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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE TREATMENT OF INEBRIETY

FOUND IN COURT CASES

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WHAT happens to the many cases of inebriety that yearly go through the courts of the various cities of the United States? Is uniform treatment given these unfortunates in all the cities? To find the answer to these questions an investigation was conducted recently by the Scientific Temperance Federation. The number of cities contributing to this investigation was disappointingly small from which fact, the conclusion was drawn that in few cities as yet has there been established adequate care leading to cure of the inebriate who comes under court supervision.

Considering our largest city first, the Commissioner of Correction of New York City reports that they "do not feel that they are doing anything at all effective with this group at this time." Short sentences, precluding the possibility of any kind of treatment, are meted out; furthermore, the Department of Correction is not at the present time, equipped to handle such cases adequately.

As soon as the inebriate is incarcerated, he is given a complete and thorough physical examination. In the near future, the Commissioner expects to have the use of a camp where alcoholics and drug addicts will be placed. Here they can be much more adequately handled than in a regular penal institution such as the one to which they are now sentenced.¹

The Women's Prison Association of New York reports intoxication as the cause for the second largest group handled during the fiscal year running from the fall of 1935 to 1936. It was exceeded only by prostitution.² The executive secretary reports, "We consider intemperate drinking not a problem in itself but one of the many symptoms of personality difficulties which this group represents. Our experience indicates that the only alcoholics with whom we have been able to see some degree of results are those for whom we have been able to get intensive care.

"The futility of handling drug addicts and alcoholics through punishment in penal institutions is obvious to us and to a great many other people who work with these groups. It would seem that both groups should be handled from a hospital and clinic standpoint rather than as legal offenders.¹

In Washington, D.C., four police court judges favor a penal farm where drunkards can be segregated from criminals and become rehabilitated. Minneapolis, Minnesota, isolates these cases and treats them in the city with a recreative program, with psychiatric and medical supervision, "followed by a definite program established for the rehabilitation of the men based on test reports."³

San Francisco, California, formerly committed inebriates to a special section reserved for them in the state hospitals. "Of late," says Judge Thomas M. Foley of the Municipal Court of San Francisco, "the load of strictly mental patients has been so great that the space formerly reserved for inebriates has been allocated to mental patients and inebriates have been practically crowded out of our institutions. Only last year a bond issue placed on the ballot for the purpose of building additional hospitals for mental or insane persons, with the aid of the WPA funds, failed of passage. The result is that in San Francisco we commit all drinkers who have not reached the stage of becoming insane persons to our county jail which is a new institution built just south of San Francisco, along the ocean. Here are many acres where the patients have fresh air, good food and exercise and they de-alcoholize themselves and come out in good physical condition, even if they do not come out with a new will to partake in more moderation.

"This state does not carry on any other special program that I am aware of (see report from Los Angeles) for the rehabilitation of its inebriates outside the ordinary employment channels that are operated by the State of California in the regular employment service, free to all-citizens.

"In our courts our treatment of these men is to attempt to have them take a pledge or place them under a suspended sentence with the promise that they will abstain from intoxicating liquors; also all other methods of moral suasion are used to cure them of their inebriety."⁴

Cincinnati reports briefly, "In the Municipal Court of Cincinnati, inebriates are committed to our work house, or, when they are approaching a more serious condition of delirium tremens, we send them to the city hospital. We have no follow-up system."⁵

Los Angeles, California, reports inadequate facilities for handling cases of inebriety at present, as regarding social service work for re-education and rehabilitation; however, "the problem is being intensely studied at the present moment by various clubs of our social service set-up here and it is hoped as a result, that some definite plan may be worked out."

In February, 1937, the Court Assistance Project was organized in the Sunrise Division of the Municipal Court. The judge refers to this court for investigation those cases which he thinks have possibilities for rehabilitation. Reports are made back to the judge with recommendations when possible for keeping the cases away from liquor and thus out of court. "Sometimes it is found that the case is living in the wrong locality and we advise him to find a different place to live, either at the

termination of his sentence, or, if the judge allows, to modify his sentence. Sometimes we find that he is drinking because of family difficulties and our court assistant who is handling the case is able to adjust this family situation so that the man is not 'driven to drink.'

"Sometimes, especially with unmarried men, the cases need a sponsor or some person to take a special interest in them and we are able to secure an employer or older brother or relative to coöperate with us in behalf of the case."

When the inebriate is really desirous of being cured of the drink habit, the Court Assistance Project advises him and his sponsor to go to a psychoanalyst who has had remarkable results with inebriates for advice and treatment. A farm for inebriates is being negotiated for where they can be held for a short time under proper supervision until it is safe for them to return to private life.

Commitment of cases to state institutions has not been productive of satisfactory results because these institutions are so crowded by serious mental cases that the alcoholic is discharged before he has had time to effect a real and lasting cure.

Where possible, those inebriates coming from outside Los Angeles are returned home since faulty orientation in a large city is often the cause of inebriety. "We believe if the inebriate is returned to his home he has a much better chance to rehabilitate himself than if he stays in the city," say the Director of Court Work.⁶

"It is our theory," writes the Deputy Probation Officer of the County of Los Angeles, "that habitual alcoholism is due to the patient's desire to escape from unpleasant realities. We believe that no cure for alcoholism can be effected which fails to discover the cause of the alcoholism. It is our theory that so-called liquor cures are dangerous in that they close to the alcoholic the door of escape from unpleasant reality by making the taking of liquor unpleasant. It is believed the result of such a cure, so-called, may be to drive him to overcome the unpleasant associations connected with liquor and to again become an alcoholic, or finally drive him to a mental escape from that reality and thus to insanity. We believe then that the treatment of the alcoholic must necessarily be an individual matter and must essentially lead to the discovery of the object from which escape is sought, that object or something being discovered and the patient being able to overcome it or face it in a rational manner rather than to run from it, it is believed the alcoholism will be at once cured."⁷

This theory has now been tested by the experience of six months and it is felt that it has been substantiated although those working on the problem do not hold it yet as a proven fact.

Chicago finds little to report. If cases of inebriety which reach the court are placed on probation, "they have the benefit of the advice and assistance of the probation officers who are appointed by the court."⁸

A most interesting project of investigation of the whole alcohol problem has been carried on as a WPA project in Boston during the past winter, known as the WPA Survey of Alcoholism at the Boston City Hospital and Associated Institutions. Dr. Merrill Moore, director of the project, and Miss M. G. Gray, supervisor, have recently published an article entitled "The Problem of Alcoholism at the Boston City Hospital," (*New England Journal of Medicine*, September 2, 1937,

published at 8 Fenway, Boston) which has received much favorable editorial comment all over the United States. This is an article which no one, working with the alcohol problem, would willingly miss.

Until the courts generally devise some method of attempting to cure the inebriate, they cannot help but be filled with repeaters of the offense, a waste of public tax funds and what might have been useful lives. It is to be hoped that in the near future, careful study will be given the matter with the result that all courts will offer re-education and rehabilitation to this unfortunate class.

References

1. Letter from Executive Secretary, Women's Prison Reform, New York, May 24, 1937.
2. 92nd Annual Report, Women's Prison Association of New York, p. 10.
3. Letter from Division of Relief, Dept. Public Welfare, Minneapolis, Minn., January 22, 1937.
4. Letter from Municipal Court, San Francisco, California, March 5, 1937.
5. Letter from Municipal Court, Cincinnati, Ohio, April 16 1937.
6. Letter from Director of Court Work, Court Assistance Project, Los Angeles, California, March 16, 1937.
7. Letter from Deputy Probation Officer, County of Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California, August 25, 1937.
8. Letter from Municipal Court of Chicago, February 26, 1937.

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JAPANESE VILLAGE PRESENTS NEW SOLUTION IN SOCIAL PLANNING

KAWAIDANI, a small village in Japan, needed a new school house. The 1,400 inhabitants felt that they were too poor to raise the 150 yen necessary for each family to subscribe. The Village Improvement Society according to the *Tribune* (Australia) for June, 1937, decided that the only way to acquire the large amount of money necessary was for the whole village to go "dry." Accordingly, it was moved to cease from the manufacture, sale and use of sake for five years from 1926-1931. Previously, the town had spent 9,000 yen yearly on alcoholic beverages.

Sake shops, eight in all, closed of their own accord. The owners of houses began to engrave the word "Kinshu" (total abstinence) on the doors of their houses. At first, the village tried to keep their plan secret because they were ashamed of being so poor that they had to stop the sale of sake. The story leaked out, however, and the village became world-famous for its novel method of economic planning.

Despite the fall in price of both rice and silk cocoons, the town saved its 45,000 yen in five years. More than that, they enjoyed the results of abstinence so much that the village voted a second five-year period without sake. At the end of this ten-year period, home life and the health of the village show improvement, gambling has been abandoned, and, when the article was written, there were no cases of divorce or illegitimacy in the town.