

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL VIEW OF A SUBMARGINAL CULTURE, OR SOME VERMONT FAMILIES
* TWO CASE HISTORIES *

After thinking over what the experts have to say about the problem, it might be well to examine several of these degenerate families for ourselves. They are not hard to find. They have already figured (or families like them) in the researches of the Eugenics Survey and in many a case report and interoffice communication. Their children are on the retarded lists of the schools, their children form a considerable proportion of the population of Weeks School and Brandon State School. Their case histories are often labelled 'familial!! Overseers know these families and sheriffs do. Their taxes are unpaid, their children often unhealthy. What these families cost the state and towns each year is so big that all the towns in the county could pay off their bonded debts if something could be done with them.

However, we can agree with Roethlisberger of the Harvard School of Business Administration when he says, "It is my simple thesis that a human problem requires a human solution. First we have to learn to recognize a human problem when we see one; second, upon recognizing it, we have to deal with it as such and not as if it were something else. Too often at the verbal level we talk glibly about the importance of the human factor and too seldom at the concrete level of behavior do we recognize a human problem for what it is and deal with it as such. A human problem to be brought to a human solution requires human data and human tools."

Obviously we cannot theorize in a vacuum and a concrete family will make the best approach to a problem that is at the same time so simple and so complex. We choose a family that is well known to the Department of Public Welfare as well as to the two towns which have paid for them the longest.

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The following letter was written in 1928:

Public Welfare
Montpelier, Vt.

Gent:

We have a family by the name of Tom Deless, that was moved here from Hamlock Corners last year, that the school board and I think you had better look into, there are 6 or 7 children, 5 in school, pretty dull. I had to round up the second girl and bring her into school recently, found her black and blue where the older boy had licked her and she was afraid to come in.

Two weeks ago the teacher found them lousy, we have got four of them back but the oldest girl has not shown up yet, think she was in some mix-up with two men up your way last year. I don't know what can be done, but they are no benefit to the town or themselves. It is said they are in bad shape at the house.

If you should come from Montpelier before it freezes come by way of the Pond Road as the road is bad over the Heights.

Yours Truly,
H. Heath and Truant Officer, Pondville, Vt.

In the files of the Department of Public Welfare is the docket of the Deless family from 1928 to 1942. Let us go further into these "short and simple annals of the poor."

The father Tom is a farmer, born in a mountain hamlet in the northern part of the state. The docket notes that Tom's father was a carpenter who had practically no education and no bad habits, did not have epilepsy nor was he feeble-minded. Tom had no education either. In fact he writes his name with difficulty. The record continues: Tom's father married twice and died of acute indigestion. Here we can only question the record: "Was Tom's father the kind of man who said 'Now, Nipper, look at me. I didn't have no schooling and lookit me. I got along all right, or was it the step-mother who turned Tom into a frightened insecure little boy whose only ambition was not to be noticed?' Because Tom learned, even if he did not have "education." "

Tom's sister did not get much education either. She lives in New York City now and her son is in aviation school. There was no feeble-mindedness noted there or anywhere as far as the record goes.

Education in a mountain hamlet fifty years ago was not thought so important as it is now, especially in that kind of a family. It was more important to learn a trade and to be able to eat and keep warm, to have fun at a fair and merry and raise a family.

Tom met the girl, Alma, at the fair at Greenville. She was a pretty girl and was ambitious. She had been through the grades and had designs on the seminary.

Alma was a little ashamed of her family. They had lived in that little place up under the mountain, and her mother had married when she was only thirteen. Alma was born when her mother was thirteen. Her father was quite a lot older than the mother, but he outlived her. Alma's sister

was born blind and the brother grew up and married. Although he and his wife were childless, he has always had a hard time just to get along. The record states that Alma's father and mother were normal mentally. They were a mountain family. The pattern of child marriages runs all along the Appalachian Mountain range down into Kentucky and Tennessee.

Alma and Tom were married. Neither Tom's stepmother nor Alma's child mother had ever given them the training in life to face marriage, children, life. They lacked courage and a sense of responsibility, because of the lack in their home training neither Alma nor Tom could be said to be "grown up." They remained on the infantile level, not because they or their parents were necessarily feeble-minded nor because they had not received the requisite number of hours of class room instruction with a teacher who had the required number of credits.

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To quote Korzybski "Infantile adults have little regard for, or endurance of, life responsibilities. They tire quickly, are easily discouraged and frightened. They are thus irresponsible, unreliable, and a source of suffering for those connected with or dependent on them. This permanent suspense for others produces, perhaps, one of the most serious sources of worry and unhappiness. Since it is persistent, it gives continual, painful, nervous shocks, the cumulative effects of which are bound to be harmful."

We do not hear again of the Deless family until they have eight children. Mrs. Deless is in very bad health and has had to go to the hospital for an operation. The eighth child was premature and lived only a week. Whether there was an attempted abortion or whether previous pregnancies had left Mrs. Deless in bad shape, we do not know, but we do know that Mrs. Deless took to her bed. The docket gives several impressions of her health: "lame, enjoys poor health, paralyzed from the waist down."

In response to the letter from Knoxville Health and Truant Officer, a social worker from the State Department of Public Welfare went, by the Pond Road, to see the family, stopping on the way to get further information from the health and truant officer. She found that two of the children had been arrested for stealing since the letter had been received, and sent to reform school. The officer told of the lack of supervision in the home, how the teacher had been played by the Deless children, and how the neighbors had been losing things since that family moved in. It certainly sounded like an awful bad case.

Things were in bad shape at the house when the officer and the social worker drove into the tiny yard. The small frame house set back into the woods and the worker noticed that the steps were broken. The oldest girl, Helena, was there in charge of the little ones. The next boy, about 15, and Mr. Deless were away working. The thirteen-year-old and the ten-year-old were the thieves as they weren't there. Just the eight-year-old girl, the six-year-old, and the four-year-old.

The officer and the social worker went all through the house. There was not a single thing in the house that could be called in proper condition. No beds made nor anything clean. No apparent food for the children and nothing clean or right. We tried to impress upon the girl that she should clean up the place but she was about the most bold girl I have seen for a long time."

They talked with Helena about the stealing and how wicked it was "We talked with Helena about the stealing and she admitted that she was the one who put the children up to the stealing from the neighbors. But she seemed to think she was not to blame because they did it."

The social worker said she was going to talk to the neighbor who had lost the things but Helena said she was away; she'd seen her drive by. So the officer and the social worker left with a final admonition.

Helena was left scolding. She was a pampered child, undisciplined, perfectly aware that she did not "belong," in constant war with authority, both at school and at home. She had finished eighth grade and they dared talk to her like that. She'd show them. When the visitors were out of sight down the valley, Helena went to the neighbor's house and looted it. When they returned they wasted no time calling the sheriff and he "went up and got Helena that night."

Helena was adolescent and defiant, "in fact about the most bold girl" the worker phrased it.

* Peter Blas in "The Adolescent Personality" writes: "In the attempt to control his environment, the individual may appear at times disobedient, defiant, and self-assertive; however, in terms of growth such behavior is not per se undesirable. On the contrary its complete absence sometimes deserves attention."

"This does not mean that any gross trespassing of social norms during adolescence, such as truancy, stealing, indiscriminate sex relations, should be regarded with complacency. Such behavior deserves attention and proper treatment. But if it is considered in relation to the developmental phase in which it occurs, it will count as a less severe indictment against the offender's personality at adolescence than during middle childhood or adulthood. For the adaptive character of behavior does not reveal itself directly through its mere overt content. Case material has borne out the point that adolescent conflicts, even those of great intensity, frequently disappear entirely in early adulthood without leaving any traces of deviating behavior."

Even stealing is a symptom and not at all unusual in a child. Who of you never took something that did not belong to you? Stealing is a psychological problem. It is wiser to treat the cause than the symptom, and it is much cheaper.

However, when a family like the Deless family, that nobody wants, that is a nuisance in the school, that is always an offense to the eye and the mores of the community, has a child that steals, something happens. We must educate parents, teachers, and the neighbors to take children who

are pre-delinquent to our State Psychiatric Clinics where behavior problems are treated as symptoms, in order to save the State money, and also to nudge many potential citizens over to the useful side, rather than keeping them hopelessly on the useless side. It is easy to see that Helena, an adolescent girl with no "bringing up", due to the infantile pattern of the parents, was a headstrong girl whose hand was against the world.

When the officer and the social worker, the courts and the neighbors had finished, Helena, Edward, Alton, and Abbie were at Weeks School. Later Abbie was transferred to Brandon State School where she joined Gladys, Vesta, and Stanley. Mr. and Mrs. Doless were left alone. **

Because this family is one of the taxpayers' luxuries, we must examine with some care what happened to each of these children. To begin with the oldest, Helena. She was sterilized at Weeks. On discharge she was married to a local farmer and they are running a farm. They are on the list of families of the special project of the Farm Security. She is one of the best and most energetic weavers at the weaving center. She cleaned house this spring for the weaving teacher, and was so satisfactory that she recommended her to a number of the summer people. "Oh, yes, I consider her perfectly honest. Yes, she's bright, goodness knows. Too bad she didn't have a family, isn't it?"

Edward was on parole for five years and is now on a defense job in Hartford. Alton was also sterilized at Weeks. He ran away from Weeks, stealing a car, was caught and transferred to Windsor. He was on probation two years. Now he is a T.P. case with a collapsed lung, but he works enough to earn his board and room, keep himself in clothes and cigarettes.

Abbie was sterilized at Brandon. She was there five years, and when she came back she could not get work in the neighborhood. She has

* ADOLESCENT PERSONALITY by Blos; Appleton Century-1941-p. 323.
** Letters from Judge re: commitment are in files.

the reputation of being "light fingered." Helena would have had the same experience except that she married. Abbie is the child who was brought into school black and blue by the truant officer after Edward beat her up. Abbie is the child that Helena directed to steal from the neighbors. We cannot tell now how Abbie felt about things. It is quite possible that she focussed her revenge and anger around the fact of her sterilization. It speaks in the Cockot and in the interoffice letters of her being promiscuous. But investigation shows that Abbie went as housekeeper two years ago to a man with two children (no other employment being available) and they have presumably been living together ever since. "Infantile types invariably show some sex disturbance which also adds greatly to family and social difficulties. An infantile type appears still in an organ erotic stage."

Gladys is still at Brandon, as are Vesta and Stanley. They are listed as high grade merons and have excellent character and work records there. To see how Gladys has improved we may compare an early playground report with her later reports.

"Gladys is very wild and irresponsible on the playground. She is always boasting, 'my sister could do that.' She wants to be the center of the stage. She is extremely selfish and egocentric."

Mr. and Mrs. Doless have recently joined the special project of Farm Security. Mr. Doless remembered his carpenter father and has built a small barn, a silo, and a milk house. He has brought water into the house. Mrs. Doless has conned more than a hundred quarts from her own garden, and walks six miles each week to the weaving center where her rugs have been selected to go to a New York exhibit, and several of her rugs have been sold. They have seven cows, a pair of horses, hens, a dog, and several cats which they baby and spoil in place of the children. They are bewildered at the way life has treated them.

They talk about the children: -

"We did all right, didn't we? They say it was Abbie who caused all the trouble. If it hadn't been for her stealing and starting it all, we wouldn't have had trouble."

"Do they take after me or after you?
I don't see why the State come and took our children. They're all good children except Abbie. She didn't turn out good."

After this examination of the record, it seems to me that we - all of us - the neighbors, the social workers, the courts, the town officers, failed to treat this case as a human problem, using human data and human tools. Entirely aside from the fact of our non-humanity, there remains the unassailable fact of our extravagance.

We are very fortunate to be able to compare this case with some from nearby towns that have been dealt with as human problems requiring a human solution. No doubt most of you are more or less familiar with the Farm Security program. The special project was established in twelve communities in the United States to find out what could be done with families more or less like the Deless family. The Farm Security, on its regular program, found that there were numbers of families unable to qualify, that held the others back. They were, for the most part, dependent on some kind of relief. Isolated in rural communities, without plans for the future, they lived a hand to mouth existence, gradually succumbing to a feeling of inadequacy which, in many instances, resulted in their being over-aggressive or belligerent.

These are the same families we have spoken of, the despair of the overseers. It should be borne in mind that under our present system of town overseers, that investigation by a town overseer merely means checking up on the estate of a family's poverty, not a study of physical, mental, economic and social factors affecting its problem of adjustment.

have the medical traits constituting causes or symptoms of mental deficiency." *

However, since we do not have funds enough to care for all the serious cases of feeble-mindedness, some other way must be found than institutionalization or neglect. We know that institutionalization and neglect are both costly. Neither method does anything about causes. We must rehabilitate as many of the low-grade families as possible and remove from others for foster home care. Without having entered into the details of the plan, I should like to refer to the report of the Farm Security "Five Hundred Families Rehabilitate Themselves" which contains facts and figures showing the comparatively low cost of rehabilitation.

"If considered from purely an investment stand-point the net worth of these families has increased sufficiently to offset any deficiencies in repayments on loans. A striking example of this occurred in Laurens County, Georgia, where the average net worth has been increased eight-fold, from \$69 to \$608, and in Oglethorpe County, Georgia, where it has increased from \$137 to \$262, or by nearly 100%."

The Farm Security found underlying causes of poverty and maladjustments among the people (needy farm families unable to qualify for the regular program) were found to vary. Seldom, if ever, is there a single cause; usually they are suffering from a complex of factors and frequently can do little if anything to help themselves until the ways are cleared for them or some aid is provided. In attempting to work out the major problems of these clients the most common and fundamental encountered were:

1. Economic Problems
2. Environmental Difficulties
3. Physical Difficulties
4. Social Difficulties
5. Emotional Difficulties

The overseer is like a Mother Hubbard; he goes to the cupboard to see if it is bare. If it is bare, he puts enough food upon the shelf to keep the family alive. It would be more humanitarian to let them die at once than keep them alive to breed defectives and to live in misery. A little education would be a help, a little hope would build morale. The overseer destroys morale, and all the education he gives is to "take what you can get and the Devil take the hindmost." It is easy even for a mental defective to learn the lesson that the "squeaking wheel gets the grease." Even hard-boiled social agencies are taken in by the convincing squeaking that some of these pupils of the overseers give.

Mr. Bickford, director of the Farm Security Special Project for Orange County, Vermont, one of the twelve in the United States, says:- "These families need help in their planning; some of them will perhaps always need guidance. But this year two of our families have graduated onto the regular Farm Security program and then will graduate onto their own. Even with constant supervision, these families are cheaper to take care of this way, because they raise their own food; they are self-supporting. Out of their experience, since the inception of this program in 1938, they have begun to develop a new philosophy of living; one which demands activity instead of inertia, cooperativeness instead of aggressiveness, accomplishments instead of complaints, and self-reliance instead of dependence. The progress they have made is outstanding - material possessions have improved and increased, and greater opportunities for personal and social development have been attained.

Here is a case history of a family, the Zero family, whose basic problems are similar to those other families we have been discussing, which gives definite evidence of what families in these situations can do for

themselves under sympathetic conditions, and the contribution they can make to the war effort of the nation (instead of being a drag on the State) if provided with proper guidance and intelligent direction.

* THE ZERO FAMILY *

The Zero family had experienced nothing but deprivation and insecurity in their struggle for existence. Mr. Zero, who was 41 years old in 1941, became an orphan when a small boy. As his relatives were poor and unable to care for him adequately, he started to work when very young. His school attendance was irregular and, although he managed to finish five grades, it is now difficult for him to write. His wife, who was 31 years old in 1941, finished eight grades. In the 16 years they have been married, they have had six children. Two died when infants; of the other four, the two boys are 14 and 11 years old, and the girls are nine and four years old. They have moved frequently in search of work; their longest residence was in a small town in New Hampshire where Mr. Zero worked as a farm laborer for five years, and in a woollen mill an additional three years. After losing the mill job in 1937, they came to Vermont, where Mr. Zero worked on a pulp job; the family lived on a farm for 11 months but did no farming. Unable to pay rent, they moved to a deserted, one-room schoolhouse, and were living there at the time they applied to be included in the FSA experimental program. In the meantime, the pulp job had been completed and Mr. Zero had no prospects of future employment. The entire family had been through the previous winter with insufficient clothing. The children, who had to walk approximately two miles to school, were without adequate shoes; although Mr. Zero had to work in the open during the winter, he had no heavy clothing. Mrs. Zero remained at home because she had nothing fit to wear in public. The entire family was under-nourished and badly in need of medical and dental care.

Thoroughly discouraged at the time he asked for assistance, Mr. Zero said, "I don't know what I want or need - all I know is that I want to get out of the fix I'm in." After he was told it would be possible to work out some plan whereby the family could obtain a better living, and that he could be reasonably sure of getting assistance from the FSA, Mr. Zero was able to buy a small place priced at \$350 without making a down payment. The person from whom he bought agreed to take a mortgage on the property for \$350, with principal payments of \$100 per year at five per cent interest. This property, consisting of 22 acres of land (two acres tillable and the rest in woodland), a small house and barn, was located near the schoolhouse in which the family was living. As soon as the deal was consummated, the family moved all of their belongings in a wheelbarrow to their new home, and even though it was late in the season (July), they immediately planted a garden. While these changes were being made, definite planning was started and temporary grant assistance was recommended for a period of one month during the development of the plans.

The first home visit made by the supervisors was spent in a general discussion of what FSA would be able to do and what was expected of the family. The value of planning was emphasized and the family was shown

how to set up an account book. An inventory of home furnishings was made and used as a basis for estimating the needs of the family for that year. Plans for farm and home plans were left with the family to study and they were asked to make a note of any questions that might arise before the second visit.

During the next visit, work was started on the plans and continued on later visits. These plans were worked out with Mr. and Mrs. Zero and each detail in the program was thoroughly discussed before any decision was reached. This consumed considerable time, but the procedure enabled the family to get a clear picture of the meaning of the plans.

In the process of planning, it became apparent that the development of a subsistence program would not be possible with the available resources; possibilities of obtaining additional land were, therefore, considered. A 640-acre tract was located nearby and a loan of \$650 was made to the family with which to buy it. Approximately 50 acres of this land was tillable and the remainder was heavily wooded. Development of a subsistence program for the first year was limited to vegetable production, for it was late in the season, but garden plans for the following year were included as a part of the year's planning.

Adequate use of home-produced dairy products was planned. At first the family used them to excess because they had been without them so long, but after a few weeks the quantity consumed was normal for a family of their size. They managed to get a small pig which provided sufficient pork to last through the latter months of 1939, and a brood sow was included in the plan to help provide a year-round supply. No beef was available for butchering the first year, but Mr. Zero had enough work to pay for a yearling that was butchered for home use. The consumption of eggs was increased from two to three dozen a week.

As the garden was not a success the first year, there was an inadequate supply of canned and stored foods. To help offset this shortage and keep down cash expenditures, the family was encouraged to produce "Surplus Commodities." There was no equipped sugar place on the farm, so it was planned that the family would top a few trees around the house and make enough syrup for their own use.

The program was carefully carried out. Moreover, Mrs. Zero had a surplus supply of butter which was salted down to be used when the production would be inadequate for the family's needs. The first year's salted down spoiled, but after being shown how to pack it properly, Mrs. Zero has successfully carried out the practice. She was also taught to cure pork and can surplus meat.

During the 1940 growing season an excellent garden was planted and about 400 strawberry plants and 50 raspberry bushes were set out. The yields from the garden were good and Mrs. Zero's canning record was correspondingly high. A large supply of root vegetables and sufficient potatoes for their own use were stored. The family's meat production was increased enough to provide practically all the lard and pork needed for a year-round supply. The use of eggs was again stepped up and the family began making cheese for their own use. A calf is being kept to provide beef during the winter of 1941. The poultry flock will be culled in the fall and the surplus chickens canned.

During the spring of 1940 the family set out grapevines, a cranberry bush, and a few young apple trees. They have had a harvest from their strawberry bed, made their own syrup as planned, planted new vegetables, and are now trying for a winter supply of onions. They raised their own tomato, pepper, and cabbage plants.

Before coming into the program, Mrs. Zero had the reputation of being a very poor housekeeper. When the first few visits to the house were made by the supervisors, the house was dirty and untidy. However, Mrs. Zero appeared eager to add any touches that would improve the cheerfulness of the home and to appreciate suggestions as to methods of cleaning and caring for the house. Suggestions were immediately put into practice. Because the family had so little cash only one room was papered and painted; it had been very dark and poorly lighted. Considerable patching of plaster was necessary and this was done over a period of time. A new roof was put on the house before any inside work was done. Doors and windows were lightened, and window screens were made to get sanitary ventilation. The walls of the bed-room were covered with wallboard and lath. The drainage system from the sink ended outside the kitchen window, forming a pool of stagnant water which attracted flies and insects. To correct this, Mr. Zero dug a drainage ditch away from the buildings. Grant assistance was used to buy piping materials. These improvements have been done over a period of two years. In April 1941 the family took off the little plaster which remained on the ceiling of the living-room and put on wallboard. The dining-room ceiling, which was about the color of the kitchen stove, was scraped preparatory to applying a coat of murexco. All the work was done by the family. The kitchen was an unsatisfactory working unit with no place to keep dishes and foodstuff except on open shelves. The family enclosed these shelves in a cabinet unit and added a broad working shelf.

Although the family owned a sewing machine, Mrs. Zero had never had any experience or instruction in sewing. The machine had been used only for mending and even this was poorly done. She had been unable to make the best use of old clothing given to the family. Garments for the children had been cut down or turned up as needed without regard to fit. She was taught how to take these garments apart and remake them and make them according to correct measurements. As her ability in plain sewing improved, she became more ambitious. She now makes pants and jackets for the boys, and undergarments and dresses for herself and the girls. She has also learned to knit socks and mittens for the children. She has used bleached grain bags to make many furnishings for the house; she has built up her inventory of sheets and pillow cases, made luncheon cloths, towels, stand covers, curtains; has tied quilts, and has covered soft pillows by using small pieces of print in the form of patchwork. Embroidery and crocheted edges were used to add to the attractiveness of many of these articles. She has also learned to do waffle weaving and has used inexpensive warp to make several sets of mats.

The children, too, have been interested in making things for the home. The 12-year-old boy has made orange-crate chairs for the children, racks with attached hooks on which to hang clothes, waste-baskets covered with scraps from a wallpaper book, holders for memorandum pads and pencils, and several pieces of doll furniture for his youngest sister. The oldest girl, not to be outdone by her brother, has painted a number of old peanut butter jars with red and green paint, to be used for vases. The family had no cash to spend for Christmas gifts, but they remembered

numerous relatives with home-made gifts like these. The supervisor was given a centerpiece made by the children from a birch log; they had bored a hole for a candle and trimmed the whole with evergreen and red berries. Mr. Zero put up clothing bars to save space and help take care of the clothing. He built a medicine chest from an old battery radio cabinet; with the aid of the oldest boy he built a linen closet in unused space at the top of the stairs, and made a drinking fountain for the chickens from the bowl of an old separator.

Plans to improve the health of this family were made immediately after they came into the program. As much of their trouble seemed to have been caused by bad teeth, Mr. and Mrs. Zero were sent to a dentist for an examination. Total extractions were recommended for both of them and special rates were obtained. It took several months to remove Mrs. Zero's teeth because they were in such bad condition that only a few at a time could be pulled. Her health has been steadily improved since she had her dentures. Previously, she had several miscarriages, and at the time the youngest child was born, she was confined to a hospital for three months. Since the family came into the program, she has gained 30 pounds, feels well, and is able to do a hard-day's work. Mr. Zero waited until all the farm work was finished and harvesting was over before he had his teeth extracted and, although he has had his dentures for only a short time, his stomach condition has greatly improved. Special rates were obtained for extraction and preventive work for the children in dental clinics held by the school. Arrangements were made to have the tonsils and adenoids of the youngest boy removed at a hospital clinic during the summer of 1941. The family has received prompt medical attention through participating in a group medical care program.

Recommendations were made in the original plan for the family to buy two registered milking short-horn cows to supply milk for their own needs and to produce high-grade livestock. This would enable the family to build a producing herd over a period of years and provide animals that would bring a reasonably good price. This particular breed was recommended on the basis that bulls that were not suitable for breeding purposes could be raised for beef, and cows no longer profitable as producers would bring a higher price for beef than old animals of strictly dairy breeds. To increase the size of the producing herd more rapidly, it seemed advisable to add five or six heifer calves of this same breed. By starting with two cows rather than a large herd, Mr. Zero would have time to construct a milkhose and make repairs on the barn necessary to pass milk inspection before the young stock came into production. By using lumber cut from his farm, and doing the work himself, he could avoid increasing his loan to provide these essentials. Mr. Zero had empty hay for these animals during 1941 and planted two acres of corn, one acre of wheat, and two acres of oats. Growing this grain will practically eliminate the necessity for buying any commercial feed. For cash crops for the crop year 1941-42, he planted approximately one acre of potatoes as well as small strips of beans, squash, and turnips.

The purchase of oxen was planned because Mr. Zero had had considerable experience with them. In addition, the original cost of a pair of oxen would be considerably less and the resale value would probably equal the purchase price. Further plans were made to raise steers to

replace the original oxen, the money received from the sale of the older oxen to apply on their loan. For this reason, repayment schedules were postponed to the third, fourth, and fifth years to give the family a chance to sufficiently increase their income to meet the repayments.

During the winter of 1940 Mr. Zero sold 30,000 feet of lumber from his farm. He cut most of this and all of it was skidded from the woods with his oxen. The proceeds were applied on current expenses, payments due on the real estate, and taxes. He also cut approximately 2,000 feet which were used in building a storage shed for grain and in other minor repairs.

This family is proud of its achievements. As its circumstances have improved, it has become more interested in affairs outside the home. The children began to attend Sunday School regularly, and are now members of the Junior Choir. As their interest in the church activities increased, Mrs. Zero began attending meetings of the Ladies' Aid. At first she was shy and had little to say, but she gradually gained confidence in herself and now takes an active part in affairs of this and other groups. Mr. and Mrs. Zero took part in organizing a group-purchasing association and have shown much interest in the development of the weaving center and the loan project. In some instances, their enthusiasm for these projects has influenced others to participate. Mr. Zero is a member of the Orange County Farmer's Cooperative Association, Inc., and though he has no means of transportation, he makes an effort to attend every meeting. Mr. and Mrs. Zero have to walk at least a mile and a half to attend these activities, and frequently have to take the children.

This family is no longer discouraged. They are looking ahead to a definite program of rehabilitation which they feel certain will eventually make them self-supporting. They have greatly improved their efficiency in farm and home practices and their attitude toward supervision has been excellent. Advice and suggestions have been carefully followed. Recently, Mr. Zero said to the supervisors, "It's getting along fine now, but I still need someone to help me with my thinking."

Two significant points arise from the discussion of this method of dealing with degenerate families. The first point is that this method is a family case work method. The human problem has been recognized as such and treated as such. As things are now - even though the social worker realizes the importance of the family background to the individual child - she has no means of dealing with the family as a unit. :

We are constrained to wait until the family has floundered, a process sometimes covering several generations, producing a good crop

of delinquents, degenerates, and perverts, while costing the town and state a large sum, before we do anything. Prevention is something we haven't heard about except in the department of public health where it is successfully practiced along some lines. Where the Farm Security Special Project "works with" the families, we wait and then "do things" to the families. No wonder it is harder for us to get complete cooperation.

The second point is that this method deals with the whole problem-economic, health, social, psychological. It sees the relationship of the problem to the whole situation - a most important thing.

To the Farm Security, it is primarily a problem of education - not academic education - but education in planning, doing, working, getting along with. It is education in what to do and how to do it, and why and when. It works at the concrete level of experience rather than at the verbal level of theory. Medical and dental care is planned for as much as crops and gardens are; group activities help lead these families from the suspicious and hostile attitude that most of them have developed into greater neighborliness. If the children are pre-delinquent, the behavior clinic, recreation and chores are all considered in relation to the total problem.

A significant factor contributing to the deficiencies of the children of these families is the fact that many of the mothers are chronic unfit for pregnancy due to repeated complicated pregnancies, improper diet, tuberculosis, heart disease, and severe anemia. Many of the cards in the "intellectually subnormal" files show that the mother is dead. Homes broken by death are the best index of the influence of the incomplete home on the growing child. From the time of the federal inves-

tigation in 1907-08 of the parental conditions of juvenile delinquents up to the last juvenile court statistics, the half-orphan looms large in the delinquency tables. Half-orphans are responsible for more than one quarter of the entire number of delinquencies, a number out of all proportion to the number of such children in the country." **

The number of half-orphans who are retarded scholastically has never been calculated. Be sure that it is proportionately large.

A part of the health program of this family case work could be to integrate with the State health program a program of planned parenthood similar to the programs being successfully used in North and South Carolina and Alabama. In Vermont, although we have no laws forbidding such information to married women with families, although planned parenthood has been endorsed by the American Medical Association, and although methods that do not use mechanical means to prevent contraception have been endorsed by the Roman Catholic Church, our public health nurses are instructed to say to any questions having any bearing on the problem, "I don't know."

At what magic point does it become imperative not to interfere with the will of God? We accept vaccination but not contraception. The principle that sustains vaccination and under certain circumstances permits the cutting of the fallopian tubes is broad enough to cover the use of contraceptives when indicated by the physician. Dr. Robert E. Seibels of Columbia, South Carolina, writes: "We have no distinct birth control clinics under the public health nor do we intend to have any. These patients receive this information when they need it and the prescription for their receiving it may be written by the physician conducting the T. B. clinic, a well baby clinic, or any other activity of the county health office.

* White House Conference - Delinquency and Dependency

Thus we have tried to integrate our pregnancy spacing advice into the public health program and have tried not to make it more important than any other of our activities nor to neglect it when an indication arises."

In order to deal with a problem so large and so invidious as is the problem of these degenerate families, we must not be blind, either to methods used successfully in other places, or to the facts as we find them here.

The facts now are that unmarried high school children purchase contraceptive material of inferior quality at drug stores and gas stands; that many medical men of experience believe that illegal abortion among married women is increasing; that these degenerate families breed prolifically. Dr. Gutzmacher of Johns Hopkins says that in his experience neither the indigent nor the mentally defective has a burning desire to rear a huge family. Most of them know they are doing a bad job and would greatly appreciate an effortless method of curtailment.

"We know today that national strength depends on national man power. We know, too, that man power depends on the health and morale of the nation's youth. We know, finally, that the source of all health (or disease) and all morale (or lack of it) is the home. What can a nation at war do to raise the percentage of the fit and to lower the percentage of the unfit?"

We can help the backward families that have been rejected by the community and have never developed self respect, to help themselves. We can help them collect their inherent powers and train them socially. The fact that one parent is truly feeble-minded does not make all the children degenerate (Mendel lived in vain if it does). Irresponsible, asexual parents may fail (usually do) to develop the right social attitudes in the children, so they appear shiftless for lack of the right pattern to follow.

Criminality, incest, etc, resulting is blamed on the biological "bad inheritance" instead of the fact that the kids never had a chance. *

The problem must be attacked from many angles with the ultimate objective of doing away with the "degenerate family" in Vermont. An attack that has as the objective the treatment of causes, not symptoms, at a human level, may use as weapons: 1. family welfare, 2. public health, 3. economic aid to rehabilitation, 4. education, 5. foster homes, 6. institutionalization, 7. parole, 8 sterilization. It can accomplish its objective only by all divisions and departments - indeed, all citizens - working together at the task. It has been done in small sections. It is being done in the southern mountains. It can be done here. The first thing is to plan, and the second is to begin.

Otherwise we can go on treating the symptoms and never the causes. If we treated cancer by soothing external applications as we treat these families by the dole from the towns, the body would not last long before the cancer had overgrown it. In one hundred ^{years} it will take an immense sum to house the offspring of these families in our institutions. As we are continually depleting the state by war, and by migration, and by failing to produce better stock in as great numbers, we are following the stupidest possible policy. We are spending money and showing as little foresight and ability to plan as the feeble-minded themselves.

An integrated central authority that would work on these angles of the problem of mental deficiency in the State of Vermont seems a necessity.

*From informal letter of Willard Beecher, psychologist.

HUMAN EROSION IN OUR SCHOOLS

The Southworths live in the last house on the road to Squirrel Pond. They come from old American stock. I mention this because a member of the Vermont Federation of Womens Clubs who was going to the Pond with me one day said, "Surely, people like that aren't Americans, foreign aren't they?" The Southworths are in the habit of moving the washtubs and lots of other things out in the yard in summer. What, with the furniture and the hound dogs and the hens and the kids, it looks pretty bad.

As a matter of fact the Southworths owned a good farm out on Butternut Hill. The old man was sick for a long time before he died, and just as soon as he died, they foreclosed the mortgage on the farm. Johnny, his son, had just got married. He was kind of "no account" and he moved up toward the end of the Pond to an old camp. His mother and sister moved to the village where the maternal grandfather had quite a nice place, but Johnny didn't want to go. He liked hunting and fishing, and he didn't like much else. He certainly didn't like work.

At the present time there is Johnny and his wife and the five children. She is still young and pretty and trim as to figure. This is a nice looking, two-headed family, if they don't open their mouths. Their teeth are terrible. Johnny has had to give up hunting and fishing to some extent and works pretty steady at the mill. They also board hound dogs for the city hunters. They have a garden of sorts and she and the kids pick berries and peddle them to the city folks who bought the place down the road. That's the place his grandfather built. The Southworths "make out", never been on the town and always had a telephone.

The oldest child is a girl named Claribelle. She started school one fall. They lived so far out, the school bus had to come seven miles on purpose to pick her up. Just for a minute put yourself in Claribelle's place. She had never played with another child, never been to the village, nor ridden in a car, nor seen a school. If the Southworths went anywhere, they went in to the Pond and did some fishing, or they went up to the slash to do some berrying. Mrs. Southworth went once a year to the town of Sternbridge and saw her folks. Johnny's mother and grandfather came up about twice a summer with the old horse. Johnny did not like them to come. They always found fault and thought he ought to move to the village.

Claribelle had been inside the city-folks' kitchen when she went with the berries. She had been to camp meeting where she had been frightened by the shouting, but she hadn't cried or anything. Her wardrobe consisted of a faded cotton dress that did not fit. Folks gave the Southworths clothes, but they never seemed to wear them.

The first day at school was a great adventure. The teacher tried to make her talk. She wouldn't. At recess she had no lunch. Teacher gave her some. Still she didn't talk. When she got home that afternoon, her mother said, "You like school?" She nodded. Next day she had a lunch; wild apples from the tree near where she had to wait for the school bus. She didn't talk and the other children began making fun of her, her clothes, her lunch, and the fact that she didn't talk. They called her "dumb bunny." She suffered.

The teacher wrote on her report card that she appeared to be dumb and stupid and had better be taken out of school. Mrs. Southworth got so mad when she saw the report card, that she went and talked to the school superintendent. He investigated. He talked to the teacher, the child's parents, to Claribelle, and to the hot lunch woman. The upshot of it was

that Claribelle was moved to the village school and is keeping up with her grade. She has a speech impediment, but it is not as bad as it was.

The story of Claribelle can be repeated in nearly every rural school in the state. Sometimes there is an understanding teacher who speaks slowly and clearly to her or him. Sometimes there isn't. Sometimes the parents get mad at the report card and whip the child. Always, in every school, city or country, rich or poor, there are some discouraged children who think it is no use to try. They are a pathetic waste of human potentiality.

The blame is not always entirely with the teacher as the lack of courage may have been begun in the home long before school days. What difference does one tow-headed mountain child make anyhow? She'll only grow up and raise a big family of ne'er-do-wells. The under-privileged children who live submarginally are the ones who raise the "degenerate families" from which come the large population of borderline feeble-minded that crowd our institutions and slow down our democratic form of government.

The superintendent found out that Claribelle did not talk because she was afraid they would laugh at her. "I didn't want to be a fool," said she. She may never get top marks, not even good marks, but if she can learn to be a social asset in stead of a social liability, it is good enough. Claribelle can learn, even if she is never educated.

Dr. Alfred Adler in "The Education of Children" has this to say: "It is interesting to examine the two types of classes we find at school, the advanced and the backward classes. One is amazed to find in the advanced classes a few children who are really feeble-minded, while the backward classes are peopled, not with feeble-minded as most persons think, but with children of poor people. Children of poor families get the reputation of being backward. The reason is that their preparation (psychological preparation for school and new situations) is not good.

And we can readily understand this. The parents have too much to do and are not able to devote any time to the children or perhaps are not well enough educated for this purpose. Such children who lack psychological preparation should not be put into backward classes. If there were means of tutoring and special guidance they would get a training in courage instead of a training in discouragement which is what they derive from classes for backward children." *

In a paper given at the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in Boston in May 1942, Dr. Leo Kanner of Baltimore had this to say:

"For one thing, we have been accustomed to lump together as mentally deficient - or oligophrenic - if you wish two widely differing groups of persons who can and must be distinguished by one criterion of major practical, as well as theoretical significance.

The one group consists of individuals so markedly deficient in their cognitive emotional and constructively cognitive potentialities, that they stand out as defectives in any type of existing human community. This group comprises all those whom we designate as idiots and many of those whom we designate as imbeciles. They would be equally helpless and ill-adapted in a society of savants and in a society of savages.

The other group is made up of individuals whose limitations are definitely related to the standards of the culture which surrounds them. In less complex, less intellectually centered civilizations, they would have no trouble in attaining and retaining equality of realizable ambitions. Some might even be capable of gaining superiority by virtue of assets other than intellectual. They could make successful peasants, hunters, fishermen, tribal dancers. They can, in our own culture, achieve success as farmers

hands, factory workers, miners, waitresses, charwomen. But in our midst their shortcomings, which would remain unrecognized and therefore non-existent in the awareness of a more primitive cultural body, appear as seen as scholastic curricula demand competition in spelling, history, geography, long division and other such essential preparations for the tasks of feeding chickens, collecting garbage and wrapping bundles in a department store! Their principle shortcomings is a greater or lesser degree of inability to comply with the intellectual requirements of the community. In other respects they may be as mature or immature, stable or less stable, placid or moody as any other member of the human species. Their apparent deficiency is an ethnologically determined phenomenon relative to the local culture and, even within the culture, relative to educational postulates, vocational ambitions, and family expectations." **

Without taking the time to consider the whole problem of teaching of curricula in terms of motivation, capacity, and persistence, we will quote only from the White House Conference reports:

"The present curricula are fetishes, not suited to modern life. From the elementary grades through college, they are too academic. Inadequate even for average children, they are disastrous for the mentally deficient. The social prestige attaching to traditional types of education makes it very difficult to persuade parents of these children to accept something just as good, the more so because the attitudes of many teachers buttress the prestige of educational tradition.

In order to train mentally deficient children we must not only modify existing curricula, but we must also prove to those parentally and financially responsible for them that the modified curricula is not merely

* Alfred Adler -THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN - Greenburg - p. 132.

** AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY vol. 99, No. 1-July 1942 - p. 19.

just as good but infinitely better because it really does educate, that is, it prepares for successful living."

The most important aspect of preparing for successful living is the learning to get along with other people. The nursery schools give this training with great success because they help the children's parents to recognize its importance as well as actually having the children live what they learn in the field of human relations. As an example we might give a case history of a child whom the parents had decided was worse than a moron, and whom they usually referred to as the idiot.

Miss X was a WPA nursery school teacher in the little town of Emville. At a parents' meeting she heard the neighbors talking about Julie and she decided to investigate. "Honest, it's awful, Miss X. She just crawls around out in the barn like a little pig. I declare I don't know why she hasn't been kicked and killed. But then, she's an innocent and so the Lord protects her."

When Miss X arrived at the farm where Julie and a large family of sisters and brothers lived, she found everybody working except Julie. Sure enough, she was out in the barn creeping about among the cows' legs.

"Could Julie come to the nursery school?"

"No," said the father, gruffly, "she can't learn; she's an idiot." But Miss X did not give up. The mother thought she should have a chance, although the father's pride made him refuse. The parents are said to have fought over it for the better part of one night, and then Julie went to nursery school. Julie's mother has been through eighth grade, and her father only through the fourth.

When Julie entered school in April her health was poor; she had no established toilet or eating habits. She could only say a few words,

her motor skills were poor, and her general expression was described as eager, open-eyed, breathless. She was generally friendly, but sulky if crossed. The school toys, the food, everything about the school was new and exciting to Julie, but she was so bewildered by it all that it made it difficult to test her.

By July we find that she had a better color; her habits showed improvement, and she had few accidents; her talking was improving, although her motor skill remained poor. "She understands the routine now," say the teacher's notes, "and knows what is expected of her, though it is sometimes necessary to repeat a word many times for a response. She is happy and friendly, and looks like a little old woman with her hair pugged up, and a little shawl on."

In December her color was good and her eyes clear; her hair was thick and she seemed healthy. When in April, after eating habits, we read, "Very hungry - stuffs mouth with hands; now in December, we read, "still exceedingly hungry - still uses hands to eat with - attempts using a spoon, but usually in a hurry to eat." She can now dress herself, but rarely has an accident. Her talking shows great improvement, and she has added a number of new words to her vocabulary. The record says, "She enjoys children; loves to play with children in the doll house. She shows improvement in playing with her associates, and imitates her brother, on whom she is dependent, in her play. Her response is much quicker." *

Miss X brought Julie to the psychiatric clinic where it was still impossible to ascertain for certain what her status was, and whether she would be better for institutional care and training, foster home care,

* Letter and report from Morrisville Nursery School -WPA- Miss Katherine Vallenau, teacher.

or what. The family moved and Julie left the nursery school.

Julie's case brings into focus two aspects of the problem. We know that, through modern nursery school technique, dietetics, and our psychiatric clinics, these children can be helped, perhaps enough so that institutional training may not be indicated. One aspect of the problem, then, is to find these children young enough so that something can be done before the regular school curriculum, and other causes, has made them so hopelessly discouraged that aggression and unsocial behavior is used as a way out of their dilemma.

The second aspect of the problem is a more difficult one. If we know about them, what can we do? We are unable to examine Julie unless her parents will consent. The father has been only through fourth grade himself, and is so busy maintaining his prestige as head of the family, and dominating male, that he will block all efforts, as he almost blocked the efforts of Miss X.

We should have a system of nursery schools as widespread as possible so as to educate children's parents as well as to train the children. We must have an integrated central authority, as mentioned in the last chapter, to which these children may be committed, after which their best interests (and the state's) could be served in a variety of different ways. Otherwise, under our laissez faire policy, we are likely to hear of Julie again only after she is in trouble and a drain on the public pocketbook. With training she can be useful; neglected, she is certain to be useless.

Educating children's parents is another newer trend in education which was given wide experimentation under the WPA. The effect of a carefully planned parent education program on a community is told graphically

in the case history of a community by Mrs. Martha Buttrick, supervisor, in a pamphlet called, "Bridging the Tracks." It tells in detail how a parent education teacher, the school teacher, the nurse, and a sympathetic overseer, worked on a whole community by teaching the mothers to sew.

"The town fathers had supported members of many of the same families for three generations. When funds became scarce during the depression, they checked back on what these families were costing the city, and were appalled. But, what could they do about it? They welcomed the WPA teacher, and gave her their blessing, but declared the situation was hopeless."

"Starting with a group of suspicious, dirty mothers, who had been lured to the schoolhouse to make presents for their children's Christmas, two years later the teacher met fifty mothers, cleaned and boomerangingly dressed, at the schoolhouse "club room" for Christmas services. They had made over so many clothes that the worker in the welfare rooms said, "What are you doing to our clientele? Now they ask for raw materials with which to make things rather than finished garments. Instead of the sly, hang-dog look, characteristic of them at first, they came in erect and with a sparkle in their eye."

A well baby clinic was held every two weeks with the mothers' club committee seeing to it that the women and babies got there, and also assisting at the clinic. Lessons in cleanliness, proper feeding, clothing, and sleep, went hand in hand with the babies' examination. Education in syphilis resulted in cleaning up the worst cases. Several serious cases of feeble-mindedness in children were sent to Brandon where they could receive training. Hot lunches in the school were made possible by the coming efforts of these mothers, who learned a great deal about dietetics at the same time.

They learned about organization and cooperation; they enjoyed recreation together for the first time. The East End Mothers' Club is an example of functional democracy and morale building.

Only by building morale in these "poison spots" into which inadequate families have drifted, can we raise the social and economic status of the family and the educational opportunity of the children. When an East End mother, making a rather faltering report on the hot lunch project, was congratulated by the teacher, she suddenly exclaimed, with animation, "You know, I have never done anything but scrub floors, and I didn't know I could ever be chairman of a committee. I just love it!"

Education is the most universal answer to the problem of mental deficiency. Not just training in an institution, nor education in special classes. No. Education in living, both integrated in the curriculum, and also taught to the underprivileged families and communities. Education in social relations that begins the circle at nursery school level and ends with parent teacher education. For though the economic disabilities are important, as we have seen in the work of the Farm Security, and we shall see again in the study of a community, the equilibrium of any group also depends on the morale of the individual and the group. This report on the East End Mother's Club shows morale building in concrete situations, and shows relatively simple means by which it was attained.