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Department of Agriculture
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MENTAL DEFECTIVES: THEIR CLASSIFICATION AND TRAINING

By MARTIN W. BARR, M. D.

of Elwyn, Pennsylvania.

Chief Physician to the Pennsylvania Training School for Feeble-Minded Children, Elwyn, Pa.

The true meaning of the word educate may be found in its utmost clarity in the training of defectives. Here the artificiality and superimpositions of the "cram" system being absolutely impossible, the teacher is literally forced into drawing out what is within and developing and building upon that alone; is compelled to study, to originate and to fit individualized work to the individual, because the defective child cannot be fitted into a system, there being so many weak parts he would simply fall to pieces under the operation. Thus, experimentation in the education of the abnormal, begun early in the nineteenth century, has been silently influencing that of the normal, demonstrating, through successive decades, flaws in a much vaunted educational system, by and through which the mental powers of the pupil have too often become enfeebled, and degeneration or nervous break-down has reduced him to the status of his abnormal brother. Under the stress of such failures the world is fast coming to realize that an acquaintance with a multitudinous number of facts does not constitute culture; that the effect of such study is to paralyze rather than to energize thought; that all knowledge is not bound up in books; furthermore, that merely stored-up knowledge, unapplied or misapplied,

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may even be a disadvantage to its possessor. Already, while watching those who can only "learn by doing," the schools begin, for a small portion of the day at least, to close their text-books, to open their workshops, and to slacken the chain of rigid examinations, while the eager cry of minds released from tension is "not what I have but what I do is my kingdom."

Valentine Haüy, de l'Épée and Itard might to-day clasp hands with Pestalozzi and Fröbel in mutual congratulation over this fruit of their labors, wherein Itard finds the actual fulfilment of the hope thus so modestly expressed:

"If it were possible that, in endeavoring to solve the simple question of the education of idiots, we had found terms precise enough, that it were only necessary to generalize them to obtain a formula applicable to universal education; then, not only would we in our humble sphere have rendered some little service, but we would besides have prepared the elements for a method of physiological education for mankind."

The way prepared, like the word spoken in season, how good it is! How necessary to all growth! This is the gift of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, and the crowning of Itard's work is greater than that accorded him by the French Academy, for the reclaiming of the wild boy of Aveyron in the past means release from the slavery of "cram" for the youth of the future.

From this dates the physiological education developed and systematized by Seguin in Paris, practically applied by Guggenbühl in Switzerland, Saegert in Germany, Reed in England and Howe in America, culminating in the cultivation of the muscular sense until "The working hand makes strong the working brain" becomes to-day the watchword in the training of mental defectives.

An interesting point to note is that Itard in his

disappointment in his savage failed at first to see that he was dealing with an idiot. He in common with Pinel and others held to the incurability of idiocy, an opinion confirmed after a century of experimentation, and further elucidated and extended in the classification now universally accepted in America, which places in four divisions the feeble-minded, thus:

The Idiot:

- (a) Apathic;
- (b) Excitable;

Unimprovable, to whom nothing can be given but asylum care.

The Idio-Imbecile:

Improvable in slight degree.

The Imbecile:

- (a) High-grade;
- (b) Middle-grade;
- (c) Low-grade;

Trainable in various lines.

The Moral Imbecile:

- (a) High-grade;
- (b) Middle-grade;
- (c) Low-grade;

Amoral, or lacking completely the moral sense. Trainable only under custodial care.

Herein we find recognized, gathered and massed as a race distinct and set apart the feeble-minded—a title comprehensive enough to cover every phase of mental weakness from the sluggish inert to the excitable erratic. That each may go to his own place and receive that which is best suited to his needs, it retires into asylum the unimprovable idiot—the lowest type of abnormality—and with him his brother, the idio-imbecile, capable only of improvement sufficient to aid in his care. It next assigns to teachers the trainable imbecile—mental or moral

—in whatsoever grade, be it low, middle or high, which determines his limited sphere in life and prepares him for it. This is effected by no ironclad rule; on the contrary, as the comfort of all—both teachers and pupils—depends upon an equality of grading, there is ample opportunity for easy transition as improvement or deterioration may require.

A glance at the program of a large institution will show this classification in working detail.

The Training Department, in its several divisions—School, Industrial and Manual—aims to give mental, moral and physical training as well as permanent occupation to “children” of all ages, from early youth to maturity.

The School, which prepares for and aids in the work of the others, provides:

First. Separate schools for the low-grade, middle-grade and high-grade; kindergartens for the young; custodial classes for the incorrigible or the incompetent, and evening classes and Sunday-schools for all.

Second. Special classes, where all who can be benefited may receive training in certain lines.

The training is in no sense abstract. In each school there is always the one definite aim presented—that the child benefited by training may be enabled by his work to benefit the community into which he is growing, and where there is always work to be found for the ready worker.

To low-grades, who, with dulled sight and hearing, are incapable of consecutive thinking, to whom letters and figures are meaningless signs; the chief, one might almost say the only, avenue of development must be through the muscular sense. By means of physical exercises which arouse, and of occupations which interest, the arm, the hand and the fingers may be enticed into movements which, if co-ordinated and persisted in, may in time produce the mental impression. The ordinary house-

hold occupations, lifting weights, drawing, pulling, stretching, rubbing and climbing alternate with the quieter occupations, giving hand and finger movement. The care of the schoolroom and plants, and the polishing of floors and windows are therefore as distinctly aids in the work as are the tying and winding of strips for carpet weaving, the folding, knitting, knotting and twisting of fiber or straw braiding, which, in these schools, form the preparation for the simplest menial service for house, farm or garden.

With middle-grade children we find the slow mental processes, of which alone they are capable, best stimulated by, and must be continually linked with, material objects. This is particularly to be noted in the use of books and in the labored acquirement of the "three R's," as contrasted with the more rapid advance by means of drawing and modeling in chalk, clay or cardboard, or the weaving of strips of wool or of woodshaving. Results of daily lessons with these materials begin soon to accumulate in the form of useful articles—baskets, wall-pockets, portfolios, blotters, etc.—and then the moral and social qualities are stimulated by utilizing them in the house, or for gifts at the different seasons. Growing powers of observation, perception and reproduction find satisfaction in the more permanent materials of willow, rope, rattan or wood; and, later, as basket, hammock or mat-makers, carpenters or painters, these children go out from schools to contribute their quota to the general economy. Capacity for very limited responsibility and for independent works is also evidenced, and we are therefore able to draw from this grade quite efficient aids for farm and household service.

High-grade school-rooms present much the same appearance as those for normal children. Classes are busy with books and black-boards, drawing maps and working examples. Abstracts of subjects

are being made or original articles written for our little school paper. Judgment and memory, power of associating, comparing and deducing are here; feeble, it is true, but they are here and trainable, and in proportion to the broader intelligence just so must methods broaden. Books, therefore, are the means of development in these schools in the same proportion that material objects are in the others. The study of minerals, of plant and animal life are emphasized in daily visits to the object room, where subjects carefully prepared for them are presented. Geography, history and the noting of current events further the enjoyment and appreciation of evenings in the library. Neatness, accuracy and exactness are enforced in number calculations and mechanical drawing; freedom and control of hand and arm in the exercises of free-hand drawing. The importance of both is realized in the constructive work, the joinery and the wood-carving of the sloyd room, just as the power of rapid sight-reading is found of value in the music classes, and working thus together these two divisions of the school form each the supplement or the complement of the other. This same interdependence and unity of purpose is discernible also between the school and the other branches of the training department.

The industrial division early gives—even during the school period—the needed stimulus of healthful employment and tests ability, while the school, aiming at a rounded development, yet prepares and sends out the child for such apprenticeship as capacity during training has indicated as most suitable. The varied requirements of a large establishment forming a distinct industrial division offer work for equally varied capacity. Thus farm and garden, bakery, kitchens, dining-rooms and dormitories, laundry and clothes rooms have all their busy apprentices and trained workers, while others are aids

in the care of the helpless in nursery, hospital or asylum wards.

The manual division comprises all those occupations in which the work of the hand developing brain power continues to be guided by it in making permanent and regular contribution to the resources of the institution. It includes the knitting, chair caning and mat making of the custodial buildings, together with the tailor and shoe shops, the carpenter and paint shops, the mattress and hammock shops, the regular job work which Sloyd begins to build up, and the work of the various sewing rooms. The schools prepare for all these—directly or indirectly—chiefly its pupils of high and middle grade.

Music, early recognized in the work as an invaluable agent, both active and passive, has grown into a distinct school, with classes well organized on various lines—a band, an orchestra, a special chorus class in sight-reading, and other singing classes for younger children.

Occupation and exercise should alternate with periods of absolute quiet and rest. A regular life free from unhealthy excitement being most essential to nervous constitutions. Yet, not losing sight of the fact that we are dealing with a perpetual childhood to which amusement is also essential, every season has its special fête, while birthday feasts, weekly dances, athletic sports and theatrical entertainments fill out the year.

The custodial department makes provision for a class either too stupid to follow, or too erratic and excitable to submit to the ordinary routine of the training department. These may, however, under supervision and constant surveillance be brought to contribute to household economy in the manufacture of shawls, hats, caps, mats and other useful articles. In these houses of prevention the moral imbecile finds the only home possible to him and

his shelter from crime and all its attendant penalties. The victim of heredity and the slave of circumstance, upon his neck must be found the sign of perpetual serfdom, lightened by every amelioration that amusement and rest periods may bring, yet toil, regular and unremitting, is his only salvation and safeguard; for hands once idle a cunning intelligence, truly satanic—the devil possessing the irresponsible—will surely devise some plan of ill.

The benefits of this classification are seen in that the child is quickly and almost unerringly placed in an atmosphere best suited to its needs—the family unhesitatingly informed as to his present condition and probable future, and the public more easily enlightened as to the different demands which abnormality makes, the possibility of ameliorating these demands by training for self-support, and the urgent need of sequestration as a means of protection to society from the results of criminal tendencies or fateful hereditary transmission.

The feebly gifted or backward children, whose defect may be due to unhealthful environment or to causes purely physical, are not necessarily included in this category, although liable through neglect and consequent deterioration to become so, especially should complications ensue from epileptic seizures. Then the question arises: Is the home or the school more desirable? This, the individual peculiarities, means and opportunities must determine. If the requirements are varied, certainly the cases are exceptional that can provide such in the family, in conjunction with suitable companionship and a regular life. It is an admitted fact in education from kindergarten to university that one's best powers are brought out only among one's peers, and the imbecile out in the world is always lonely and alone. Even those trained and sent out from the schools often seek to come back, saying, "Somehow they don't understand me. People don't want me. I can't get along."

There is indeed among all leaders in the work a consensus which regards the return of the imbecile to the world as most inexpedient. First, for the unfortunate himself, whose happiness is best found among his fellows and in work pursued on lines adapted to his needs. He misses the companionship and the amusements of his community as much as the guiding hand, the discipline and the sympathetic control which is continually on the alert to protect him from harming himself or his brother. Without these sustaining props, weak wills simply cannot pursue regular employment, and successful competition with normal labor is the exception, not the rule.

Again, society is suffering quite as much from the irresponsible as from the criminal element in its midst. Indeed, is not criminology proving that this last is but a lower stage of degeneration? The amoral imbecile becoming brutish, suddenly, on occasion, betrays the fangs of the wolf or the spring of the tiger; or, strained to tension, in an access of delusional insanity, commits first a deed which shocks the world, and then walks in a state of ecstatic egotism to what he deems a martyr's death. How often it is proven that an innocent, careless fool can reck more harm than a knave, who may be deterred by at least a cowardly fear of consequences. Is it wise for us, then, to pass unheedingly these danger-signals which we read all along the pathway of history—not only those which shock nations, but the tragedies which darken communities or extinguish the light of homes?

Let us look for a moment at one, which may stand for a type of the many, differing only in incident and location:

The trial in Philadelphia of Samuel Henderson, aged fifteen years, for the murder of Percy Lockyer, aged five, makes a valuable addition to the annals

of criminology and sociology, as showing the possibility of crime absolutely motiveless beyond the momentary impulse of a nerve storm and the danger to society of an uncontrolled, irresponsible element in its midst. The extreme youth of both appeals to one not less than the sense that each was, in a measure, the victim of ignorance and of circumstance.

The boy Henderson, like so many of his class, is a series of contradictions: He is tender and cruel, ingenious and crafty, phlegmatic and nervous, unfeeling yet affectionate; he is open, frank, artless, secretive, shy, deceitful, truthful in many ways, but also an accomplished liar. Atavism and environment combine to form a moral imbecile, in whom the moral sense is obstructed or altogether absent. One of his chief characteristics was fondness for animals, babies and young children, and it was remarked on the afternoon of the tragedy how carefully he carried the little Percy on his shoulder across the muddy fields to the playground in the wood, from which later he returned alone. When search was made for the missing child he denied, when first interrogated, any knowledge of him or his whereabouts, but afterward, revealing the imbecile peculiarity in his susceptibility to suggestion, he was finally led to a confession of the deed and to a narration of the circumstances leading to it. How that playing "Wild West Show"—his parents had travelled with Buffalo Bill—the child ran against his knife and, as he expressed it, "just stretched, and said nothink." Then in sudden terror he stabbed him again and again, dragged the body into the stream, concealed it under rocks and ran home, where he took up his evening duties with the same indifference which he displayed later in the court room when a prisoner at the bar.

With a family-history of neurosis on both sides for generations, this boy exhibited all the stigmata of imbecility, yet there were not found wanting many experts to testify as to his entire sanity, with no signs of imbecility, and no evidence why he should be considered irresponsible. This, in full view and presence of the malformed head, drooling mouth and idiotic grin of the boy who leered from the dock even when the verdict was rendered.

None but those acutally engaged in the work can comprehend the eccentricities, the vagaries, the thousand and one contradictions and the infinite phases of abnormality that shade off and merge so as to render difficult even a broad diagnosis after months of careful observation.

It is not surprising, therefore, that it was impossible for these experts—mainly neurologists—to accept as an imbecile a healthy, happy, careless boy, who, within six years of his majority, laughs and weeps many times a day without cause, who, finding in little children his dearest playfellows, could calmly recite the murder of one, while shrinking at the thought of the death of a pet squirrel which for him to kill was an impossible thing; and who, indifferent to the loss of home and friends, would yet shed copious tears over the torn dress of a paper doll. The jury, however, accepted the argument of irresponsibility made by the defence, but there being no statute recognizing imbecility, brought in a verdict of murder in the second degree which consigned him to the penitentiary. By this the state was preserved from a judicial murder and society for a while from an irresponsible. Early recognition and sequestration would have prevented the murder of one child, and the detention of the other in an atmosphere which will simply foster degeneration. The penitentiary is for him but an

advanced training-school for vice, from which, after a term of years, he goes out branded, with no other inclination, probably with no other resource, but to repeat his former experience, being now in ten-fold degree a menace to the social welfare.

Another case shows yet another phase of degeneration, which, if not so tragic, is perhaps even more far-reaching in its influence for evil:

A physician, rich, handsome, cultured, of esthetic tastes, a graduate of one of the most prominent medical colleges in America, made a pronounced hit as a specialist. Enjoying for some years phenomenal success, wine and women proved his bane, and he sank lower and lower. His excesses no longer tolerated at home, he drifted from capital to capital in Europe, and finally established himself in Japan with a harem. With an appetite still unsatisfied, he exhibited new phases of moral degeneration, causing his body to be tattooed with wonderful skill, every picture a work of art. Thus his back bore a huge dragon, the shading of each scale showing perfection of detail; this, on revisiting America, with the utmost vanity he shamelessly exposed. Returning to Japan, he bought a performing bear and wandered from place to place clad in the garb of a *hinin*, exhibiting himself, his bear and his harem, and distributing photographs of each and all in endless variety. This past-master in vice, shocking both Europe and America, and astounding even Japan, next hires a squad of Japanese boys, who, attired in full uniform, are trained in military exercises. To these are opposed an equal number of monkeys dressed as Chinese soldiers, and the war of China and Japan is constantly renewed for the entertainment of himself and his harem, who watch in ecstasy of delight the sufferings of the poor brutes. Rewards are offered, and the more

bloody the contest and the greater the atrocities, the more intense is the gratification.

Not only from the tragedies and monstrosities of degeneration does society need protection, but from its certain and appalling increase. Statistics, though imperfect yet, prove that nothing clings so persistently—is so certain of transmission—as mental defect. A literal realization of the sowing of dragon's teeth is the record of the so-called Tribe of Ishmael, in which within half a century were produced some 5000 degenerates, the offspring of one neurotic man.

Who, in the face of all this, shall fail to see that mercy, pity and the cry of humanity and self-defence alike, call for legislation which shall forbid the perpetuation of evil and the contamination of pure stock?

Much has been done to redeem and raise to higher planes by training, but much remains to be done; the establishment of separate asylums for the helpless idiots, idio-imbeciles and epileptics now burdening the training schools; legislative enactments providing for the separation of abnormal from normal children, and requiring their assignment to schools for special training; the permanent sequestration, *under conditions dictated by science* forbidding increase of those adjudged unfit for the duties of parenthood and citizenship; the opening of reservations and colonies to which may be transferred those trained in the various institutions, thus relieving overcrowded conditions, while giving a stimulus to training and also providing permanent homes where trained imbeciles may pursue their various vocations under new and more satisfactory conditions.

These are some considerations for thoughtful legislators, for it is to the law-makers in all lands

that we must now look, lest the work, having attained a certain success in one century, should in another, through lack of protection and encouragement, fail to go forward.