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**Contributors**

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Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
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IN MEMORY

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OF

EDOUARD SEGUIN, M.D.

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A Review of Addresses at his Funeral,

BY

G. E. SHUTTLEWORTH, B.A., M.D.,

*Medical Superintendent, Royal Albert Asylum, Lancaster.*

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Reprinted from "The Journal of Mental Science," October, 1881.

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THE MEMOIR

OF ROBERT SEYMOUR, M.D.

AS RELATED BY HIMSELF IN HIS JOURNAL.

BY C. E. SHUTTLEWORTH, M.D.

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## IN MEMORY OF EDOUARD SEGUIN, M.D.,

Being Remarks made by some of his Friends at the Lay Funeral Service, held October 31st, 1880. G. P. Putman and Sons, New York.

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The name of Edouard Seguin will long be pre-eminent amongst those who, to use the forcible expression of Esquirol, have laboured to remove the "mark of the beast" from the forehead of the idiot. Forty years and more have passed since the world awoke to a sense of its duty towards these waifs and strays of humanity; and during these forty years the spirit of Seguin would seem, in one way or another, to have animated the work on both sides the Atlantic. A brief obituary notice has already appeared in this Journal (Jan. 1881, p. 643), and it is not our present intention to do more than to refer to some of the salient points of the addresses delivered at the funeral of Dr. Seguin, now printed in the form of a memorial volume.

In these addresses by Drs. Brockett, H. B. Wilbur, George Brown, and Marion Sims, we find not merely the admiring tribute of personal friends, but the appreciative criticism of scientific collaborators. The remarks of Dr. Brockett supply interesting information as to Seguin's early career, political as well as professional; and those of Dr. Marion Sims testify to the value of his labours in connection with the general practice of medicine, specially as regards various means for promoting uniformity of scientific observation. The addresses of Drs. H. B. Wilbur and George Brown, themselves superintendents of well-known American institutions for idiots, refer more particularly to his labours in the field of idiocy.

At the present time it is not easy for us to realise the absolute hopelessness with which efforts to ameliorate the condition of the congenitally imbecile were regarded by psychologists and physicians at the period when Seguin commenced his labours at the Bicêtre. The standard "Dictionnaire de Medicine," published in 1837, had broadly stated, "It is useless to attempt to combat idiotism. In order that the intellectual exercise might be established, it will be necessary to change the conformation of organs which are beyond the reach of all modification." And even Esquirol himself had penned these desponding words: "Idiots are what they must remain for the rest of their life; everything in them betrays an organisation imperfect or arrested in its development. We do not entertain the idea of its being



possible to change this condition. No means are known by which a larger amount of reason and intelligence, even for the briefest period, can be bestowed upon the unhappy idiot." Providentially this pessimism was not allowed to prevail; and whilst Guggenbuhl on the Abendberg, and Saegert in Berlin, were independently working out plans for benefiting the cretin and the imbecile, it was Seguin who, in the wards of the Bicêtre at Paris, was most conspicuously demonstrating the means of which Esquirol had despaired. There is little doubt that to Seguin, who commenced his labours in 1837, is due the credit of priority in the work of the reclamation of idiots, although with characteristic modesty he himself avers that "at certain times and eras the whole race of man, as regards the discovery of truth, seems to arrive at once at a certain point, so that it is hard to say *who* is the discoverer." Step by step the work progressed, and gradually it earned recognition at the hands of the leaders of medical opinion. Thus in 1843 we find the illustrious Voisin, in a paper read before the Royal Academy of Medicine in Paris, referring in terms of warm appreciation to Seguin's studies and successes. "While we are speaking" (says he) "of the men who have occupied themselves with idiots, we should not fail to mention here, with some distinction, M. Seguin, whom M. Ferrus and myself were so very fortunate as to recommend to the esteem and favour of the Council-General of Hospitals, and who was therefore appointed director of our idiot-asylum at Bicêtre. Endowed with an energetic character, full of capacity, a good observer, and with his whole time at command, he has all the qualifications for this special work, and, at the same time, rendering a service to science and humanity. Already in 1838, and since, he has published the results of his efforts on behalf of a certain number of pupils, whose condition he has favourably modified. His studies, during a later period, are entirely unique, and I trust that their publication by him will not be long delayed; and I do not doubt that the time is not far distant when he will be entitled by his psychological contributions to take a distinguished rank among his cotemporaries." Voisin's prognostications were fully realised by the publication in 1846 of Seguin's *magnum opus*, entitled "*Traitement Moral, Hygiène et Education des Idiots, et des autres enfants arriérés.*"

Defining idiocy as "an infirmity of the nervous system, which has for its effect the abstraction of the whole or part of the organs and the faculties of the child from the normal



action of the will," he proceeds to divide all cases into two principal classes, those of profound and those of superficial idiocy. The basis of the treatment which he proposes is in the main identical with that which in later works he described under the designation of *physiological education*. Starting with the axiom that "The education of the senses must precede the education of the mind," he argues that the true physiological method of tuition for persons whose nervous system is imperfectly developed is (I) "*to exercise the (imperfect) organs so as to develop their functions,*" and (II), "*to train the functions so as to develop the (imperfect) organs.*" Ingenious devices are described whereby the organs of the senses may be methodically exercised, and cases are given in minute detail in which such exercises have been adapted to special incapacities.

A treatise containing so much that was novel and of deep interest, not only with regard to the training of the idiot, but in its relation to the principles of education generally, could not fail to elicit attention, and Dr. Brockett tells us "it was crowned by the Academy," whilst Dr. Wilbur mentions that the author received from Pope Pius IX. an autograph letter of thanks for the service he had rendered to mankind. But the most practical result was the attention it attracted to Seguin's work at the Bicêtre, which was speedily visited by psychologists of many nations, and amongst them by Mr. Gaskell and Dr. Conolly. The former published in "Chambers' Journal" for 1847 an appreciative notice of Seguin's school, whilst the latter testified, in the "British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review," his high estimation of the skill and science of the master. It is not too much to say that the establishment in England of the asylums for idiots at Earlswood and Colchester, and even at a later date of the Royal Albert Asylum at Lancaster, was due to a large extent to the influence of the principles and practice set forth by Seguin at the Bicêtre. The fame of his work moreover spread to the United States, and an approving report by Messrs. Horace Mann and Sumner of what they had seen in Paris, gave strength to the movement which ultimately led to the institution of state asylums for idiots in Massachusetts and New York.

It is curious that the torch from which so much illumination was kindled should have at length been allowed to go out. But with the revolution of 1848, Seguin's connexion with the Bicêtre, and with France, came to an end. An earnest Republican, and distrustful of the designs of the Prince President, he resolved


\* Jan 1845 - 6292.



to become a citizen of the United States, and for a time he engaged in general practice in Ohio. Soon, however, he became acquainted with the recently-established Institutions for Idiots in his adopted country; and for a period he presided over the Pennsylvania Training School. But his want of familiarity with English, and his distaste for mere administrative detail, rendered this post irksome to him; and for the last 30 years of his life he practised as a physician in New York. His love for his early work never left him, and in 1866 he published, with the assistance of his son, Dr. E. C. Seguin, a book in English on "Idiocy, and its treatment by the Physiological Method." This, notwithstanding its occasional Gallicisms, has a charm of style which renders it very lively reading.

In the last decade of his life he was a frequent visitor to European Medical Congresses, where he figured more especially as the advocate of a uniform metric system, and of "mathematical" thermometry in medicine. He lost, however, no opportunity of aiding in the progress of the scientific treatment of idiocy; and in his official "Report on Education," *apropos* of the Vienna Exhibition of 1873, he records his visits to many of the English and Continental institutions. His latest writings were monographs on the "Training of an Idiotic Hand," and the "Training of an Idiotic Eye," in which he puts forward observations to show that cerebral and cranial development followed the training of those organs. It is interesting to learn that the last enterprise of his life was the establishment in the City of New York of a "Physiological School for Weak-minded and Weak-bodied Children." From the prospectus of this, dated October, 1880, we quote the closing paragraph—"The application of physiology to education was the work of my youth, and has been the main object of my thoughts for forty-two years. I give it my last years, with the assistance of my wife, meaning to leave her the young and clear-headed exponent of the method I have scattered, but not exhausted, in many books, pamphlets, and living lessons." It is melancholy to think that within a few weeks after he penned these words he was snatched by the hand of death from the fresh sphere of usefulness he had contemplated. His devotion to his work was of the most unselfish kind, and, to borrow the words of Dr. Brockett, the most appropriate and truthful inscription on his monument would be, "He loved others better than himself."

G.E.S.



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