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ALIENIST AND

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THE TRAINING OF

CHILD

BY MARTIN W.

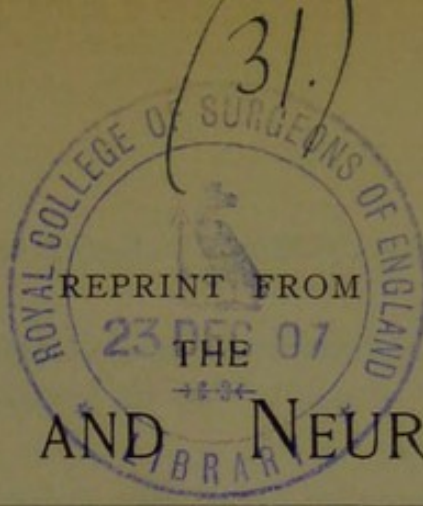
Elwyn

Chief Physician to the Pennsylvania

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<sup>Read before the Class in Social</sup>  
712, 1902.



# ALIENIST AND NEUROLOGIST.

VOL. XXVII. ST. LOUIS, AUGUST, 1906. No. 3.

## THE TRAINING OF MENTALLY DEFECTIVE CHILDREN.\*

BY MARTIN W. BARR, M. D.,

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

THE successful training of the feeble-minded in various avocations, thereby transforming a dependent class into a community contributing in large degree to self-support, may be accounted as by no means the least of the achievements of the nineteenth century. Not only does it mark a distinct era in education, but it is already influencing a return in the schools to that development through the hand which, in the past, built up communities and associations of craftsmen, and dignified labor as an honorable calling, and we cannot but feel that this recognition is the best possible endorsement of our work. That our methods demonstrate the true meaning of the word educate, is readily perceived, for we are forced to study the child and develop what we find. We simply cannot pursue the or-

\*Read before the Class in Social Work, University of Pennsylvania, May 7th, 1906.



dinary plan of beginning with abstract ideas and second-hand knowledge through the medium of books for many reasons.

Take for example, one, the defective memory of the child, which is apt to be either exaggerated or nil. Therefore the presentation of mere facts is to him either harmful or useless. Again, inertia or dulled faculties need the constant stimulus of emotions healthfully awakened, in order to be attracted to things or to the occupations that lie nearest. When he begins to do, to accomplish, to himself create anything, however simple, then, and then only, is the child interested in what others have done and how they do it; and, as step by step he follows this path, does he demonstrate that "the working hand makes strong the working brain," and enables it to grow and develop.

In the process of this experimenting with numbers in mass, we have repeatedly found them dropping into three divisions, each evidencing a certain kind of ability within certain limitations, beyond which it is impossible to pass. This has led to a nomenclature of grades, a term somewhat confusing to the general public, who naturally associate it, as used in the schools, with the idea of progression, although they are distinguished, not numerically, but adjectively as low, middle and high.

Thus a mother finding her boy year after year in the same room, inquired when he was "going up to the high grade room?" and was quite amazed when the teacher exclaimed: "Madam, your son can no more become a high-grade boy than he can become an elephant. He was born of middle grade and that he will always be, even after he leaves school." However she was afterwards consoled when shown the progression he was making, and the various avocations which would open to him a useful life in some one of which he was capable of being trained.

Building upon the experience of half a century, we have gradually evolved the following classification indicating the kind of training suited to capacity of grades and



outlining future possibilities. The value of this we have proven with successive classes for some years:

|                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ASYLUM CARE.                                                       | IDIOT.                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                           |
|                                                                    | Profound                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Apathetic<br>Excitable—Unimprovable.                                      |
|                                                                    | Superficial                                                                                                                                                                                              | Apathetic—Slightly improvable.<br>Excitable—Improvable in self-help only. |
| CUSTODIAL<br>LIFE, AND<br>PERPETUAL<br>GUARDIANSHIP.               | IDIO-IMBECILE.                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                           |
|                                                                    | Improvable in self-help and helpfulness.<br>Trainable in very limited degree to assist others.                                                                                                           |                                                                           |
|                                                                    | MORAL IMBECILE.                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                           |
|                                                                    | Mentally and morally deficient.                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                           |
|                                                                    | Low-grade.                                                                                                                                                                                               | Trainable in industrial occupations.<br>Temperament bestial.              |
| LONG<br>APPRENTICESHIP,<br>AND COLONY<br>LIFE UNDER<br>PROTECTION. | Middle-grade.                                                                                                                                                                                            | Trainable in industrial and manual occupations. A plotter of mischief.    |
|                                                                    | High-grade.                                                                                                                                                                                              | Trainable in manual and intellectual arts, with genius for evil.          |
| TRAINED<br>FOR A PLACE<br>IN THE<br>WORLD.                         | IMBECILE.                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                           |
|                                                                    | Mentally deficient.                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                           |
|                                                                    | Low-grade.                                                                                                                                                                                               | Trainable in industrial and simplest manual occupations.                  |
|                                                                    | Middle-grade.                                                                                                                                                                                            | Trainable in manual arts and simplest mental acquirements.                |
|                                                                    | High-grade.                                                                                                                                                                                              | Trainable in manual and intellectual arts.                                |
|                                                                    | BACKWARD OR MENTALLY FEEBLE.                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                           |
|                                                                    | Mental processes normal, but slow and requiring special training and environment to prevent deterioration. Defect imminent under slightest provocation, such as excitement, overstimulation, or illness. |                                                                           |

Here you find presented in three broad divisions, the perpetually helpless in asylum, the perpetually dangerous trained in custody, and the tractable class capable of being brought, through training, to various degrees of responsibility, but maintained there only by constant direction



and supervision which should be life long. It must be borne in mind that weak-will, feeble-intellect, and poverty of tissue and fibre, mental and physical, have combined to render them cripples for life and never can they stand alone. And I would say just here that when each and all of those engaged in the work of charities, are able to convince parents and guardians of this fact, and that withdrawal means the inevitable undoing of all that has been achieved for the child, together with almost certain reproduction of his defect—a double misfortune—they will have influenced a much needed consensus as to the necessity of the permanent sequestration of defectives and in so doing will have signally aided the work in both the dependent and delinquent classes.

In reviewing this outline of training and its confirmation and results as found in any large training school for defectives, it will be seen that occupations are provided for grades of capacity in such manner as to stimulate and keep alive the awakened interest. All are busy, each contributing some service to the life and well-being of the whole. Thus the hewers of wood and drawers of water, the laborer in field or garden, the aids in the care of the helpless in nursery or in the simplest or most menial offices in kitchen or asylum, has each gone to his own place after testing and preparation in the school; as have the workers in laundry, bakery, dining-room and dormitories, or apprentices in shoe-making, carpentry, tailoring, sewing and printing, drawn chiefly from the middle and high grades. Training has for its object the testing and proving of a diagnosis which rarely errs and, while exercising the mental and physical powers so as to achieve all possible development, to assign each to his own group and there train for that avocation for which the child exhibits a certain proclivity. To this end are arranged schools as distinct in aim and working methods, as is the capacity or ability of the pupils for whom they are designed.

For the very young children, Froebel's theory and practice has been so modified as to be adapted in three



kindergartens, to the capacity of those of low, middle and high-grade. From these they pass to their respective grades in the school for which these kindergartens have prepared them.

The pupils of the low-grade school are those found incapable of comprehending abstract signs and who can therefore never learn to read and write. Their power of grasp goes no further than the clutch of a broom, a rake or hoe; yet some learn readily to knit, to sew and wind carpet strips; others are successful as weavers of mats, of nets and of baskets, and even of carpets and tapestry, where the looms are once set up for them. In addition to this, these children have daily practice in some industry about the house and grounds, giving needed physical exercise and development as well as initiation into what may prove a life service.

Children of middle-grade show an intellectual advance beyond these, in ability to recognize and to form letters and figures and, although they glean but little from books—rarely advancing beyond the second or third reader—and that not always intelligently, yet the specific gain for them is in the discipline of class exercise, concentration of attention, daily practice in independent working, and neatness and accuracy in transcribing. In this latter, the making, lining and decorating of their books forms no unimportant part, as does also the free-hand black-board exercises, the drawing in black and white and in colored crayons, the modelling in clay, the constructive work in card-board and the sewing and knitting. Indeed, the distinctive difference between the two grades of low and middle is this of the muscular sense as evidenced in the clasp of pen and pencil, or grasp of tool, so that a typical child of middle-grade may be counted upon to develop into a fairly good artisan.

Children of high-grade show an intelligence approximating normal, varying in degree from a slight advance upon middle-grade to that of merely backward children. Capable of receiving and assimilating, of rehearsing and of reproduc-



ing a narration, even of pursuing to a limited extent a sequence of logical thought and deduction, many of these pupils advance as far as the ordinary intermediate or grammar school grade, while acquiring at the same time a certain degree of skill in hand crafts, fitting them to enter intelligently upon a trade apprenticeship; and from this class are drawn as we have seen quite capable tailors, shoemakers, seamstresses, carpenters, printers and typewriters. Drawing and modelling in clay, card-board and wood, physical and military exercises; and daily practice in music—both vocal and orchestral—are important adjuncts to training in these higher-grades; and band, orchestra and chorus have each their place, as have athletic sports their season, in contributing to the happiness and well-being of all. That many of this type approach normal, proves often their great misfortune, for out in the world there is more expected of them than they are able to give and over stimulation and over pressure leads to mental deterioration. Even if successful in gaining a position, some eccentricity or else inability to follow business habits, or to sustain any prolonged responsibility, forces them soon to yield and, disheartened, they drop out of the race to join either the dependent or the criminal ranks.

Experience of this proves the great importance of special methods in the training of merely backward children to enable them to take and hold their place in the world; those whose mental processes are normal but with whom at that critical period mental deterioration is always to be feared. Witness the frequent breakdown of children under the stress of examinations and the nervous collapse of young men and women on the eve of success at college.

It has been estimated that an institution colony with a fair acreage and a population of from one thousand to twelve hundred, could, in groups of twenty-five or thirty, under skilled supervisors, train and furnish all its own laborers and mechanics and also supply aids to asylums, thus reducing largely the cost of maintenance. This, however, could be accomplished only under that protection which



the legalized sequestration of defectives alone could give. Under present conditions, hardly have pupils entered upon that apprenticeship for which the school has prepared them, when they are withdrawn, and their places too often filled by either helpless idiots, or by imbeciles both mentally and morally defective, whose training, except in close custody, is equally impossible.

Now, the idiot, of whatever age, is in a state of perpetual infancy. Devoid of the power of speech, often of locomotion, incapable of self help, many can neither feed nor dress themselves.

The incongruity—one might say the absurdity—of applying for admission of such into a training school is self-evident. Yet people will do it, and, after bringing every influence to force in a case, become very indignant at finding their children in asylums and not in training. We can do much in the way of developing brains, but we can not do the impossible, nor manufacture brains to order; nor are we surprised that the parents of bright, trainable pupils object, for their children, to such association even in name. An asylum for the hopelessly, helpless class is little more than a well ordered nursery for sick children, under a capable house-mother with efficient nurses; the trained idio-imbecile and those of low and middle-grade making excellent aids to these, more dependable, in fact, than normal labor, because more willing, and content to remain in an atmosphere of constant seclusion.

The admission of moral-imbeciles is even more incompatible with the true interests of the work. Children of this class—a criminal type with moral instincts altogether absent, or so absolutely perverted, that they always choose the bad rather than the good—prove a veritable fire brand among innocent children of weak wills, susceptible to suggestion and easily led or dominated by another, especially if that other be possessed of a pleasing personality; and one such case may often demoralize a whole group.

Found associated with all grades of mental defect, this moral obliquity varies from bestial brutishness in the lower-



grades, to the skilled cunning and clever adaptations of the merely backward defective, who is but one removed from his brother, the recognized and responsible criminal.

Trainable these are, and innocent in the eye of the law they should be regarded, because being defective—morally and mentally askew—they are irresponsible; but both their own safe-guarding and that of society demands, that for them should be provided a LIFE TRAINING SCHOOL, where every advantage and amelioration in the way of comforts of living, amusement and training, might compensate for the loss of that liberty which would be fatal to themselves and to others.

Summarizing, therefore, we find the training of mental defectives has resolved itself in the experience of years, and in the development of new phases of defect, into two broad divisions. One for the ordinary imbecile of defective mentality and will-power in community life—the other for the irresponsible, mentally and morally defective in custodial life. In each, provision should be made for three distinct and permanent grades of mentality, with complete sex separation.

Development through the hand should be the underlying principle of each and all. Training should lead directly to some avenue of employment early entered upon, as constant occupation is for them the only security from deterioration. This is best accomplished by separation and segregation. Moreover legalized sequestration and sexualization are equally necessary to assure permanency to the work, happiness to the individual, and safety to society.

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