

CANADIAN JOURNAL OF MENTAL HYGIENE

VOL. 1

JULY, 1919.

No. 2.

STATE PROGRAMMES FOR THE CARE OF THE MENTALLY DEFECTIVE.*

BY WALTER E. FERNALD, M.D.

Superintendent, Massachusetts School for the Feeble-minded.

IT is now generally understood that the feeble-minded and the progeny of the feeble-minded constitute one of the great social and economic burdens of our modern civilization.

We have much accurate knowledge as to the prevalence, causation, social significance, prevention and treatment of feeble-mindedness, its influence as a source of unhappiness to the defective himself and to his family, and its bearing as a causative factor in the production of crime, prostitution, pauperism and other complex social diseases. The literature on the subject has developed to enormous proportions.

An intelligent democracy cannot consistently ignore a condition involving such a vast number of persons and families and communities, so large an aggregate of suffering and misery, and so great economic cost and waste.

Nearly every state in the union has already made a beginning in the way of a programme for dealing with the mentally defective, either directly or indirectly. The development of this programme in the different states varies greatly in degree and method. Even the most advanced states have not yet formulated a plan for reaching all of the feeble-minded of the state. It is safe to say that no state has yet officially taken cognizance of ten per cent. of the mentally defective persons in that state. No state has even ascertained the number of feeble-minded in the state, their location, or the nature and expression of their defect.

* Read at Children's Bureau Conference on Child Welfare Standards, Washington, D.C., May 7, 1919.