

Study of Diseases of Children, of London, at its meeting on October 17th, 1902, which had been under his care for hydrocephalus since the age of eight months, which had been arrested by repeated lumbar puncture. The hydrocephalus was secondary to basal meningitis. In all, thirty-five ounces of cerebro-spinal fluid were drawn off by repeated tappings, each being followed by a gain in weight and marked improvement in general health. Although the hydrocephalus had been arrested the child was blind and lacking in intelligence.—*Archives of Pediatrics*.

According to Bourneville traumatic epilepsy only is amenable to surgical treatment. The intervention should be early and many years should not have elapsed since the first attacks.—*Report of Cong. of Neurologists and Alienists of French Speaking Countries. 1902.*

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PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF

MEDICAL OFFICERS OF AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS FOR

IDIOTIC AND FEEBLE-MINDED PERSONS

HELD IN WASHINGTON, D. C., MAY 15TH AND 16TH, 1903,

BY

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FOR the twenty-seventh time this Association convenes in annual session. These sessions are held that we who are engaged in the care of the feeble-minded may gather together, become acquainted with each other and compare notes, so that the experience of each member may benefit and become the property of all. Fortunate are we who gather together to-day in finding so much accomplished by those strong and zealous men, those pioneers in the work, who founded the Association.

Twenty-seven years ago, at the time of the organization of the Association, there were but a few more than two hundred feeble-minded persons receiving institution care in Pennsylvania. At present this number has increased almost ten fold, and this is but an example of the progress made in the states which then possessed institutions for the feeble-minded. Many states, which at that time made no provision for the care of this class of their defectives, are now provided with admirable institutions caring for large numbers of the feeble-minded; and other states are now seriously contemplating the construction of similar institutions. At present eighteen states are caring for over twelve thousand feeble-minded persons in special institutions, either

owned by the state or receiving state aid, while about three hundred feeble-minded persons are being cared for in private institutions.

With the increase of general knowledge, and particularly with increasing interest in sociology by the intelligent people of the country, our work is being better understood and appreciated. We trust and believe that the time is not far distant when public sentiment will demand that the state segregate all the feeble-minded whose presence in the home and community is a constant source of danger. It will take time and money to accomplish this; however, we must not let the public interest decrease, but must continue as missionaries in the field, and whenever and wherever the opportunity presents be the educators of the people, particularly our legislators, in matters pertaining to the feeble-minded and the importance of their segregation and control under state supervision.

It is not sufficient that accommodations be provided for the great army of feeble-minded, it is our duty to point out the necessity of laws governing their control by the state. The question of who should be sent to our institutions should be decided by those most competent to judge; and, when placed within an institution, removal should not depend upon the mere whim or misguided judgment of parents or friends totally incompetent to judge of the possible consequence of their removal. Too often a feeble-minded child, after spending a year or two in an institution and learning the rudiments of some occupation or trade, and to be a useful, happy and contented member of the institution community, is removed by relatives who, visiting the institution, see the child clean, tidy, cheerful, happy and industrious and thinking if so in the institution he will be the same at home, remove him. Thus the training received instead of proving an aid, proves to be a detriment, aiding as it does in obtaining a liberty which the child can only use to his own degradation and the degradation of society; miserable himself, possibly becoming the parent of children as defective as himself and probably ultimately to be restrained of his liberty in the almshouse, or possibly the jail or penitentiary. If allowed to remain in the institution, instead of shame, crime and pauperism, the feeble one might have spent a useful, harmless life, filled with honest labor and the pleasure of congenial companionship.

We cannot be too emphatic in pointing out the importance of placing in proper hands the legal control of the admission into and removal from institutions for the feeble-minded.

We hear much of the danger to the nation by pollution from without through the immigration of those unfit for citizenship, far more than of the danger by pollution within through the propagation of children who will never be fit for citizenship. As a foe within is more to be feared than one from without, so should we guard more zealously against the development of ills within than against the entrance of those from without. We must keep constantly before the people the importance of making at least as strenuous efforts to protect the coming race of American citizens, by preventing the propagation of unfit children within our own land, as are made by the Bureau of Immigration to protect it by preventing the entrance of the unfit from foreign lands.

In regard to this matter let me say a few words about special classes for

feeble-minded children in connection with the public schools. Such classes are springing up rapidly in the large cities throughout the United States. We grant that existing conditions seem to make them a necessity in order that the development of normal children may not be hampered by the presence, in the class room, of the defective ones; but is it not possible that these special classes are preventing the sending of feeble-minded children to institutions at the time when they should come under institution training? If the child will ultimately be unfit for citizenship and must eventually be deprived of his liberty is it not evident that it is best, both for the child, his family and society at large, that he be sent to a suitable institution as early as possible after reaching the age when he should attend school, before undesirable habits are formed; before he becomes accustomed to street life, if a child of the poor, or habituated to habits of idleness if a child of the rich? Do we not find that those children who enter the institution early in life are more happy and contented and can be trained to be more useful than those who come to the institution later in life?

In this connection the report of Mrs. Ellen Pinsent, Chairman of the after-care committee of the Birmingham, England, School Board, is of the greatest interest. The committee of which Mrs. Pinsent is chairman, she states, was first organized to find situations for those children who left the special classes capable of working, and also to see if there was anything that could be done for the hopeless cases where the children were found to be incapable of work. While this was the immediate object of this committee it was by no means the most important. The most important work was the investigation of the worth of the education given in special classes for the defectives. It was hoped, that if for some years after they had left school the careers of the children who had passed through this course of training were closely watched and accurately reported, the committee would have some definite facts to place before the school board which would enable them to judge how far the special classes really met the requirements of mentally deficient children.

To show how many of those who left the special classes and ultimately became self-supporting, or even partially so, Mrs. Pinsent states that as yet the committee has not been in existence a sufficient length of time to give extensive statistics; however, she gives the following facts:

We had forty-eight children on our list to begin with, and of these we found it impossible to trace thirteen. This, I hope, is a larger percentage than will ever occur again. Many of these children had left school for some years before we began work. Now that each class is taken up at once and constantly watched we shall have a better chance of tracing them, though I am afraid we shall always lose a certain number. The parents are perpetually flitting, and as there are so few after-care committees when a child goes to another town we have no organization to whom we can hand him or her over. Before passing on I should like to point out that children who are perpetually wandering are almost always the offspring of low and degraded parents; and, probably if they were found, would swell the numbers of the incapable and hopeless. This should not be forgotten when conclusions are drawn from our statistics. It also points to the advisability of such chil-

dren being placed in a boarding school where they could be kept under permanent control, and not left to the chance of their parents remaining in the neighborhood of a special class or of an after-care committee. There can be no doubt that many parents of feeble-minded children, belonging as they so often do to the street-hawker and irregularly employed class, are even more migratory than the rest of town populations. This is one of our most disheartening difficulties; for, unless the after-care association can establish permanent custodial homes it must always lose a large percentage of cases, and every lost case may mean, and generally does mean, a future generation of feeble-minded children.

"Of the thirty-five remaining persons, sixteen are at work. The average age of these sixteen persons is seventeen years, and the average weekly wage which they can earn is 5s 9d (about \$1.43); one boy earns 10s (about \$2.50) a week. We have not at present been established long enough to know how often these persons change their situations, or the amount of time wasted during such changes, which if considerable, would, of course, lower their weekly wage. But, speaking generally, I believe that our investigation will show that they are perpetually changing their situations. Certainly of the four cases which have come under my own eye only one is satisfactory; one person is too bad to work at all; one never keeps his situation more than a few weeks, and the other never more than a few months. Neither of the latter will ever be capable of self-support after their near relations die, and I think it probable that both will find their way into goal. Here they will cost at least as much as in an industrial colony where I feel sure that working under supervision both could have contributed largely to their own support. These cases I believe to be typical of most of the sixteen. A small percentage will get along passably, but by far the greater number will eventually be found in the prison, the penitentiary or the workhouse. The next seven children on our list, although capable of work, are out of work. This you will notice is nearly one-third of the total number of cases in which the subjects are capable of work. Our after-care committee will probably get them work of some kind, but by that time others will have lost their situations and I fancy our books will show that this is about the usual proportion. Our utmost efforts will probably prove inadequate, there will always remain a third doing nothing. If those who fail to keep their situations were placed in industrial colonies they would work continuously with greater profit both to themselves and to society at large.

"I have now accounted for twenty-three out of our thirty-five children. Of the remaining twelve, one has died, five are so bad that they should be placed at once in some asylum or home, and six are being looked after fairly well at home, but are incapable of work and will have to be provided for on the death of the mother. I have said fairly well looked after, and by this I mean that they are fed, clothed, and kept passably clean; but I do not for a minute believe that they are protected from all chance of moral harm. Some of them are girls who should never be allowed out of the house by themselves, instead of which I know that they are prone to wander alone for hours in the streets. A poor mother with other children cannot give her whole time and strength to the weak-minded member of the family. The child must take a

her chance during the busy hours of the day. These girls are often of a clinging and affectionate disposition and will follow any man who chooses to speak Kelly to them. We who pay the rates and the taxes will have to support these girls in the end. Would it not be wiser to do so at once, instead of waiting until they have produced others for us and our children to support?

Once more it is for permanent industrial and custodial homes which we must work, and the chief duty of an after-care committee, is to collect the evidence which will demonstrate their necessity. No after-care committee, however vigilant its members, can watch over the feeble-minded at all hours of the day and keep them from harm; but what an after-care committee can do is to show the public the result of its investigations and go on publishing facts until rate-payers, poor-law guardians, and city councillors are convinced."

It is earnestly to be hoped that after-care committees will be established, if indeed they do not already exist, in connection with the training classes for defective children in America. If so, may we not expect them to furnish evidence to support the view that, with few exceptions, the children sent to the special schools should have been sent to institutions where they would be under constant supervision and trained for a life of usefulness with congenial companionship within the institution colony.

From a practical point of view, considering the conditions as they exist, the lack of sufficient accommodations in our institutions and the difficulty of obtaining the consent of parents to consign their children to a permanent residence in an institution, the special schools are no doubt a necessity and do a good work. Is it not true, however, that where it is evident that a child is feeble-minded the interest of the family and posterity are best conserved, not by temporizing, but by facing the condition in his early years and placing him in an institution, where these feeble ones may associate with each other, working and playing all their lives, children to the end—but happy, harmless children instead of dangerous and degraded ones?

There are, no doubt, many children not feeble-minded who, through prolonged illness or lack of opportunity, are far behind children of their own age in the public school curriculum. There are other children who, through lack in the faculty of merely memorizing, appear to disadvantage among their fellow pupils, but who are by no means feeble-minded.

If, as pointed out by Dr. Wilmarth, the special schools were so conducted as to constitute clearing houses to separate the inherently feeble-minded from those whose mental growth is retarded by circumstances temporary in character, they would serve a useful purpose; but if they are attempting the impossible, the education of the inherently feeble-minded to equip them to battle single-handed in the struggle for existence and thus prevent their entrance into institutions during their early years, they are harmful. It is our duty to point out the limitation of usefulness for such schools.

TUBERCULOSIS AMONG FEEBLE-MINDED CHILDREN:—On looking over the reports of institutions we are struck with the frequency with which tuberculosis appears in the mortuary tables. Tuberculosis, "The White Plague," which to-day is receiving so much attention throughout the world is nowhere more prevalent than among the feeble-minded. It no doubt plays a larger part in the etiology of feeble-mindedness than has heretofore been ascribed to

it. In the gradation of our children within the institution are we doing all we can to separate the tubercular from the non-tubercular? Certainly it is of greater importance to do so than to separate the epileptic from the non-epileptic.

Those of us who spend our lives among the feeble-minded become familiar with and accustomed to their peculiarities. The filthy habits of the low grade child, or the perverseness of the morally deficient, no longer affect us as when we first took up our abode in their midst. The epileptic seizure no longer disturbs our sensibilities as when we first beheld the muscular contortions, the heavy breathing, the frothing mouth and cyanotic countenance of the unfortunate victim of this awful malady. The deformity of head and body and limb, the strangely formed features which so often accompany the feeble mind, no longer give us horrors or make us see things at night. To all these things we have become more or less inured. It is well that it is so, but let us not become hardened or indifferent.

Do not let us neglect the opportunity for research into the mysteries of psychiatry and pathology which the vast amount of material within our grasp makes possible, but do not let the scientific aspect of our work make us less thoughtful or attentive to the comfort, well-being and happiness of the helpless ones under our charge. Let us see that our experience and added knowledge do not make us indifferent or careless; but rather more kind, more sympathetic, more filled with love for the unfortunate for whom it has been put in our power to do so much.

Remember the words of the Man of Nazareth, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of one of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Remember that the best institution on this earth is the home, and that the nearer we approach home life in the institution the nearer we approach perfection. Let us do our utmost to gain the confidence of the children under our charge, sympathize with them in their troubles, let them see we are pleased when they are joyful. Remember the value of a kind word and let us not be unmindful of the heartaches caused many a sensitive nature by a harsh rebuke. Remember the value of employment in dispelling the gloom from a discontented and unhappy child.

But do not impose, or let others impose, upon the willing ones; but rather, see how the work may be divided that all may lend a helping hand. Let us make our institutions homes where kindness is the ruling spirit and hardships unknown.

Then will we have the love of the children, the gratitude of their friends, the confidence of the people, and above all will we have that peace of mind which passeth understanding.

DISCUSSION

Dr. Barr: I wish we could get our children taken care of for life. When they go out from our schools they are in more danger than ever, but I can-

not convince parents of this. Last week I had the most notorious moral imbecile taken out of my school to be a page in a club in Philadelphia noted for card playing and drinking, but I could not convince the mother of the danger.

Dr. Wilmarth: I think the task of convincing parents is hopeless, but there is no more urgent question before us than to convince legislatures of the necessity of taking children from the community who are going to be a burden to it and who are going to increase the criminals of the land. Our work in the future must be in that line.

Dr. Smith: This is a subject of the most vital importance. I meet it every day. I apprehend that this Association would hardly go on record as saying, "Once in an institution always in an institution," but I would like to hear an expression of opinion which will place those of us engaged in private work and who have not the support of the state and cannot be as independent as men in state institutions,—an opinion which will give us something absolutely definite to work upon, some statement which will enable us to say positively that the feeble-minded should have permanent care. Eastern people seem to be more educated as to possibilities and probabilities in this direction. Dr. Barr in one of his reports refers to the perpetual care of the feeble-minded, and it has staggered everyone to whose notice I have brought it.

Dr. Carson: I think most of the superintendents are in favor of some stringent law which would give us the power to hold cases permanently in institutions. I myself think it would be unwise to have such laws enacted. There would be, perhaps, no objection to a law which gives superintendents discretionary power. The parents are naturally interested in their children, and I do not believe it is possible to pass a law in any state which will take away parental rights. It is, however, important to hold certain cases in institutions. I have never had much difficulty in holding such cases. I have several cases where the parents have tried to get them for years, but without legal process I have retained them. If an attempt were made to bring about a law to permanently restrain and control all feeble-minded persons in institutions there would be a re-action. It is a rule that works both ways. A few years ago a member of the State Board of Charities said he thought there ought to be power to restrain all such persons. I took issue with him and said: "Supposing you had a feeble-minded child, would you be willing to place that child in an institution if you felt that you could never take him away?" He thought a moment and said, "No, I wouldn't do it." That is what would follow. A great many children that ought to be in institutions would be kept away for fear they would be retained permanently. I have always felt it was best to have the law such that it is easy to place them in the institution and easy to take them out, where they have suitable homes, and there are many cases where there is not the slightest objection to their going.

Dr. Wilmarth: I do not think there should be any difficulty in enacting a law that should place such children in the control of an institution, for incorrigible children are placed in reform schools until twenty-one when parental control ceases.