

WHERE THE FEEBLE-MINDED ARE SELF-SUPPORTING.

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It has long been recognized that many of the feeble-minded can be made self-supporting in a relatively simple environment if properly trained for the things which they can best do. This is being done for a small number of these unfortunates in some of our institutions. The boys are being taught wood work, farming under supervision, while the girls learn to cook, sweep, and to do many other simple household tasks. In this way they earn their keep, whereas if turned loose in the world, most likely they would become dependents.

Very little is being done in the way of educating our mental defective to earn his own living. Our state law compels him to attend the public schools until he is sixteen, where he studies the same things as the normal children. He remains in each grade for two or three semesters, or until the teacher is tired and is ready to push him onto the next instructor. As a result he ends up in the fourth or fifth grade with nothing in his head to show for his long years of wasted time, the wasted time of the teacher, and the other pupils. He knows no arithmetic, grammar, or history. All has gone into one ear and out of the other. He is turned loose with no training. He and his brothers and sisters go into unskilled labor, maybe. Sometimes their life-long profession of idleness begins immediately. If they are lucky enough to reside some distance from town, they will probably get by as farm tenants—the kind that moves to a new place every year.

For some time the writer has been making a study of a family of mental defectives and it has been interesting to note the kind of occupations common to the different groups within the larger group. To give some idea of two of these groups and their characteristic employments, some facts concerning the family will be given very briefly.

About 1798 there came from Virginia to Kentucky a man whom we will call John Jones. We know little about him except that he hunted most of the time. His family raised corn, part of which was made into cornmeal, and part into that beverage for which the Kentucky mountains

are famous. He had eight children all of whom lived and died in or near the old homestead, except two, who came to the southern part of the State of Indiana. About all the descendants of children numbers 2, 4, and 7 are still living in the Kentucky mountains from twenty to fifty miles from a railroad. The descendants of child number 5 settled in Orange County of this State. The descendants of child number 1 are in two groups, the legitimate and the illegitimate. The former are also in the mountains while the descendants of the illegitimate are in Indiana. In 1856 the illegitimate son of number 1 came here to live. He and his family left their home because they could no longer make a living there. For two years the crops had failed to grow and no corn had been raised to make their bread and mush. Other people have said that it failed to grow because the family was too shiftless to tend it. The man and the three older children walked, while the wife and the two younger ones rode on an old broken down mule. He carried an iron skillet in his hand and when night came, he would cook what he could find or beg. Haystacks, barns, and sympathetic country folks furnished lodging. In this manner they finally reached the south-central part of Indiana.

There they made their home, and from that time until this they have rapidly multiplied and degenerated until their name is a synonym for shiftlessness. Eight more children were born in rapid succession, the last six of whom the mother never saw because of blindness. The descendants of these thirteen children form the first group, of whose occupations I wish to speak.

They live in or near a town of about 12,000 in the south-central part of Indiana. There is plenty of work in this town for unskilled laborers in the factories, stone quarries, and on the streets. But in spite of the fact that there is plenty of work, the majority of the Joneses are unemployed most of the time.

Those above the age of fifteen years have been used for the following figures: Out of fifty-seven men and women, fifty-four are feeble-minded. They have been found to be so in one of the three following ways: (1) by a formal examination in the laboratory; (2) by a judgment of the field worker where the condition was so apparent that no examination was necessary, and (3) where the person has been judged feeble-minded by his reaction to society. The normal individuals of Jones blood are the result of marriages into fairly good families, and

each of these have normal consorts. They are self-supporting and do much to keep some of the relatives from becoming entirely dependent on the community.

Of those fifty-four feeble-minded men and women, thirty-four have received poor relief for the greater part of their lives; in poor relief I include also the poor asylum cases; ten have served sentences, and one has spent most of his life in an insane asylum. Four of the fifty-four have worked regularly, the other fifty only when the spirit moved them.

Fifteen have no occupation at all.

Seven do odd jobs.

Six are fairly good housekeepers.

Four are farm tenants.

Three work in factories as unskilled laborers.

Three are housemaids.

Three are prostitutes.

Two are washerwomen.

Two are stone quarry laborers.

One was a brakeman.

One is a wood cutter.

One is a barber.

One is in a slaughterhouse.

One is a well cleaner.

One is a street cleaner.

One is a hod carrier.

Seven per cent. of these are entirely self-supporting.

Twenty-nine per cent. are non self-supporting.

Thirty-three per cent. are partly self-supporting.

The simplest environment in which we find the Joneses living is down in the Kentucky mountains where living conditions are of the most primitive to be found. The district is so far from a railroad and the roads so nearly impassable that they have never been far from their homes. They raise all they eat and eat all they raise, or let it waste, because there is no market. So there is no incentive for folk to be ambitious, but to work just enough to feed and clothe themselves. On the other hand, it is necessary that they do have the needful things of life, for there is no

kindly poor relief law to care for them, and oftentimes they are living so far from neighbors that they could starve before help would arrive.

Eighty-one adults who are, or should be, earning their living represent this group. Of this number fifty are feeble-minded and thirty-one are normal. The normal cases will be eliminated as they were in the Indiana group. Of the fifty feeble-minded people:

Sixteen have no occupation.

Fifteen are farm tenants.

Eight help at home.

Five are farmers.

Two hunt gingseng.

Two are bootleggers.

One is a prostitute.

One does odd jobs.

Total, 50.

Six of those listed as having no occupation are not dependents in the real sense of the word. They manage to live without work, but also without begging. They gamble, steal, and hunt. One entire family lives mostly on the squirrels the men are able to kill. Oftentimes their aim is so poor that they miss the squirrels and kill sheep. The remaining ten who are non-self-supporting, are idiots and imbeciles, who could not care for themselves in any environment, so this 20 per cent. is not really comparable to the 29 per cent of non-supporting individuals in the Indiana group. The people whose mentality was of the same level as the Indiana paupers, were all self-supporting in the simpler environment. And if we exclude those idiots and low grade imbeciles, we have no non-self-supporting mental defectives to compare with those of Indiana.

It may be that the simple environment is not responsible for these figures, but there are other instances where the feeble-minded are self-supporting in a relatively simple environment. In some of the European countries where the work history of a man is pretty well determined when he is born, and where he is bound by certain industrial conditions which we do not have here, there is less unemployment, tramps are fewer, and there is very much less unrest and changing about than among our subnormal laborers. In the institutions which are run on the colony plan, the inmates are taught to do certain things well, and are kept at

those particular tasks by the men in charge. It is now the dream of some of the men interested in the problem of the care of mental defectives, that in the near future we can have large farms or colonies where these people can be kept at work, protected from the complex conditions of the outside world which they are unable to meet. And this will make it possible for them not only to take care of themselves, but to relieve society of the burden placed upon it by the crimes and other social evils to which this class is naturally addicted.

