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MENTAL TYPES OF JUVENILE DELINQUENTS, CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO TREATMENT.

CLARA HARRISON TOWN.¹

From whatever point one views the life of a great city the problem of juvenile delinquency looms appallingly large. The criminologist, statistician, sociologist, economist, educator, anthropologist and biologist are all equally alive to the situation. It is well, for the roots of juvenile delinquency are so intricately intertwined and so deeply hidden that the concerted efforts of all are none too much for the mere tracing, preliminary to the final uprooting.

At present we are entering upon an active period of this tracing process. The misfits of the public school (the truants, the retarded and incorrigible), the juvenile court cases, and the inmates of the institutions of various kinds are being studied mentally, physically and socially, and a mass of data is gradually accumulating which already is suggestive of the influences which turn some children toward the juvenile court while their comrades follow the beaten track.

The cases of juvenile delinquency so far studied may, for clearness of presentation, be grouped in four classes: First, the *mentally normal*; second, the *backward*; third, the *moral imbeciles*, and fourth, the *feeble minded*. The four types represented by these classes are fundamentally distinct, not only in mental status but also in mental potential, and absolutely different methods must be used in dealing with them.

The fact that a child's behavior is such as to warrant the brand of delinquency is in itself sufficient to bring his normality into question. The social test of normality, a universally valid one, equally applicable to the savage, the ignorant and the cultured, is that the intelligence of an individual be sufficient to enable him to fulfil the requirements of society in that position of life to which he is born. A delinquent child has already failed in this test, he has not fulfilled these requirements; but the failure may be but a temporary one, due to ignorance, to a transient state of mind peculiar to the developmental stage through which he

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is passing, or to an environment in which moral development is difficult, if not impossible. If, after careful testing, the delinquent child shows no additional signs of abnormality, he is entitled to a trial in the most favorable environment. If he is really a normal child, and his new life is wisely directed, his delinquency will soon be but a memory.

The mentally *normal* child who develops traits which class him with the delinquents is, it is probably safe to say, always the victim of his environment. His environment has been vicious, or if not vicious at least badly adapted to the individual in question. The only solution of the problem with such children is to take them away from their accustomed haunts—absolutely away—and surround them with new interests which will awaken enthusiasm and draft off the misdirected energy into useful, healthful channels. I recall the case of one young girl who was sent to a reformatory in Philadelphia. She was given a garden to develop and care for. She was overjoyed with it, perfectly contented, and remarked that she had no wish to do wrong things, now that she had her garden there was no need, she had that for which she had longed.

Habits are proverbially hard to break but they may often be combated effectively by the establishment of new interests, provided the new ones be such that they will make when established as great an appeal to the interest, the imagination and the energy of the child as the old ones did.

The delinquent child who is *backward* also, who is not abreast with children of his age mentally, and at the same time not feeble minded, is differentiated from the normal group for the reason that he requires more individual attention. His interest is not so easily awakened by new pursuits, and when it is concentration is lacking. In many cases adenoids or some sensory defects act as a handicap and when their removal is supplemented by intensive school work, improvement begins. Others of this group spring from densely ignorant stock and have, like group one, lacked favorable environmental conditions. Still others come from good stock but have, nevertheless, always been at war with their environment. The environment has not been vicious but badly adapted.

A young man of the latter type was brought by his father to one of the smaller insane asylums with the request that he be observed for a few months and an opinion given of his mental and moral responsibility. The father was a successful business man, stern and exacting in his demands and expecting from his boy careful, thorough work, such as would be expected from the ideal son of such a father. The son had repeatedly and persistently disappointed the father's hopes. At school he wasted his time; one school after another was tried in vain. Finally the father made a place for him as a clerk in his own office. Here he shirked to the

limit of the possibilities, and at the end of three years could be used only as a telephone boy; he had learned to operate a typewriter but his work was too faulty to be useful. Finally, after some words with his father, he left, without permission, to join some friends on a pleasure trip. Ill health forced him back to his home, and it was at this point in his career that his father, in despair, took him to the asylum as a last resort. The young man had no extravagant habits, he neither drank nor smoked and had never been suspected of dissipation of any sort. He was simply an individual who shouldered no responsibility. There are certain things in life which to him spelled happiness—leisure, books, and outdoor life; so long as he had these and enough to eat and wear nothing else was of much consequence. "If," said he, "I can get these things without work, why work? Others work for one aim or another and are no happier after all." His philosophy of life was simple—its object was happiness, and happiness was absorption of all the beautiful that nature and books held for him, coupled with lack of all effort. His method was to do as he desired, with as little friction as possible, but still to do as he desired. He was always quiet and polite, if annoying disputes could be avoided by judicious lying, such lying was forthcoming. He was in short a typical egoistic hedonist, but a lazy one, willing to absorb all that pleased and give nothing in return. In spite of his intense egoism he was of an affectionate disposition and showed none of the antisocial and cruel tendencies characteristic of the moral imbecile. His tastes were all refined, he enjoyed the best English writers, including philosophers and essayists and could talk quite intelligently about what he had read. He claims that had he been sent to classical instead of technical schools he would have succeeded, but that instead he was forced to study mathematics, which he detested.

As our idea of studying a case is to watch its reaction to educative measures, we made a daily schedule for the boy following those lines for which he thought himself adapted. French lessons were given him and he was guided in the study of English literature, in addition to which he was assigned to regular work in the greenhouse. Time was left for tennis, which he much enjoyed and needed also, as his physical condition was not the best. He seemed grateful for the attention shown him and worked hard for a short time, but soon grew less ardent and shirked whenever it was possible. When, however, he found the work inevitable he showed capacity; in the French lessons both intelligence and concentration were evidenced, but the preparation for the lessons, which was not supervised, was inadequate. We finally decided that the boy was not lacking in mental capacity, but in those traits of character which nothing

but systematic work develop, and also in the motives and aims which dominate actively useful individuals. He was, besides, lacking in physical energy, which was probably due to a rather frail physical makeup. We advised the father to place him in a military school or on a school ship where strict discipline would be assured, and we made the effort while the boy was still with us, to develop a different conception of life and its possibilities, with some, at least temporary, success.

In the third group we have placed the *moral imbecile*. This term is rather vague, as the limits of its application are still indefinite. The majority of writers on the subject apply it to those individuals who seem to be entirely lacking in moral sense, whether this condition is or is not accompanied by other mental defects. One authority, Kellogg, confines the term to individuals who are otherwise mentally normal. The Report of the Royal Commission for the Care and Control of Feeble Minded confines it to those who have the moral defect coupled with the mental one. Pinel, Rush, Prichart, Kerlin, Henri, Berkley, Maudsley and Bart all hold that moral imbecility may exist uncomplicated by mental defect, but do not confine the term to such cases, while Esquirol, Greisinger, Casper, Ireland, Shuttleworth and Norman think that moral imbecility is always accompanied by mental defect.

Leaving this question unsettled, there is a type of individual in whom moral imbecility dominates. If otherwise defective mentally the defect is so slight that but for the moral twist it would remain unsuspected. Such individuals have no sense of obligation toward their fellows, they remain permanently in that infantile stage of moral development through which the race has passed and through which many individuals still pass, that stage in which the primitive egoism is untempered by the least touch of altruism. Such children are often unloving and even cruel; they lie and steal without compunction and their impulses are completely unrestrained. No argument excepting that of fear of consequences is with them of any avail. Efforts to influence these children by environment or training of any kind is always futile, and it is this total incorrigibility which alone differentiates them from many children belonging to groups one and two. For a pen picture of such a case traced through manhood, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell's "Autobiography of a Quack," is unsurpassed.

What to do with moral imbeciles is an unsolved problem; they are a menace to society and they are too intelligent to be confined with the feeble minded. Dr. Kerlin, the first man to classify moral imbeciles as a distinct type, strongly advised the establishment of institutions for this type alone; he contended that neither reformatories nor schools for feeble

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minded were suitable, but that in institutions especially adapted for their needs they could be trained to lead happy, useful and harmless lives.

And now we have reached the great fourth group—the *feeble minded*. How great it is few realize, and those of us who do, feel that we must cry it from the housetop and compel the passerby to stop and listen, so grave is the situation and so urgent is the need for action. It is estimated that in the United States alone there are¹ 307,185 feeble minded persons. Of these 23,856 are cared for in institutions. This leaves 283,329 feeble minded persons. Of these a few thousand are cared for in private schools—where are the others? Is it difficult to answer this when those of us who live with these people in institutions, testify that the brightest of all are absolutely lacking in power to resist temptation, or even suggestion that does not tempt? It cannot be said that such children are vicious or immoral; they are simply an easy prey to any influence in the environment. A young girl, whose intelligence proved to be limited to that of a child of six, a girl who cannot tell what day, month or year it is, who cannot copy a diamond figure, count to thirteen, or distinguish a nickel from a dime, and who can name but one month of the twelve (her birth month) was brought to the Lincoln State School and Colony from the State Reformatory at Geneva recently. She had been sent to Geneva for flagrant and persistent sexual immorality. This is one case of many. The experiences that such children pass through before they find refuge at Lincoln can be explained only by the supposition that those who lead them on are themselves feeble minded.

The simple and appalling fact is that there are in the neighborhood of 280,000 absolutely irresponsible individuals at large in our country. Can we doubt that they furnish a large quota not only of our juvenile delinquents but of all criminals? If we do, let us turn to the reports of the examinations of delinquents which have recently been made in various places. From Chicago we learn that 26% of 600 children who appeared more than once before the juvenile court are feeble minded; from New York that of 5,000 consecutive admissions to the Elmira² Reformatory 30 are defective mentally, and, that of 300 inmates of the Bedford³ Reformatory 44 were feeble minded. Eighteen of these were mothers of 22 illegitimate children and three were mothers of three legitimate children. The most systematic and extensive work in this field has been done in Great Britain by the Royal⁴ Commission on the Care and Con-

¹The Training School March, 1911.

²MacDonald, Arthur. Juvenile Crime and Reformation.

³Moore, Anna. The Feeble Minded in New York.

⁴Report of the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble Minded, Vol. VIII.

trol of the Feeble Minded, which published the report of its findings in 1908. This commission found that in some prisons such as Halloway, Pentonville and Parkhurst the proportion of feeble minded prisoners was so large that the Prison Commissioners had found it necessary to make special provision for their care and treatment. At Halloway among 803 women prisoners 39 were feeble minded, and of the total number of prisoners, 1297, 56 were feeble minded. At Pentonville 18% of the prison population and 40% of the juvenile prisoners were feeble minded. Parkhurst had a total of 111 "weak minded," of whom two had incurred over 30 commitments, four over 20, and 27 over 10; only 35 of the whole group were serving their first sentence. A labor colony for "weak minded" prisoners has been instituted at Parkhurst and cases from other prisons are received by transfer. The report states also that 16% of the patients at the State Criminal Lunatic Asylum at Broadmore are cases of congenital or infantile mental deficiency, and that of 100 boys taken at random from a remand home for juvenile offenders in London, 37 graded as *backward*, *slightly mentally deficient*, or *deficient*.

Such are the facts which are accumulating under the hands of investigators. Similar conditions obtain in poor houses where many of those who escape the prison and reformatory find refuge.

In short, this vast host of feeble minded individuals have proven themselves incapable of protecting and supporting themselves and have become a burden to society. Those who are not cared for in institutions for the feeble minded are supported at much greater expense in prisons, reformatories, poor houses, or by private charities. Unhappily, such support is not forthcoming until they have proven its necessity by perpetrating and sustaining all sorts of outrages, outrages far beyond any remedy.

The one measure which would bring protection both to the feeble minded and to society, and save the coming generation also from the burden of an increasing host of feeble minded, is complete segregation of the whole class. Such segregation would put a stop to the rearing of large families of feeble minded children and the perpetuation of bad stock from generation to generation which are everywhere attracting the attention of investigators today. Feeble minded persons as a rule have large families, and when two of them mate there is little chance of any normal offspring. At the present time sixty-five families are represented at Lincoln by from two to five children each. A large percentage of the parents of these children are feeble minded, and the proportion would doubtless be still larger were our data complete.

Proper provision for these people by the state would be largely a shifting of expense rather than the assumption of a new one, for the prison

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and poor house population would soon show depletion. In the long run it would doubtless be a saving for the state; the results would surely show in the next generation, a reduction in the number of criminals, and also a reduction in the actual number of feeble minded, for the bulk of the feeble minded child population is derived from the feeble minded class itself.

The segregation should begin in early youth; it should be made impossible for a feeble minded girl to be sent to Geneva with such a history as that recorded above.

Most opportunely, simultaneously with the recognition of the extent of the evil, the psychologist has come forward with a thoroughly reliable and at the same time practical method of diagnosing the various grades of mental deficiency in the young. The psychologist trained in clinical work can, without the aid of his laboratory, in any school building which can offer a quiet room, examine the children and determine their mental status. If this precaution were taken and all school children examined at the age of ten or eleven, by some competent psychologist, it would be a simple matter to draw the line where segregation should begin.

This survey of the four groups of delinquents will make it very clear that the method of dealing with any particular child depends entirely upon the result of a preliminary diagnosis. When it is determined to which group the child belongs, the broad lines of treatment are thereby determined. If he proves to be feeble minded an institution alone will do; if he is backward or suspected of moral imbecility a protracted observation of his case under favorable pedagogical and environmental conditions must be made, and this must be followed by a life under normal conditions or in an institution according to final diagnosis; if he is normal, a change of environment and a chance to develop under favorable conditions must be presented. Within these lines the methods must be adapted to the needs of the individual child. Each personality is complex and individual, and the key to its development is found only by a thorough psychological analysis.