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EDITORIAL.

IS THE CARE OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED A HOPELESS WORK ?

In discussions concerning the care, training and treatment of the state's numerous wards, the statement is frequently made that the care of the feeble-minded is the most hopeless. While this is true in a comparative sense, there is another and very important sense in which it is not true, and the unqualified statement is misleading to the popular mind.

To those who have been led to believe that the feeble-minded can become normal and go out into the world as full citizens, the results of their training do not justify their expectations; but to those who appreciate the real educational possibilities and limitations, to say nothing of the sociological phase of the work for their improvement, the results are exceedingly hopeful.

The writer had occasion to refer to the educational possibilities of this class in the Biennial Report of the Minnesota School for Feeble-Minded, published in 1895, and may be pardoned for repeating that reference in this connection.

"In undertaking the education of a feeble-minded child, we must assume in general that the possibilities of development are only limited by physical incapacities of communication between the mind and the exterior world. The psychologist recognizes at once a lack of will and that spontaneity which, in the normal child, keeps up a constant nerve activity, holds the mind continually in contact with outward objects, and develops perception, conception and judgment without the teacher's assistance. For the normal child the teacher has but to direct these spontaneous activities of the mind that they may be applied to the best advantage. As judgement is the most complex of mental operations, it is the most imperfect product of the feeble mind.

"The physician recognizes (since the time of Seguin) the dependence of these deficiencies upon imperfect nerve tissues, either of cells in the brain or conducting fibers. In some cases these deficiencies seem to exist from lack of exercise, and in others disease has destroyed the tissues, and with them the possibility of restoring their functions, while in others the necessary tissues never existed.

"The successful teacher of the feeble-minded, then, must first supply the will and establish the physical activities, and gradually evolve volitional action on the part of the child. The educational process thus consists of an intimate combination of the interdependent physical and mental exercises, the physical element being predominant at the beginning, and the more distinctly intellectual element gradually evolving as the process continues.

"It should be distinctly understood, however, that a feeble-minded child never becomes normal. The question is not one of curing the person, but of developing the mental capacity in each as far as the capacity for development will permit,

"On the other hand, there are very few individuals whose mental development cannot be stimulated, if sufficient time and care can be expended upon it.

"The story of Sylvanus, and other similar ones so often told, are not fictitious (though sometimes misunderstood); but the application of public funds to the education and amelioration of this class necessarily involves an adjustment of the expense to the recognized good accomplished on some plan of strict catholicity; hence the systematic training of the school and manual rooms can be continuously applied only to those children whose improvement is unquestioned, while for those less susceptible of improvement every effort should be exerted to provide them with the comforts of a cheerful home and such instruction, entertainment and amusement as they are capable of appreciating."

Those who have the privilege of watching the continued transformation of children of low mental activities into sufficiently intelligent people to carry on efficiently the plainer duties of life, ranking very favorably in general intelligence and efficiency of service, and often excelling in industry, force of character and courteous bearing, the lower order of paid servants, can appreciate fully the purely educational possibilities of the work.

DR. J. Q. A. STEWART died at his home, Farmdale, Ky., on the afternoon of Jan. 25th, 1898. This end was not unexpected by his friends, but the announcement was none the less a shock to them. The Doctor had been a sufferer from Bright's disease for many months, and, in private correspondence, he had intimated a full appreciation of the inevitable result. In the March number THE JOURNAL will give a more extended notice of the life of this noble man, and in the meantime its staff can only extend its deepest sympathy to the afflicted family.

A NEW HISTORY OF THE CARE OF EPILEPTICS IN AMERICA is being prepared for early publication by Hon. Wm. P. Letchworth, of Portage, New York.

"BIBLIOGRAPHY OF EDUCATION" by Will S. Monroe, A. B., is just issued by D. Appleton & Co. for the International Education Series. Professor Monroe is an indefatigable student and teacher. He has given considerable attention to the study of defectives as well as normal children. THE JOURNAL congratulates him upon the publication of this admirable work. The classification and topical arrangement renders it very convenient for the reader to obtain the information desired.

THE MARYLAND TRAINING SCHOOL seems to have entered upon a new era. Dr. Frank W. Keating, the present superintendent, took charge October 1st, 1896, and a perusal of his recent report to the visitors indicates a progressive spirit and an intelligent conception of the work. THE JOURNAL extends a welcome to Dr. Keating and a hope that politics may hereafter bless "Rosewood" by ignoring it as a field for operations.

IOWA LEGISLATORS are considering the advisability of creating a special board to have supervision of the state institutions. Whether its duties shall be investigatory, advisory only, or executive in character is not yet determined. A committee appointed at the last session to investigate the institutions during the recess, has reported on all of them. The system of accounts at the School for Feeble-Minded at Glenwood is recommended as worthy of imitation by the other institutions.