

FEDERAL PROBATION

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ADDICTS ON PROBATION

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The Act establishing two United States Narcotic Farms for confinement and treatment of persons addicted to the use of habit-forming narcotic drugs contains a provision for treatment at the farms of convicted Federal prisoners who instead of receiving a definite sentence, are placed on probation, one of the conditions being that the defendant must submit himself for treatment at a United States narcotic farm until discharged therefrom as cured. The reason for this provision of law is to have addicts treated rather than punished. It is generally accepted by medical men that addiction as a rule, is an expression of an unfortunate weakness rather than of viciousness.

DIFFICULTIES INVOLVED IN MENTAL READJUSTMENT

The probation feature of the law has not been used to the extent that is desirable, nor have all the cases selected for it been of the type most likely to be benefited by treatment as probationers. From the time the hospital opened in May, 1935, until the end of February, 1938, only 273 probationers had been admitted. The majority of these were well selected but some had records indicating that they would never be permanently benefited by any type of treatment.

However, a more unfortunate mistake was made. During the same period many addicts with good records and hopeful prognoses were given definite sentences and sent to Leavenworth or directly to Lexington. This is the type that should be placed under probation supervision, especially those among them who are first offenders. If the best results are to be obtained, such patients should be given thorough hospital treatment free from a prison environment and without subjecting them to the stigma of prison sentences.

The permanent rehabilitation of the unstable type of addict who comes in contact with Federal laws is, at best, difficult. His physical rehabilitation is comparatively simple but this is not the important thing in treatment. The important thing is mental readjustment so that he gets a different view of life, brought about largely by giving him a better understanding of his innate difficulties and a desire to overcome them. Successful treatment of the kind necessary can never be forced. The patient must be cooperative and his mind receptive if the root of the trouble is to be reached.

TREATMENT SHOULD ACCOMPANY FORCED CONFINEMENT

A certain measure of forced confinement of addict violators for treatment is justifiable and when administered as treatment is accepted without the resentment that precludes cooperation, but long prison sentences served as punishment in the more or less necessarily harsh environment of prison by a patient who knows he is guilty only of a weakness, tends to fix and accentuate the underlying trouble and to bring about resentment that makes cooperation impossible. Such sentences are not only useless but definitely harmful in so far as rehabilitation is concerned.

PERMANENT CURE CANNOT BE AFFECTED IN CERTAIN ADDICTS

It goes without saying that many addicts cannot be permanently rehabilitated. They have started with innate difficulties and have so formed their character by dissipation, idleness, delinquency and prison life that they regard as of little consequence the addition of what is to them such a slight thing as addiction. It is useless in so far as rehabilitation is concerned to send such patients to Lexington. A recent patient of this type had twenty-nine arrests for drunkenness, thirteen for larceny and twenty-two for other offenses. Persons who begin in early life with delinquencies and serve time in houses of reform and correctional institutions before reaching adulthood and then become addicts and continue with criminal careers are extremely unfavorable prospects for treatment. Their addiction is only one expression of their personalities. They would be criminals without it. Their addiction can be treated as well in prisons as at Lexington. On the

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other hand, the man, otherwise normal, who falls into addiction and gets into trouble with the law because of his addiction should never be left without help. This type of person should be placed on probation even though he has relapsed after several enforced sentences for narcotic law violations.