

## THE FEEBLE-MINDED AND DELINQUENT BOY.

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FRANKLIN C. PASCHAL.

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In an examination of the relation of feeble-mindedness to delinquency, we find ourselves in the realm of the higher degrees of mental defect, the moron and the borderline cases. These, not the imbeciles, are the ones who present the difficult problem to the student of delinquency, for when those of the lower grade come into contact with the law, their antisocial behavior is recognized as but a manifestation of the deficiency. But the delinquent whom we classify as a high grade defective is not so easily disposed of, and it is this class with which this paper deals.

Only within the past few years have the courts begun to recognize that each case is an individual case and that an understanding of the violator is fully as important as an understanding of the law violated. This has come about largely through the appreciation that a great many of these persons have grave mental defects which were not of a sufficient degree to be recognized by the community. As a result, the juvenile courts of the larger cities and many penal institutions are depending upon the findings of the clinical laboratories to guide them in the disposition of the cases which appear before them. These institutions are finding extremely difficult, almost hopeless, the task of readjusting in society those who from congenital or early developmental causes are equipped with inadequate mental machinery.

A delinquency is an abnormal reaction to stimuli furnished by the environment. There are many conditions which operate to produce abnormal reactions, such as mental depressions, a craving for excitement, instability and, very frequently, a mind not completely unfolded. If judgment, foresight, and moral appreciation are undeveloped, then inhibitions are deficient and the resulting anomalies of behavior will quite likely become criminal acts or delinquencies. The feeble-minded boy is the tool of his environment. He can not see his way forward in the situations that arise, nor can he control his environment. The more complex the situation in which he is placed, the less liable he is to solve his own problems and the greater the probability that his reactions will be construed as antisocial.

The types of delinquencies of boys of the feeble-minded class, then, are many and depend upon the peculiar combinations of circumstances which chance may throw about them in their environments.

The feeble-minded boy is usually a member of a family of degenerate type. This degeneracy may be due to feeble-mindedness itself, to intemperance, or other causes may be to blame, but at least the family has fallen into the lowest strata of society. What mental defect the boy may be given is then of a lower instead of a higher order. The instruments for the implanting of the higher ideas and ideals, the church and the school, are either absent or ineffectual. If the family in its descent has become criminal, the boy is trained in the criminal paths, into which he falls quite readily. If not actually trained, he is encouraged by a family attitude which countenances this sort of thing.

Even though the family is not directly responsible, it has thrown him among associates of the lowest kind and surrounded him by the atmosphere of the slums or, in the small town, of the saloon and the gang. These people will train him, will assist him and will encourage him in starting upon a career of antagonism to law and order. A high level of intelligence is required to rise of itself above surroundings such as this, but our feeble-minded boy stays where he is put. He makes an excellent tool: he does not reason, nor appreciate the full nature of his acts, but he can be induced to perform quite difficult feats for those whose only labor is his instruction and who receive the lion's share of the profits. And, of course, having performed the act, he is the one who pays the penalty if caught, while the real criminal remains hidden.

The public schools, the churches and the charitable organizations have long fought the various instruments of suggestion, the dime novel, the yellow periodical, the moving picture film of similar nature, *et cetera*, most potent factors in the production of juvenile delinquency; but how much more influence do these things have when the mentality is so low that the counterbalancing elements are not present. When the environment is of the slum type, how much additional material for suggestion is presented that can not be controlled other than by the removal of the boy from these surroundings. He does not possess the wider and deeper mental interests, so seeks the activities, which even the feeble-minded demand, in some lower form.

Only recently have we recognized that weak-mindedness is present in a great portion of those boys who fail to progress in school and soon

begin to practice truancy, itself a delinquency. From this it is but a step to the gang with its series of petty thieving. The feeble-minded boy is often the oldest and largest boy in his room and consequently a leader. Under his guidance the younger normal boys learn to play truant, to smoke cigarets, to steal and to practice sexual vices. It is through the moral deterioration of these unfortunate followers that this defective does the greatest damage.

Not being capable of being aroused by the interests that are presented to the normal boy, our defective is looking about for excitement, and this he finds in stealing or other delinquencies. We often find in a good home a boy of this kind, who, although his parents do all that seems possible, is continually getting into trouble and eventually finds himself in some serious situation. Such a case is particularly hard for our juvenile courts, as it is not easy to take the boy from his home, yet the parents are seldom able to deal with him. A mother will overlook the faults of this boy because she feels that he is not to blame, yet she will not acknowledge even to herself that his is an incurable deficiency. She makes allowances and covers up his faults instead of enforcing the discipline that she would give a normal son. The feeble-minded boy is even more in need of strong and rigid discipline, for even this child may learn the effects of fire if it is hot enough.

Space will not permit a discussion of what is called Moral Imbecility, but a few words are necessary at this point. By moral imbecility is meant, to quote Tredgold, "that class of persons who are so constituted that they are utterly devoid of any real moral sense, and of the consciousness that any obligation is morally due from them to their fellows. Such defect is inherent and it may rightly be called moral deficiency. . . . Their moral defect is in fact, latent . . . . But although latent, moral defectives of this kind are not of necessity actual criminals: they may well be described as potential criminals."

Many psychologists declare that moral imbecility does not appear independent of grave mental deficiency, some say that it may appear with a deficiency which is slight, while others say that it may be present without accompanying defect of mentality. That portion who have unquestionable mental defects fall within the range of this paper. The moral sense, sympathy, benevolence or social instincts may be lacking, and if the boy is without the intelligence to simulate these instincts or to de-

termine what society considers to be the correct attitude, delinquencies will quite likely result. These are the ones who commit the acts of violence, malicious destruction, assault, rape, sodomy, and other sexual abnormalities and perversions. No hope can be held out in these cases.

Many there are, even of feeble-minded families, who living in the less exacting environment of the thinly populated districts, exist unaided by tilling their small plot or by performance of the tasks of drudgery and attract not even the notice of the communities in which they live. But when the unusual occurs, hardships or difficulties arise, they lack the judgment and foresight necessary to carry them through. Then the easiest way out is the only way, and they come into conflict with the law. This is not the class of the delinquent boy, but is the class into which the delinquent boy often later falls, and this element of his future must be considered in handling his case. This is the class found in large numbers in our reformatories and prisons.

A few cases from our own laboratory will serve to make concrete some of these types :

A colored fellow of very low mentality is serving a sentence for petit larceny. He had once been committed to an Illinois prison for cutting a white foreman who had attempted to take advantage of him by withholding a portion of his pay. While traveling to a point in Indiana at which he expected to find work, he fell in with a white man who took some railroad brass and told this fellow to carry it into the next town where they would sell it and divide the money. Not appreciating the nature of his act, he walked into town with the brass under his arm and when arrested, his director, who had followed at a distance, disappeared. Under a controlled environment and cared for, this subject is a very hard worker at the menial tasks and says that the only mar to perfect happiness is that he can not have tobacco.

One boy of sixteen years is but eight years of age mentally and comes from a feeble-minded family and a vicious environment. His brother has been in our institution and other relations have been incarcerated. When he was eight years old, his mother refused longer to own him and at that age he was thrown upon his own resources. But he soon provided for his future care by performing certain acts which obtained admission for him into the reform school, and he has been a ward of the State almost continually since that time. Besides his mental incapacity, he is physically subnormal and distinctly unstable. He is also a pervert and is a contam-

inating influence even in a reformatory. With such a background as this, a favorable prognosis is impossible.

One boy of sixteen years comes from a family that we have reason to believe is mentally subnormal. The mental examination shows him to be a moron, and our information is to the effect that his environment has not been particularly bad. Though employed, he stole a wheel which he traded for a billy-goat he had long desired.

Another boy is now with us for the second time. His congenital defect is of syphilitic origin and he presents many physical malformations, among which is a nose quite small and deformed. He had previously been in the reform school and was sent to us first for continuing his petty thievery after returning to his home, a small town in western Indiana. He was not long absent upon parole before he returned with a new sentence for horse-stealing, which act was without purpose but probably was due to the suggestion of associates. He recently appeared at our office with a smile upon his face and informed us that he had made a discovery. Upon being supplied with a nail, he passed it in one side of his nose and out the other. It afforded him great pleasure to exhibit this accomplishment to a clinic before a medical association.

One boy of about eighteen, whom the psychological examination showed to be of low level, was convicted upon a charge of petit larceny. In the institution he was a hard worker both in the shop and in the school, but he could not accomplish a great deal. He explained in the most pleading terms to me at the time of his entrance, that he had been without work and while sleeping in a barn he found a fur overcoat which he took because he was so cold. Rather a delinquency than a crime is it not? And the cause? Mental incapacity, the inability to compete on equal terms with his fellows.

From a scientific point of view, one of the most interesting cases we have had was that of a young man of the borderline class, having sufficient intellect to appear normal and about whose home life and environment we have not been able to obtain sufficient data. He stabbed and killed a fellow inmate, almost a total stranger to him, for the sole reason that he wished to obtain a transfer to the State prison, where he would be given tobacco. Even a prison is not a complete protection against a mentality such as this.

Many more instances could be given from this one institution which

are of great interest because of the light they throw upon the essential relations of feeble-mindedness to delinquency, and many more yet must be recorded before the subject will be fully understood.

What shall we do with these feeble-minded and delinquent boys? It is the duty of society to develop their scant capacities and prepare them for things they will be able to do, then to surround them with an environment in which they will be able to do their part and thus get the greatest happiness out of their narrow lives, while society is freed from the menace.

There has been for some time a movement on foot in several States looking toward the establishment of state institutions for defective delinquents where they may be given permanent custodial care. Massachusetts now has such a law, and in New York the Governor last year vetoed a similar bill. Our reformatories are not feeble-minded institutions and can not hold these boys indefinitely. Our feeble-minded institutions have more than they can do with a lower class and are not suited to the requirements of these. In an institution such as suggested, provision could be made for the effective development of the abilities of each one. Each could be given duties that could be made to appeal to his interests and which are within his capabilities. Removed from the competition to which he is not equal, his planning done for him, the cares and troubles to which he is subjected in the world eliminated, his life could be guided so as to give him the maximum of happiness. Furthermore, he would be beyond the power of those who seek such as he to further their own ends. And, again, he would no longer be able to bring into the world others of his kind, to endure a difficult life and to furnish more cases with which society would have to deal.

But since we do not have such an institution at the present time, it is our duty now to do all that we can to assist them with our present machinery. Many of these delinquents have special abilities which can be developed, if we will find them. Already there have been many instances in which the finding of an adaptability has furnished an outlet for the hitherto recalcitrant individuality. We must develop them mentally as far as possible, teach them to read and write, if they prove able to learn, for here some mental interests may be aroused. Closely related to the mental defect in many of the cases, is a physical defect due often to malnutrition and improper care during infancy or early childhood. So far as is possible, these physical handicaps must be removed. The training in

any trade can only be a matter of learning a certain number of movements, yet this may be sufficient to enable them to earn a living on the outside when we are forced to release them. Agricultural pursuits are especially advantageous, as here the demands of the community are not so complex. At such a time as we release them, it is our duty to see that they are placed in environments to which they are best adapted and where the effects of our care and guidance may be such as to insure for them peaceful lives which for society is the greatest protection.

The investigation of delinquents is now being carried on through departments of research in a number of penal institutions throughout the country. In the Indiana Reformatory we are gathering much valuable material of all phases of this subject, but there is one thing which interferes with our efficiency. Every psychologist and psychiatrist recognizes that feeble-mindedness, as well as insanity, is evidenced in other ways than by intelligence alone, and while a psychological analysis will bring forth the defect in the majority of cases, there are a great many of the borderline type that can be rightly understood only by careful investigation of the heredity, family history, developmental history and environmental conditions of the subject. This work presupposes trained field agents upon whom a great amount of work would necessarily fall. In most cases our laboratory now has no information as to those particulars other than that which we have been able to obtain from the inmate, and this is unreliable often because of false representation, but more often from a lack of knowledge of the things desired. Our men know pitifully little about themselves or their families, especially in those cases in which we are the most anxious to obtain accurate information. Many a man has considered it strange that we should expect him to know the year of his mother's death, the number of years he spent in school, the number of times he failed there or whether he was six or twelve at the time of an illness. This developmental period, which is very important to us, exists for him only as a hazy portion of his existence. It is only as legislatures will provide for such needs of our state clinical laboratories that we will be able to contribute to the fullest extent to the thorough understanding of the relation of feeble-mindedness to delinquency.

