

SOME FAMILIES AS FACTORS IN ANTI-SOCIAL CONDITIONS

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One of the first undertakings of the Board of State Charities of Indiana, after it was established in 1889, was to ascertain how many persons were inmates of the state and local institutions and, later, who these persons were, some facts of personal history and the reason they were public charges. The information, collected by means of institution reports, was transferred to a card registration. Beginning modestly with the inmates of ninety-two county poor asylums and four state hospitals for the insane, the registration contained about 5700 names at the end of its first year. From time to time other institutions were added, and the reports were made to include something of both personal and family history. All this was properly carded.

The registration now contains over 158,000 names of persons who are, or within the past thirty-one years have been, inmates of eighteen state charitable and correctional institutions, ninety-two county poor asylums and thirty-three orphans' homes. It is maintained in duplicate, one set being arranged by institutions, the other alphabetically and phonetically. It is the latter that brings family names together, and no one can glance over the cards without being impressed by the frequency with which feeble-mindedness or a related defect appears on these records. It was from them in 1896 that Mr. Ernest P. Bicknell, then secretary of the board, made a study of 248 families, selected because of feeble-mindedness in one or more generations. Concerning these records, Mr. Bicknell well said:

They are not clean cut, not properly rounded out. They begin in obscurity, come into view for a few years, and fall back into obscurity again. But the broken stories of their misery, their perpetuation of their own wretched kind, their demoralizing influence upon their fellows, their dragging down of the average of morality, intelligence, and physical development, are sorrowful beyond words.¹

Eleven years afterward it was my privilege to present to the National Conference of Charities and Correction a similar study from this registra-

¹ National Conference on Charities and Correction, 1896, page 219.

tion, of 803 families, more than half the members of which were feeble-minded.²

Beside this card registration of institution inmates, the board has a record, by name, of every family aided by official out door poor relief, of every person received at a county jail, of every child born in a maternity hospital. All these make available a vast amount of information concerning public dependents. Out of it has grown a desire for still more data, and one result was the appointment by the governor in 1915 of a committee to study the whole problem of mental defectives and suggest a program for their care.

This committee has surveyed ten of our ninety-two counties, listing every feeble-minded, epileptic or insane person, found 5322 in all, an average of 2.1 per cent of the population of those ten counties. On this basis, Indiana has 56,718 mental defectives—44,284 feeble-minded, 8311 insane and 4123 epileptics. It is estimated that 25,232 of these do not need institutional care, but of those who do need it, the state is now caring for 79 per cent of the insane, 23 per cent of the epileptics and but 7 per cent of the feeble-minded. It is plain, therefore, that it is the feeble-minded who constitute our most serious problem. We have but two state institutions for them a school at Fort Wayne, a colony farm at Butlerville. Together they have about 1500 inmates—a very small porportion of the number in our state who need institutional care. Where are the rest? They are in institutions not suitable for them, or they are at large in the communities.

More than half the inmates of our county poor asylums are mental defectives. They wander in and out almost at will. Usually present in large numbers in the winter months, they leave when spring comes, and roam about the country, satisfied with whatever offers shelter,—an old hut or sometimes a rail pen.

Because the state school for feeble-minded youth is crowded, our orphans' homes are gradually filling up with children who cannot be placed with foster parents. A study of 225 dependent children in one institution disclosed 22.6 per cent mental defectives.

Many of our prisoners are feeble-minded. "Mental defect is good soil in which to develop crime." The ten counties surveyed by our committee were represented in the Indiana State Prison by 69 men, of whom 60.8 per cent were mental defectives.

Of nearly 1000 school children tested by the Binet-Simon method, from 2 to 3 per cent were found feeble-minded and 10 per cent in need of special

² N.C.C.C., 1907, page 1.

instruction. They were receiving no benefit themselves in the public schools, and were hindering the progress of normal pupils.

In our records of official outdoor relief, we usually expect to find defectives in about one-fourth of the twenty thousand families aided annually. These people are living in their own homes, or in some deserted shanty, depending on charity, to eke out a miserable existence.

What kind of homes do they have? Let me quote from an investigator's report on some of them:

The dirt, disorder, filth and cluttering are indescribable. Animals wander in and out. Garbage on the table, piles of filthy clothing on the floor, food stored under beds, an awful stench arising from the filth. . . . The yard of one house a jungle of harness, ropes, old buggies, broken cots, cans, old iron, wheels. In the house the beds are piled high with dirty rags. One room so cluttered with old furniture that a pathway to the beds is the only unoccupied space. . . . Many homes dilapidated. Isolation remarkable. Roads are just ruts and ditches.

The records which have been accumulating in our office for the past quarter of a century, and more recently those collected by the Committee on Mental Defectives, while somewhat in the nature of a census, yet contain in some cases many generations of family history. Now and then when a particular name occurred with unusual frequency or a particular locality seemed unduly represented in public institutions, a special investigation has been made. In one way and another, hundreds of degenerate families have been listed, some going back as far as seven generations. Among them are scores of references to the Tribe of Ishmael, which is to Indiana and the central west what the Jukes are to New York and the Kallikaks to New Jersey, though a much larger group than these or any other that has so far been studied. While these family records are strikingly similar, some are noted for a particular trait or tendency. There is, for example, a family in eastern Indiana, of which the mother and ten of her eleven children are mentally unbalanced. Two sons and two daughters of this family committed suicide. Another daughter with two children threatened their lives and her own. Their maternal grandfather met death by his own hand.

A family which has long been a veritable hotbed of immorality lives in southern Indiana. One woman, whom we will call "Polly," is known to have eleven illegitimate children, each with a different father. One of Polly's daughters, feeble-minded like her mother, has had eight illegitimate children, seven of whom are of the same mental caliber. One of these seven has had four illegitimate children. In this one group there have been twenty-three illegitimate children, the offspring of three feeble-minded women. Altogether, Polly has fifty-six lineal descendants, thirty-one of whom are feeble-

minded and eighteen of whom have been inmates of public institutions. Sixteen of the eighteen are known to have spent a total of seventy-two years on public support, at a cost of \$10,800. This is one branch of a family group of 477 individuals representing seven generations. The younger members are still a serious problem in the life of their community.

In another county is a family group of 152 individuals, notorious not only for shiftlessness and immorality, which so often characterize these records, but also for crime. Fourteen of its members have police court records, three have been convicted for serious crimes, one has been in a reform school.

The writer once had ranged before him in a county poor asylum four feeble-minded persons: a man, his daughter, grand-daughter and great grandson—four generations, all living at public expense.

Thirty years ago a young feeble-minded woman was admitted to one of our county poor asylums. A year later a blind man became an inmate. The two became acquainted and in time were married. Their wedding occurred in the poor asylum, they set up their family altar there and to them were born five children, all in the institution. Quite recently one of their daughters was committed to the Woman's Prison for perjury, in connection with statements concerning her illegitimate child, who is now in an orphan's home. In this case, as not infrequently happens, public officials connived at that which later brought a heavy burden of expense and disgrace upon their community. They "knew not, and knew not that they knew not."

One could fill a book with these Indiana stories of misery and degradation, of sin and suffering and crime, of public ignorance, indifference and neglect. And they could doubtless be duplicated in ever state in the Union. Everywhere our people have failed to realize what was happening and these weaker children of the land have grown incredibly strong in numbers and in power for evil. More than once I have taken occasion to say that feeble-mindedness is one of the most potential destructive factors in our civilization. It produces more pauperism, more crime, more degeneracy, than any other one force. It is a fact we have to face, a condition we have to meet, a power we must keep under.