FEEBLE-MINDED CHILDREN IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

BY

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INSTRUCTOR IN PEDAGOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY IN THE STATE NORMAL SCHOOL AT WESTFIELD, MASS., AND HONORARY MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL OFFICERS OF AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS FOR IDIOTIC AND FEEBLE-MINDED PERSONS.

[An Address read before the Association of Medical Officers of American Institutions for Idiotic and Feeble-Minded Persons at Fort Wayne, Indiana, May, 1894, and Reprinted from the Proceedings of the Association.]

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

Many requests have come to the writer for copies of his address on “Feeble-Minded Children in the Public Schools”; and, as it has been accessible only in the published proceedings of the association of medical officers before whom it was read, he has decided to reprint it in the present form. In a number of the larger cities of America to-day, the question of segregating the mentally deficient children from those children with normal capacities is forcing itself upon the attention of school officials. The intelligent work of Dr. George E. Shuttleworth in this connection in the elementary schools of London is well worth considering on this side of the Atlantic.

The writer wishes to express his sense of obligation to those superintendents of schools for feeble-minded children who, through personal suggestions and printed reports, have aided him so materially in his studies, and especially to Dr. A. E. Osborne, Superintendent of the California Home for the Care and Training of Feeble-Minded Children, Dr. Walter E. Fernald, Superintendent of the Massachusetts School for the Feeble-Minded, and Dr. A. C. Rogers, Superintendent of the Minnesota School for Feeble-Minded. These three gentlemen take high rank in the field of pathological education, and the institutions over which they preside, are doing a grade of work well worthy the thoughtful attention of American teachers of all classes of children.

Three European specialists have greatly aided the writer in his efforts to understand the means of training the abnormal mind. These are Dr. George E. Shuttleworth, Director of the Ancaster House, Richmond, England, whose writings are of great value to teachers; Herr J. Trüper, Direktor der Anstalt für schwer erziehbare Kinder auf der Sophienhöhe bei Jena, in whose institution the writer was for a period of six months a frequent visitor, and Prof. Theodor Ziehen, of the University of Jena, whose inspiring and helpful course of lectures on pathological psychology it was the great good fortune of the undersigned to hear.

Westfield, Mass., Jan. 5, 1897.

Will S. Monroe.
FEEBLE-MINDED CHILDREN IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.*

The degree of mental disorder which unfit:; a child to attend the public schools of the state has varied widely in point of time. Fifty years ago many children with minor psychical abnormalities—now considered proper subjects for special institutions—were freely admitted to the privileges of the common schools, so long as they did not seriously interfere with its even tenor, or jeopardize the lives and morals of the other children. And in many sections of our country to-day the child with deranged nervous mechanism, distorted perception, slight power of attention, uncertain memory, and weak will-power, is admitted to the same school and subjected to the same methods and course of study as the normal and healthy children in the community. State and private institutions† have entirely changed these conditions, but an experience of fifteen years as teacher and superintendent of public schools leads me to believe that the practice is yet all too common.

A few instances will suffice to illustrate this prevalence. A. was a lad of fourteen years; his mother of American and his father of English birth. He was found to be in a grade the average age of which was a little more than nine years, but he was not large for his age. His features were irregular and his gait unsteady; he was fidgety and inattentive in school, and possessed of a morbid stubbornness to such a degree that hostilities with his teachers were constant. He seemed incapable of study, and his moral perversity becom-

* Also read before the National Conference of Charities and Corrections at Nashville, Tenn., May, 1894.

† An admirable account of the growth of such institutions in America will be found in The History of the Treatment of the Feeble-Minded, by Walter E. Fernald, Boston, 1893. An account of European institutions will be found in Rapport sur l'Assistance des Enfants idiots et dégénérés, by Dr. Bourneville, Lyons, 1894.
ing so marked, the superintendent was asked to dismiss him from school. After a conference with the teacher, and a week or two of personal observation, it was decided that the boy was not "quite right," and that he ought to be placed in a special institution. The mother was consulted, and she gave many incidents in the boy's life which pointed strongly toward his imbecility; she was told of the superintendent's conclusion, and, while recognizing its justice, was unwilling to bring such disgrace on her family as that of having him committed to a home for the care and training of feeble-minded children. Within a year from the date of this conference, he committed an act which brought him within the power of the police, and the court sentenced him to a long term in a juvenile reformatory, where he has since been declared to be an imbecile.

B. was a girl of American parentage who entered school at the age of ten; her father was consumptive, but her mother was a healthy but simple minded woman. The girl herself was of rather low nutrition. She was quick in movements, and at times highly excitable. The first evidence of defect noted by her teacher was a tendency to relate strange, improbable stories and these often in a disconnected manner, repeating the details over and over. By nature she was affectionate, and during the first two years of her school life she was fond of her teacher, and kept pace fairly well with the other members of her class. But promotion brought her in contact with a teacher she did not like, and in spite of watchfulness and solicitude on the part of an educated sister who was interested in her welfare, the girl's intellectual progress was at an end. Although kept in school the four subsequent years, she made no advance in her studies. She was frequently punished for failure to perform the simplest tasks, but to no purpose. Superintendent and teacher frequently discussed her work, but neither recognized her mental disorder. The solicitous sister, noting the child's tendency to waywardness and social failure, made frequent appeals to the superintendent, but he had no remedy to suggest. At sixteen years she had grown into an
incorrigible woman, and it was found necessary to commit her to a home for wayward girls. After two years' detention, medical experts pronounced her unmistakably feeble-minded.

These may be extreme cases, but they typify at least one child observable in almost every public school of the land. Believing such abnormalities to be much more common in our graded schools than is usually supposed, I addressed letters of inquiry some months ago to several hundred public school teachers in California. I asked these teachers to observe the physical and mental defects of the children under their charge.

* Dr. Osborne in an able address to the teachers of California remarks:

"How shall we detect true feeble-mindedness in school children?"

"To answer this I must enumerate some of the characteristics and leading propensities of this grade. Perhaps the more noticeable characteristics of the truly feeble-minded child is the very childishness or immaturity of its acts, its expressions, and its demonstrative desires. Here is to be found an innocence that is strangely out of place with its environment, and whose lack of depth and breadth to its conception of the concerns of life is at variance with the opportunities which confront it. Thus its acts are in the main purposeless, or when directed to a purpose that purpose is found to be puerile. We have the body at sixteen directed by a mental consciousness scarcely greater than that of the normal child at six. In the majority of cases there will be found to exist some physical abnormality, blight, or peculiarity that will give you a clue to the retarded development of the brain and mind. The first of these to be mentioned is the exaggerated symmetry of the features. I may note here that no human being is anatomically symmetrical, and it is well that we are not, for if we were our present ideas of individual beauty and personal attraction would be leveled to the one type of a model that, from its absolute sameness in all individuals, would radically dispense with those facial contours which now give pleasing variety to our conception of individual charms and of personal beauty. The feeble-minded, therefore, are pretty sure to present exaggerations of these variations, sometimes to the degree of undue conspicuousness or perhaps downright repulsiveness. Test this by comparing facial lines and angles and the muscular development of the one side of the median line with the condition of affairs found on the other.

"The stature is, as a rule, under size. This is especially true of females, and in both sexes there exists a tendency to round shoulders—a stooping—that increases as they grow older. The gait is more or less shuffling, the step marked by a peculiar dragging of the feet, the whole body lacks graceful carriage, and the general progressive movements of locomotion and prehension are performed hesitatingly and with apparent lack of confidence. This state of affairs arises from the enfeebled or erratic muscular development and the inherent weakness of the will, whose
and to send me their observations. These results, collated and condensed, are as follows:

1. No. of pupils observed. .................................................. 10,842
2. No. with irregularities in features. .................................. 318
3. No. with irregularities in movements. ............................... 312
4. No. with irregularities in speech. ................................... 345
5. No. maimed or paralyzed. ............................................... 98
6. No. with history of “fits” during school life. ..................... 46
7. No. of low nutrition—pale, thin, delicate. ......................... 754
8. No. who are mentally dull in school. ................................ 1,054
9. No. who are feebly-gifted mentally. .................................. 268
10. No. of imbeciles and idiots. .......................................... 6

behests are responded to feebly and irregularly by the muscular system. In these movements there will be found to exist a lack of coordination, accounting for the deficiency shown in purposive acts. This also explains many errors in speech which are more or less defective from lack of coordination of the muscles involved in producing speech, from malformations of the speech organs and their auxiliaries, and lastly, from the inability of the nerve cells in the speech areas of the brain to convert readily, mental impressions into ideas, and ideas into the correct word representatives.

"Sensibility, for obvious reasons, falls far below the normal standard, not only as to tactile sense, but in their tolerance of pain as well. In the grade of cases usually found in institutions, this deficiency is marked. They will often mutilate themselves with indifference, and will most complacently undergo minor surgical and dental operations that would cause acute sufferings to those of normal nervous development. I have known a gross, plethoric, feeble-minded girl to fall asleep during the extraction of a number of decayed teeth; another to sit with calm indifference under the accumulative horrors of having decayed teeth excavated, the nerve pulp destroyed, and the cavity chemically cleansed.

The cranium, as might be expected, shows divergence from a normal type, heads being very big or very little, very long and narrow, or flattened posteriorly. The external appendages of the ear lack conformity to the usual type in texture, size, and shape. The mouth is so frequently relaxed and open that this constitutes a prominent sign. Associated with this condition is the drooling, the slaverling of the lower types, and the forcible projection of spittle in the efforts to talk under strong excitement met with in the higher types.

"The memory is nearly always weak and unreliable. The faculty of observation is limited within the more elementary lines, and attention is both difficult to fix and hard to hold without unusual efforts on the part of the teacher. The imagination is very crude. Such children are capable of the most meager abstract thinking, and their powers of judgment aberrant to a degree; they act impulsively, and without reason, because the fundamental principles of potentiality in this respect are inactive—inert."
The test is in no sense scientific or conclusive, but it is suggestive in at least this—that there are many children in our public schools who could be more economically and wisely trained in special institutions than in the state schools where they now are, and many more who, although not positively feeble-minded, skirt the border land of abnormality, and because of their large numbers—nearly ten per cent. of the whole public school enrollment—should receive the thoughtful attention of teachers and specialists.*

Irregularities in feature may arise from causes wholly independent of mental disturbances, and unless associated with asymmetry cannot be taken as diagnostic of mental defect; but when associated with irregularities in movement and speech, they do indicate infantile palsies and cerebral troubles, which must have retarded the development of the tissues and functions. Over three per cent. of the more than ten thousand California children observed bear these blemishes.

"Number with history of fits during school life," was not an easy question to answer, because of the fact that children rarely continue with one teacher more than a single year, and teachers, in the city schools at least, know little that happens in the homes. But the number is sufficiently large to indicate the presence of many epileptics in our public schools.

Of those with low nutrition—pale, thin, and delicate—the large number—nearly seven per cent.—estabishes the fact that a great many school children are neurasthenic—suffering from

*For the characteristics of mental deficiency in childhood see:

_Mentally Deficient Children: Their Care and Training._ By George E. Shuttleworth. London, 1895.


An excellent bi-monthly journal (in German) is now being published at Langensalza. It is edited by Dr. J. L. A. Koch of Würtemburg, Chr. Ufer of Altenburg, Professor Zimmer of Herborn, and J. Trüper of Sophienhöhe bei Jena. It is entitled _Die Kinderfehler: Zeitschrift für Pädagogische Pathologie und Therapie in Haus, Schule, und Sozialem Leben._
nervous strain with all its reactionary vices upon the training and development of minds and bodies.*

Regarding the "mentally dull in school," Dr. E. A. Osborne, Superintendent of the California Home for the Care and Training of Feeble-minded Children, and a specialist of high repute, writes me: "I am astonished at the number of mentally dull—ten per cent. I am sure from my experience with census statistics that these figures are below what a specialist would give were all the children (10,842) to pass before his inspection. It indicates two things at least; first, that children of feeble minds are found in all the schools, but probably unrecognized as truly mentally abnormal, and, second, that we must change some of our old ideas regarding proper educational benefits for the feeble-minded. It is easy to surmise that fully ten per cent. of your 10,842 children are incompetent or defective in some degree."

From these statistics, two things seem to me especially needful; first, instruction which will acquaint our teachers with the characteristics of mental defects and disorders,† and second, such general discussion of the needs and methods of training feeble-minded children that the prejudices of parents may be overcome. A long experience teaches me that every school of fifty pupils has at least one child that can be better and more economically trained in the special institutions than in the public schools. Kept in graded schools as they are, with teachers who have little knowledge of their condition, and no appreciation of their needs, they leave these schools and take prominent rank among the paupers, social failures,

*Dr. Walter E. Fernald says in this connection: "As a rule these children come to us in poor physical condition. They need generous feeding with the most nutritious food in good variety, but in the plainest sort, such as good bread and butter, cereals, an abundance of pure milk, meat at least once a day, preferably in the form of soluble soups and broths, and a liberal supply of fresh vegetables. . . . Their digestive and assimilative functions are so imperfectly performed that they often actually need a much larger ration than would a normal person."

†In the normal schools in Germany, as a part of their professional training, the students have a course of instruction in the education of defective children.
and criminals. But what of the remaining eight or nine per cent. who are yet much below the general average? Are they to over crowd our special institutions, by adding to the state's burden? Or are they to remain a hindrance to the ninety or more per cent. of normal children of the community? In the larger cities and towns, some segregation would be possible, where a specialist might take small classes of the "mentally dull" and "feebly-gifted mentally," and give them such individual instruction as their peculiar defects required. In Norway, I am told, there are such schools for exceptional children, and that in these schools no teacher is permitted to have more than twelve children under her care.* Why not have such schools in the United States?

* Such schools were organized in London nearly seven years ago, and were recently visited by the writer. Five hundred mentally dull children are organized into special classes, and these are under the supervision of a specialist. No teacher of the mentally dull is permitted to have over twenty children under her care, and the methods of teaching used are those usually found in institutions for feeble-minded children. When a teacher concludes that a pupil is too feeble, mentally, for the work of the ordinary school, she reports the matter to the superintendent of the schools for the mentally dull children, who, together with the medical adviser of the public schools, diagnoses the case; and if they find the teacher's judgment to be correct, the child is transferred to a mentally dull class. These classes are in the same school building with the normal children.
OTHER WRITINGS BY WILL S. MONROE ON THE EDUCATION OF DEFECTIVE CHILDREN.


2. The same reprinted in pamphlet form, pp. 8. Oakland, 1894.


