An apartment school for mentally deficient boys
by
Ada M. Fitts
A "APARTMENT" SCHOOL FOR MENTALLY DEFICIENT BOYS—BY ADA M. FITTS

Out in the North End of Boston an apartment originally arranged in six rooms with a laundry in the basement has undergone some novel remodelling. By removing partitions, building shelves around the walls, introducing benches and a few similar touches it has been converted into—not a sweatshop, but a school for some of Boston's mentally deficient boys.

Boston was one of the first American cities to provide special classes for mentally defective children, two being formed in 1899. The city now has thirty classes with nearly 500 children in attendance. Great care is taken to select only improvable cases. Unimprovable ones are gradually being placed in the state schools for feeble-minded at Waverly and Wrentham.

In Boston, as in many other cities, the special class has usually occupied a room in an elementary school building and has cared for the mentally deficient children of the immediate neighborhood. In 1912 an attempt was made to work out the so-called "center" plan.

Under the leadership of Helen E. Mead such a center was established in an apartment house in a district in the North End having a school membership of over 2,000 boys. Twenty-five children were selected and two teachers provided.

The equipment of this center differs from that of the usual schoolroom. Instead of desks and chairs ordinary kitchen tables and chairs are used. These tables have been cut down, the drawers removed and boards nailed in

THE STORY OF MY LIFE

Written by a mentally deficient girl of fourteen trying to do third grade primary work in a Boston school

I am a girl who would like to have more brans than I have got because a brans is a very good then to have to work by and to see by and to hear by. Some peoploe have a very good brans and some peoploe have very sleepy brans indeed but I would like a smart brans. I would not like to have the brans that I have got any longer.

crackers or homemade bread spread with peanut butter, fruit of some kind, nuts, raisins, and occasionally a lump of sugar. The drink is a cup of cocoa made with malted milk. Many of the children come to school without breakfast. It is not strange that at half past nine they are more interested in a sandwich than a book.

The work after morning lunch is largely individual. The purpose is to teach these boys to do a few things well: writing their names, measuring, counting, spelling or word study, reading, drawing, modelling, telling time, oral language interspersed with physical exercises. Eleven o'clock brings a short period of play out of doors, after which the school work is continued till noon.

A large number of these children eat on the street so it is no hardship for them to re-enter school about one o'clock. They do manual work until 1:30, then wash their hands and go to the class room to rest. What seems to the careless observer laziness in these children is in reality fatigue, the effect of late hours, overcrowded sleeping quarters and poor ventilation. Often half of the children sleep at this rest period. Those who do not are taught to close their eyes while the teacher reads or tells a story, but for all there is almost complete relaxation.

After the rest period two boys from fourteen to sixteen years of age come from the neighboring North Bennet Street Industrial School to act as pupil teachers, a position which they consider an honor. They do excellent work without compensation and are much interested in the progress of their pupils. A general oversight is kept by the teachers but so little is needed that they can carry on basketry, weaving, caning, modelling and brass work in an adjoining room. Later comes the cleaning of the manual training room, putting rooms in order and recess. From 3.00 to 3.30, four days in a week, oral work, sense training, observation lessons out-of-doors or gardening are carried on. On Wednesday afternoon the last half hour is used for a bath at the Municipal Bath House.

There are obvious advantages in this "center" plan. In a crowded district the mentally deficient may be classified and those of a lower grade of development may be given the form of instruction best adapted to their needs while the more improvable types may make more rapid advancement. The older may be separated from the younger and sexes may be separated in the older groups. The teachers may specialize in the subjects they are best fitted to teach, one taking all the manual training, another the games and physical training, and so
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... thus through constant co-operation they may work out their problem for the good of all.

As the special class children reach the age for leaving school the need of "follow-up work" becomes urgent. Franklin B. Dyer, superintendent of schools says: "The need is for an institution that will provide this oversight, or an officer who will watch the career of each graduate and act as adviser, who will consult with employers, co-operate with court officials and institutions and continue the guidance and control begun by the teachers. This follow-up work will eventually be one of the great means of preventing pauperism, vagrancy, crime and racial degeneracy. Two such officers have been recently appointed in New York city."

The "story of my life" printed in another column is one of the strongest appeals that can be made to the educators of the country to secure justice for feebleminded and normal children alike.

MEASURING A TREE—OUT OF DOORS INSTRUCTION AND PLAY PERIODS ARE FEATURES OF THE SCHOOL WORK