

THE PROBLEM OF THE MENTALLY DEFECTIVE IN THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC.

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FOR centuries the world has been faced by the problem of what to do with those persons who are born into the world with a mentality below that of the average human being. The pendulum in the treatment of this problem, like all social questions, has swung first one way and then back the other. At first these poor unfortunates were treated with scorn and derision: there was no place on this earth for them to lay their heads. Then as the pendulum swung the other way, they were called the children of God, nothing was too good for them, but with all this lavish care no intelligent study was made of their condition nor any attempt made to solve the whole question of mental deficiency, its cause or treatment. Heredity and environment have had their exponents as the cause of feeble-mindedness and much time has been wasted in trying to solve the problem by fruitless discussion over these two subjects.

Crime, prostitution, illegitimacy and immorality have all been questions which have worried every person who is public spirited enough to want the community in which he lives to be better mentally as well as physically. Very little attempt was made to solve these questions from a scientific standpoint until a few years ago.

Within the last ten years—I mean since the organization of the United States National Committee for Mental Hygiene in 1909—an attempt has been made to try and stop the ever increasing number of feeble-minded persons in the United States. This Committee, founded through the efforts of Mr. C. W. Beers, author of "A Mind that Found Itself", has roused the people of their country to the problem of the ever-increasing number of mentally defective and to the terrible strain and cost they are to the community. The question has been attacked from all sides, by educational methods, by the formation of clinics to study these persons sent by the Juvenile Courts or other Courts, and by the building of splendid institutions where they can be segregated and taught to live a useful and happy life.

Itard, the physician-in-chief to the National Institution for the Deaf and Dumb at Paris, in the year 1800, was the first person who