

Imbecile and feeble-minded Children

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Imbecile and Feeble-minded Children
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In presenting to this Congress a few thoughts
on "Imbecile & Feeble-minded Children" and
the measures necessary for their welfare and
protection, I propose to state as succinctly as
I can what has already been done in this
Country for these classes, and what in my opinion
still remains to be done in order to make the
most of the benevolent spirit which has manifested
itself in various directions on their behalf. The
terms of the title I found in the original programme
of the Congress, and it may be well in the first
place to set forth what I understand them to
mean. Etymologically of course there is little
difference between the term Imbecile, which
comes to us from the Latin ^{Imbecillus} through the French
and means "weak" (usually in mind), and
the American hybrid term Feeble-minded.

which conveys its own meaning. Usage however
 is a more trustworthy guide to the signification
 of a word than mere etymology: otherwise the
 term Idiot, etymologically simply "a private
 person" - i.e. one not busying himself in public matters -
 would have a far wider application than it has,
 or used to have, when employed to denote the
 lowest grade of original mental defect. To my
 thinking, the conventional classification of the
 several grades from below upwards under the
 names of idiocy, imbecility and feeble-mindedness
 is of practical utility as denoting three degrees
 of mental defect; but now it has become the
 fashion to call all idiots, imbeciles, and all
 imbeciles, feeble-minded: indeed following the
 lead of our American cousins, ~~now~~ the English
 Institutions originally established as "Asylums
 for Idiots and Imbeciles" are assuming the
 title of "Training Institutions for the Feeble-minded".
 Though I thoroughly sympathise with the
 kindness of heart and consideration for the
 feelings of parents which have prompted this
 change, there is, I think, some ground for
 apprehension that, with this altered use of terms,
 "feeble-minded" may acquire the same sort of stigma
 as "idiot" has acquired in the past, & we may be
 driven (as the Germans have already been) to

I invent some new term to denote the lighter
 shades of mental defect, & we shall have to
 talk of "feebly-gifted" (Schwach befähigte)
 instead of "feeble-minded" (Schwach Sinnige).
 In this paper, however, I propose to adhere to
 the old-fashioned English use of the expression
 'feeble-minded' as denoting a less degree of
 mental defect than does "imbecile"; whilst
 the latter term must do duty for such defects
 as preclude the child from benefiting by any
 of the forms of instruction given in connexion
 with our English System of Elementary Education
 including the "Special" Schools. This is, I know,
 not a scientific demarcation, but it has the
 authority of official usage, and is of
 practical utility.

What then are the agencies which
 we have at the present time in England
 & Wales (for I shall restrict my observations
 to this part of the Kingdom) for dealing
 with mentally defective children of these
 several classes? They are threefold: first,
 the voluntary & poor-law institutions for the
 care and training of imbecile ^{& idiotic} children & at
 any rate children certified as such through
 the voluntary institutions (designate them
 "feeble-minded"); secondly, the school authorities

which have adopted the provisions of the Defective & Epileptic Children's Education Act. (62 & 63 Vict. Ch. 32), and have provided special instruction for defective (but not imbecile) children; & thirdly, the Voluntary associations which have established boarding schools for this latter class and also industrial institutions for adolescents beyond school age. It is much to be regretted that these agencies have no co-ordinate scheme of work, & as yet are not agreed as to their respective "Spheres of influence". I must venture to describe a little in detail the more important members of these several groups.

Talking first the "idiot establishments" — to use the official designation in the Lunacy Commissioners' Blue-books of the Voluntary institutions originally called Idiot Asylums but now assuming the title of "Training Schools for the Feeble-minded" — there are in England five; — Earlswood, the Royal Albert, the Eastern, ^{the} Western and ^{the} Midland Counties Asylums.

The "Asylum for Idiots" now at Earlswood Heddlie, was established in 1848 at Highgate & may claim to be the pioneer of all that has

been done for the mentally defective class in this country. Starting with a bye-law (still apparently in force), that "Idiotic and Subcile persons only be eligible for this Asylum", though the address of the Founder, Dr. Reed, shows that Education was aimed at, it is noteworthy that the present able Superintendent, Dr. Caldecott, urges in his last published Report the "necessity for the two-fold character of the Institution, viz: a "School" for the education and training of the higher grades of feeble-minded children, & a "Home" in which all types of all ages may find a refuge for life". It is much to be regretted that the funds which the charitable public supply to the Board of Management only suffice to ensure ^{unless by re-election} a five years training for the former class, & for the maintenance on the free list of not more than 100 life cases.

The average number resident ranges between five & six hundred, and patients are received from all parts of the ^{British Empire and most of the} world.

The Royal Albert Asylum was opened in 1870 "for the care, Education & Training of Idiots and Imbeciles of all classes belonging to the seven Northern Counties of England". (Since 1900 the term "Feeble-minded" has been substituted

for "Idiot and Imbecile" in the above. Chronologi-
 - cally it does not come next in order of foun-
 - dation to Earlswood, but as it is at present
 the largest of the Voluntary Institutions, con-
 - taining over 600 patients, & its success
 financially has been phenomenal among the
 charities of the country, it may well be considered
 in the second place. Recent additions for
 Epileptic & crippled patients, the gift of
 the "Storey Home for Feeble-minded Girls"
 where prolonged industrial training is
 given to 40 of the most advanced of the
 female patients, as well as its ^{house} Farm, and
 separate establishment for private patients,
 will increase its accommodation to upwards
 of 700 beds. The majority of the lunatics
 are elected by Subscribers - Each County
 electing its own quota of patients - for a
 term of seven years training, prolonged in
 some cases from year to year by the Managing
 Committee; but there is no provision for
 life-cases otherwise than by payment.

The Eastern Counties Asylum "for Idiots,
 Imbeciles and the Feeble-minded" (the last
 term having recently been added to the title)
 was an outgrowth of the original foundation
 for Idiots, Essex Hall, ^{Colchester,} having been adopted

as a Special Institution for the Eastern Counties when no longer needed by the Committee of the National Institution after the erection of Carlwood Asylum. Instituted in 1859, it now accommodates more than 250 patients. Cases are received on election for a period of 5 years training - & may be re-elected for a similar term, & provision is made in the Rules for the reception of 10 Life-election cases. In his last Report the Secretary and Superintendent writes sympathetically of those lower-grade cases for whom no public provision has yet been made, though naturally preferring that cases should be selected capable of receiving permanent benefit from training. The generous gift of a ^{combination} block of schools & workshops by Mr Peckwood has vastly improved the facilities for training.

The Western Counties Asylum at Starcross, Devon, was founded in 1864 on a charitable basis, & now contains 270 patients, the majority of whom are of the pauper class paid for by Guardians. It is still called the Western Counties Idiot Asylum in consequence of the Commissioners in Lunacy objecting to the Sub proposed substitution of the term Feeble-minded for that of

Idiot in the title of the Institution as
 "Inexpedient & unnecessary & likely to prove
 misleading to the public". It is nevertheless
 a Training Institution for higher-grades cases
 perhaps more exclusively than any of the
 other Asylums which have assumed the
 designation in question, for only cases
 found to be improvable are retained, & the
 variety & excellence of the industrial work
 of the inmates is remarkable. No provision
 appears to be made for life cases.

The Midland Counties Asylum at Knost
 near Birmingham, founded in 1868, has
 accommodation at present for about 80 patients
 shortly to be increased by an addition for
 40 more. The patients, whose friends
 have to contribute 15 guineas annually, are
 elected by subscribers for a term of 5 years,
 & may be re-elected if suitable; but there
 is no provision for life cases & paupers are
 inadmissible.

In addition to the five institutions above
 described there is a small Asylum for 20
 Idiot & Imbecile Children at Lombe Down,
 near Bath under the management of Trustees
 of a charity called the Magdalen Hospital,
 4 of the inmates are of the pauper class.

700
500
250
100
1000

The aggregate accommodations furnished by the several voluntary institutions at the present time seems to be for about 1800. Primarily established for children, some of them retain patients of adult age, and perhaps one-third of the 1800 would belong to that category. It is probable that less than half of the inmates are children of school age & are between 5 and 16 years of age & though the majority remain children mentally all their lives. It has to be borne in mind however that they do not continue children as regards physical development & instincts, & hence the necessity for a much larger permanent provision ~~than~~ for this class than at present exists.

It ~~is~~ ^{has been} ~~generally~~ agreed by the authorities of the voluntary institutions that their proper function is to supply training for improvable imbeciles, & that the County authorities should "provide out of public funds Custodial Institutions where children and adults who are incapable of being taught can remain permanently." Let us see what has already been done in this direction.

In this County it is the rule that new

philanthropic movements are in the first
 place carried through the experimental
 stage by voluntary associations, and not
 until they have thus been tested is aid
 given by the State. The Metropolitan
 Asylums Board, a body created by Act of
 Parliament in 1867 to provide for the care
 of the Sick & infirm poor of the Metropolis
 and of such "insane" persons as the Poor
 Law Board might direct, opened in 1870
 two asylums for "harmless persons of the
 chronic or imbecile class," & in 1873 the
 children who had been sent to these insti-
 tutions were gathered into a separate
 establishment, ultimately forming the Schools
 Department of the large Asylum at Danewell
 where there is also accommodation for 1000
 adult imbeciles. In process of time the
 accumulation of unimprovable cases in the
 Schools, and the unsuitability of the Adult
 Asylum for continuing the industrial employ-
 ment under favourable circumstances of those
 successfully trained in the Schools, lead to a
 further evolution. Last year Rochester House,
 Ealing, was opened as an experimental
 training establishment for 150 of the most
 unimprovable of the patients previously at Danewell;

& this it is hoped may become the nucleus of an industrial colony where the industries acquired by these high-grade imbeciles may be permanently carried on under life-long supervision.

In the Counties comparatively little has been done in the way of provision for imbeciles apart from lunatics. Northampton has the credit of being the first in the field, having arranged as long ago as 1888 for the special training of 100 idiot children in a separate annex ^{at Berrywood Asylum.} As they reach adult age they are, however, transferred to other departments of the Asylum. A more satisfactory arrangement has been made in connection with the Middlesex County Asylum where an entirely separate block for 200 ⁽²⁰⁰⁾ imbeciles has been arranged for their ^{permanent} training & employment in useful industries. There is also a separate block for 50 idiot children at the Hants County Asylum, and the County of Lancaster has a special establishment ^{(Loinwick Hall).} for 50 idiot boys. Recently the West Riding County Council has opened a similar establishment at Stanley Hall, Wakefield, for 70 children. Separate idiot wards also exist at the Kent (Chartham)

Durham County, & Rubery Hill (Birmingham), Asylums, and provision is being made for 100 in connection with the new East Sussex Asylum. Altogether special arrangements have been made for not more than five or seven hundred imbecile children by County authorities outside the Metropolitan district, a provision totally inadequate as compared with ^{over} 1000 beds provided for similar cases by the Metropolitan Asylums Board to serve a population not more than one-seventh of that of England & Wales.

In addition to children calling for Asylum care, there exists amongst our school-population not less than one per cent of sub-normal children - officially called defective and popularly feeble-minded - who require special modes of Education. The Act to make better provision for the Elementary Education of Defective and Epileptic Children in England & Wales (1914-15 V. Ch. 32) enables School authorities to establish special schools & classes for children certified by the Medical Officer as "not being imbecile, and not being merely dull & backward, ^{yet} ~~but~~ by reason of mental or

physical defect incapable of ^{properly} benefiting
 by ordinary school instruction, but capable
 of benefiting by instruction in a certified
 special class or school". This Act, which
 is permissive only, has been adopted by a
 considerable number of School Boards
 throughout the Country, and a recent list
 issued by the Board of Education shows
 that not far short of 5000 school places
 have been provided in special schools in
 different parts of the Country, of which 2800
 are for the mentally & ~~therefore~~ physically defective
 children of London, where there are no less
 than 60 centres of special instruction. Having
 myself had three years experience as Examiner
 of defective children under the London School
 Board, I may venture to add a word of
 appreciation of the good work which has
 been done in these centres, together with my
 conviction that in the majority of cases in
 which benefit has been derived from ^{special} school
 training, which ends at the age of 16, further
 supervision is required in order to ensure
 permanently good results. Great care needs to
 be exercised in the selection of suitable cases for
 special instruction, & cases ^{properly} ~~family~~ certifiable as
 imbecile should be rigorously excluded.

Some cases a probationary period in the Special Class may be granted, but experience will soon teach that those are certain classes and grades of mental defect which will surely waste the time & energy of the Special Institute without fully adopting the dictum of Dr. C. Mercier that "The line that divides the Quack, weak-minded man from the imbecile is the ability to earn a living", I think the idea which these words express should be kept in mind in deciding which cases should be passed for Special classes, & which relegated to an Institution for Imbeciles. In connection with the Birmingham Special Classes an After-care Association has been formed, and in an analysis which has been made by Miss Pincent of 35 cases who have passed through the Classes 16 were at work, earning on the average 5/6 per week, 7 were out of work, (but presumably capable), & only fit for asylum or home, 6 at present looked after at home but ultimately cases for Asylum treatment, & I had died. It is worth remarking in this Report that "if there is no chance of a child becoming self-supporting or responsible, that child should be placed under permanent control", i.e. certified as imbecile for the good of the community as well as its own, & for that of the next generation.

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As Supplementary to the work of the Special Schools, we may now pass on to the charitable efforts that have of late years been made for the benefit of feeble-minded children and young persons by certain such agencies as the "National Association for the promotion of the welfare of the Feeble-minded", the "Lancashire & Cheshire Society for the permanent care of the Feeble-minded", & by various benevolent ladies who have established working homes for feeble-minded girls. We may also notice some experiments by Poor Law Guardians in the same direction, noting that most of the voluntary homes receive patients of the pauper class as well as others.

The first home for Feeble-minded Girls in England was established in 1887 at Aubert Park House, Highbury, & there are now no less than 16 homes for girls & one for Boys in different parts of the country. All of these have been certified or approved by the local G.O.C. Board, & the three which receive children of school age would also may be regarded in the light of boarding schools for the class for whom special instruction is

desirable, & the same care should be
 exercised in the selection of suitable
 cases as I have advocated with regard
 to the Special Schools themselves. The
 School at Hendon under the management of
 the National Association (shortly, I regret to
 say, to be abandoned for want of funds) was
 able to earn grants from the Board of Education
 under the provisions of the Defective Children
 Education Act. With the exception of the
 one Boys' Home at Upshurbury under the
 management of the aforesaid Society, all
 the other Homes are for Feeble-minded Girls,
 in communities of from 15 to 20, laundry work,
 housework, sewing & mat-making being the
 principal industries. In some cases girls
 have been trained for ^{domestic} service, but unless great
 care is exercised in obtaining suitable ~~care~~
 places & maintaining some form of after care
 there is much risk of their going wrong.
 There is no doubt that Miss Duncanson's idea of
pleasant homes for defectives - even slight
 ones - is sociologically what should be aimed
 at, & though immediate outlay would be large
 the consequent restriction of the output of
 inherited mental defect in succeeding genera-
 tions would ^{in the long run} justify the expense. The

more progressive American States are by
degrees arriving at this conclusion, & in
addition to Schools for feeble-minded
children ^{of all grades} are authorising Custodial permanent
homes at the cost of the respective States.
In England we are still groping and
experimenting in this direction: the
Lancashire & Cheshire Society have founded
what it is hoped will become an important
Industrial Colony for the feeble-minded
at Sandbach, Cheshire, whilst the
Chorlton & Manchester Guardians propose
immediately to proceed with their
long-cherished project of a colony for
Idiot & imbecile paupers. It may
not be out of place to mention that the
Children's Committee of the Metropolitan
Asylums Board who have taken charge of
the Education of Mentally-defective
pauper children in London are also
feeling their way to some permanent
Industrial Establishment for those that
pass school age. In the Eastern Counties
there is a movement ^{amongst the Guardians} for providing permanent
homes at the public expense (1) for unimprovable
Imbeciles, (2) for feeble-minded men & boys,
(3) for unimprovable feeble-minded women
& girls.

The question of detention ^{in such Homes} & of the means by which it may best be attained, has been much discussed. It has been proposed that in the case of feeble minded persons whom workhouse medical officers do not feel justified in certifying as "of unsound mind", or even as "imbeciles" under the Lunatics' Act, magistrates should be empowered to order the detention (in "Homes") of feeble-minded persons for a limited but renewable period. Personally I doubt whether such powers are likely to be granted by the ^{British} Legislature, for "the liberty of the subject", even of the feeble minded subject to propagate his own kind, is ~~not~~ ^{still} an article of belief with the majority. Of the necessity of the detention of some there can be no doubt; & if the expression "non compos mentis" were allowable in a medical certificate instead of that of "unsound mind" I do not think there would be the same hesitations to certify as is often ^{experienced under present} ~~found present~~ conditions.

The ideal arrangement seems to me that as little obstacle as possible should be placed in the way of ^{the training and} education of defective children - whether feeble minded or imbecile, while of school age & under parental control,

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by branding the child with an opprobrious designation in a formal Certificate. Surely a parent is under little temptation to send his normal child to a "Special School for defective children, whether called a 'Home for Feeble-minded' or an 'Asylum for Idiots'! It seems to me, therefore, that even the modified Certificate prescribed by the Idiots Act, 1886, might be dispensed with or relaxed in the case of a child of school age. Of course when adult age is reached (in view of slow development school age should be extended even beyond 16 in the case of defective children) certain safeguards for the liberty of the subject may be deemed desirable, and for my own part where it is obvious that a person is so far deficient in will power or in moral control as to be a danger, actual or potential to himself or the community, I for one, would stretch a point to write him down as "imbecile". The mildly "feeble-minded" ^(the "mildly" as they have been called) may indeed require protection, but will not as a rule run away from a well-managed Home in which they are treated with tactful consideration. It is interesting to note that the Commissioners

in Lunacy in their Report for 1897 refer to the class of "feeble-minded" as "not the subjects of such a degree of mental unsoundness as in the opinion of the Medical Officers (of Lunatics) renders them certifiable in the present state of the law, & they are therefore not unable to be deterred against their will, although they are not sufficiently of sound mind to be able to take adequate care of themselves", & suggest that if official supervision be necessary it should not be by ~~themselves~~ ^{the Lunacy Committee}, "but by a department which would not associate with its work the so-called stigma of lunacy".

In conclusion I think I may say that the early training of feeble-minded children may be looked on as preventive of their sinking deeper into the mire of imbecility or even idiocy. This good work should be encouraged by an avoidance of unnecessary restrictions & technical forms; & in those cases which require continued protection in adult life - as is the case perhaps with the majority - certification and supervision by an official character should be made as little burdensome as possible so long as the liberty of the subject is sufficiently safeguarded.

Small homes of a domestic character,
such as those run by the Societies for
Fable-minded children seem to supply
a want which the larger Institutions
with their greater facilities for ^{varied} industrial
training do not overtake, and considering
that