

October 1 / 80

To Governor John S. Pillsbury -

Sir -

We visited the Hospital for the Insane at Rochester on the 29<sup>th</sup> ult: and found nothing noteworthy to report. The Institution is in its usual good order both as to its hygienic condition and general management.

The State is to be congratulated that by the judicious expenditure of the appropriation for the new wing it has secured an excellent overall arranged building at a price considerably less than is usually demanded for public works such as this: great credit is due to Dr. Bowers and the trustees for the good judgment and economy with which the fund has been expended.

It is to be regretted that several months must elapse before the introduction of heating apparatus and furniture renders the new building available for use; a delay which should have been avoided by making the appropriation necessary for these purposes.

Since our last visit, May 26 / 80, there have been sixteen (16) admissions to the house, three (3) deaths, and one (1) elopement. There are now eighty-seven (87) inmates in the hospital, and two (2) are out on "trial visits". The new wing, when filled with utmost capacity, will accommodate one hundred and twenty (120) patients.

Our visit on this occasion to the School for Imbeciles at Faribault only confirms us in our estimate of the great value of the Institution, both present and prospective, and induces us to rely confidently upon the generous support of the next legislature as soon as they shall see for themselves what has been done by Dr. Knight and his assistants for the children committed to their care.

A thesis upon amentia would be out of place in an official paper, yet as we shall probably have no occasion to prepare another report before the expiration of our term of office, we desire to state somewhat more at length than would otherwise be fitting the general grounds upon which we base our urgent recommendation that the School at Faribault, hitherto an experiment, be formally adopted and recognized as one of the established institutions of the State, and that such aid be extended to it as shall be amply sufficient to carry out to their fullest extent the beneficent objects of its foundation.

Some reference has been made to this subject in former reports; but we feel that its importance warrants us in again adverting to it, and more in detail.

The population of our State by the late census is 780,000: if we apply the usual rule of estimating that there is one feeble minded child in every thousand of the population, we shall have 780 of this class in Minnesota.

It is customary to divide these children, defective in brain power, into three grades; idiots, imbeciles and feeble-minded, according to the degree of mental deprivation. Happily the proportion of the profound type of idiocy is small; it is comparatively rare to find a human being absolutely without a

spark of intelligence: more frequently they are found to possess the undeveloped germs of intellect and are capable of some improvement. In a larger number, known as imbeciles, the mental faculties have been developed to a very limited extent; and somewhat higher in the scale of intellectual endowment we find the most numerous class, known as weak-minded.

The two latter interest us most, not only as humanitarians, because they are susceptible of the greatest improvement; but also as citizens, because from them, if neglected, the greatest amount of mischief and even of crime is to be apprehended.

We do not, however, use this fact as an argument for the exclusion of the more deeply afflicted from the shelter of the school: not only they, but their families also, are entitled to our truest sympathy and commiseration; and we cannot permit ourselves to doubt that provision will be made which shall admit of the establishment of what shall be at once an asylum for the hopelessly idiotic, and a school for the training of those whose mental condition is susceptible of improvement.

It would be an insult to the humanity of our State to base an appeal for needed assistance for these little unfortunates upon grounds of charity and philanthropy.

No one who has any conception of what is implied by the terms idiot and imbecile can fail to be deeply moved at the thought of the utter wretchedness of children so afflicted; to whom all the brightness and joyousness of childhood is denied, and for whom, unless aided by instrumentalities beyond the reach of private persons, there is often nothing in prospect but a life of deep degradation, comparable only to that shared in common with them by the less intelligent of the brute creation.

Yet while all this may be conceded, it often happens when the amelioration of the condition of imbeciles is proposed that certain practical, albeit humane persons inquire, "cui bono?"; supposing as many do, either that the end in view is wholly Utopian, or that the amount of possible improvement is so small as to render the needed outlay of time and effort and money unjustifiable.

We therefore desire to speak solely as utilitarians, and to regard only in what may be said the financial and economic interest of the Commonwealth.

The time has gone by when the utility of schools for the feeble-minded can be safely questioned. We cannot now enter into details, but must content ourselves with affirming that since the establishment in 1847 of the first school of this kind in the United States, the testimony in their favor has steadily accumulated; and he who would take issue with it must confront an amount of evidence which would speedily convict him of gross incompetence.

The class we are considering are in a condition directly opposed to that of the insane: the latter are demented; the former, amented. That is, the insane once possessed intellectual powers, but have lost them to a greater or less extent; while imbeciles have the germ of mental endowment which has never been developed. Its analogue is found in a muscle unemployed from birth; to which tho it may never attain the symmetry or force of its fellows, yet a serviceable degree of activity may be imparted by proper training.

“It is not claimed,” says one of the best authorities on this subject, “that these defectives can be brought up to an average normal mentality, yet it has been fully shown that much may be done towards developing in them a higher degree of intellect.” “In fact,” another writer remarks, “when there is the least spark of intelligence to build upon, more may be added until from almost nothing, a half or possibly a three quarter intellectual being may be the result.”

But while all this is true, it is equally certain that the usual methods of instruction are useless. Neither the devotion of parents nor the assiduous efforts of competent teachers in the ordinary schools are adequate to accomplish the desired result.

Experience has proved that only trained instructors in institutions specially fitted for the purpose are competent to meet the requirements of the class in question; and who by the exercise of due patience, tact, and kindness, are able often to effect the greatest improvement in the moral and physical as well as in the mental condition of their pupils.

A visitor to the Pennsylvania Training school tells of a young man who had recently returned to that institution on a visit to his old friends and teachers, and says of him: “He is now earning his own living, and doing it well, yet he was seven years in training at this institution. That is to say – for seven years the State supported him and paid skilled teachers for his training; it took some hundreds of dollars to do it, but the poor imbecile, who must else have remained a life long pensioner upon the almshouse, was converted into an industrious, self-respecting, self-supporting man”: and pointedly adds, “this was not a bad investment for the State.”

A weighty argument for the adoption by the State of the imbecile and feeble minded is that our criminal classes are largely recruited from their ranks. A careful study of the antecedents of the inmates of our reformatories and prisons will show that a large proportion of them belong in varying degrees to this class; and a true economy will prefer the outlay requisite for their enlightenment and education to the far greater expense attendant upon crime with its resulting prosecution and punishment.

A personal inspection of the School at Faribault, however, will enforce our appeal more effectively than argument, of whatever cogency: we regret only that these who witness the proficiency of its pupils could not have seen them when they were first subjected to its training less than 18 months ago, that they might be able to realize the gratifying progress that has been made in that time; a proficiency which is not only conclusive as to their susceptibility of improvement, but which is most creditable to the faithfulness and efficiency of Dr. Knight and his assistants.

We append two letters written last spring by two of the children now at Faribault, who, when they entered the school, a little more than a year ago, did not even know the alphabet, and could speak but very little English.

We close our series of reports with the confident expectation that our legislature will regard it as a privilege not less than a duty to so provide for the institutions we represent that Minnesota shall possess a yet stronger claim to the distinction she already enjoys of standing in all charitable and benevolent enterprises in the foremost ranks of her sister states, and in advance of many who are both older and wealthier than herself.

WH Leonard  
G. Weston Wood  
C. H. Boardman  
Commissioners

Dear Brother Caleb.

I was glad that you wrote me a letter. I like to answer it. I can read now in the primer and learn about the earth on the map. I work out doors sometimes after school and water the cows for Charlie. I like to help him.

I am going to work in the garden this summer. I want a new hat to wear to church. I am well, I want you to write soon.

From your Brother, Joseph Erickson.

Dear Brother Philip.

I was very glad to get a letter from you and I thank Mother for the pretty blue ribbon. Yes, we have a Sunday school here, and Miss Hale tells us stories and we sing.

Tuesday and Friday evenings we dance in the school-room. I like it very much.

Can Father send me \$3.00 to buy a pair of shoes and a new hat? I want to go to church. I send love to Mother and all.

Your Sister, Ester Erickson.