

THE PROBLEM OF FEEBLE-MINDEDNESS.

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The first recorded attempt to do something for feeble-mindedness occurred in the year 1800, when Dr. Itard, a French physician, tried to educate a so-called "wild boy" found in the woods. The attempt failed because the boy was feeble-minded, and was followed in France by several abortive attempts to educate feeble-minded persons.

The first successful attempt in this direction was made by the School for the Deaf and Dumb at Hartford, Conn. in 1836. They took several feeble-minded children and succeeded in training them a little in school work and in forming better habits of life.

In 1846 Dr. Seguin, a pupil of Dr. Itard, opened a successful school for mental defectives in France. This attempt succeeded so well that other schools were soon founded for this most unfortunate class. In 1848 Massachusetts started the first state school in the United States. This was followed by other States, and in 1879 Indiana established her present school.

All these schools were started with the idea that mental defect was curable, and that the idiot or imbecile could be educated to become a self-supporting and dependable citizen. This we now know to be an impossibility, and the fact is coming to be more generally recognized that there is no cure for mental defect. It is a condition, not a disease.

Insanity is a disease attacking a developed brain and is often cured; feeble-mindedness is never cured, but may be greatly relieved by proper training and care.

There are between 5,000 and 6,000 feeble-minded persons in Indiana needing institutional care today, and only about one-fourth of these are receiving it. These people are at large, reproducing defectives in an ever-increasing amount, like the waves from a pebble thrown into a lake. If we are to protect the coming generations of our sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters from this growing burden, we must wake up to the condition and *do* something about it.

What to do, and how to do it, constitutes one of the most serious problems for our State.

I presume if I were to ask any member of this body before me tonight, what in his estimation was the best measure, he would say sterilization or asexualization. And to that measure I would give a hearty amen, if it were as practical a proceeding as I wish it were. Theoretically it is good, but in practice, owing to ignorance, false sentimentality, honest disbelief in the measure by honest people, it is not as easily carried out as most of the persons here would think. If applied, it should be used on persons at large, not on those already segregated and cared for by public institutions; but the problem here is first to catch them, and then to decide where to draw the line.

I believe that for many years to come, segregation will be our best method of dealing with this problem. Mr. Butler has recommended for this State a real practical step in the establishment by this Legislature of a commission to investigate this condition throughout the State and report to our next Legislature.

I have also recommended a large farm, 2,000 acres or more, somewhere in the south central part of the State where the adult boys and men can live as useful and happy as may be; and also another smaller farm where the older women could care for chickens, turkeys, and small fruits, living their lives apart from the world, where they are such complete failures.

I believe that better marriage laws, permitting no one to marry without a clean bill of health, would be a help.

Whenever alcohol and vice are abolished in this world the feeble-mindedness from those causes will cease, and the public registration of venereal disease would prove a potent weapon against mental defect. I believe, that every case of syphilis and gonorrhea should be registered with the health officer as well as smallpox or typhoid fever.

I hope Indiana will realize in the near future the momentousness of this problem, and by meeting it and better preventing the reproduction of defect, place herself where she belongs, at the pinnacle of those States who prevent, as well as provide for this burden of feeble-mindedness on her community.