

A COMMUNITY OF CHARITY CASES.*

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Since charity work in many cities has been organized as a community project, the character of the person helped becomes a question of concern to the average citizen. That families making repeated appeals for aid have some common characteristics might be expected. This study was begun as an attempt to find some of these common factors in an Ohio city with a population of 150,000. This City was among the first to adopt the "Community Chest" plan and the charity work is well organized. The cases selected were those of families who had applied many times for aid through the organized charities. The files of the Family Welfare Association furnish a history of the cases that have come to their attention since 1913. From these records over fifty cases were reviewed and twenty-nine of these cases form the basis of this study. In following up these histories with field observations seventy homes were visited and one hundred and fifty of the persons charted seen.

A problem which presented itself early in the field work was locating the families. Unless the appeal for aid had been very recent, the records of the Family Welfare Association could be of little use. Tracing the residence record of the family is not a problem of the Association as the family will sooner or later make an appeal from the new address. In a re-check of ten families after a six-months' period, six were found at new addresses and one family had moved twice. With so much shifting it was surprising to find that few members of the families studied had ever left the city after once establishing their residence. One reason for this continuous residence is found in the policy of organized charities to give substantial relief only to their own citizens. When this study was begun three of the families were stranded in Davenport, Iowa. They had started west and their automobiles had broken down at that place. The Associated Charities of Davenport decided that an investment in transportation would be more profitable

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than an uncertain expenditure for food and clothing, so the three families, eighteen persons in all, were helped back to the city. One of these families has applied for aid at the Family Welfare Association since its return.

Not only has their residence in the city been continuous, but most of the families, when finally located, were found within a very limited area of the city. Two areas, both in the poorer residential parts of the city, seemed especially favored. Although separated by the river, railroads, and factory district, these two areas belong to adjoining school districts. The only members of the group not in these areas were those who had moved out into adjacent plats where small houses could be had at low rent.

Housing conditions were of the poorest and none of the homes were in good repair. Many lived in antiquated tenement houses with three or four rooms to an apartment, small cottages, often on alleys, or rooms. These rooms were usually upstairs or in the rear. The rent ranged from ten to twenty dollars per month. Often two families occupied the same rooms. In only two cases did a family occupy a two-story house by themselves. In a few cases "rooms" were rented "furnished," some families owning only a little bedding and a few dishes. Despite the fact that most of the homes were meagerly furnished there was usually an effort at cleanliness and some homes were quite neat.

For the most part the men were the sole bread winners but occasionally the men were found at home while the women were out at work. Four such cases were found, or about six per cent of the homes visited. The employment of the men was limited to a few classes of work, mainly laborers, truck drivers, and helpers. None had any definite trade and few worked in shops, although a small group aspired to be contractors in painting. Because of the uncertainty of weather conditions, many were forced to be idle much of the time. Truck drivers with regular routes and helpers in filling stations were the most prosperous. If the class of labor done is a criterion, this group is below the level of the average in intelligence.

The women working outside the home were usually in restaurants and bakeries. One did sewing at home and one worked in a factory. Because the housekeeping efforts are so successful one is apt to over-estimate the mentality of the

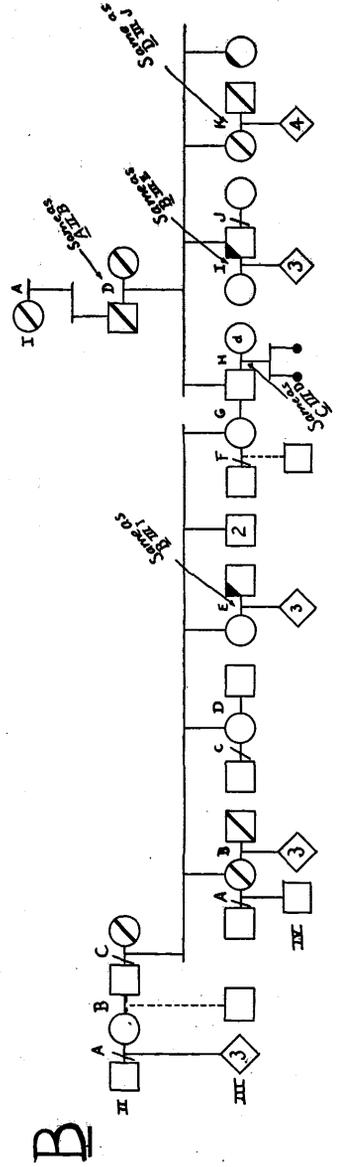
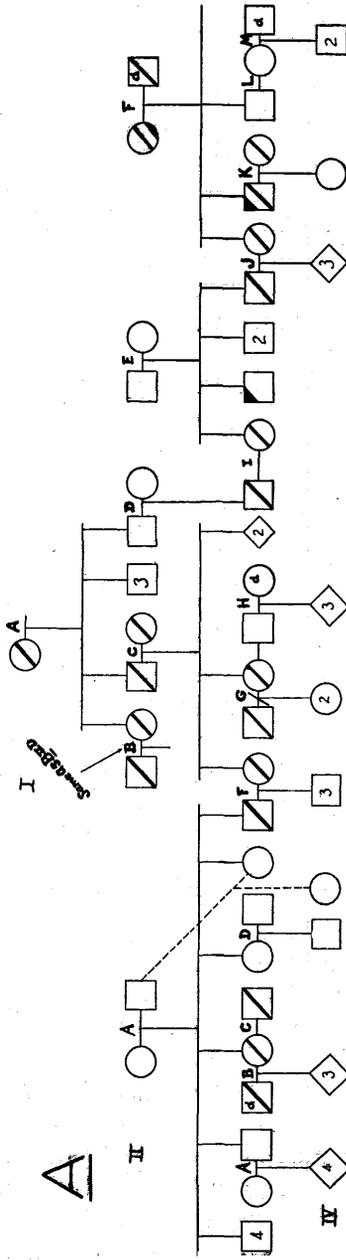
home keeper. A little questioning regarding persons and events, and more especially questions concerning directions and locations, reveals the intelligence of the women on a par with that of the men.

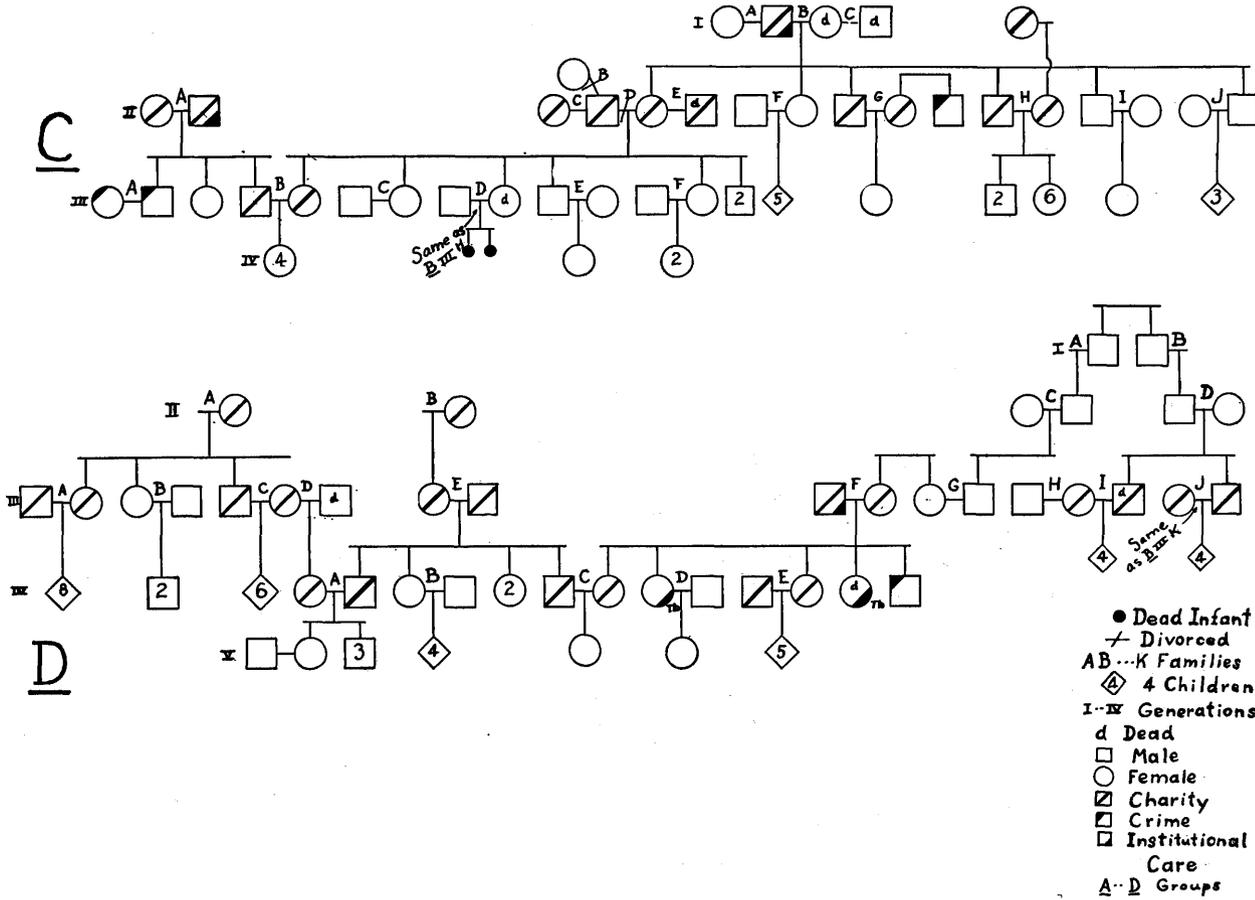
The school attainment of the children is limited to the sixth and seventh grade. Four of the children have been in "special classes" and most of the others are below the school grade usual for their age. Of the twenty-nine children above the first grade there was a total retardation of forty-three years. This is a year's work for one teacher. This group of twenty-nine was receiving one-third more attention than the average school group of its size.

Taking the cases from court records, certain types of crime are found to be common. Three have been convicted of theft, one of boot-legging and two of peddling dope. Sex offences are frequent in some families. There are three illegitimate children in the group, one being a case of incest. The record of one family is striking in that nearly all have been divorced and re-married. Separations and desertions are frequent occurrences. Early marriage is common within the group. There are few single men or women over twenty years of age. One fifty year old woman had a married granddaughter.

Several of the families selected were found to be related through marriage. Two large related groups of families each connected with a third large family which, though usually thrifty enough to tide itself over times of stress, was still close to the borderline of dependence. Using this family as a connecting factor all the group resolved itself into an inter-related community. The situation is strikingly similar to that of an isolated rural community of the last century. The social barriers separating the group from its neighbors are as effective as distance was to the frontiersman. The other cases reviewed from the Family Welfare Association records show the same tendencies to remain within a limited area and intermarry within their own group. The accompanying chart shows the relationships among the families visited.

Some of the families were most striking in their dependence on charity. N. C.— whose father is in the County Infirmary has received aid while she was living with each of her two husbands. Two of her brothers have received aid and her youngest son received extra attention in a "special" class in





school. Her oldest daughter will probably need assistance for some time, as she is separated from her husband, and is trying to care for her four children. The father's assistances to the support of these children is gotten by the Humane Society, and they must re locate him frequently because of his attacks of wanderlust. W——'s mother has gotten help at various times so has W—— and two of his daughters, also a nephew and the nephew's brother-in-law. In the family of D—— three generations have received help, so also has the L—— family.

The rehabilitation of one of these families is always temporary. Only under the most favorable conditions can they remain self-supporting. Both parents and children come for help whenever the conditions become adverse. Institutional care is the future of those who outlive their earning period, for the family is never able to carry the burden of an additional unproductive member. When the study was made five of the group were being kept in some tax supported institution and one other living member had been in the State Hospital on two occasions.

If the children of those families which have received aid through the Welfare Association are considered by themselves, the incidence of dependence is striking. When the parents of one or both parties have received help the chances are about two to one that the family will apply for aid by the time a second child is born. And it will be remembered that the Welfare records cover a period of only sixteen years.

Although the selection of cases implied a long residence in the city there was found to be a wide range in the length of residence. One gray-haired woman, with her husband in an institution for epileptics, a daughter in a T. B. sanitarium, and a son at large, had spent her entire life within a dozen blocks of where she was born. Others have been in the city only a few years. The greatest influx of these families seems to have been from 1910 to 1915. The movement into the city aside from a few coming in from nearby farms and villages was very largely from the south. The hill country of Kentucky and Tennessee furnished more than 60% of the families. A study of the surnames is significant. English, Irish and Scotch names predominate. It would be interesting to trace these family names back to the early Colonial settlers and to England.

The vigorous robust individual is a rare exception in this group. One boy is interested in baseball and plays on a neighborhood sand lot team. He is the only one inclined toward athletics. Most of the men are below the average in size and apparently underweight. Their power of disease resistance is much below the average. One very common form of charity accepted by them is the free clinic and hospital service. This impression may have been gained by their willingness to talk of their hospital experiences.

The question of drunkenness is ignored. It is assumed that drunkenness is an effect of some more remote cause. Attitudes on the liquor question are as one finds them in any group. Many spoke of drinking among others in the group but usually about those for whom they had a dislike. Just how much drinking was excused among friends one could only surmise.

Generalizing on so few cases can hardly be done with satisfaction but some conditions are so common as to be outstanding. A most striking characteristic was the unquestioning willingness of the subject to give information. This, in my opinion, is associated with the child-like simplicity of the feeble-minded. The willingness to answer questions was all the more noticeable as the investigator went as an individual, not backed by an organization. Had the subject thought that a charity organization was interested excuses to apply for aid would have been forth-coming.

Another characteristic noticed was the cheerful, hopeful outlook on life. Very few were despondent. There is a record of one suicide but this seems to have been started by a bluff and the disastrous turn in the situation was unexpected. Their attitude toward help from the outside seemed to be a passive one. There was little insistence on charity as an inherent right.

These families are living in a poor neighborhood under poor housing conditions with poor food and clothing. Their immediate environment offers little and they can not take advantage of the opportunities for advancement offered them through the schools and other educational agencies. Their ancestors in the hill country failed to meet successfully the simple demands of a rural life and the children are experiencing more difficulties in meeting the complex life of the city. In trying to determine a

single causal factor contributing to their delinquency one has a problem as complex as that of Father Jupiter in "The Bridge of San Luis Rey." In general, one can say that the inherited factors which keep them dependent lie within the comprehensive grouping of mental status known as feeble-mindedness.

ANNUAL MEETING
OF THE
OHIO ACADEMY OF SCIENCE.

Notices of the Spring meeting of the Ohio Academy of Science have been sent to all members but for the benefit of any not now connected with the Academy it may be noted that the meetings will be held at the Ohio State University, Botany and Zoology Building, April 18 and 19. Those interested in Science are welcome to these meetings and to membership in the Academy. Applications for membership may be sent to the Secretary, Mr. W. H. Alexander, Weather Bureau, Columbus, Ohio.