

RETYPE FROM THE ORIGINAL

Quarterly conference August 5, 1902

Supt. Brown:

In considering this question, I have been a little in doubt as to the meaning of the committee. As to whether it means the elimination of those conditions that tend to bring people into our institutions, or whether it means those tendencies to retain people in the institution after once in it. I have taken it for granted that the former was meant and have so treated it.

HOW TO REDUCE TO THE MINIMUM THE TENDENCIES TO INSTITUTION LIFE.

In order that we may apply a remedy to any disease, it is first necessary that there be an intelligent and correct diagnosis of the cases in hand. We may therefore in the question before us properly inquire, what are the prime causes for the filling up of our State Institutions with the criminal and unfortunate classes. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes said that "you can always cure the patient providing that the Doctor is sent for in season, but that in many cases he should have been called two or three hundred years before the patient was born." So it is that often when discussing the causes of the many unfortunate and criminal tendencies of the human race, we are obliged to go back many centuries into the dim past. To change the world, one would have to go back and change it from the beginning. What are the evils for which we would provide a remedy? They may be summed up in a few general terms. Ignorance is one of the ; Idleness is one; disease is one. (Under this head would be included all physical defects, such as insanity, deafness, blindness, etc). Another is poverty and crime. The ultimate causes of ignorance and idleness, disease, poverty and crime lie in the constitution of human nature and human society. These are so closely interwoven, that one cannot be considered apart from the other. Love of ease, laziness, is one of the inborn traits of human nature. The natural man will not work for that which he can get without labor. The curse pronounced upon Adam "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread: was a blessing in disguise. It is necessary for the physical and mental vigor of mankind, as well as to secure its greatest happiness, that his time be well employed. It is the unemployed who compose the great army of tramps that infest this country. Our state institutions are largely filled with those who have lacked systematic and constant employment. I believe if we would reduce the tendency to institution life, we should strike at the great influences that tend to fit men, women and children to fill our institutions. The great army of a hundred thousand or more tramps in this country are being constantly recruited from the ranks of our boys and young men. They have recruiting stations in nearly every town and railroad station. The inducements to join are the promise of a life of ease, of freedom from restraint, and an opportunity to see the world. These all appeal very strongly to the average boy. The boyhood and early manhood spent in this manner is the best possible fitting for the life of

the institution in later years. The man so trained in early life, is not fit to enter into competition with his fellows more favored by birth and education, in the great struggle for existence; and there is nothing before him but the poor house, the Insane asylum, or the prison. The constitution and organization of society, or the development of our modern civilization, is the cause of many of the evils of which we complain. The invention of labor-saving machinery, and its general adoption and use, has revolutionized the world. Thousands have been thrown out of employment at their chosen trades, to seek a livelihood at that with which they are entirely unacquainted. Take for example the type setting machine, and in the agricultural line, the self-binder, one man with his machine does the work of many. Labor-saving machinery makes possible the aggregation of capital in the hands of the few, and the tendency is, to congregate the population in large cities and towns, instead of being distributed over large areas. All these conditions we have with us, and we cannot change them. The reasonable thing therefore, is to educate the children to meet the changed conditions. I believe in compulsory education, and in an education that fits the child for the duties of life. I would not neglect the literary education, but an industrial education should be no less prominent. I would have large garden in connection with every school, and children given lessons in the cultivation of flowers, fruit and vegetable. Special attention should be given to this in connection with our country school. More attention should be given to the mechanical arts in the schools of our large cities. Every effort should be made to cultivate an interest in and love for those things, on the part of the children so that when they are called upon to assume the responsibilities of life they may take up their duties in an intelligent manner.

The tramp evil can and should be abated. No tramp as such should be allowed to exist in this country. With this, as with nearly all the moral ills that afflict the people of this world, work is the great panacea.

I believe that in this great agricultural state of ours, a large farm should be procured on which cheap buildings should be erected for the accommodation of several hundred men. Every person found wandering from place to place, with no visible means of support, should be immediately placed therein for a term not less than one year and be obliged to labor faithfully for ten hours each day. Such an institution could be made nearly, if not quite, self-sustaining and with the certainty that every tramp would be dealt with in this manner the effect would be magical. I predict that by such a course of treatment the number of tramps in Minnesota would be reduced 90% in two years and if something similar could be adopted in every state the practice of tramping in our country would soon be at an end and one of the great sources of supply for our state institutions would be cut off. Whether such an institution could be made self-sustaining or not should be a matter of slight consideration. Many thousands of dollars are annually expended in private contributions by the people of this state for the support of tramps in idleness, and every such contribution can but help to sink the recipient to a lower level. Certainly the state owes as much to the tramp as it does to its criminal population and they are more dangerous to the moral and pecuniary life of the state than the criminals.

It is true that there are two classes of tramps, those who will not work and those who are willing to do so provided they can find something that is agreeable. Ordinarily however, there is no excuse for being out of employment in this great and prosperous

country, and there should be no excuse for beating one's way from place to place and begging from door to door.

Intemperance or drunkenness, will be submitted, I think, to be one of the great recruiting agents for our institutions. A great many volumes have been written upon this subject and still the evil is not greatly diminished. If we attempt to dictate to a man what he shall or shall not drink, the cry goes up that this is a free country and that we have no right to interfere. It occurs to me that those who are obliged to contribute to the support of the neglected families have also some rights and that they should demand that those who profit by the labor of the man whom they have degraded should be obliged to provide for his helpless family.

A rigid enforcement of our immigration laws and possibly the enactment of more stringent laws with regard to the importation of persons of low mentality would relieve our school for defectives and our insane asylums very materially. Once received into our institutions they can only be gotten rid of after death as they seldom have friends who are able or willing to receive them again under their care.

Unsuitable marriages have much to do with the diseased population that goes so far to fill up the institutions for the feeble minded and insane. I am aware that this is not a popular subject for discussion and he who would become the author of a bill seeking to regulate such a matter only subjects himself to ridicule, but this class is so rapidly increasing and becoming such a burden that o'er long radical and surgical means will be adopted to stem this tide of degeneracy for which the state has to pay so dearly and for which so many suffer...

I have neither the time nor the ability to discuss in detail these great preventive measures. I believe in the possibility of a higher mental, moral and social life for this great country of ours, and as loyal citizens we should exert ourselves to the utmost for the benefit of mankind, that the generation following may be stronger and purer than the one in which we now live.

Mr. Leavett: The discussion of this paper was to be led by Superintendent Dow.

Supt. Dow: Mr. Chairman, you would soon discover if I did not mention it, that I have taken an entirely different view of the question from that taken by Supt. Brown. I discovered some little time ago by some correspondence that I had with him that he took the view of the subject which he has presented to you this morning. I had been thinking along another line, which had to do with the life in the institution rather than the tendencies which led up to the necessity for life in the institution.

The Chairman: That is good, we will hear from both sides then.

Dr. Dow: Therefore, while recognizing that I should be presenting an entirely different topic and not discussing Mr. Brown's paper at all, I went on in the line which I had at first considered and what I have to present to you therefore will not be a discussion of Mr. Brown's paper and will have no bearing whatever on it, except in the way of sequence. My idea of the question, as you will quickly see, was, How to reduce to the Minimum the unfortunate tendencies which arise in connection with Institution Life. That was my interpretation of the subject.