

NOVA SCOTIA LEAGUE

FOR THE

Care and Protection of Feeble-Minded Persons.

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An Appeal for the Care and Training of Feeble-Minded Persons, and a Plea for the Formation of Leagues for the Protection of the Feeble-Minded in All Parts of Nova Scotia.

In May, 1908, a number of persons held a meeting in Halifax and formed an organization known as the Nova Scotia League for the Care and Protection of the Feeble-minded. This League now numbers among its members 150 residents of Halifax and Dartmouth, and it is expected that during the immediate future the membership will be greatly increased.

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The objects of the League are as follows :—

First, to educate the public as to the need that exists for protecting and training feeble-minded persons.

Second, to impress upon the Government and Legislature of Nova Scotia the necessity for making some provision for the education of boys and girls who, owing to mental deficiency, are unable to take advantage of the training given in the public schools.

In several of his annual reports Dr. G. L. Sinclair, Inspector of Humane and Penal Institutions, has called attention to the pitiable state of feeble-minded persons who were to be found in poor houses, salvation army homes, orphanages, infants' homes and other kindred institutions throughout the province.

In 1906 The Halifax Local Council of Women, realizing the fact that many unprotected feeble minded girls were becoming the mothers of feeble-minded children, and that the number of mental deficient was being increased to undue proportions, issued a circular to doctors, clergymen, overseers of the poor and superintendents of almshouses, refuges, etc., in the Province of Nova Scotia with a view to finding out the names, ages and condition of such persons. The replies to this circular have been carefully collated and establish beyond doubt the following facts :—

First, that there are many feeble-minded adults resident in different parts of the province who had they been trained might have materially aided in their own support, but who are now charges upon public or private charity.

Second, that many unmarried feeble minded women had given birth to one or more feeble-minded children, and that these children were growing up as public charges without receiving any proper training. The following quotation from a paper read by Mrs. William Dennis before the Halifax Local Council of Women will serve as a forcible illustration :—“ Some years ago the Women's Council asked the Superintendent of the Halifax Poor House for the number of children born of feeble-minded mothers in that institution in five years. The answer was twenty. These twenty children were the offspring of nine feeble-minded mothers. One had borne one child, five had borne two, and three had borne three each.” This deplorable report can probably be duplicated by the superintendents of most of our Provincial Poor Houses or Poor Farms.

Third, the statistics collected prove that many homes are

unduly burdened by the care of a mentally deficient member of the family, who is practically absorbing the full time of at least one normal person.

Fourth, that there are a number of feeble-minded children in the province who are growing up without proper training, many of whom in a few years' time will unquestionably go to swell our criminal classes and become public charges in our penal institutions.

It is the earnest wish of the members of the League to arouse public opinion as to the need of training and caring for feeble-minded boys and girls. Clergymen and all public-spirited persons should further the movement to protect those of their fellow beings who from no fault of their own are destined to be life-long children. The members of the Government and Legislature of Nova Scotia should seriously consider the whole question of dealing with these poor, unfortunate boys and girls. Through the neglect of this class in Great Britain up to a comparatively recent period the proportion of degenerates to the total population has steadily increased, and to-day they form no small portion of the army of unemployed in that country. For the sake of our own generation and the generation yet to come it behooves us as Nova Scotians to take active measures with respect to the care and training of this class. It is hoped that our Government and Legislators will at once take steps to ascertain what is now being done for feeble-minded children in Great Britain and the United States, and be prepared to begin even in a small way to do something for the betterment of such children in this province.

The Nova Scotia League would respectfully suggest to the public-spirited men and women of the cities, towns and villages of Nova Scotia, that immediate steps should be taken for the formation of local branch leagues in each community, confidently believing that by the joint action of these leagues and by the co-operation of other public organizations the Government and Legislature of the Province will be awakened to their responsibility as to the care and protection of feeble-minded persons.

EXTRACTS FROM A PAMPHLET ON "THE ELIMINATION OF FEEBLE-MINDEDNESS," BY HENRY HERBERT GODDARD, PH. D.

Feeble-mindedness may be defined as a state of mental

defect from birth or from an early age due to incomplete or abnormal development, in consequence of which the person afflicted is incapable of performing his duties as a member of society in the position of life to which he is born. There are according to the most careful and reasonable estimates in the United States about three hundred thousand persons who would come under this definition. These are conveniently divided into three groups: (a) lowest, or idiots, (b) middle group, or imbeciles, and (c) highest group, formerly called the feeble-minded in a specific sense, but to whom we are now giving the name of moron.

The following definitions of these groups were given by the Royal College of Physicians of London, and were adopted by the Royal Commission on the Feeble-Minded as a basis of classification. The idiot is defined as "a person so deeply defective in mind from birth or from an early age that he is unable to guard himself against common physical dangers." The imbecile is defined as "one who by reason of mental defect existing from birth or from an early age is incapable of earning his own living, but is capable of guarding himself against common physical dangers." While the moron is defined as "one who is capable of earning his living under favorable circumstances, but is incapable from mental defect existing from birth or from an early age, (a) of competing on equal terms with his normal fellows, or (b) of managing himself and his affairs with ordinary prudence."

CARE OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED.—Dr. Walter E. Fernald, Superintendent Massachusetts School for the Feeble-Minded, Waverley, Mass., U. S. A., in a pamphlet on the Care of the Feeble-Minded, says "A feeble-minded child is a foreign body in a family or a modern American community.

"Who can estimate the waste of money and energy and heart in the extravagant home care of the feeble-minded and idiotic children! There is no greater burden possible in a home. The feeble-minded child becomes the silent yet awful skeleton in the closet of many an otherwise happy home. It is the innocent and helpless cause of an agony of grief to maternal hearts through long, weary days and months and years, as the mother sees her helpless offspring become the butt of jest and ridicule and a greater burden and care as the years add to its life." Thousands of sorrowful homes with thousands of

susceptible brothers and sisters are shadowed with the presence and the influence of these imbeciles.

Countless loving mothers have been worried into nervous break-down, or insanity, or an untimely grave, by the ceaseless anxiety and sorrow caused by the presence of the blighted child in the home. Many fathers have been driven to drink, sons to the "gang" and daughters to the street to get away from the unnatural and intolerable home conditions caused by the defective one.

This home care of a feeble-minded child consumes so much of the vitality and energy of the wage-earners of the family, that often the entire family becomes pauperized. It is a public duty to relieve these families of their unbearable burdens.

The problem does not lessen when adult life is reached. The adult males become the town loafers and incapables, the irresponsible pests of the neighborhood, petty thieves, purposeless destroyers of property, incendiaries, and very frequently violators of women and little girls. It is well known that feeble-minded women and girls are very liable to become sources of unspeakable debauchery and licentiousness which pollute the whole life of the young boys and youth of the community. They frequently disseminate in a wholesale way the most loathsome and deadly diseases, permanently poisoning the bodies of thoughtless youth at the very threshold of manhood. Almost every country town has one or more of these defective women each having from one to four or more illegitimate children, every one of whom is predestined to be defective mentally, criminally, or an outcast of some sort.

The modern American community is very intolerant of the presence of these dangerous defectives with the desires and passions of adult life, without the control of reason and judgment. There is a widespread and insistent demand that these women be put under control.

The great majority of these defectives are the children of parents in moderate or straightened circumstances. Few laboring men or mechanics or small farmers are able to pay any appreciable rate for the care and education of the defective child without depriving other children of proper food and clothing or opportunities for ordinary education. It follows that the great majority of these cases can be trained or cared for only at public expense in some form.

AN EXTRACT FROM AN ADDRESS DELIVERED IN BRISTOL, ENGLAND, ENTITLED "PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE."

From both the moral and scientific point of view we must, if we consider carefully, see the absolute necessity for preventive measures in dealing with the feeble-minded or defective. No maxim is more frequently quoted than "prevention is better than cure;" and outside of the medical profession, no maxim is more persistently disregarded. Perhaps this is natural. People, as a rule, want to see immediate results from their work. They want to see sick people made well, sad people made happy, and dirty places cleansed. There is, however, a higher claim upon our leaning towards whatsoever things are true, beautiful, and of good report. Is there any worker for hospital, workhouse, or gaol, who does not, at times, feel heart-broken in witnessing the long procession of invalids, paupers, idiots and criminals? Who does not say to himself: "To what purpose all my work? The evil grows unceasingly."

But what is the evil might be stopped? Not for ourselves, but for a future generation? Could we not then rise to that higher unselfishness which is content to labour all a lifetime through, to fight all a lifetime through, in order that those who come after us may have less to fight with? It is because this point of view is not yet generally taken that it is difficult to procure sympathy for the imbecile as yet unborn, and for the society to which he will prove a curse. This is the sympathy now asked for. This is the comprehending sympathy which must be forthcoming if our nation is not to sink, dragged down in the scale of existence by its own diseases. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and the weakest link in the chain of our social life is the mass of mentally-feeble persons who live amongst us, unguarded and unguided, suffering and helpless, and perpetually propagating their species. The time has come when this trouble must be dealt with: very kindly, very gently, very tenderly, so far as individuals are concerned, but very plainly, very sensibly, very scientifically so far as society at large is concerned. As, years ago, our nation realized that we had no right to populate a new country with criminals, and ceased to send its convicts abroad, so now it is asked to realize that it has no right to provide for its own future a feeble, helpless, half-witted population. That this is what we are doing at present, there is no doubt, seeing that the main

cause of feebleness of mind is hereditary. We who believe this, believe it because of incontrovertible proof, claim that our object is to force upon the public a great new principle of right doing. We exist for nothing less than that. We demand the recognition of our duty to the future, and the immediate action appropriate to such recognition. We demand the stoppage of the transmission to the future of a terrible evil; an evil which brings all other evils in its train. It is not only that our weaker brethren themselves become criminals, they afford the opportunity for crime in those who are not weak but only bad. There is no kind of crime which is not frequently the consequence of deficiency of intellect. It is probable that two-thirds of the crimes of our nation might be prevented, in the course of two generations, by a scientific method of dealing with the feeble-minded. And we must remember that it is futile to talk of feeble-minded criminals as sinners. Sin there must be, where so much crime and misery are, but the sin lies where the responsibility lies, and that is with every sane person who knows of these things, and does nothing to stop them.

EXTRACTS FROM A BULLETIN ISSUED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC HEALTH AND CHARITIES OF PHILADELPHIA, PA.

WHAT IS NEEDED.

Segregation of the feeble-minded so that degenerate stock cannot be transmitted, and the feeble-minded will be saved from ruin.

Proper institutions for the care of the feeble-minded. Relieve our jails, almshouses and insane asylums of misfit cases. Deliver the feeble-minded from the jails, almshouses and insane asylums.

Separate institutions for the high grade and low-grade cases. This is the present urgent need. The high-grade cases in an institution under wise management are practically self-supporting—are able to do farm work and shop work. It is cruelty to such people to put them in close contact with helpless low-grade imbeciles and idiots. In the case of children, in the past, such a policy has deterred parents from placing their children in our public institutions.

Better laws governing the care of the feeble-minded. In many States there is no distinction made between the insane and feeble-minded.

