

**Twenty-second annual report of the Trustees of the New York Asylum for Idiots of the State of New York : transmitted to the Legislature January 22d, 1873 / New York State Asylum for Idiots.**

**Contributors**

New York State Asylum for Idiots.

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**Publication/Creation**

Albany : Printed by the Argus Co., 1873.

**Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/g3yv9rjy>

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TWENTY-SECOND ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

TRUSTEES

OF THE

New York Asylum for Idiots

OF THE

STATE OF NEW YORK.

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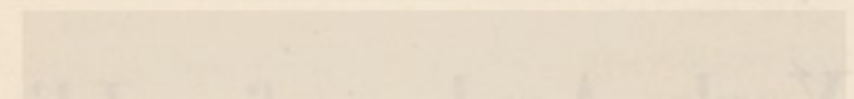
TRANSMITTED TO THE LEGISLATURE JANUARY 22d, 1873.

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ALBANY:  
THE ARGUS COMPANY, PRINTERS.  
1873.

TWENTY-SECOND ANNUAL REPORT

TRUSTEES



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# OFFICERS.

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SUPERINTENDENT.

HERVEY B. WILBUR, M. D.

ASSISTANT PHYSICIAN.

DR. JOHN FRAME.

MATRON.

MISS ALVIRA WOOD.

ASSISTANT MATRON.

MRS. F. A. HARDY.

HOUSEKEEPER.

MRS. SUSAN E. LOESCHER.

TEACHERS.

MISS S. P. YOUNG,                      MISS E. M. AMES,

MISS E. PETHERAM,                      MRS. M. E. COOK,

MISS M. AMIDON.

STEWARD.

MR. WILLIAM H. WOOD.



# STATE OF NEW YORK.

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No. 24.

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## IN ASSEMBLY,

January 22, 1873.

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### TWENTY-SECOND ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

TRUSTEES OF THE NEW YORK ASYLUM FOR IDIOTS.

*To the Legislature of the State of New York:*

Agreeably to the provisions of the act establishing this institution, the undersigned, trustees, respectfully submit this their twenty-second annual report.

The total cash receipts for the year ending September 30th, 1872, as will be seen by the treasurer's report, herewith annexed, were as follows:

#### RECEIPTS.

Cash from State Treasurer .....	\$25,000 00
County treasurers for clothing State pupils .....	2,687 40
Individuals for teaching and clothing pay pupils.....	5,710 20
Overdraft at bank, September 30, 1872 .....	651 99
	<hr/>
	\$34,049 59
	<hr/> <hr/>

## EXPENDITURES FOR SAME PERIOD.

Provisions and supplies .....	\$9,138 28
Fuel .....	1,610 47
Gas .....	914 90
Furnishing articles and furniture.....	1,732 69
Farm, garden and stable ..	1,785 22
Repairs, improvements and additions .....	1,638 62
Drugs and medicines .....	156 96
School books, stationery, printing, etc.....	380 52
Salaries of officers and teachers .....	6,150 00
Wages of attendants, farm labor, etc.....	5,313 12
Clothing.....	2,311 57
Freight, express and telegrams .....	64 62
Postage .....	34 88
Interest on loans.....	57 61
Traveling expenses of trustees.....	105 12
Traveling expenses of superintendent .....	36 00
Sending children home .....	10 30
Grading cemetery lot.....	110 94
Water.....	425 00
Funeral expenses .....	35 60
Cash in hands of superintendent for contingent bills..	241 47
Overdraft at bank, October 1, 1871.....	1,795 70
	<hr/>
	\$34,049 59
	<hr/> <hr/>

From the above statement it will be seen that there was an overdraft at the bank, October 1, 1872, amounting to.....

At the same date there were due bills for supplies, amounting to.....	\$651 99
Salaries for quarter ending September 30, 1872.....	2,398 29
	1,462 50
	<hr/>
	\$4,512 78
	<hr/> <hr/>

## CASH ASSETS OF ASYLUM, OCTOBER 1, 1872.

Due from individuals for board, instruction and clothing .....	\$1,753 75
Due from construction account fund.....	567 81
	<hr/>
	\$2,321 56
Other assets of various kinds on hand, and available for present year's support.....	2,340 00
	<hr/>
	\$4,661 56
	<hr/> <hr/>



The cost of maintenance and instruction of each pupil, taking the average attendance for the whole period, was about \$204 a year.

Two years ago the Legislature made provision for the enlargement of the asylum, by an appropriation of \$30,000. The sum of \$5,000 was also appropriated last year to furnish the buildings thus provided.

In the last annual report of the board of trustees, mention was made of the steps taken to that date, in carrying out the contemplated improvements.

The work has now been completed, the buildings furnished and occupied, as will be seen by the report of the superintendent.

The cost of all these improvements has exceeded the estimates to such a moderate extent, that no further appropriation on building account seems called for at this time. In fact, the cost would not have exceeded the estimates at all, but for two reasons: The first was, the contract for the last building erected was necessarily let last spring, just when there was a large rise in the cost of all building materials; the second was, there was a necessity for a considerable outlay in altering the former buildings, to adjust them to the new arrangements.

The construction and furniture account has been kept entirely separate in bank from the current expense account or ordinary funds of the asylum.

The amount of bills now outstanding on the construction account is \$3,608.44. With the exercise of a very close economy in management the coming year, it is the opinion of the superintendent that it is safe to charge these bills over to the current expense account.

While the provision thus made for the wants of the idiots of teachable age and condition is adequate for the present, the board of trustees of this institution feel constrained to again call the attention of the Legislature to the need that exists for the relief of those now burdened with the care of custodial cases. By custodial cases are meant such idiots as are too old or of too low a grade to be improved by instruction. With a very moderate expense, it would seem as if they might be cared for in connection with the asylum for chronic insane, at Ovid.

In conclusion, it may be said, that to the members of the board who have had an opportunity of knowing what this asylum has done, during the last twenty-one years, in ameliorating the condition of the idiots of the State, and the relief to friends thus afforded, the moneys appropriated by the Legislature, from time to time for its



support, seems to them to have been well bestowed, and they can therefore cordially commend it to the further good-will and benefactions of the representatives of the people.

All of which is respectfully submitted by the undersigned members of the board.

JAMES H. TITUS,  
HENRY N. POHLMAN,  
FRANKLIN TOWNSEND,  
LAKE I. TEFFT,  
LYMAN CLARY,  
E. W. LEAVENWORTH,  
ALLEN MUNROE,  
GEO. F. COMSTOCK,

*Trustees.*

JOHN A. DIX, *Governor,*  
NELSON K. HOPKINS, *Compt'r,*  
JNO. C. ROBINSON, *Lieut.-Gov.,*  
*Trustees ex officio.*

## SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT.

*To the Trustees of the N. Y. Asylum for Idiots :*

GENTLEMEN.—I herewith submit a report of the affairs of the institution for the year ending October 1st, 1872.

The whole number of pupils connected with the asylum during that period was 164. The average daily number of pupils was 149.

Of the whole list 132 were supported entirely from the State appropriation. The remainder were paying pupils, either in full or in part of the actual cost of their maintenance.

The State pupils are admitted free of charge on an application signed by the parents or next friend; this is indorsed by two other parties acquainted with the applicant and the circumstances of the case, who make an affidavit before the county judge, whose certificate is then attached to the application.

The actual cost for board and instruction of each of the average number in attendance was a trifle more than \$200 a year.

Four deaths among the pupils occurred during the year; an unusual number in the experience of the asylum. One of these, a confirmed epileptic, died instantly in a fit; two died of consumption, after a lingering sickness; the fourth from diphtheria.

The general health of the pupils has been good. The present number of pupils is 163. In addition to these there are some seven or eight new pupils, whose presence is daily expected. With the appropriation made by the last Legislature, the probable number for the coming year will be about 185, including the usual proportion of paying pupils.

When this asylum was founded by legislative enactment, it was to meet a public want of a wide nature. The extent of the want, and the obligation of the State to step in to supply it, could be then and can now only be fully understood by considering the variety of conditions that exist under the general name of idiocy, and the social circumstances to which it is related in various ways.

Generically, it may be said that the term idiot includes all those cases where, from defect or infirmity in the nervous system, there is



a want of natural and harmonious development of the mental and moral powers of a human being, under the customary laws and circumstances of human growth and culture.

The inherent physical cause and the accompanying mental deficiency may be slight or extreme. It may affect every function, every faculty and every power; or it may only blunt the sensibilities, weaken the intellect and slightly impair the force of will.

In its social aspects it presents an equal variety. It may occur in the homes of the affluent, in the families of the middle class, or the indigent, and finally is often found in our pauper establishments. Everywhere it is a cause of discomfort, anxiety and a frequent source of mortification; in many instances a burden hard to be borne by rich as well as poor. And rarely can the proper means and appliances be supplied for its mitigation, except in institutions designed expressly for the purpose.

Not to attempt to present any very definite classification of idiots to enforce these opinions, it may be briefly said that, viewed as subjects of the State's providence, there are several broad classes of idiots whose condition may be referred to in this connection.

So far as the State's provision for the wants of the class is concerned, the cases occurring in wealthy families may be disregarded. Such can be cared for in private establishments; for, in that respect, it is fair to presume that the supply will equal the demand for institutions of that character.

There is then, first to be mentioned, a class of idiots, born as they are, or made so by the diseases of infancy; so defective or diseased in physical organization, and mentally and morally so deficient, as to be absolutely dependent upon others for the supply of their most simple wants; infants in everything but age and physical stature. By the very nature of their condition they are, as they grow up to man's estate, not only non-producers themselves, but, by the burden and trouble of their care-taking, diminishing the comfort and productive power of those who from affection or a sense of duty are constrained to minister or try to minister to their wants. The degree of the burden and discomfort is measured only by the degree of incapacity, the depravation of the habits or the viciousness of the particular case. In some cases, with <sup>the</sup> knowledge of those connected with the asylum, the burden has been sufficient to pauperize a whole family.

Providentially, and fortunately for society, it may be added, the



lower the stage in the descending scale of degeneracy, the power of endurance diminishes, and the survivals of the unfortunates are continually more infrequent. Now, for such as these a place of custody, whereby system in the management and the proper appliance, a relief from positive misery and suffering, a degree of comfort, and at the same time some improvement in the habits can be secured, is not alone of service to the individual and a great relief to the average family of the community, or even those in charge of the ordinary county asylum, but is a positive gain to the productive power of the State.

Separation of any dependent class from the ordinary life or circumstances of the community, or even from the aggregated masses of the county poor-houses, properly conducted, does not increase its burdensomeness, but should reduce it to its minimum.

Prompted by such considerations, and after some experience of its operation, the work of separating and caring for the class of idiots by themselves has been determined upon by the authorities in England, and with the warm approval of the commissioners of lunacy of that country.

Canada is just now following in the same steps, by the establishment of custodial institutions for idiots, as out-departments of their several insane asylums.

There is another class, constituting the mass of idiots, with physical constitutions superior to those already described. In these the physical defect and infirmity is less deep seated and less marked. The bodily functions are impaired in their action to a less degree. The capacity for improvement, mentally and morally, is latent, because the mental life is not spontaneous in its action. It does not seek, through the active exercise of the senses, the aliment that should minister to its growth and strength. It does not feel the motives of action that lie above the range of appetite or passion. It grovels, while it should rise in the scale of being. And while the spirit thus fails in a proper, active out-going, a crust of habits of inertia and indifference forms about it and grows continually more impervious to external influences.

Socially speaking, it may be said, that while the existence of such as these is less a dead-weight upon the energies of any community than those of a lower grade of idiocy, yet in themselves they are equally unproductive. Their wants in the way of shelter, food and clothing, are to be supplied without their aid; and very often this



state of unproductiveness is accompanied by disagreeable habits and annoying dispositions.

Higher than these in the scale of intelligence are those to whom the term weak-minded may be properly applied. For in their physical aspect they are hardly distinguishable from ordinary persons; and yet, through some subtle default in the functional action of the brain or other nervous tissue, in their mental expression and moral traits, they are imperfect and exceptional. However, to the practiced observer, even these have certain physical marks, related either as cause or consequence to the mental states within, that are quite well defined and certain; just as partial deafness is heard in the tones of the deaf man's voice, and even seen in the expression of his face.

These cases so defined are just enough below the rank and file of human beings, in all the attributes of the race, to be forced to the rear in the progress from infancy to manhood. And this enforced disposition of them, or rather this dropping out of line, leaves them without the occupations and the impulses suited to their age, and by which and through which the growth and development of their fellows is secured. Want of occupation, in early life, means want of occasion for thought, for the exercise of the will, for self-determination, and the individual is left to be taken possession of by habits that wall him in from future purpose or effort. Sometimes a vicious self-education goes on, guided by appetite, passion or a spirit of mischief; and the result is seen in low cunning, petty misdemeanors, or even serious crimes that endanger the peace and safety of community.

Each of these conditions of the several classes thus rudely sketched, and without attempt at scientific precision, has its own mode or form of impairing the soundness of the state and depressing its social activities and industrial forces. Each may be such a source of trouble, cost and anxiety, to family and friends, as to leave it an open question, in philanthropy, which of them is most deserving of sympathy and aid.

But for these two last classes described, something more than custody is needed, in the effort to ameliorate their condition. They are not beyond the reach of training and instruction. The bodily health can be confirmed. The muscular powers can be developed and brought under the control of the will. The noticeable want of co-ordination in these physical forces can be made to give place to a measure of prompt action and dexterity. The avenues of sensation



may be opened; the perceptive faculties may be awakened to a natural life; the intelligence may be quickened and enlarged; and these may be combined into a capacity for useful occupation and habits of industry.

They may be trained to be cheerful and obedient. They may be taught habits of self-control, and the more obvious distinctions of right and wrong, and to act upon these in their intercourse with those about them.

Such were some of the considerations that ruled in the foundation of this asylum, as well as in the case of similar institutions in other States of the Union and in foreign countries.

By the determination of the original board of trustees of this institution, its scope and purpose was limited to those degrees of idiocy which might prove to be teachable or improvable in the sense already suggested. One requisite for this was obvious, namely, the youth of the subject of instruction. Beyond this, it was assumed at the outset that somewhere in the descending scale of idiocy the line between teachableness and unteachableness would be reached. Of some at a distance from this line, it could be affirmed at once that they were susceptible of instruction, or they were not. And for these latter, it was presumed that a custodial institution would sooner or later be provided for their necessities. But with reference to others nearer the line, the fact in this respect could only be determined by a fair trial. The conditions of admission of pupils were based upon these principles.

From a variety of causes, principal among which was the want of a custodial establishment for the unimprovable cases, it has occurred that those found to be unteachable have not always been dismissed when this fact was ascertained. Custodial cases have been gradually accumulating till they now include, perhaps, twenty per cent of the inmates. But even with this drawback, the general success of the institution seems to be fairly established. It has now been in operation for twenty-one years, and in our annual report from time to time the evidences of this success have been put on record. These may be briefly referred to here. Thus, there has been a constant demand for the admission of pupils far beyond the former capacity of the institution for their reception. Of late years, the most of these applications have come from parties who have been induced to seek its advantages for their children from their knowledge of cases that had already received its benefits. There have been annually



dismissed a greater or less number of pupils after the usual period of training, who have been improved in habits, rendered more intelligent and manageable, and what is most essential, capable of simple employment under intelligent direction.

And all the while, the institution has been freely opened to visitors, who can testify to the general healthy and orderly appearance of the pupils; the obvious adaptation of the educational means and appliances to their mental needs, and to the practical ends of their instruction, and the general progress of the pupils in their school exercises.

In fact, so well adapted are the modes of instruction to the different degrees of mental endowment of the pupils; so interested and attentive are they in the various exercises of the school-room; so well disciplined in the prescribed movements and changes of the several classes, from hour to hour, and so free from the repulsive habits that are supposed to be inseparably connected with idiocy, that it needs some explanation to convince strangers that the pupils represent the average idiots of the State.

Some of your number, familiar with the working of the institution for a series of years, can bear witness to their improvement in industrial matters; the household work done by the girls, and the farm and garden work accomplished by the boys.

Even in the case of the unteachable portion of our inmates, this much may be said: the relief to their friends has been so great by their continuance in the asylum as to fully compensate for the cost of their maintenance and care. And this question of cost deserves a mention here.

Though, as might be supposed, the cost of management would seem to be necessarily increased, whenever the twofold objects of custody and education are combined in any one institution, yet the experience of this asylum has shown that the annual per capita cost of the support and instruction of idiots is not much more than two-thirds that of the inmates of the other charitable institutions supported by the State.

It remains to speak of the increased accommodations that have been furnished by the legislative appropriation of 1871.

The original buildings provided for the reception of about 150 pupils, with the necessary officers, teachers, attendants, etc.; the additions made during the last two years, and the necessary furniture for the same, for which the sum of \$35,000 was appropriated by the Legislature, will enable us to accommodate 225 pupils.



The increase of room has subserved the double purpose of adding to our accommodations for pupils, and of giving a better opportunity for a proper classification of the inmates.

The additions made in the summer of 1871 were described in the last report. During the past year a new detached wing was built at the north-west angle of the original building. It is 100 feet long, with an average width of thirty-five feet, with two stories and a basement. The exterior was made to conform to the style of architecture of the main building.

The work was done under contract by Mr. John Moore, of Syracuse, and to the entire satisfaction of the board of trustees and the superintendent.

It is warmed by steam and provided with bath-rooms and other conveniences of the most approved construction. Everything in the workmanship is plain and substantial.

It was completed about the time of the commencement of our school year, and has been occupied long enough to test its convenience and the efficiency of its apparatus for warming and ventilation. Access to the new wing has been <sup>secured</sup> covered by an inclosed piazza.

As the buildings now stand, they will compare favorably with any that have been erected for a similar purpose, in everything essential.

The entire amount appropriated for buildings and furniture for the asylum, from its foundation, has been \$121,000. Dividing this sum by the number of pupils it will accommodate, and we have a construction account of less than \$550 to each inmate.

In opening the asylum to an increased number of pupils, the officers have intended to extend its benefits as widely as possible throughout the State. To this end a circular was prepared, stating the fact of the increase in its accommodations, and giving particulars of the mode of obtaining admission. Some seven or eight hundred of these circulars have been sent to the more remote portions of the State, and returns are beginning to be received in the form of applications.

There has been but little change during the past year in the corps of assistants of every grade, and I am gratified to be able to renew my expression of satisfaction with the fidelity and zeal they have shown in a work often demanding such qualities in a high degree.

H. B. WILBUR,  
*Superintendent.*

SYRACUSE, October, 1872.

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## TREASURER'S REPORT.

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ALLEN MUNROE, Treasurer of the New York Asylum for Idiots, in account current with the State of New York, for cash received and expended for the general supplies and the salaries and wages of officers, teachers, attendants and servants of said asylum, during the year ending September 30, 1872:

1871.	<i>Dr.</i>	
Oct. 2.	Cash from State Treasurer.....	\$6,250 00
Dec. 26.	Cash from State Treasurer.....	6,250 00
1872.		
February	Cash from county treasurers, clothing State pupils .....	2,687 40
March 30.	Cash from State Treasurer.....	6,250 00
June 25.	Cash from State Treasurer.....	6,250 00
Sept. 30.	Cash receipts from pay pupils for board, tuition and clothing .....	5,710 20
30.	Overdraft at bank ..	651 99
		\$34,049 59
		\$34,049 59
1871.	<i>Cr.</i>	
Oct. 1.	Overdraft .....	\$1,795 70
1872.		
Jan. 1.	By cash paid on warrants of ex-commissioners for quarter ending December 31, 1871.....	7,174 81
April 1.	By cash paid on warrants of ex-commissioners for quarter ending March 31, 1872.....	8,573 59
July 1.	By cash paid on warrants of ex-commissioners for quarter ending June 30, 1872 .....	6,614 95
Sept. 30.	By cash paid on warrants of ex-commissioners for quarter ending September 30, 1872.....	4,180 34
30.	Accounts audited by ex-commissioners and paid by steward during the year.....	5,468 73
30.	In hands of superintendent.....	241 47
		\$34,049 59
		\$34,049 59



## APPENDIX.

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### EXTRACT FROM THE BY-LAWS OF THE ASYLUM.

“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. Those only will therefore be received into the asylum who are of a proper school-attending age, and for such periods of time as shall, in the estimation of the board of trustees, suffice to impart all the education practicable in each particular case, and in conformity with the regulations hereinafter specified.

“Children between the ages of seven and fourteen, 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, may be admitted by the superintendent, with the advice and consent of the executive committee. Applications in behalf of others shall be referred to the action of the board of trustees.

“The parents or next friends of those in whose behalf applications are made for admission as pupils shall make answers in writing to such questions as the superintendent and committee shall prescribe. They shall, moreover, if of sufficient ability, engage to pay such reasonable sum for the education and support of the pupils, and to furnish them with such proper clothing while in the institution, as shall be stipulated by the superintendent, and they shall in all cases be bound to receive them back, when required, free of expense to the asylum. But no idiots shall be received into the asylum without there shall have been first lodged with the superintendent thereof a request to that effect, under the hand of the person by whose direction he is sent, stating the age and place of nativity, if known, of the idiot, his Christian and surname, the town or city and county in which they severally reside, the ability, or otherwise, of the idiot, his parents or guardians, to provide for his support in whole or in part; and if in part only, what part and degree of relationship, or other



circumstances of connection between him and the person requesting his admission ; which statement shall be verified in writing by the oath of two disinterested persons, residents of the same county with the idiot, acquainted with the facts and circumstances so stated, and certified to be credible by the county judge of the same county. And no idiot shall be received into said asylum unless the county judge of the county liable for his support shall certify that such idiot is an eligible and proper candidate for admission to said asylum as aforesaid.

“ The State pupils in the asylum will be selected in equal numbers, as far as may be, from each judicial district, from those whose parents or guardians are unable to provide for their support therein.

“ The State pupils will be expected to come to the asylum provided with a supply of neat and substantial clothing for the first six months, after which period the clothing will be furnished by the asylum, at the expense of the respective counties of which they are residents, as in the case of the deaf and dumb, and the blind asylums of the State.

“ A bond will be required in all cases, except the case of a State pupil, to insure the removal of the pupil free of expense to the institution.

“ All pupils will be received upon trial for one month, at the end of which time a report upon the case will be made to the parents or parties sending them.

“ The education furnished by the institution will include not only the simpler elements of instruction usually taught in common schools, where that is practicable, but will embrace a course of training in the more practical matters of every-day life, the cultivation of habits of decency, propriety, self-management and self-reliance, and the development and enlargement of a capacity for useful occupation.

“ There shall be a vacation during the whole month of August, unless otherwise directed by the board, at which period all pupils must be removed from the asylum, by the parents or guardians, if required by the superintendent.

“ Applications for admission to the asylum, stating age, sex, general health, and such other particulars as will enable the trustees to judge of the teachableness of the person for whom application is made, must be directed to the superintendent, Dr. H. B. Wilbur.”

It will be seen by reference to the foregoing, just what the mode of admission is. Application is first made to the superintendent of



the asylum, furnishing such particulars of the condition of the person for whom application is made as will enable the executive committee to decide whether the party is a suitable subject for admission.

If the case come within the purpose of the institution, a blank form of application is at once sent, which, when filled up and returned to the superintendent, furnishes a statement of the name, residence, etc., of the party, and his or her pecuniary condition, or the pecuniary condition of his or her parents, verified by the affidavit of two persons acquainted with the circumstances related in the statement, and confirmed by the certificate of the county judge.

On the return of this circular, if there is a vacancy from the judicial district in which the party resides, permission is at once given for his or her admission.

If no vacancy exists at the time, the parties interested are so notified, and the application is filed, the applicant to receive the benefit of the first vacancy, in turn.

It is provided in the by-laws that each pupil shall be taken on trial. The probationary period named is one month. The practice has been otherwise. The cases rejected on trial have usually been retained a much longer period; at all events, till it was certain they were not suitable subjects for improvement.

The grounds upon which pupils have been dismissed under the rule hitherto have been, first, serious ill health that seemed likely to terminate in a speedy death. In most of the cases included under this head, the wisdom of the decision requiring their removal has been verified by the fact that they died not many months afterward. Next, confirmed epilepsy. When this disease has been fully developed, the same reasons that suggested the article in the by-laws against the admission of epileptics, would require their dismissal.

Again, true dementia, or a loss of mind resulting from organic lesion of the brain, as a consequence of some disease in infancy or childhood.

Again, cases of idiocy conjoined with insanity. In these, the very measures of management and instruction adopted in the case of idiocy, only excite and aggravate the peculiarities presented; and as there is no proper provision in this institution for confinement, seclusion or restraint, their dismissal is rendered unavoidable.

In a few cases only it could be said that all efforts to educate or radically improve, that the asylum afforded, had failed of their purpose.

