

CHILD WELFARE IN ALABAMA

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Child welfare in Alabama by Edward N. Clopper

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EDWARD N. CLOPPER

**CHILD WELFARE
IN ALABAMA**



CHILD WELFARE IN ALABAMA

An Inquiry by the National Child Labor Committee
under the Auspices and with the Co-operation of
The University of Alabama

Edward N. Clopper
Director

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
BUREAU OF CHILD LABOR
WASHINGTON, D. C.

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INTRODUCTION

EDWARD N. CLOPPER
National Child Labor Committee

The child is the *raison d'être* of the family, which is our social unit for its protection and rearing. It is the family's center of interest, and itself the potential founder of a future family. Whatever affects the child affects the family and reacts upon society and the state. Therefore the well-being of the child in all respects is of vital concern to the state.

The child has many interests and is subject to many influences, some sound and healthful, others sinister, fraught with danger, or positively harmful. All these interests and influences are of the utmost importance to the state, but in our individualistic way we of the United States have looked upon them primarily as matters properly within the control of the family and have deemed it wise to take action for the sake of the children only when the family has been broken up or has failed notoriously in its obligations. We have clung persistently to the theory that the family in its independent struggle to promote its own welfare will solve its own problems to best advantage and at the same time promote the welfare of society. But as society has become more and more complex, we are faced by the cold fact that conditions no longer make it possible for the family to carry on this struggle independently—it is unable to bear up against the pressure of social factors as it once was against individual factors, and we begin vaguely to understand that society itself must take a hand in the control of these greater forces. Intelligent parents will logically and almost instinctively correlate all their efforts for the benefit of their own children, so far as they are able to put forth such efforts in their own way as separate undertakings, but it would be, of course, absurd for the state to assume that all children have intelligent parents, financially able to give them proper attention and training, and that therefore no responsibility rests upon its own shoulders. We all agree that children unfortunate by reason of orphanage, defectiveness, environ-

ment, poverty, disease, or neglect must have the fostering care that their peculiar circumstances require. But we forget that even children who are fortunately situated in their home life and normal in body and mind, stand nonetheless in need of thoughtful oversight in order that their continued welfare may be assured. Plans for child care that are aimed only at the correction of abnormal situations and do not provide for the strengthening and development of normal conditions are but narrow in scope and limited in effect. We cannot take it for granted that because it has the protection of a family all will go well with the child and that another good citizen is guaranteed. Only now is the state beginning to see dimly that this happy-go-lucky guardianship of its wards is fair neither to them nor to itself, and that it must hold itself to strict accountability for the welfare of all within its jurisdiction.

The healthful interests of the child embrace all those things that make for worthy manhood or womanhood—the essentials to which everyone is entitled as the basis of strong and intelligent citizenship. They may all be grouped together under the two heads of Health and Education, both considered in their broadest aspects. Health means the segregation of the mentally unfit to ensure a reduction in the birth-rate of abnormal children, the requirement of physical fitness of applicants for the marriage license, freedom of mothers from toil before and after confinement, control of infant mortality, insistence upon responsibility for illegitimacy, birth registration, physical recreation, pure food, good housing, medical inspection of children in schools, in institutions, and at work, as well as all other precautionary measures, and suitable organization for the administration and control of these matters by the community. Education means training for definite responsibilities in life, a broadening of opportunity, a quickening of the appreciation of one's duty to self and fellows, character-building and discipline, as well as mental recreation and instruction in the fundamentals of learning.

Opposed to the healthful interests of the child are the harmful influences that retard, dwarf, pervert and sometimes wholly destroy his growth and future usefulness. They are the evils to which the child is exposed—disease of the mind or body, premature or improper labor, bad environment, delinquency, poverty, mistreatment.

We have on the one hand the constructive forces acting for the