

THE RELATION OF THE INSTITUTIONS FOR DEFECTIVES TO THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM.

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There is perhaps no principle more thoroughly recognized by the American people than that of the right of every child to receive a common school education. The public schools, being open to all children who can receive benefit from them and being conducted according to similar methods and standards throughout the country, afford the opportunity for becoming a great clearing house for determining approximately the ability in children sent to them for mental and moral development. The constant effort also to reach a uniformity of standards and methods has led to a more careful differentiation of ability and moral purpose in pupils, and the elimination from the regular classes of such individuals as do not readily respond to their methods, either because of physical defect, reluctance to yield to ordinary discipline, or mental dullness. There are thus three of these eliminated groups: First, the physically defective, only, the deaf, the blind and the cripple; second, the truant and incorrigible; third, the mentally subnormal and feeble-minded. Each of these classes, of course, requires a specialized method of treatment.

The Deaf, so far as I can gather from the correspondence had with those engaged in their education, have no special topic for championship at this general session of the Conference, except the necessity for compulsory education. The reasons for this latter are, of course, the same as for hearing children, except that they are more emphatic because the deaf child is so largely dependent upon specialized training for his very language by which to overcome his natural isolation. It is therefore essentially true that the degree of his education is the measure of his independence.

The Blind, barring the question of language, are still more dependent upon specialized education than the deaf, because fewer fields of lucrative employment are open to them, hence, their training whether music, piano tuning, or other occupation, must be of a high order to enable them to compete with seeing people in the same specialty. Only a little over one-half of the blind children in the community of school age are receiving educational advantages. The necessity for compulsory education is evident. There are about 70,000 blind in the United States of all ages. About 4,500 are in special schools.

The blind present some problems peculiar to themselves. While the purpose of this paper is to discuss general principles rather than details, two matters of general public interest should be referred to as suggested by Supt. Thos. S. McAloney of Pittsburg, viz. :

First: The parents and relatives of a blind child naturally spoil him. They anticipate his every want and he is not required to do anything useful either for himself or others, and when he is finally brought to school his hands are weak and practically useless. He cannot care for himself and it takes years of hard work to overcome the defects caused by his lack of training. The parents of a blind child should treat him as they treat his seeing brother or sister. He should be required to perform little household duties and taught to dress and care for himself. He should be sent out to romp and play like other children and get the fresh air and exercise needed to build up his body. He should be made to feel that he is a responsible creature and that something is expected from him.

The general public, also, in many respects, sap the self-reliance of the blind. Through their sympathy and generosity they encourage the blind to be beggars.

Second: More than one-third of the cases of blindness in infancy is preventable. Carelessness or ignorance on the part of nurses and mothers, and sometimes of physicians, in the treatment of the eyes of the new-born infant is accountable for a large number of cases of blindness. A campaign of education is being carried on in several states (more particularly in the State of New York), showing the people how blindness can be prevented. This campaign has resulted in much good and blindness is now on the decrease.

The State of New York has a law requiring nurses and physicians to report all cases of new-born babies with weak eyes, and homes for blind babies and babies with weak eyes are now established in several of our large cities. These babies receive treatment from the most skillful oculists and more than one-fourth of them are restored to either normal or partial sight.

Of the large number of blind, however, in this country, over two-thirds lost their sight after school age.

The Deaf-Blind, even, are no longer barred from education, thanks to the highly specialized training devised for Laura Bridgman and Helen Keller, and now being applied to other pupils in this country as demonstrated so beautifully by Dr. Tate and Miss Blanche Hanson in the case of Vera Gammon.

The Cripples are now being provided where necessary, with transportation to school at public expenses in some of our larger cities. Their right to surgical assistance is also being more generally recognized. I am proud that Minnesota has a hospital school for cripples—a regular state institution. I may state in passing, that it owes its origin to the simple, earnest, disinterested statements and appeal of a crippled young woman, to the appropriation

committee of a Minnesota legislature, and its permanent establishment to the excellent management and successful work of its medical superintendent and his associates.

Truants and Incurables form another partially eliminated group, the discussion of whose treatment is not suggested by the title of this paper; but truants, incurables and mentally deficient classes, overlap much more than the public at large imagine. Many cases of apparent mental dullness and many others of apparent incurability are due to common causes, viz., lowered physical vitality from poor diet, poor ventilation, nervous excitement, cigarette smoking, and depressing hygienic conditions generally, or immoral, vicious and depraved influences that stunt or pervert the natural instincts and impulses of childhood, or possibly deprivation from educational opportunities by forced child labor. Apparent dullness may result from unrecognized defective vision or hearing, irritability of disposition from reflex irritations—the presence of adenoid growths in the air passages, etc. The most valuable work that a school medical inspector can do is to carefully examine these cases physically and mentally, and the information so obtained, when supplemented by investigations as to their home environments and the report of teachers—when in school—will practically determine their classification. After the physician has employed his skill to the removal of remedial causes some will proceed successfully in the common schools, some will require temporary discipline in a parental school, some will be assigned to the classes for backward children and some will be found truly feeble-minded.

This leads to the special consideration of *Backward and Feeble-Minded* children. The terms employed in designating these classes do not have the same meaning when used by different people, hence, the necessity of explaining my own interpretation of them.

By a backward child, I mean one who is simply slow to learn, but whose whole intellectual nature is well balanced; who in proportion to his mental grasp, possesses good judgment; who, while he learns slowly, reasons correctly, and whose judgment, so far as his limited experience goes, is good; who possesses that indefinable something that we call common sense, and the power of application, so that his progress, even though it be slow, is continuous. Such children may not be able to make sufficient progress in the grades of the common schools to be kept in the regular classes, but, if proper opportunity is given them, will develop into good average citizenship. The

teacher may not recognize this condition from his work with books, and pronounce him feeble-minded; but the child must be studied with reference to his aptitude and application to other things coming into his life. Boys of this character not infrequently have been dropped from the public schools as failures, who afterward made successful, though not brilliant, business men. Some of them have been to the public institutions for feeble-minded, and are among the few who go back to their communities and cease to be a burden to the commonwealth. The training of these is the special function of the special classes in the public schools.

The Feeble-Minded Child, even of the highest grade, lacks in ability for persistent application; or, should he possess this in a reasonable degree, he lacks capacity for good judgment, the common sense so necessary to properly interpret his own relation to others. He is always in a greater or less degree out of harmony with the outer world. His capacity for intellectual development, or acquiring skill in manual pursuits, is limited. He is not only slow in the improvement he makes, but he is unable to reach the degree of development which the backward child can attain. He is handicapped and his limitations fixed by some abnormality of the brain or nervous system. His most valuable asset is his capacity for acquired and assigned routine industry. He it is whose life should be under continuous supervision that his energies may be properly and economically directed; and as he contributes his best efforts, whether they represent more than the equivalent of his support, a half of his support, a tenth of his support, or an absolute dependence, he is entitled to a happy and protected life.

The correlation of the public schools and the public institutions for children with reference to the borderland cases, is of the utmost importance. Theoretically no one questions the advisability of retaining in the public schools every child who can make reasonable progress therein towards successful citizenship; and very few who have had the opportunity and taken the pains to study the matter closely, question the necessity of retaining the truly feeble-minded (or at least these as a class) permanently under institution guardianship. The practical difficulty is for the common school authorities to properly diagnose the case of the pupil who, for any of the causes above enumerated, drops behind, in, or out of the regular school classes. There is a special field for the organization and maintenance of classes for backward and for truant children under

the supervision of the public school system, especially in the cities where the number of pupils properly belonging to said classes is sufficient to justify the expense involved. The important functions of these special classes, as already indicated, are, first, to make a more careful diagnosis of cases; second, eliminate the unsuited and secure medical and hygienic assistance where necessary; third, give the backward child his opportunity; and fourth, collect data concerning conditions that contribute to causation. Merely backward children should be started successfully on their independent careers, and truly feeble-minded children should be, after due trial, returned to their homes to be committed to the public institution, whenever their condition at home and the interests of the child make it desirable. Naturally the reluctance of parents, first, to recognize mental deficiency in their own children; and second, to send them away from home, even when their limitations are more or less definitely recognized, will result in sending some children to these classes that should be sent to the public institution. The history of the special classes, both in England and this country, shows that this latter has been the tendency. Over sanguine advocates of these classes, like earlier organizers of institutions for the feeble-minded, promised too much. In London, England, special classes were organized sixteen years ago, and there are now over sixty classes and three thousand pupils in that city. The same heroic courage that instituted this work has since required a careful analysis of results. In Birmingham was organized about six years ago, what is termed an After-Care Committee, that has kept a careful record of the pupils from these classes in Birmingham. In October, 1904, Mrs. Pinsent, for the committee, made a report on the eighty-three cases of mentally defectives whose histories they had.* From this report, since published in the *Charity Organization Review* (March, 1905), and the *Journal of Psycho-Asthenics* (March, 1906), we learn that only twenty-six were wage-earners, and from this report I quote:

"The average weekly wage has gone down and not up, as it should. This is probably due to two causes: the general depression of trade, during which unskilled feeble-minded individuals are the first to suffer for want of work; and also the undoubted fact that feeble-minded persons tend to degenerate on leaving school, when discipline and control are relaxed, and there is nothing to counteract the bad influence of degraded surroundings. It should also be borne in mind that many of these wage-earning

*Read at the Guild-Hall Conference in England in October, 1904.

cases frequently change their situations, and that, therefore the average year's earnings would give a lower figure owing to employment being intermittent. From these facts, it is safe to conclude that only a small percentage even of the wage earners will become entirely self-supporting. Yet all these wage-earning cases are capable of work, and it is probable that if working under supervision in a colony, this work would be much more remunerative, and it would undoubtedly be perfectly continuous. So much for those who have left our special schools capable of earning wages. We still have to consider the larger class who are stated in the annual report to be doing no work, though many are capable of simple manual work under supervision. There are thirty-three of such cases recorded. These, added to those who are wage-earners, but incapable of remaining so, would make a very large percentage of feeble-minded individuals who will eventually have to be supported by the community. I have elsewhere worked out the percentage, based on our after-care evidence, and the result was about seventeen per cent; the remaining eighty-three per cent. will require permanent protection and partial support."

Mrs. Pinsent suggests that these results would be more satisfactory if the children could be compelled to attend the special classes with more regularity and be under their influence and training for a longer period; and, in addition to that, the introduction of manual training would be of great advantage, and suggests that work begun in the schools could be continued in the industrial colony with better results to the individual.

Turning to this country, where the first "Special Class" was opened in Providence in 1894, my search for a statement of results discloses the following from Miss Scofield, supervisor of the kindergarten department to which these classes in that city are assigned, published in the superintendent's report for 1905-6:

While it has been proved that special classes connected with the public school system can do much for the development of our children, by increasing the mental power and making them less of a burden in the home and community by giving them interests and opening avenues of usefulness, yet it is useless to think of their ever being like normal children, or becoming normal men and women. They will always lack judgment and common sense, and must ever work under guidance. They will also lack in power of self-control, and this makes them peculiarly susceptible to evil influences. They easily become victims of the vicious, or centers of vicious influences themselves. If they have wise guidance and good home influences, all may go well, but, if not, the only safe thing for them and for the community is for them to be placed in an institution, where they may be protected for life. A number of those who have left our schools in the last three years had been so trained that, with a little additional training along special lines, they could easily have paid their board in an institution in manual work. But, in many instances where children have left school to go to work, the next thing we have heard "they had lost their job," and perhaps gone to another, and presently they are drifting about the streets, a menace to society, and it is only a matter of time

when they, or their descendants, will have to be supported at public expense. Our schools are doing much, especially for the borderland cases, and for those whose parents would never consent to have the children removed from home, but these schools can never take the place of an institution where they would have special care through twenty-four hours of the day, instead of five.

These testimonies taken from the oldest classes—one under the educational conditions of England and the other the corresponding but quite different educational conditions of America—are exceedingly valuable. On the other hand, the schools for feeble-minded have been seeking to solve their particular problems. Many of us were taught by our predecessors that the home life in a restricted community, with the various activities and interests of the world outside, reduced, as it were to miniature, and with an absolute ban on marriage and reproduction, afforded the best and happiest solution of the question of the feeble-minded. The experience of the last two decades has strengthened this sentiment and has served to develop a little more definitely the policy in regard to the character of training involved. Less value is now placed upon the long time given to classroom work for the higher mental grades, and the line is drawn less sharply between the higher and lower grades. In other words, we are emphasizing industrial training and trying to reach larger numbers and to fit them for useful employment of a simple nature in an agricultural and industrial community, rather than to give intensified and long term training to a few only. We find that better results are obtained as to industry and happiness—and I think they should be associated with our people—by colonizing the trained boys as they grow to manhood, at some distance from the parent institution. The latter with adequate facilities for classification, will serve two important functions, viz., first, the maintenance of a complete training school for both sexes; and, second, provision in separate and suitable quarters for the humane and kindly care of the helpless and low mental grades. The question of colonizing the girls has not yet been worked out, and the nature of the employments to which they are best suited, has made colonizing unnecessary so far; the provision for colonizing the older boys removed the one possible reason that might otherwise be cited in its favor.

EPILEPTIC CHILDREN

should receive more attention than has heretofore been given them. They should not attend the ordinary school classes, both because of the effect of their seizures upon normal children, and because

they should not be forced or allowed to follow a set curriculum of study intended for healthy children. School work should be prescribed for them upon competent medical advice, just as a dose of medicine would be; the development of physical health being of supreme importance. Generally speaking, life in the open air, a carefully regulated dietary, plenty of physical exercise and active interest in constructive or other definite physical occupations, are very important. Epileptics are prone to introspection and their friends usually unwittingly encourage this tendency by constant reference to their disease when talking with them or of them in their presence. They are usually either over indulged or so frequently crossed that the irritability induced by the disease itself, is increased and intensified. The fact of the occurrence of epileptic seizures, is in itself an indication of a highly sensitive nervous organism and suggests the danger of intellectual and emotional overstimulation and the necessity for definitely planned motor activities and the development of self-control. Special classes organized for epileptics should have a medical adviser skilled in neurology and thoroughly versed in the nature of the particular group of symptoms known as epilepsy. There is no known specific for the cure of this affliction, but there is a possibility of a developmental increase of stability in the nervous system during childhood and adolescence under favorable conditions, which latter the competent medical adviser is best qualified to designate.

To my mind the greatest sociological problem involved in the relation of the public schools to the special classes is the proper handling of some of the borderland cases; those who lack the mental and moral stability of the typical backward child, but whose quick perceptions and plausible though superficial characters so readily mislead their relatives, teachers and neighbors. It is a well known fact that no small percentage of criminals and prostitutes are derived from these borderland groups. In our own state's prison over seven per cent. of the inmates and in the reformatory about ten per cent. are pronounced of inferior mentality by the warden and superintendent, respectively. If to these were added the inmates derived originally from the truant and incorrigible groups, the percentage would be increased very much. Again add to these the thousands of tramps and vagrants and other direct or indirect dependents and then remember that a very large percentage of these cases could have been directed into normal, useful citizenship

by the operation of an extension of our educational system such as suggested, and the importance of this matter can be more fully appreciated. We can not overlook the question of heredity, but on the other hand we can not emphasize too much the necessity for good environment for little children and youth.

The study of the home environments of mentally defective and incorrigible children, already referred to, is a matter of immense importance in the future study of causation. The juvenile courts and auxiliary probation systems are bringing intelligent study to bear upon many of these borderland cases. The proximity of the public schools to their homes enables the teacher, the medical and truant officers to learn at first hand so much more of the home conditions and influences that affect the natures and temperaments of the children than it is possible for institution officials to obtain.

There are ominous indications of a decided increase in the proportionate number of state beneficiaries and we should utilize all reasonable means of acquiring information tending to throw light upon causation.

This generation may not be able to discern from the data collected by the agencies mentioned, the family physician and the state institutions, all the causes or suggest all the remedies, but let us hope that the experience of this age may become the wisdom of the next, and the Eutopian dreams of the present may become the practical realizations of the future. Be this as it may, there is no excuse for neglecting the duties we owe to the children of today.

THE INSTITUTION AS A LABORATORY FOR THE PUBLIC SCHOOL.

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It is necessary, under the title of this talk, to broaden the usual meaning of the word laboratory. I would have it mean a place of study and investigation, from the results of which the institution men and women may offer certain suggestions to the workers in the public schools. The public school teacher has no time to make careful studies of her pupils, neither has the principal nor superintendent. The public schools today may well be com-