

A MEDICAL STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL ON SCHOOL CHILDREN.*

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IN a study of the relation of heredity to the mental deficiency of children, undertaken in 1901 for the New York Academy of Medicine. I was forcibly impressed with the conspicuous position occupied by alcohol. A more extensive study verifies the facts then presented and gives added emphasis to alcohol as an etiological factor in mental deficiency.

This subsequent investigation included 55,000 school children—10,790 females, 44,210 males; 17,422 of foreign parentage, 37,578 of American parentage.

These children represented 143 schools and 1,572 classes; 10,800 are from country schools, 44,200 from city schools. Of this latter number 13,000 are from cities of less than 50,000 population.

The conservatism of many school officials, together with the numerous duties of school teachers made it impossible to secure an exhaustive, consecutive, and comparative study of city and country schools; however, the facts secured are sufficient and the field covered comprehensive enough to reveal the relative importance of the underlying causes of mental torpor.

The 55,000 children, classified according to their standing in studies, appear as follows; Standard, 42 per cent.; below standard, 16 per cent.; dullards, 17 per cent.; very deficient, 25 per cent. Direct causes of dullness reported; personal habits, 9 per cent.; environment, 11 per cent.; heredity, 65 per cent.; sickness, less than 1-300 of 1 per cent.

Comparing city and country schools we find a preponderance of deficient in the city. Country schools; Dullards, 15 per cent.; very deficient, 7 per cent.; a total of deficient in country schools of 22 per cent. City schools; Dullards, 17 per cent. plus; very deficient, 29 per cent. plus; a total of deficient in city schools of 46 per cent.

The causes contributing to dullness in country towns are less conspicuous and glaring than those which obtain in more crowded and metropolitan centers. Those that do exist find partial compensation in more congenial environment and healthful activities.

The city, with its multitudinous avenues for advancement, affords unbounded opportunities for the concentration and operation of those retrograde forces which reduce the vitality and capability of children.

In city schools, the children of foreigners make a large percentage of the deficient, but their dullness is directly traceable to causes other than racial. All things being equal the children of the native present

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