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## PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS, FARIBAULT MEETING, 1890.

By DR. A. C. ROGERS, Faribault, Minnesota.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—As a partial acknowledgment of the honor which you have conferred upon me, I shall attempt briefly, in accordance with the annual custom of this office, to refer to some of the matters which seem to me to be of importance in our work and of common interest to us all. The first thought that overwhelms us is the magnitude of the harvest and the scarcity of laborers. This little gathering represents the only organized body on the American continent devoted entirely to the interests of the feeble-minded, idiotic, and epileptic. We do not apprehend that the laborers would be few if the necessity for work were better understood.

To a few of us the story of the last half-century is a familiar one. The history of the labors of that little group of devoted men, three of whose portraits grace these walls, is an oft-told tale. Four of them have passed to the other shore, their heads silvered by age. They gave the vigor and energy of their lives to the organization and management of schools for this class, and when we visit these schools and the others since established, and find that several thousand children have been the recipients of their benefits, we realize that much has been done. On the other hand, when we remember that there are at least one hundred thousand of this class on the continent, and that of our forty-three States and five Territories, together with the provinces of Canada, only sixteen have organized any work in their behalf; and that, further, but few children are receiving any care or training by private means, and that the whole public and private effort is reaching less than five per cent. of the class to which it applies, we realize that we are but pioneers in a vast field.

The next fact that forces itself upon our attention is the prevailing ignorance of the number of people whose mental infirmity deprives them of the ordinary means of education and incapacitates them for the ordinary privileges and responsibilities of life. We talk of these things till they are very trite, and we hesitate to repeat them for fear of impressing the public too strongly with a belief in our own intellectual limitations. How often the visitor to one of our schools exclaims in utter astonishment, "I did not suppose there were so many in the whole world!" or something to that effect.

There is always a quick response on the part of our people when a call is made to assist in uplifting humanity, and that our work is slow in gaining recognition in any State is almost altogether owing to this ignorance as to the number of defective persons.

People must know that there is an average of two such persons for about every thousand people, and then take the rule home to their own communities for trial when the subject presents itself to them in a new light. For the purpose of illustration, let us take the census returns of 1880, which we know do not give us anywhere near the correct number of defectives, and select a few counties, outside of the large cities, in various States at random. Starting with Minnesota, we find Carver County with twenty-two, Fillmore with forty-four, Goodhue with thirty-one, Nicollet with thirty-six, Rice with twenty-five, and Stearns and Waseca with thirty each. Take Maine: the little counties of Lincoln and Waldo had sixty-three and ninety-two respectively, Somerset eighty, and Washington eighty-five. Away West, among the mountains of California, we find Contra Costa with sixteen, El Dorado with eighteen, Napa with twenty-six, Sonoma with twenty-eight, and San Joaquin with forty-one. The State of Missouri, with one hundred and seventeen counties, averaged twenty-eight to each. Tennessee, with ninety-four counties, averaged thirty-seven. The old State of Pennsylvania averaged ninety-seven to each of her sixty-seven counties. From the little District of Columbia, beneath the very shadow of the nation's capitol, were reported one hundred and seven. So we might continue all over the continent only to find similar results. Now, add to this the shortage which for various causes well understood reduced these figures below the truth, and again supplement this result by the natural increase during ten years, and the grand total tells its own story.

It follows that our work must be aggressive, at least to the extent of keeping the public informed of its status, its objects, and its results.

When the systematic organization is once properly established for the training of this class, and the people understand it, they support it generously. If you ask why, the answer is found in the simple statement that it reaches the homes, the primary units of society, upon the perfection of which the highest type of civilization depends. Whatever affects the homes, whether for good or evil, affects the community, the State, the nation.

When we take the imbecile capable of marked improvement, and by systematic training develop him into a bread-winner, though only so under the watchful eye of his *alma mater*, or bring the dullard under influences that inspire him to progress instead of offering discouragements, and thus

send him out to successfully battle with the world, the result is worth to the State what it costs ; and I know of no charity more worthy or beneficent than that which succors the family where a helpless idiot enslaves the hands of those upon whom the family are dependent for their support to such an extent that the daily bread of all its members must be supplied them from outside. Love may render cheerful homage, but this slavery is complete. The mother with a bright infant, though she may be compelled to work out by the day for their support, can find friends to care for her child while she labors, but not so with the more unfortunate mother. If, in her desperation, she seeks such assistance she rarely secures it. The presence of her child is not wanted and seldom permitted where her work would otherwise be in demand. It is not uncommon in our Western States, where the struggle for home is often waged at a disadvantage, for the institution to render just that assistance which changes a whole family from a condition of dependence to one of self-support.

As to the scope of our work, there is probably a general unanimity of opinion among those engaged in it. Experience has shown it to be almost impossible to provide for any one class exclusively, because of the various grades of idiocy, imbecility, and weak-mindedness,—the classes that can be very much improved and those that can be only slightly so. The gradations through infancy, childhood, youth, adult, and old age so blend one with another that no fixed rule or line can be maintained. Again, some are capable of profiting by training through a longer term of years than others, and then the epileptic class forms a percentage of all grades of mental fatuity. If the institution undertakes to confine its admissions to selected cases alone, it must assume arbitrary and unwarranted distinctions that are sure to work injury and injustice. If the principle of aggregation for these people is correct in the first place, and we believe thoroughly in the light of the present day that it is, at least, the lesser evil, we can do nothing less than accept all. Let the line of distinction be incapacity to attain to reasonable mental development by the ordinary public-school methods from lack of intellectual vigor or by reason of epilepsy. Extremes of age should be no disqualification. No one can take the place of an intelligent and loving mother to the infant, when such mother can spare the necessary attention ; but that child is not too young for admission when its individuality becomes prominent either as an element of disturbance among other children or as an object of a disproportionate share of attention and care. In homes of wealth or competence special provision can and should be made for such children till ten or eleven years of age. Gray hairs and an age positively beyond hope of improvement need not be a bar to admission.

In two directions there is some difficulty experienced in establishing a test for admission,—viz., (*a*) when the child possesses sufficient capacity to improve some in the public school and yet requires more special attention than the teacher can devote to him, and (*b*) when there is marked manifestation of excitement with combative or destructive propensities. For the former class auxiliary schools have been established in Norway and Germany that meet with fair success. The same plan has been proposed in England, but one valid objection has there been urged against it: "Such an education as is given in a special institution could not be given in the ordinary elementary schools, even if there were a class for imbecile children in such schools. The number of children called imbeciles would be extremely small who would be benefited by classes at an ordinary school, because so much of the training depends on care out of school, and if they went to their own homes, where they would not have that care, a good deal of the school education would be wasted." (Report of Royal Commission, etc., sec. 681.) With regard to the latter class, an atmosphere of quiet kindness should be everywhere predominant in the institution, and nothing that gives rise to fear on the part of the children, to say nothing of danger to life and limb, should be tolerated, and these cases introduce an element of this kind. If restraint or isolation is required, it could better be provided at a hospital for insane. This leads us to consider the point that, in my opinion, needs emphasizing more than any other,—viz., the necessity of retaining our pupils and wards for life, not as prisoners, but as pupils, patients, members of a great family living a life of usefulness amid cheerful and happy surroundings. Defective children may be born to families that are above the suspicion of a taint, so far as human insight can discern; but as the "spring can never rise higher than the source," and as men "do not gather grapes of thistles," so are the progeny of imbecile and epileptic stock, unless leavened by a correspondingly strong stock, sure to be in a greater or less degree fatuitous. It seems to me we should at once recognize the importance to society of retaining these people under legal control for life. It is true that interference in any cases with parental authority is a serious affair. In most cases there will be no difficulty in obtaining the co-operation of parents in this matter, and so far as possible a sense of responsibility should be maintained by the parent for the child; but the State certainly has a right to interfere in the case of feeble-minded persons when the parents are manifestly incompetent or unfit to care for them, if it has in cases of bright children. The reasons for this, as intimated above, are that (1) marriage and the opportunity for reproduction should be absolutely out of the question; (2) another reason follows from the character of development which train-

ing produces. We may describe it by saying that such a child will learn by sufficient repetition what he should do, both as to personal conduct and industrial pursuits, but will never possess the faculty of adaptation to circumstances. Once feeble-minded always feeble-minded, only in a less degree. In the language of Sir A. Mitchell, "However great the improvement, every child leaving the best institutions for the education of imbeciles will still be imbecile. He may be much less imbecile than when he entered, but he will still be imbecile. This, however, is no reason why earnest efforts should not be made to do all that can be done, and it does not seem to us to weaken in any material sense the claims of imbeciles to get such education as they can receive. The judgment will never be good. The struggles of life are too relentless for him. To insure him reasonable success some stronger mind must do his thinking, assist him in planning, and he requires the confidence of those in complete sympathy with him."

"Where the plan of educating the feeble-minded for a term of years and then sending them out has been tried, it has not infrequently happened that the boys and girls who were well trained to work have been sent to hospitals for the insane, because their parents, who are generally their best friends, were incapable of properly controlling them." (Report of Royal Commission, etc., sec. 668.) The experience in this country has been similar. The stronger minds willing to become guardians to these unfortunates, when their fathers and mothers have passed away, are few indeed.

We note with pleasure the efforts of the older institutions organized strictly upon the educational basis to provide for the asylum cases, and for the newer ones to organize their custodial departments simultaneously with the training schools. The inevitable conclusion is being reached that our custodia must embrace very nearly all our older pupils; the training school serving as the preparatory department, the centre of vitality. We do not propose, however, a community of enforced indolence. Bishop Haygood is quoted as saying, "If book-learning does not increase one's earning capacity, it is a business failure; if it decreases it, it is an injury as well as a failure; if it increases wants and decreases capacity to supply them, it is simply ruin,—ruin of all sorts." (*Harper's Weekly*, June 7, 1890, p. 452.) Sir A. Mitchell, above referred to, states very aptly, "It is of very little use to be able to read words of two or three letters, but it is of great use to teach an imbecile to put his clothes on and take them off, to be of cleanly habits, to eat tidily, to control his temper, to avoid hurting others, to act with politeness, to be truthful, to know something of numbers, to go messages, to tell the hour

by the clock, to know something of coins, to enjoy and understand games, and a hundred other such things." (Report of Royal Commission, etc., sec. 666.)

We have faith in the success of productive industries with our boys and girls of the better classes. They learn how to supply their wants to a large degree. If they develop pride and self-respect, they learn to yield willing courtesy to others. If their tastes are so developed as to admire more fine clothing and to keep it neat and clean, they learn how to make that clothing. If it requires more polish for their shoes than it did, they can make the shoes and the brushes to polish them with. If their appetites become slightly more fastidious, they can be readily taught how to produce the delicacies of the garden and the dairy. We say, give our boys and girls the training they are susceptible of, and furnish them opportunities for employment where their labors will result to the best advantage, morally and financially, in a community of happiness and industry.

One class of our patients I cannot pass without a word in their behalf. Ladies and gentlemen, there is nothing within the whole compass of our work that appeals to us with such tragic force as the cause of the epileptic. The victims of this fearful malady are found in every walk of life, and their fate is generally deplorable beyond description. There are many afflictions in life that lay heavy hands upon us, but with them also is some mitigating circumstance, even though it be no more than a reasonable assurance that the calamity will not repeat itself. But the epileptic is never free from the possibility of an attack of this dreadful disease. Whether asleep or awake, at work or at play, whether quietly engaged in social converse or on the public highway, the horrid monster strides beside him to close his fangs upon him at any moment and hold him at the very verge of the grave, if not to leave him lifeless.

Under proper care and treatment the condition of the epileptic can be much alleviated and a percentage cured. I am glad to know that one State has already established a department in connection with its training school for this class alone. Minnesota recognizes in her statutes its duty to this class, and we believe proper provision will soon be made for it. Hail the day when the other States shall follow, and thus lead the way to the development of the highest possibilities for this most afflicted class of humanity!

The idiotic, epileptic, and insane population of the world embody in their very existence the deepest problems of sociology, and I believe the day will come when the scientific study and investigation of social and hereditary questions growing out of our work will bear fruit of no insignificant value.

The social conditions of the American people are not at present favorable for developing continuously and exclusively special lines of investigations, except as private bequests are devoted to such objects. It has been suggested that no nobler object could be endowed than an institution for the care and training of the feeble-minded. I heartily agree with the suggestion. We can imagine such an institution where every patient's physiological and clinical life and its pathology would be put on record; where the most approved methods and apparatus would be in vogue. The State could then expect, and we believe would receive, a valuable return for its investment in the form of prophylaxis. We have learned enough, however, to feel that this work has come to stay, and that the interests of our wards will receive ever-increasing attention.

“An’ is there ane amang ye but your be wi’ him wad share?  
Ye maunna scaith the feckless, they’re God’s peculiar care.”