

**Notes of a visit to American institutions for idiots & imbeciles / by G.E. Shuttleworth.**

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## AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS FOR IDIOTS &amp; IMBECILES;

BY

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During a visit to the United States in August and September, 1876, I inspected (with my friend, Dr. Fletcher Beach, Superintendent of the Metropolitan District Asylum for Imbecile Children), the following Institutions in the order specified:—

	<i>Name of Institution, and where Situate.</i>	<i>Character.</i>	<i>Superintendent.</i>	<i>No. of Patients</i>
1	Massachussets School for Idiotic and Feeble-Minded Youth: South Boston, Massachussets.	Incorporated Institution, subsidised by State.	Dr. Edward Jarvis; (Dr. Henry Tuck, Acting Supt.)	80
2	Private Institution for the Education of Feeble-Minded Youth: Barre, Massachussets.	Private Institution.	Dr. George Brown.	70
3	Connecticut School for Imbeciles: Lakeville, Connecticut.	Incorporated Institution, subsidised by State.	Dr. H. M. Knight.	85
4	New York City Idiot Asylum: Randalls Island, New York.	City Institution.	Miss Dunphy, (Principal of School.)	183
5	Pennsylvania Training School for Feeble-Minded Children: Media, near Philadelphia.	Incorporated Institution, subsidised by State.	Dr. J. N. Kerlin.	225
6	Ohio State Asylum for the Education of Idiotic and Imbecile Youth: Columbus, Ohio.	State Institution.	Dr. G. A. Doren.	408
7	Kentucky Institution for Feeble-Minded Children: Frankfort, Kentucky.	State Institution.	Dr. E. H. Black.	120
8	Illinois Institution for the Education of Feeble-Minded Children: Jacksonsville, Illinois.	State Institution.	Dr. C. T. Wilbur.	100
9	New York Asylum for Idiots: Syracuse, New York.	State Institution.	Dr. H. B. Wilbur.	215

The above comprise all the recognised Institutions for Idiots and Imbeciles in the United States, with the exception of the Iowa State Institution, at Glenwood, now in course of organization, under the superintendence of Dr. Archibald, and a small private establishment at Fayville, Massachussets.

Of the Institutions named, Nos. 1, 3, 4 and 8 were more or less in vacation, but the arrangements were fully explained, and in most cases classes shown, by the respective Superintendents. The other Institutions were in full working order, organized for the winter's work. A summer vacation of from six weeks to two months, during which a large proportion of the Pupils and the whole staff of Teachers leave the Institution, is the rule in all the State Institutions.

The oldest Institution in the States is that at Barre, Massachusetts, established by Dr. H. B. Wilbur, as his own private enterprise, in 1848, but now carried on by Dr. and Mrs. Brown, as a school and retreat for feeble-minded children of the wealthier classes. The South Boston Institution originated in the same year with an Experimental School established by the late eminent philanthropist, Dr. S. G. Howe, in connexion with the Blind Asylum over which he presided. 2,500 dollars per annum for three years was granted by the Massachusetts Legislature for the experiment, and at the end of this time so satisfied were they with the result that the Idiot Institution was placed on an independent footing, and the State now annually provides such amount as is required for the support of the School over and above the income derived from the payments for cases, and a small charitable fund. In 1851 followed the foundation by Act of Legislature of the New York State Idiot Asylum: in 1853 the Incorporation of the Pennsylvania Institution: in 1858 the establishment by Dr. Knight of the Connecticut School for Imbeciles, afterwards incorporated as a Public Institution; and in 1857, 1860, and 1865 respectively, the opening of State Institutions for Ohio, Kentucky, and Illinois. In 1860 the Municipality of New York City established an Idiot Asylum for its Pauper Children; and in 1867 a School for the teachable cases was organized there.

From this account it will be seen that in the States there are no Institutions for Idiots supported by voluntary contributions independently of aid from public funds. The Incorporated Institutions recognise indeed the charitable element in their constitution, but practically rely for their chief support upon State grants made to them conditionally upon their receiving gratuitously a certain number of patients nominated by the State Authorities, and called State Beneficiaries. The State Institutions, on the other hand, have been founded by the State Legislatures primarily for such State Beneficiaries, but receive in addition children of the non-indigent class, on the payment by their friends of the bare cost of maintenance and instruction. In the Western Institutions, however, no charge is made, even for the latter class, in the case of children of citizens of the State; and in the State Institutions generally, there is no special accommodation for payment cases. In the Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Connecticut Schools, besides low-payment cases, some few of a higher rate (*i.e.* up to 500 dollars per annum) are received, and some little distinction of rooms is made. At the Pennsylvania Training School profits derived from the higher payment cases, together with benevolent contributions, go to form a fund designed for establishing a custodial branch of the Institution, to be located on an adjoining farm.

The State Institutions for Idiots, being established like those for the Blind, and the Deaf and Dumb, as recognised portions of the

public educational machinery, are primarily intended for the reception of *educable* cases. The bye-laws of the New York State Idiot Asylum — (and this may be taken as a type of the other State Institutions) — set forth that “The design and objects of the Asylum, as established by the action of the Legislature, are not of a custodial character, but to furnish the means of education to that portion of the youth of the State not provided for in any of its other educational institutions.” . . . . “Children between the ages of 7 and 14, who are idiotic, or so deficient in intelligence as to be incapable of being educated at any ordinary school, and who are not epileptic, insane, or greatly deformed,” and whose physical health is such as not to interfere materially with their attending school, are consequently the subjects received into these Institutions. The period of training varies, according to the age of the Patients when admitted, from five to seven or even ten years. Great care is exercised in selecting for admission such cases as from the description given of them appear teachable, and a probationary period is invariably imposed. Reception on trial for *one month* is usually specified in the regulations, but in practice the more ordinary term of probation is *one year*, patients of proved incapacity for training, or unsuitable for Institution life on account of epilepsy, or other grave physical disorder, being then returned to their friends. At the Connecticut, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania Institutions, however, epileptics are not rigidly excluded; indeed in the last-named Institution, about 10 per cent. of the cases are epileptics, mostly of a mild type. The effect of careful selection, and of the weeding out of bad cases, is that in the State Institutions generally the physical and mental condition of the inmates presents a higher average than that seen in British Institutions, and consequently the death-rate is lower, and the standard of scholastic education higher. The class of “Feeble-minded Children” would indeed appear to preponderate over that of the pure Idiot in the American Institutions.

Great stress is very properly laid upon the importance of keeping the two classes just named entirely distinct. This is effected in several instances by providing accommodation for the low-grade cases in a building detached from the main-block, with separate exercising ground, &c. At the Ohio Institution this class is provided for in connexion with the detached Infirmary. With regard to the higher grade cases, precautions are taken to prevent unsuitable association out of school-hours; and Dr. H. B. Wilbur, of the New York State Asylum, makes a point of providing “a multiplicity of play-rooms of moderate size instead of a few large ones.” He, moreover, disapproves of the assembly in a common hall of a large body of the children at meal times; and his patients dine by classes in eight separate dining-rooms, each class under the charge of its own Attendant. This plan does not however obtain in most of the American Institutions, there being usually provided a common room for the collective meals of the majority of the Patients. It appears to me that the superior facilities for supervision which the collective plan affords, outweigh any advantage accruing to the pupils from the isolation of the respective classes at meal times. In the Dining Hall, of course, as elsewhere, it is essential that correct principles of classification be observed in the arrangement of groups at the respective tables; and in a mixed

Institution, such as the Royal Albert Asylum, it will probably be found that, ultimately, about two-fifths of the patients will take their meals apart from the general body, either in private rooms, or in special departments. It is important, no doubt, to make distinct provision for the best, as well as for the worst cases.

Out of school the care of the patients devolves upon the Attendants, under control of the Matron. In all the Institutions we found a few Male Attendants for the older boys; but as a rule Female Nurses are preferred for those up to 14 or 15 years of age.

The excellent School arrangements are perhaps the most noteworthy feature in American Institutions. In each we found a large and intelligent staff of Teachers, and admirably appointed School-rooms and Gymnasias. At Media, a staff of 6 Female Teachers, and 2 Drill Instructors, were engaged in the instruction of 175 pupils; at Columbus, 15 Female Teachers were provided for 350 pupils; at Syracuse, 6 Female Teachers and a Gymnast had a School-list of about 180; at Jacksonville, 100 pupils employed 5 Female Teachers; at the New York City Asylum, for Pauper Idiots, a Schoolmistress and 4 Assistant-Teachers had charge of the School, which had on its list 127 Pupils. In addition to the Teachers proper, School-Attendants are engaged (*e.g.* at Media and at Syracuse) in assisting in the instruction of the lower-grade children. The proportion of Teachers to Pupils on the roll of School attendance may thus be said to average 1:25; but a certain number of children being always withdrawn for industrial work, &c., the average number in a class would certainly not exceed 20. Boys and Girls are taught in the same class. Usually there are as many separate Class-rooms as there are classes, each presided over by a Teacher. We observed that frequently these classes were sub-divided into sections, half-a-dozen children being perhaps employed in writing, half-a-dozen in some other manual occupation, while the remainder would be working at some simple imitation exercise immediately under the Teacher's eye. Thus efforts were made to individualise instruction, a necessity never to be lost sight of in the training of Idiots.

In the equipment and apparatus of the Schoolrooms, we noticed several matters worthy of imitation. Seats, with tables or desks for not more than two children in a group, often indeed a separate seat for each pupil, presented obvious advantages over long forms and desks in promoting discipline by preventing mutual interference. A range of black-board, extending at a convenient height entirely around the room, afforded ready facilities for graphic illustrations on the part of the Teachers, and for exercises in drawing, writing, and ciphering openly and simultaneously carried on by several pupils. A table of horse-shoe form, in the concavity of which stood the Teacher, and around which were gathered a group of children, performing under her eye various finger-exercises and objective lessons, appeared to us convenient. Such arrangements as those just described we found in the Public Elementary Schools as well as in Institutions for Idiots; but of special interest were various ingenious devices in use in the latter for quickening the perceptions, and educating the senses of the Feeble-minded. These are matters for demonstration rather than description, and appliances with similar design may be seen in most of

the British Institutions; but I may just name exercises with the "peg-board," for fixing the attention and teaching the use of the fingers; exercises in the perception of form, size, colour, weight, relation, &c. These were in use, with more or less varied forms of apparatus, in all the Institutions visited. Picture lessons follow: that is, it is impressed upon the child's mind first, that a certain picture denotes a certain definite object; afterwards, that the word printed under the picture also denotes that object. Thus Reading is taught by what is known as the *Word Method*: an acquaintance with the *letters* forming words comes at a later stage. Speaking lessons are of course in many cases necessary before these words can be rightly pronounced; and we heard some admirable articulation exercises at the Pennsylvania Institution.

The Gymnasium is everywhere regarded as an important preliminary and adjunct to school exercises proper. To this purpose a large room in convenient proximity to the class-rooms is devoted. At one end is seen some form of gymnastic ladder, and, around the wall, racks for wands, dumb-bells, rings and Indian clubs. On the floor lies a ladder with broad treads, over which the lowest grade of children are exercised in lifting their feet, carrying, it may be, when greater steadiness has been attained, a cup of water which they are encouraged not to spill. Small bags filled with beans are thrown from master to pupil, the object of this exercise being to fix the idiot's wandering gaze, and to induce him to raise his hand, even in self protection, to catch the bag. Then follow, by imitation of the teacher, simple extension movements of the arms and legs. A more advanced class use the gymnastic ladder, upon which various exercises are planned, calculated primarily to fix the attention, and to develop the will, and, in a secondary degree, to strengthen the muscular system. Exercises with wands and light wooden dumb-bells follow, and time is kept to music. We saw in several Institutions admirable expositions of this Musical Drill, the general style of which is somewhat as follows. A class of boys and girls files into the Gymnasium to the music of a slow march, and as the children pass a certain point, each receives a wand or pair of dumb-bells, as the case may be. Dividing into columns, the pupils take their stand in the appointed order, marks on the floor indicating their respective places. Then the movements begin, those of the Teacher, or of a leader selected from the class, being followed accurately by the pupils, who keep time to the music, the click of the dumb-bells now and again marking the accentuated notes. These musical gymnastic exercises admit of much variety, and form quite a pretty spectacle. In this connexion I may mention dancing exercises, which we saw carried out to perfection and joined in by Patients of both sexes, in the excellent Assembly Room of the Ohio State Asylum. Military drill for the older boys, who form what is called a "cadet-corps," is carried on at several of the Institutions.

In the Pennsylvania Training School, the Kinder-garten System was in use. We saw in practice some of the "movement-plays"; and at the Philadelphia Exhibition there was a very creditable display of Kinder-garten and other work by inmates of this Institution.

Industrial occupations are of course carried on in all the Institutions, but in none of them are handicraft trades so conspicuous a feature as with us. The Superintendents explain that as the majority

of their male patients come from agricultural districts, the most appropriate industrial training is such as will fit them for working on the land. Consequently all the boys whose physical condition permits are in suitable weather employed on the Garden or Farm. Many of the more useful lads, indeed, appear to work on the land all the summer, and to attend school all the winter. In some of the Institutions, mat-making, the cane-seating of chairs, and a little carpentering, are carried on; but nowhere did we see tailoring and shoe-making taught on an extensive scale. In the New York State Asylum, plaiting hemp and the making of chain-mats are practised as part of the School instruction; and recently brush-making has been introduced with good result. The manufacture of carpet-brooms is carried on in several Institutions. The Girls are of course employed in the several branches of domestic industry, and in sewing and fancy work.

Very simple, and quite unsectarian, religious instruction is given as a portion of the school system; but only in a few Institutions do the pupils attend external places of worship.

Amusements of a varied character are provided periodically in all the Institutions: the weekly associated dance (in which both boys and girls join) is made a feature at the Pennsylvania and Ohio Institutions.

The Institution organization is generally as follows. The Management is vested in a Board of Trustees, appointed, in the case of State Institutions, by the Governor and Senate, and in the case of Incorporated Institutions, jointly by these authorities and the Corporation. This Board designates a President, Secretary and Treasurer, and by its Executive Committees supervises the affairs of the Institution, giving special attention to matters of finance. The entire responsibility of internal administration devolves upon the Superintendent, who is, as a rule, whether the Institution be large or small, a qualified Medical man devoting his whole attention to the duties of his office. Next in authority to the Superintendent (in the inner economy of the Establishment), comes the Matron, who in the larger Institutions is not charged with the details of housekeeping, but is looked upon as the Mother of the Family, to whom all questions of nursing, clothing, &c., are referred. For the strictly domestic duties, there is usually a House-keeper. The Teachers are ranked according to seniority, but in several of the Institutions there is no Head School-Mistress, each Teacher being, in that case, directly responsible to the Superintendent for the duties assigned her. In most of the Institutions there is a Steward who has charge of the Stores, and sometimes combines with this office the immediate control of the Male Attendants and Servants.

We noticed, that as a rule, the children were well and tastefully clothed, and that a liberal dietary was provided. The meals were usually supervised by the Matron, or some other superior officer.

The general average cost of Maintenance (making allowance for disproportionate establishment charges in the case of the smaller institutions) probably does not differ materially from that at the New York State Asylum, where the yearly cost per head for board and instruction is estimated at nearly 200 dolls. (£40), with 30 dolls. (£6) additional for clothing. This is calculated upon an average of about 200 pupils. At the Ohio State Asylum, with 400 pupils, the cost is reduced to something like £35 per head; but this charge does not

include clothing, which is invariably provided by the friends or local authorities. At the Pennsylvania Training School, with 225 pupils (one-fourth of whom are payment cases) the rate per head was stated to be 256 dollars (£51). It must be borne in mind that in America wages are higher, and clothing more expensive than in this country; the cost of food is probably much the same as with us.

With regard to the Institution Buildings, it may be stated generally, that the majority are of a less substantial character than those erected for similar purposes in Great Britain. Those of the Pennsylvania Training School, and of the New York and Ohio State Asylums, are, however, solid edifices of handsome architectural elevation; and a permanent building is now in course of erection at Lincoln, Illinois, to supersede the present framed-wood structure at Jacksonville, temporarily occupied by the Illinois Institution. For the last-named, the State Legislature has recently appropriated 175,000 dollars (£35,000) for a building designed to accommodate at least 250 children. The cost of the buildings of the New York State Asylum, including furniture, is estimated at 550 dollars (£110) per inmate: those of the Ohio State Asylum, which are excellently appointed, cost 250,000 dolls. (£50,000) and will accommodate 425 patients.

All the Institutions visited, save that at South Boston, have farming land attached to them: the Ohio State Asylum farms as much as 400 acres. The Superintendents concur in their testimony to the great value of out-door labour in promoting the bodily and mental vigour of their patients. At Columbus we were much impressed by the efficient manner in which a number of imbecile lads, under the charge of a single Attendant, were engaged in reaping a field of Indian-corn.

The ratio of Staff to Patients, (taking a general average for the State Institutions), may be set down as 1:4 or 5; of Attendants to Patients as 1:10; of Teachers to Patients as 1:25. Thus, at the New York State Asylum with 215 patients, there is a Staff of 50 persons; at the Ohio State Asylum with 408 patients, about 80 persons are employed. It must be remembered that in these Institutions there are no special arrangements for payment cases. At the Pennsylvania Training-School, where there are a few private cases, there is a staff of 85 officers, attendants, and other employés to 225 patients. This enumeration will no doubt include some persons who work on the land as well as act as attendants.

It is estimated that throughout the States there are at least 40,000 Idiots and Imbeciles. At present there is special provision for not more than 1,500 of the class. In America, as in Great Britain, the question how best to provide for unteachable and adult idiots—whether in connexion with existing Schools, or in entirely separate custodial Institutions—is the subject of considerable diversity of opinion. It was satisfactory however to note that the public utility of the several Training Institutions was regarded as a demonstrated fact wherever they had been sufficiently long in operation to produce results. We heard from Mr. Hayes (Governor of Ohio and one of the candidates for the Presidency), unqualified testimony as to the value of the State Institution at Columbus; and in the last published Report of the Commissioners of Public Charities of New York City, there is a record that the School of the Idiot Asylum there, had “abundantly vindicated the wisdom of its

appointment." The respective Superintendents furnished statistics of results, varying of course with the different classes of cases under instruction, but all of an encouraging character. Thus Dr. Knight, writing of 12 years experience at the Connecticut School, says, that of the whole number of the pupils, (carefully selected, no doubt with a view to their improvability), 26 per cent. had been "so far lifted up, trained, and taught, that they have become comparatively useful members of society: having left the Institution to earn their own support, or to enter the Public Schools." Dr. Doren, of the Ohio Asylum, claims that 25 per cent. of his cases have become productive workers, still requiring, it will be understood, a greater or less degree of kindly supervision. At the Pennsylvania Institution, we were informed that 70 out of 700 patients who had passed through a course of training there, were known to be earning their own living; and at the New York State Asylum the statistics were of a similar character. Facts like these are of course the most striking results of training: less obvious, but perhaps not less important to the community, are such improvements as are referred to in Dr. Howe's summary of the operations of the Massachusetts Institution during the 27 years of his superintendence. "More than three-fifths," says he, "of the 548 idiotic youths who have been enrolled as pupils of our School have been improved either physically, morally, or intellectually by their stay in the Establishment. They have been put into a higher state of health and vigour. They have been trained to the command and use of muscle and limb. They feed themselves, dress themselves, and conduct themselves with decency and decorum. Their gluttonous and unseemly habits have been broken up. Their powers of self-control have been strengthened, and they strive to make themselves less unsightly and disagreeable to others. Many of the pupils have been trained to habits of industry, so that they may at least be less burdensome to their friends and neighbours, or to the townships or communities by which they are supported. Their mental faculties and moral sentiments have been developed by lessons and exercises suitable to their feeble condition, and they have been raised in the scale of humanity."

In concluding these notes, I gladly avail myself of the opportunity to acknowledge my obligations to the several Superintendents, who, one and all, received us in the most cordial manner and spared no pains to elucidate to us all that might be of interest in our common work. To Dr. H. B. Wilbur, of the New York State Asylum, we are specially indebted for valuable aid and counsel during our tour. In New York we had, moreover, the pleasure of a conference with the veteran, Dr. Seguin, who, though not now practically engaged in the work of the physiological education of the Feeble-minded, fills the honoured place of President of the American Association of Superintendents of Institutions for Idiots.

