

INTRODUCTION

This investigation into the conditions of life in the Ragged Mountains was undertaken by the Civic Club for the purpose of obtaining accurate information about a community which, because of its marked peculiarities, has been of great interest to many students of sociology and a considerable number of philanthropic organizations. Our study was undertaken from several points of view – the environment, the social habits of the people, their religious beliefs, their education facilities and the advantage taken of them by the people, and, lastly, their moral and spiritual status in relation to one another and to society in general. The University of Virginia is fortunate in having so close at hand this community of backward and, in part, aberrant individuals; and the Civic Club, in its initial effort in sociological investigation, could have found no more fruitful and interesting a field in which to work.

The investigation was carried out by a committee, appointed by President Myers, and under the chairmanship of Mr. L. A. Johnson. The committee was divided into several sub-committees, each of which was held responsible for some special aspect of the investigation. The question of education, of medical and sanitary problems, of social habits, and so forth, were determined by these small sub-committees, which reported at frequent intervals to the committee as a whole; in this way the various results and data could be kept in harmony.

The data, as finally gathered in detail, were sifted and reduced to order by Dr. James C. Bardin, who is responsible for the final written form of the report.

The results reached and the conclusions drawn therefrom do not claim to be exhaustive in any degree, but the facts as presented are as accurate as our means of verification could insure; that there was much which was incorrectly observed, and much which was left untouched goes without saying, and there is still left abundant material for future investigations. The committee hopes that its work will serve to indicate to other workers some of the problems remaining to be examined, and to stimulate an interest in them which shall lead to their solution.

AN INVESTIGATION OF CONDITIONS IN THE RAGGED MOUNTAINS

The district known as the Ragged Mountains lies in Albemarle County, to the southwest of the University of Virginia, its nearest boundary being approximately two miles away. The territory embraced in this district runs from a point about two miles from the University southwest nearly to North Garden, Va., a distance of approximately fourteen miles; and from a point about two miles and a half southeast of the Southern Railway in a direction north, northeast as far as Batesville, Va., a distance of approximately eight miles. This portion of territory is not officially called the Ragged Mountains, this name being applied to it by those dwelling therein and used by us for purposes of description. On the State and Government maps, one hill only is designated as Ragged Mountain, and it is not included in the district studied by the committee.

Within this district, which is traversed by the main line of the Southern Railway, and whose northwestern boundary approaches within about five miles of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway, lie the villages of Hickory Hill, Red Hill, Arrowhead, and Batesville, as well as the small community formed by the Almshouse of the County of Albemarle. The first three lie on the line of the Southern Railway; Batesville is not on the railroad, but lies about five miles from the main line of the Chesapeake & Ohio; the Almshouse community lies a little more than two miles from Charlottesville, near the Southern. Hickory Hill and Arrowhead had are little more than stations on the railroad, having only one store each and only one or two dwellings in the neighborhood; but Red Hill and Batesville are good sized country villages, each consisting of several stores, churches, school buildings, numerous dwellings and each has above two hundred population. The rest of the population of the district is scattered on farms, about the missions, and in small communities about stores and crossroads.

The region, in proportion to its area, is rather thinly populated. Owing to the fact that the census reports and other sources of information do not apply specifically to the district, it is impossible to state even roughly the number of people included in it.

Topographically, the Ragged Mountain district consists of two groups of hills and ridges, the smaller lying to the southeast, the larger to the northwest of the Southern Railway, and of a plateau region lying between and to the south of them. The hills vary from 100 to 500 feet above the level of the surrounding country, the level above the sea ranging from 1,000 to 1,500 feet. The larger ridges have a general direction of northeast to southwest, but there are a number of cross ridges lying at right angles to them. The plateau region presents a rolling country rising gradually into the foothills of the Ragged Mountains and the Fan Mountains in Nelson County, all of which are foothills and off-shoots of the main chain of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Geologically, this is an old region, and consists of two distinct portions, the line of separation being, in a general way, the Southern Railway. That portion to the west of the railway lies over a granite strip which is a portion of the strip extending throughout the Piedmont region of Virginia. This portion contains by far the larger number of mountains. There are in it a few sedimentary rocks which, having been eroded and for the most part removed, have left exposures of granite and granite gneiss. When the latter decay there is formed a soil which, though lacking

in lime, is fertile. It is strikingly noticeable that in the country traversed by this granite strip the people are more prosperous, the farming is on a larger scale, and the mental condition of the population is more advanced than that of their neighbors toward the east, who live in a different geological environment.

The eastern portion extends southwestward to the east of the Southern Railway; here the mountains are only about two miles wide; the formations are felspathic, micaceous, and of quartzite schist. This produces a soil of very meager fertility. The plant food is much smaller in proportion than in soil of granite formation, felspar, mica, and quartz tending to produce a lean soil.

The plateau region presents a series of rolling elevations, the soil of which is formed by eroded earths and loams from the mountains; as would be expected, this soil is more uniformly fertile than that lying upon the sides and in the valleys between the mountains. There are in the district no streams of importance, but mountain brooks arising from springs are numerous, and in the plateau good sized creeks are formed.

The larger hills, not being cultivable, are covered with forest growths of many varieties. Very little of the original forest remains, the large timber having been almost completely removed, and a second growth now covers the hills. This second growth consists of chestnut trees, mainly, that have grown up around the dead stumps of trees cut some time ago. The chestnut trees are being cut for telegraph poles, for which the lumbermen receive about \$1.50 apiece. Besides the chestnut timber there is a considerable amount of poplar, which is usually sawed up into lumber. Saw mills move from place to place through the hills and the trees are cut out very rapidly; the lumbering is unskillfully done, there being no care taken to protect the small, growing timber or to replace trees felled. Owing to the fact that there is great demand for crossties and tanbark (from black and red oak trees), the supply of available timber is being rapidly exhausted, and very little care is being taken to insure new and healthy growth. This rapid felling of the forests will have its effect upon the soil and water supply, as the rain water will have nothing to impede its descent from the slopes, and will run off rapidly without penetrating the ground, carrying with it the rich loams of the surface.

The only minerals of value in the district are lead and zinc. Lead was discovered in 1849, and during the Civil War the mine was operated for the benefit of the Confederate army, furnishing the troops with bullets. The mine was abandoned during Sheridan's raid and has been worked very little since; later workings have not proved to be productive. In recent years a mill with a capacity of 80 tons has been installed, but at present is not in operation. The products of the mine are Galena, Zinc Sulfate, Fluor Spar, and Quartz.

Through the region run two main roads, the one starting from Charlottesville and going southwest parallel to the Southern Railway; the other running from Red Hill across to Batesville and on to the Staunton road, via Miller School. These roads are nowhere particularly steep, but are ill kept and rough, especially in bad weather and in the winter season. Branches run out from these main roads into the small valleys and coves in the mountains, and these branches are in much worse repair than the main highways. The state of the roads, particularly in bad, rainy weather, is a serious hindrance to the prosperity of the country, because hauling of heavy loads is practically out of the question, and the wear and tear on vehicles and draught animals is necessarily very great.

Along these roads lie the homes of the people. Property varies greatly in value throughout the region; the majority of the people live in houses that may be called comfortable; they are convenient in plan and location as a rule, have from two to eight rooms, are well built,

painted, and well kept. A few of the better houses are built of the native rock, which lends itself readily to such purposes. The poorer classes among the inhabitants live in the traditional mountain "cabin," usually built of logs, but sometimes of planks set upright. These cabins vary greatly in comfort and size, the better ones consisting of several rooms, with walls snugly built, and having a porch. The very poorest people live in huts which are wretchedly built, and left to fall into a state of disrepair that is sometimes remarkable; several were observed which consisted of only a single room, in which dwelt a large family, and often several varieties of domestic animals as well; the roofs and walls were leaky and open to the weather, the porches tumbling, and the premises in disorder. But as a rule, the homes were comfortable, protected against the weather, and of sufficient size to accommodate without undue overcrowding the families dwelling in them. Practically all the homes are provided with outbuildings – stables, chicken houses, pigsties, and so forth; these outbuildings varied from snug, well-built barns to rough shelters built of the branches of trees.

Nearly all the inhabitants, particularly those engaged in farming, own one or more varieties of live stock. Horses and mules are owned by those who have farms of any extent; the value of these varies a great deal, but as a rule, they were found to be servicable animals, the owners taking pride in this of kind of property. It is not unusual to see horses in this district valued at from \$150 to \$200, especially young horses. Mules are used to a large extent, especially by men who drag timber and bark from the mountain sides; being smaller and more sure-footed, they can perform better and endure more of such work than horses. Cows are plentiful, and occasionally three or four may be found on one small farm. The breed of these is generally not very good. In summer the grazing is abundant and the cost of feeding cows is at a minimum; the milk is almost entirely consumed by the owners, but some butter of inferior quality is made and brought to Charlottesville to be sold; the making of this butter cannot be said to be done under even fair sanitary conditions. The poorest of the people, as a rule, do not possess either a cow or a horse, but nearly every family makes shift to own one or more pigs, because in summer these animals live on acorns and roots and their increase in weight is clear profit to the owners. The animals are all given some kind of shelter in winter, if it is only a shed built of thick branches of trees.

The farming portion of the population owns, of course, the various implements needed for this kind of work; the wealthier farmers possess good apparatus; the poorer are forced to make one plow and a few hoes satisfy. Very little care is taken of these implements, even by the more intelligent people; they are left exposed to the weather, and are badly repaired when broken.

From the sanitary point of view, the homes of the people are primitive. Even the better classes know very little of practical sanitation, and the arrangement of the premises is apt to present many bad features. The position of stables, pigsties, and privies in relation to the houses is often ill chosen and at times positively dangerous; while almost all the wells and springs are potential sources of actual disease from contamination. Very little notice is paid to the direction of drainage, and a spring will often be found into which the surface washings from stables and privies can easily be swept in rainy weather. The internal arrangements of the houses present the same primitive conditions; overcrowding and lack of sufficient air space per individual is the common fault; cleanliness is apt to be superficial; the dairies and "spring houses" where butter and milk are kept are in no way protected from insects and other sources of contamination. The knowledge of cookery is not such that conduces to good health, and the care and preservation of foods is more often left to chance and primitive methods than to care and foresight; this is

4 Source: University of Virginia Civic Club. An Investigation of Conditions in the Ragged Mountains of Virginia. Charlottesville: U of Virginia Civic Club, 1912.

particularly true in regard to the food and feeding of children. The consequence of this general unsanitary mode of living is evident in the physical condition of most of the inhabitants, who are not the robust, strong people that one expects to find in mountainous sections, but tend to be thin, anaemic, and of little resistance when attacked by serious disease.

The principal occupation of the people of the Ragged Mountains is farming, and their crops are the principal means of livelihood. Corn is the general crop raised, with small amounts of wheat, oats, and hay; the corn crop is consumed almost altogether by the live stock, though some part of it is ground into meal. Wheat and oats, when properly cultivated, are profitable, but as a rule the mountaineers do not know the correct method of planting such crops, sowing too little grain in proportion to the area of land, and the yield is usually a small one. The corn crop, on the other hand, does not require so much expert agricultural knowledge and the yield is fair, though it is not nearly as great as it could be if the farmers knew more about how to cultivate their lands. Some fruit is also raised, and when the trees are of good stock and care is taken of them, the profits are high – much higher, probably, than those gotten from any other agricultural enterprise. Apples grow well in the sheltered coves, and peaches and small fruits produce good yields. The knowledge of practical agriculture, however, is very small, and the general size of the crops is much below the normal for the richness of the land. With better, more intensive methods, the dwellers in this section could improve the value of their properties and make themselves more prosperous than they are with their primitive traditional methods of cultivation.

In addition to farming, lumbering and the making of sassafras oil are the chief occupations; there are a number of saw mills throughout the section, which give employment to many of the poorer classes, and the cutting of trees also gives work to these people. The manufacture of sassafras oil is a novel industry, there being several mills of this kind in the mountains; the oil is made from the roots of the sassafras plant. The mountain people, and particularly the larger children, boys and girls, gather these roots, for which they receive about fifteen cents the hundred pounds. The oil brings from seventy to seventy-five cents the gallon. The railroad furnishes work to the men of the lower classes, but this cannot be called a regular occupation. Basket making is also done on a very small scale by some of the people.

There are in various places throughout the district, particularly in the villages, a number of stores, owned by the mountain people. Some of these are large and in flourishing condition, particularly those in Red Hill. As most of the people raise nearly all the food they consume, the business of these stores is confined to selling articles like clothing, agricultural implements, and the like.

The education of the people is not extensive; few have any other than a knowledge of the rudiments, and many are totally illiterate. There are, however, several excellent schools. There are four state schools: At Red Hill, a large graded school, with a two-story building; Mr. Healey, a graduate of William and Mary College, is in charge, and several teachers are employed. The attendance is about 200. The Arrowhead school, at Arrowhead; average attendance 16. A small school about halfway between the Mission of St. John and the Reservoir, and another, similar, at the Reservoir. There are numerous other schools which have been abandoned. There is also a negro school at Batesville, with 1 teacher and 40 pupils. The school at Red Hill is attended mostly by children from the better class families, who come from all over the district and reside in the village of Red Hill during the term. The other smaller schools are attended by the poorer classes. Aside from the school at Red Hill, the number of pupils is small, and girls predominate; the terms are short, attendance irregular, and the children, coming from the poorer families, seldom attend after their thirteenth year; they are needed to help earn the family support.

5 Source: University of Virginia Civic Club. An Investigation of Conditions in the Ragged Mountains of Virginia. Charlottesville: U of Virginia Civic Club, 1912.

The very poorest classes, and those showing degenerative tendencies, and so forth, are reached by several Missions and Mission schools. The Mission of the Good Shepherd at Hickory Hill, under charge of Miss Boorman and Miss Coleman, has a school with an attendance of 20 – all drawn from the very lowest level of the social strata. This formerly was a state school; but it failed because the attendance under state control never averaged above 6, and was turned over to the Mission. The Holy Cross school, of which statistics were unobtainable, lies near the border of Nelson County. The St. John's School, which has an attendance of about 25, is located two miles from the Miller School. These Missions and Mission schools are doing excellent work in teaching the lower classes of the population how to live and to better their state in life.

All these schools, except the Red Hill High School and the school at Hickory Hill (Mission), have a six months' term (October to March, inclusive). Red Hill School and Hickory Hill School have a term of eight months; and the colored school at Batesville has a seven months' term. The reasons for the shortness of the term is due to the child labor in the mountains. The sassafras mills use every available boy and girl for digging sassafras roots. The saw mills use the large boys, and children of all ages are employed upon the farms in the spring and fall.

These schools have to face many difficulties, the principal one being, of course, the inertia of the people themselves; but they are slowly spreading education through the mountains, and in time should be able to raise the general education level considerably. The Mission schools are especially to be praised for their work – of a more personal, intimate nature than that of the state schools – among the lowest class.

There are throughout the district several churches, supported by the people themselves; the church buildings are not particularly valuable and the best one of them all is the negro Baptist Church, located at Batesville. Most of the churches are found in the villages, there being several in Batesville, Red Hill, and so forth. In addition to these self-supporting churches, there are four missions supported by outside aid and doing their work among the poorer classes. These are: The Mission of St. John the Baptist (Episcopal), about two miles from the Miller School, and under the charge of Archdeacon Neave, who has devoted his life to these people. The mission consists of a church and a mission house, which is a converted farm house; there are two lay workers, Miss Cary and Miss Couch. The Holy Cross Mission (Episcopal), south from Red Hill, near the border of Nelson County; statistics unobtainable. The Mission of the Good Shepard (Episcopal), or the University Mission, near Hickory Hill; there is a chapel and a schoolhouse, in charge of one deaconess, Miss Boorman, and one lay worker, Miss Coleman. Besides these, there are two quarry missions established in districts whose labor is all derived from the Ragged Mountains. There is one at Alberene (Episcopal), with one deaconess in charge and under the supervision of the clergy at Scottsville; and one at Scuyler (Episcopal), with one deaconess in charge; this is a self-supporting mission with fifty members.

These, then, are in general terms the topographical and physical conditions of the environment of the Ragged Mountain people as a whole. There remain still to be considered the relation of social conditions to this environment and the state of the people themselves.

Throughout the entire region the social conditions bear considerable relation to the physical and even geological environment. The better classes of people dwell in those portions of the region which are most fertile, most accessible to highways, and most favorable from the point of view of topographical location; the general rule may be stated that the greater the isolation and inaccessibility, the greater the poverty and the lower the social tone, though this

6 Source: University of Virginia Civic Club. An Investigation of Conditions in the Ragged Mountains of Virginia. Charlottesville: U of Virginia Civic Club, 1912.

does not hold good throughout the entire region, as will be noted when the district around the Almshouse and Hickory Hill is considered. It has already been pointed out that the people who live to the west of the Southern Railway, where the soil is of granite formation, are more prosperous and in better social condition than those living to the east, where the soil is poor.

There are four distinct classes or strata to be noted in the relative status of the inhabitants. First, those owning land of value, good buildings, stores, mills, and so forth – in other words, the class which may be called prosperous, or well above the poverty line, living among conditions favorable to a reasonable efficiency and well-being. Second, those who own very little land, or who own none at all, but live as tenants on larger properties; who own very little personal property and live stock; and who depend for their livelihood upon work bringing wages – in other words, the poorer classes, or those below the line where efficiency and physical and moral well-being can be maintained. Third, a class properly a subdivision of class two, which consists of people not only very poor, but also tainted with various forms of physical and moral degeneracy which make of them not only useless citizens but bad neighbors. The fourth class is the negro, of whom there are many in the mountains; they are not included in the three classes enumerated because they hardly can be called Ragged Mountain people and because the status of the negroes in the South places them in a position apart from that of the white man, whose social relations they seldom modify directly, particularly in mountain communities like this one.

The social conditions of the better, more prosperous classes do not come within the scope of this investigation, as they are good citizens, physically and morally well off, whose life presents no problems of particular interest to the sociologist. The people that are of the most interest are those of the poorer classes, and particularly those included in class three – the degenerate type – whose social and moral conditions have given to the Ragged Mountain people as a whole an unjust and unmerited reproach. From this point on, unless specific note is made to the contrary, only the poorer classes included in classes two and three of this analysis will be considered, and when the Ragged Mountain people are spoken of, it should be understood that it is only to these lower strata that reference is being made.

From the point of view of distribution, the committee found that while class two – that is, those people living in more or less poverty – is scattered uniformly throughout the district in normal relation to the distribution of population, class three – that is, the degenerate, vicious type – is confined to one small region. This region, strangely enough, lies closest to Charlottesville and the University; it begins at the Almshouse and runs southeast along the line, and for the most part to the east, of the Southern Railway to a point a mile beyond Arrowhead, about eight miles from the Almshouse. Within this narrow strip, eight miles long and from two to four miles broad, dwell practically all the people who may legitimately be included in class three; it is further to be noted that the worst conditions are to be found in the neighborhood of the Almshouse, the social tone of the people growing better as Red Hill is approached. The committee, owing to limited time, was unable to make inquiries and investigations which will throw any light upon the question of why this degenerate strain should exist in such a definite region, or what conditions in environment or heredity produced the falling off in the physical and moral tone of the people; this presents an interesting problem for future investigation. It should be said, in justice to the whole people of the Ragged Mountains, that aside from this particular region, which contains only a small portion of the population, the inhabitants are in as good physical and moral condition as those found in the average rural community throughout the State.

The social condition of the poorer classes, as a whole, throughout the mountains has already been indicated somewhat in the descriptions of the dwellings, crops, and occupations. These people own little or no land, raise the meagerest of crops and gain their livelihood by working for wages; they man the sawmills, cut timber for the lumbermen, help the more prosperous to harvest their crops, work in the quarries which lie outside the section in which they dwell, and in general do any sort of work which will bring them a little money. Part of their sustenance is gained by hunting, particularly in winter. The women of this class do not, as a rule, "work out"; they pick berries, gather chestnuts and chinquapins in season, and occasionally assist their more fortunate neighbors in various household tasks; but generally they remain at home, helping to care for the gardens or small farms. None of these people can be said to have any regular occupation; most of them have small gardens in which they raise crops of vegetables which furnish them barely enough food, which is eked out with supplies bought from the stores, and with game.

Physically, this class is below the normal standard; they are of average stature, or slightly taller, but they are thin, anaemic, and with constitutions ill fitted for the struggle against environment and disease. Their food is bad, their dwellings poor, and their sanitary surroundings of the most primitive, careless sort. Ignorance of proper standards of personal hygiene, poverty, and indolence combine to reduce their vigor and efficiency, and operate to keep them in a state of slow but progressive descent in the social scale until they reach a point where degeneracy begins, the inevitable function of which in eliminating the unfit may be witnessed from year to year by those living in the mountains.

In disposition, these people are kindly, peaceable, and hospitable; there are no family feuds, such as are common in other parts of the Virginia mountains; they respect the law and settle most of their personal disagreements by appealing to its aid. Most of their quarrels seem to be caused by difficulties about their women. Morally and religiously, the poorer class as a whole shows itself to be weak. Because they have no very definite purpose in life and no responsibilities such as accompany the ownership of property or a business, they have little incentive to respect rigorously the unwritten ethics of society; the sexual morals of the women are inclined to be loose, and consanguinity is very frequent. Religion consists mostly of emotionalism and practical ethics is generally reduced to questions of expediency, though the people are, as a rule, kind to each other.

Education among this class is rudimentary and the proportion of illiteracy is high. Only the youngest children attend school, and these do so for only a few months in the year. As far as could be ascertained, the children of the poorer classes usually stop school at about the age of thirteen, on an average. It was further observed that the majority of the children enrolled in the schools attended by the poorer classes are girls. The children attending the Red Hill High School come principally from the wealthier families.

The social condition of the poorer people included in class two is found to be that accompanying poverty and thriftlessness in any community of society. Their struggle for existence against an unfavorable economic environment, their incomplete lives, isolation, nourishment insufficient to keep up a state of physical efficiency, and the lack of new blood to strengthen a race hereditarily weak, all react upon their moral and spiritual natures in such a way that they have little positive fiber of character, no ambition, and their minds present a soil whose inertia causes its response to cultivation to be slow and at best uncertain; this latter trait is further intensified by the mental aloofness and suspicion, seemingly so characteristic of mountain peoples, which renders them insusceptible to influences contrary to their inherited traditions, and

makes their reaction to new environmental agencies very sluggish. Education – not of the scholastic type, but of that type which will teach them how to live better and to cope advantageously with their surroundings – will, if applied long enough, do more, perhaps, to improve their status than any other measure that can be devised.

Such are, in general, the social conditions of the poorer classes throughout the entire extent of the Ragged Mountains. There remain yet to be considered those included in class three – the degenerate type.

This class, as has been said, is confined to a single small region between the Almshouse and Arrowhead, and the majority of the people live to the east of the Southern Railway, in the midst of a geological formation yielding a very poor soil. The economic condition of this class is at the lowest point; the lack of fertility of the soil prevents them raising crops of any value; and they are by nature so shiftless and lazy that they do little to earn enough to live upon. Their homes are of the wretchedest type; the cabins are pitifully small, the families occupying them pitifully large; and often the pigs and chickens live in the same room with seven or eight people. Some of the cabins are so tumbled down and open to the weather that it is amazing that human beings can dwell in them, particularly in the winter. The premises about the cabins are in equally as bad condition; stables, pigsties and privies are placed without regard for drainage into the wells and springs; the stables and other outbuildings are often merely shelters, sometimes built of the thick branches of trees; and the fences, porches, and yards are ill kept and unkempt to a degree that is sometimes astonishing. Horses and cows are rarely owned by these people, but nearly every family has one or more pigs and a collection of chickens; there are few agricultural implements, and these of the poorest type, and in bad repair. About each cabin there is usually a small vegetable garden, and those who own land raise indifferent crops of corn; there are rarely seen in this region, in contrast with other sections of the mountains, flowers and other ornamental plants about the houses.

Scarcely any of the people can be said to have occupation; those who own land cultivate small crops of corn and vegetables, but beyond this, no one does any regular work. The men, as a whole, are shiftless and lazy, and will work only when it is absolutely necessary. The women never do any regular work away from their homes, but they occasionally gather berries and chestnuts, which they bring to Charlottesville to sell. The entire class is thriftless to a degree; they live only for the day and are too indolent by nature to make any effort to better themselves. The fact that a large number of persons infected with the “hook-worm” (*Uncinaria Americana*) has been found in this district leads to the supposition that the unfitness and shiftlessness of this class may be due to infection with this parasite; observations have been too few, however, to justify the conclusion that the physical laziness and mental hebetude of this class come from this cause. In appearance, most of the inhabitants are alike and dress alike; their clothing is generally very scanty; many wear cast-off garments obtained, usually, from the mission workers. Begging is very common by people from this neighborhood; they beg in Charlottesville and around the University.

Physically, the people show the effects of their environment; in general, this class is far below the standard of normal physical health, and their laziness and lack of sanitary and hygienic care will tend to keep them so. The adults are about of average height, but the present generation of children looks stunted. The adults are thin, underweight, anaemic, and have very sallow skins; the children are nearly all anaemic (probably from “hook-worm”) and many are rachitic. There is but little tuberculosis, though constitutional diseases are common. There were observed several cases, in successive generations, of an hereditary skin disease (ichthyosis), and a few

cases of syphilis were noted. Another potent cause of physical deterioration is the practice of intermarriage with close consanguinity. Nearly all the people in this section are included under but two surnames; marriages occur early and the women bear many children in rapid succession; all this tends to weaken the stock and to propagate the tendencies toward degeneration. No new blood comes in to strengthen the race, as the people are very clannish and marry among themselves rather than go outside their district.

It is from the standpoint of morals, however, that the degenerative traits of this class are most apparent. In so far as honesty and fair dealing are concerned, the fear of the law causes the people to maintain some semblance of probity; but in those relations which more properly belong to the domain of personal ethics, they make no pretense of obeying even the most elementary moral precepts. Their sins are sins against posterity rather than against present society; for it is in the sexual sphere that their morals are weakest.

The women are practically all promiscuous in their sexual relations, and these are almost always established before marriage – often very young in life; after marriage, they hold the vows in no respect; and very frequently they dispense entirely with the ceremony of marriage. The idea of chastity seems to be beyond the grasp of most of them. They indulge in promiscuous sexual relations, do not regard the marriage vows, live in states of concubinage, and one case was found in which a white woman lived with a negro man, and had in the house children of pure white blood, and some of half white and half negro! In addition to this ordinary promiscuity, many of the women are prostitutes. One house was found in which live ten women, all descended from the same ancestress; this house is locally known as the Ragged Mountain house of prostitution.

In regard to the men, they are, of course, as promiscuous as the women, and hold the marriage vow in as little respect. In addition to ordinary promiscuity, and living with mistresses by whom they have offspring, but to whom they are not legally married, they sometimes go farther, and several cases of curious sexual relationships were discovered; one man, for example, lived in the same house with his legal wife and another woman as well, who was his mistress; there were sixteen children, offspring of the two women and the one man; this family lives contentedly together, all nineteen of them in a single room.

Such promiscuity and depravity of sexual relations causes the people to lose their respect for the integrity of the family; and the great number of illegitimate children found seem to bear no stigmata. These relations, moreover, indicate almost better than anything else the state of degeneration and spiritual deterioration of this class; such sexual laxness is seldom if ever observed among even the most savage races whose notions of morality have not evolved far beyond the earliest stages. The widespread moral degeneration of these people, who live surrounded by civilization, is the clearest sign and worst manifestation of their economic status, their physical weakness, and their mental darkness; it indicates state of both physical and moral unhealthiness that is excessive and deplorable, for a people whose bodily and spiritual balance is even fair will not sink to such depths.

In sum, the social conditions of this third class could hardly be worse. Oppressed by the heavy burden of an extreme poverty, they are not able to maintain their physical and moral efficiency; and this lack of bodily and spiritual stamina tends in its turn to increase their poverty and to intensify their misery. The vicious circle thus formed, operating for generation after generation and unrelieved by the only possible remedy – the right sort of education – has caused this unfortunate community to sink lower and lower until at present their state is truly pitiable. They still retain, however, some shreds of their independence and sturdiness; it is a startling fact

that though they live in a state of extreme poverty in the immediate neighborhood of the county almshouse, very few ever become inmates of that institution. They make a shift to get along and in some manner contrive to maintain themselves.

To alleviate the unfortunate conditions present in this community of the Ragged Mountains the Mission of the Good Shepherd was organized. The work done by the two women who live in this mission cannot be too highly commended, for they are making use of the only lever powerful enough to lift this people from its depths – education. The mission faces a two-fold, difficult task – that of overcoming the mental inertia of the people, and that of finding how to make them respond to the stimulation of a higher ideal of life and morality. It is necessarily a slow, and must at times be a disheartening, work; but those in charge of the mission, inspired by a religious zeal to better the lives of these people, are proceeding with a patience and care that are bringing and will continue to bring results; such unselfish labor for the betterment of so unfortunate a class can excite naught but the most sincere admiration.

CONCLUSION

The committee found that, in the main, the conditions of life in the Ragged Mountains are those to be found in any rural community in which the physical environment is more or less unfavorable, and into which education has not been sufficiently infused to fit the inhabitants to cope advantageously with their surroundings. The larger part of the Ragged Mountain people are reasonably prosperous, of good intelligence and moral fiber, and possess at least a rudimentary education; they are handicapped and held back by the necessity for a continuous struggle with difficult economic conditions, coupled with the native suspicion and inertia of mind peculiar, seemingly, to mountain people everywhere.

We have found, furthermore, that there is a small portion of these people – dwelling, in fact, in a practically separate community – which is vastly more backward, in greater poverty and moral darkness than its neighbors; this group is, apparently, a degenerate type which seems to keep almost entirely aloof from the people who live about it, and resists practically all efforts to improve its condition. Whether these people are of a different stock, whether they came into the mountains at a different period and in different circumstances from the rest of the dwellers in the section, the committee could not discover. The people living in this community, we wish to reiterate, are not the characteristic type of the Ragged Mountain people as a whole; their moral laxity has in times past cast an unmerited reproach upon all the inhabitants of the Ragged Mountains, and the committee is glad to point out and to be able to insist upon the fact that the mountain people dwelling in the entire region do not merit the opprobrium put upon them by a small and seemingly separate community in their midst.

The committee believes that conditions in general in the Ragged Mountains can only be bettered by education, and education of a practical sort; the people need most to be taught how to live. The main difficulty to be overcome is the indifference and suspicion exhibited toward all things new on the part of the people. The economic conditions will improve in proportion as education brings increased knowledge of agricultural methods and farm management. In respect of the community centering about the almshouse, a different and more difficult situation presents itself, for here there will have to be faced not only the mental inertia common to all the mountain people, but a physical and moral degeneracy as well, which will complicate and impede all efforts of an educational and uplifting nature; this is a problem, however, for the specialist and not the general investigator; it is well worth the attention of any one interested in the abnormal in social processes.

Two problems of especial interest were noted by the committee:

1. The origin of, and the causes of, the degeneracy in the community centering about the almshouse.
2. The causes underlying the fact that the Ragged Mountain people as a whole are so backward, so mentally isolated, in the midst of an advanced and cultured civilization.

These problems forced themselves constantly upon our attention; but the committee, in view of its more general task and limited time, did not feel itself capable of undertaking to look into them. We trust that future investigators, stimulated, perhaps, by our contributions, will attempt to solve them.