

# Sterilization and Segregation

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## INTRODUCTION.

*The following paper is reprinted because of the urgent importance of the subject and the clearness with which Dr. Goddard has set forth the essential principles involved.*

*Dr. Goddard brings out the fact, that while sterilization promises help in checking the multiplication of defectives, it is at best a partial remedy, and he shows, on pages 7 and 8, that "the practical application of it is fraught with difficulty." It makes it clear that it is necessary to develop the segregation plan of colonization as well.*

*In a letter dated March 5, 1918, Dr. Goddard says:*

*"I have long felt that there was great danger that the public would be led to feel that if we only got sterilization laws, our problems were solved. As a matter of fact, it will hardly touch the real difficulty.*

*"I think we must keep hammering at segregation, especially of the women of child-bearing age. Sterilization, if we have it, will be of very great help in certain individual cases that are hard to reach in any other way. But as for solving the problem, it is not going very far for a long time to come."*

NOTE:—Papers by DR. HASTINGS H. HART, on "The Extinction of the Defective Delinquent," and "Sterilization as a Practical Measure," will be sent on request.

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## **STERILIZATION AND SEGREGATION.\***

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Many persons ask how does it happen that the feeble-minded child has so suddenly come into prominence? Has he so suddenly increased in numbers as to become a social menace, or is it merely a fad of a few enthusiasts, who have become over-excited on the question? The answer is easy. The feeble-minded person we have had always, but under the former regime, the problem largely took care of itself because the feeble-minded person being neglected, the law of the survival of the fittest eliminated large numbers of them. But in the last half century, we have come to extend our humanity and feelings to these defectives. We have established institutions and schools for their care and training.

The compulsory education laws have brought these children to our attention by bringing them into the public schools. Our attention, once turned to them, we have begun to investigate the situation, and have quickly found certain startling facts.

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### **Certain Startling Facts.**

First, we have recognized that a great many children whom we had formerly thought to be wilfully bad, are actually mentally deficient and unable to do well—to do differently than they do.

Second, there has been discovered some remarkable methods of testing the intelligence of children and showing us that many of them are below par. The results of these investigations have shown that at least 2 per cent. of the children in our public schools are mentally defective and incapable of taking their place in society. To show what this means, one has only to take an example. Applying this ratio to New York City, we would find that there are 15,000 feeble-minded children in the public schools of that city, and this figure has been amply verified by other means and by observation. Furthermore, a careful study into the causes of feeble-mindedness has shown that it is very largely hereditary, at least two-thirds of the cases being the children of feeble-minded parents or grand-parents, or both.

Third, the Royal Commission of England, studying the problem for four years, discovered that these people were increasing at twice the rate of the general population. It requires only a little thought on these facts to realize that we have before us not only a very serious problem, but one which underlies many other social problems of the day. When we realize that a large percentage of our criminals, paupers, prostitutes, drunkards and ne'er-do-wells are mentally defective, we can't but ask ourselves the question: What can be done to prevent all this?

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### Two Proposed Remedies.

The attempt to answer this question has led to two propositions. The first is to colonize them. Determine the fact of their defectiveness as early as possible, and place them in colonies under the care and management of intelligent people who understand the problem; train them, make them happy; make them as useful as possible, but above all, bring them up with good habits and keep them from ever marrying or becoming parents. The other solution

that has been offered has been to render them sexually sterile by surgical interference.

These two methods each have their advocates and their opponents. As usual, the solution to a problem so vast is not altogether simple, and the methods proposed for the solution are not easy of application.

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### **The Colonization Plan.**

Colonization appears to be the ideal method. Under the compulsory education law, all children now come to public attention when they enter school. Placed in colonies, which are in reality well regulated communities, where these people do all the work that they are capable of doing, and live under conditions that are easy for them because simplified by the persons of intelligence who manage the colony, these children become happy and harmless. A great many of them are trainable to do many things with their hands. They can carry on much of the work of the colony and become partially self-supporting or even completely self-supporting under direction. This is more than they could ever do if free in the world, and besides they are thus kept from propagating their kind—a result that cannot be attained if they are left in their native community. It is ideal, and it looks easy. But we have only to consider a definite case to realize the difficulty.

Our 15,000 feeble-minded children in the public schools of New York City would require from eight to thirty institutions, depending upon the number placed in each. The custom in many States is to have large institutions of from a thousand to two thousand inmates. With the larger number we would require eight such colonies for New York City alone. Many people believe that five hundred is enough for any one superintendent to have charge of. At this rate, we should require thirty institutions or colonies.

New York City now has one. The whole State of New York has four. None of these has sufficient money or equipment, and it is with great difficulty that they can be maintained, even as they are, the public being unwilling to raise sufficient money to carry them on as they should be. We feel then at once the difficulty of providing enough of these colonies to take care of all of the defective children. As is often true, however, the difficulty is not really as great as it appears. It is only necessary to show, as it some time will be shown and appreciated by the people, that the increased cost will be largely offset by the saving. We are not only planning for the future of these children, but the moment we begin to care for them, we shall reduce our expense for courts and prisons and almshouses, save the social losses that come from fires and injuries committed by these people, the moral injuries that come from their example and the prevalence of so much crime committed by them. Nevertheless, it will take time to make this clear to all of our people. But this is not the greatest difficulty that we have to face in this matter of attempting to colonize all of the mental defectives. A greater difficulty lies in getting these children into the colonies. The majority, indeed, the dangerous part of them are not idiots, technically so called—that is to say, they are not of so low intelligence that every one, the parents included, is convinced of their defect and is willing to have them placed in separate colonies. On the contrary, many of them are what are known technically as morons or very high grade defectives, who oftentimes do not show to the satisfaction of the parents that they are defectives until they are adults in years and attempt to take their places in the world. The consequence of this is that the parents are altogether unwilling to have their children placed in these colonies.

This comes from two causes. First, because of their parental love for their children, they are unwilling to send them away from home. Second, many of them are trainable to do errands and

simple work which brings in a few pennies to the family treasury, and this in many of these families is an important item. Until we come to the point where society is driven to the extreme of making laws requiring the forcible taking away of these children from their homes and placing them in the colonies, this matter will be an insurmountable difficulty. Many even of those who are allowed to go to the institution when they are young, where they become trained to a certain amount of useful work, are then taken home to their parents because that very training becomes an asset. So that at present we are not able to keep in the institutions even those that we get there. So much for the colonization plan.

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### **The Sterilization Plan.**

The advocates of sterilization, on the other hand, claim that they have a simple, safe and easy solution of the problem. They say to us that, barring the danger of procreation, this element in the community will be no worse, or not greatly worse, in the coming generation than they have been in the past, and while we will suffer some consequences of their condition, we can endure it for another generation if we are reasonably certain that it will then largely cease. Therefore, it becomes only necessary to render these people sexually sterile to solve the problem.

It is easy to point to a feeble-minded man that lived six generations ago, who has become the ancestor of one hundred and forty-three known defectives, and say, "Had he been sterilized this would have all been saved."

Again, the plan is easy and appeals to us as reasonable and conclusive, but the practical application of it is fraught with difficulty. In the first place, for its wholesale application, the plan would involve going into the homes, declaring that such and such children are feeble-minded and liable to reproduce their condition,

and therefore must be sterilized. Up to date, it has been very difficult to persuade the people of eight States to pass laws authorizing the sterilization of a limited number of assuredly incurable cases in a few institutions. How long it will take for us to get to the point where we will legalize the process of going into the families and sterilizing such of their members as may be declared feeble-minded, the reader is left to guess for himself. Before such laws will ever be passed, a vast amount of work must be done, and many subsidiary problems solved. For example, we must discover some method of accurately determining what children are mentally defective. No one is willing to authorize the sterilization of a child as long as there is the possibility that he may turn out normal. That means that a large number of those who are really most dangerous to society would escape on the basis of the existent doubt. Secondly, we must be assured that in proceeding to apply this remedy, we are not jumping out of the frying pan into the fire, that in thus providing by our surgical interference that these people shall not propagate their kind, we are not putting into the community people who will be a social and moral menace, much more serious to us than their actual feeble-mindedness. In other words, what will be the effect upon the social evil, and upon the spread of venereal disease of thus having in practically every community some persons who are known to be free from the liability of having children? Will the relief from this fear lead lewd women and men of normal mentality to seek out these people with whom they can satisfy their passions without fear of consequences, and in so doing spread disease and debauchery broadcast?

In the writer's opinion, this danger is largely overestimated, but this is only an opinion, and we must have facts. The danger from disease could be largely, if not entirely, overcome by proper and efficient medical inspection. The increase of sexual immorality would probably not be great, since it is the testimony of most social



workers and people familiar with this class of society that the fear of children is not a great deterrent.

We have been considering the wide and general application of this measure to all mental defectives who can be found, but, as has been said, the course that the matter is taking now is to allow this operation to be performed on certain selected cases in certain specified institutions. Let us see the possibilities of this. In the first place, the operation which is generally proposed, of vasectomy, seems to have no bad effect physically or mentally; indeed, good effects are claimed for it.

A careful study of this whole matter is being made by a committee of the American Breeders' Association, and we shall doubtless have some valuable facts on this matter in the near future.

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### **Not a Question of Criminality.**

Practically, the matter seems to stand as follows: Of the eight States having the law, only one has ever applied it; and even in that one case, the operation is at present abandoned at the suggestion of the Governor, on the ground that it is probably unconstitutional. The strongest argument against the constitutionality of the law is that it is a "cruel and unusual punishment." The idea of punishment comes into the question because the laws include among other persons who may be operated upon, the inmates of our jails, prisons and reformatories; that is to say, such of them as are considered incurably criminal. In the writer's opinion, it is a serious mistake that the question of criminality is brought into the matter at all. There is no agreement among criminologists that criminality is hereditary. Indeed, that theory is fast losing ground. Criminality is not born, it is made. The easiest material out of which to make criminals is feeble-mindedness. Therefore, if we could make

our law apply to the feeble-minded and say nothing about the criminal, we would get, under that head, probably all of the criminals that need to be considered; and furthermore, if the term criminal could be left out of the laws, the idea of the operation being a punishment would entirely disappear.

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### **Both Plans Practical.**

Returning, then, to those institutions and those cases where the laws can properly be applied, we have the following situation: If the individuals that are selected for the operation are never to go out into the world, the operation will be of no very great benefit to society. It will remove a little of the necessary precaution in the institutions. That is of doubtful advantage. But it is true that many institutions for the feeble-minded have inmates that could go to their homes and be well cared for, their lack of ability to earn a living would be made up by others in the family, and the State would be relieved of the burden. If they were safe from the danger of procreation, this would be a proper procedure. It is also true that our institutions for the insane are so crowded that many cases that are known to be chronic and incurable, and are clearly hereditary, are often allowed to go home during their periods of quietness, and while away from the institution, they become parents of children who inherit their weakness. If the operation were applied to these people, it would save a large percentage of defective inheritance. In the institutions for the feeble-minded, if these people above alluded to could be sent home, others could take their places, could be trained to work, sterilized and again sent to their homes to be fairly comfortable in those homes. In this way, in the course of time, considerable help could be offered to the solution of this

problem, and the burden of caring for so many people for their entire lives in colonies would be, to a certain extent, reduced.

We thus see that in the present status of the problem neither one of these plans will solve it at once, but since both are good and both can contribute somewhat to the solution, the only logical conclusion is that we must use both methods to the fullest extent possible. As we have attempted briefly to show, and as any one can discover for himself if he will give a little time to investigating the conditions, the situation is fast becoming intolerable, and we must seize upon every method that is suggested and offers any probability of helping in the solution of the problem. In other words, it is not a question of segregation *or* sterilization, but segregation *and* sterilization.