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E. H. Vickens

THE
WEST VIRGINIA
STATE CONFERENCE
OF
CHARITIES
AND
CORRECTION

1917

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STATE OFFENSES

CHARTERS

AND

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The first State Conference of Charities and Correction met at Wheeling, November 22-24, 1915. Representatives from many parts of the state attended. The information, stimulus and suggestion yielded by the discussions so impressed the participants with their helpfulness that the decision was unanimous to effect a permanent organization and to hold an annual conference. The purpose of the organization, as set forth in the Constitution, is "to discuss the problems of charity, correction and prevention, to further disseminate information, and

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promote reforms." The first Conference decided to center its efforts during the year on problems of child welfare, and appointed several committees to gather information that would be of value as a basis for constructive endeavor.

At the Second Annual Conference held at Clarksburg, November 20-22, 1916, reports from these committees, reinforced by papers and discussions in which experts from other states had a leading part, brought into prominence certain social conditions and problems in the state that seemed to call for immediate and urgent action. Some of these problems had already received careful attention on the part of state officials and only needed an enlightened public opinion to make their recommendations effective through legislative action. In harmony with the purpose of the State Conference as expressed in its Constitution, and in accordance with facts brought out at the Annual Meeting, the following recommen-

dations were unanimously adopted as a

Working Program for the Year 1916--1917

1. The continuance of the committees on Collection of Laws affecting Children in West Virginia, Child Labor, Juvenile Court (including Domestic Relations), Agencies and Institutions for Children, and Mental Defectives.

2. Co-operation with the State Bureau of Health to secure such modification of our present laws concerning *registration of births and deaths*, or such administration of our present laws, as to put our state in the registration area.

3. An effort to secure the passage of a law at the next session of the legislature providing for *an institution for the special care and training of Mental Defectives*,—as recommended by the State Board of Control, the Superintendent of the State Industrial School for Boys and the heads of sev-

eral other state institutions.

4. Endeavor to remedy defects in our laws concerning family desertion and in their administration, to the end that the deserter be obliged adequately to support his family.

5. Effort to secure passage of a law creating an unpaid, non-partisan State *Board of Charities and Correction* with an expert secretary appointed by the Board on a civil service basis, such Board to have full power to investigate and report to the Governor on all state, county and municipal and private institutions having the care of dependents, defectives and delinquents, especially children, and such other powers as may be considered advisable upon further consideration by the Executive Committee.

6. Co-operation with the West Virginia Child Labor Committee as far as may seem advisable to the Executive Committee, in the effort to have our *child labor* law so amended as to con-

form as nearly as possible with the uniform law already passed in many states.

The Conference recommended, further, that the Executive Committee bring the above legislative program to the attention of the Governor and take such other measures as might seem advisable to secure its accomplishment.

In order to put this working program into effect, the Executive Committee met at Fairmont, December 16, and after making some definite plans, appointed a sub-committee of three, consisting of Professor E. H. Vickers, Chairman of the State Conference, Professor L. M. Bristol, Chairman of the committee on Working Program, and Superintendent H. E. Flesher, of the State Industrial School for Boys, with power to act for the Executive Committee in carrying out so far as possible the legislative program outlined above.

The following facts are added in jus-

tification and support of the above Program:

The State Bureau of Health, at a recent meeting held in Parkersburg, decided to recommend to the next Legislature the passage of the Uniform State Law concerning the registration of births and deaths.

The need of a state institution for the care and training of mental defectives, is strongly brought out in the Third Biennial Report of the State Board of Control, Part 1 pages 33, 34, 51, 54, 154, 194, 312, 319, 339, 355--6 "As respects the feeble-minded and imbeciles," we are told, "there is a constantly increasing number in the Boys and Girls' Industrial Schools, in the Schools for the Deaf and Blind, in the White Children's Home and in the Colored Children's Home. . . . and the next session of the Legislature should give this matter serious consideration and take action." p. 34. Superintendent Flesher's report shows that they have

no facilities at the State Industrial School for Boys for proper segregation of criminals, mental defectives and the merely homeless and unruly, and recommends "that prompt and effective measures be taken to care properly for the feeble-minded in the state, and to prevent, as far as possible, the further increase of this unfortunate class among us." pp. 317--320--339.

The uniform law concerning desertion and non-support received the endorsement of Governor Hatfield at the session of the Legislature in 1915.

The need of a State Board of Charities and Correction is indicated by the fact that the Board of Control is not now able to give the time required by law to the inspection of state institutions (report, 30, 31), that it does not have time to inspect County jails and infirmaries which are sadly in need of standardization and improvement, even if it had the authority, and that the Board is appointed

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primarily to administer the business side of our state institutions rather than to supervise and standardize their methods and to study the problems connected with charity and correction in the state at large. Nor can this important work be done by any other existing organization in the state. Twenty states already have such Boards, several of them in addition to State Boards of Control.

West Virginia is the only state having no regulation as to hours of labor of children, and the present law is otherwise defective at many points. Some legislation along this line is the more imperative now that the Federal Child Labor Law prevents the inter-state shipment of goods, unless made in conformity with certain regulations designed for the effective protection of Child laborers.



