect society from them and at the same time secure to them a maximum degree of happiness within the bounds of their forced and necessary restrictions.

So far as I have been able to formulate my own conclusions they are as follows:

1. Children that manifest strong impulsive tendencies towards evil, with a weak exercise of will-power, should receive special training calculated to develop a stronger will and a desire to repress the impulsive tendencies.

2. Intellectual training may be a detriment to such persons, and should be used only to the extent that it diverts the attention or strengthens the moral power.

3. Special attention should be given to the discovery of those causes which stimulate favorably and those which act unfavorably, and they should be as completely isolated from the latter as possible.

4. Physical isolation is generally to be preferred to physical punishment, the latter being liable to assume the character of cruelty. It must be remembered that they cannot always control their impulses, and that these tendencies have come to them by no choice of their own; hence they should be treated tenderly after others are securely protected from their influence.

5. When possible, manual employment should occupy a good portion of their time. As this is generally distasteful to them, it should be well seasoned with legitimate pleasures.

6. When the impulsive manifestations are plainly attributable to sexual perversion, I believe that surgical interference should be called to our aid after each case shall have been acted upon by a competent and legally constituted commission.