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AN INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL SCHOOL WORK
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BY

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DIPLOMÉE GRADUATE OF THE TRAINING SCHOOL, VINELAND, U.S.A.

WITH A FOREWORD BY

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PREFACE

The systematic education of mentally defective children has passed through various phases since its early days, while changes in both procedure and method have been frequent. Some theories have been discarded, others modified or strengthened, and new ones have been put forward. Most of this development has been brought about by the wonderful “enthusiasm for something and faith in something” of earnest workers. Carried out with enterprise and devotion until the merits of the movement have been recognized, these ideas have been communicated almost entirely by means of conferences and verbal intercourse.

There are, however, many young teachers opening new schools and taking charge of classes who will need several years’ experience before they can hope to know the defective child sufficiently well to have any strong convictions with regard to his training. There are at the present time many who have undertaken this most arduous task with hardly any preparation for it; even now the number of those who have taken a special course of training for Special School work is an almost negligible percentage.

Nothing has been written for teachers from a purely educational point of view, or by a teacher of mentally defectives for others, yet one is continually being asked for a simple non-medical book for teachers.

This Introduction to Special School Work is an
attempt to fill the gap, and it claims to be mainly sug-
gestive to those who can develop the ideas put forward as their experiences and observations accumulate.

To appreciate the difficulties of a beginner, it is essential to have experienced them, and yet not too long ago to remember how anxious a time it was, and how cheering gradually to pierce the clouds of difficulty.

In order to be helpful it is equally necessary to know many schools and institutions both at home and abroad, so as to compare and sift out the best from each. Many of the suggestions given here are developed from ideas gathered during a year I spent in Germany several years ago, when I visited over a hundred schools, mainly Special Schools; some, too, are the fruit of a visit of several months' duration to the eastern United States in 1914, where I saw over forty schools. The experiences gained in these countries and in many towns and cities of England and Scotland have been of exceptional value to me.

If my little volume proves to be of service to teachers in helping them to make the mentally defective children in their charge more useful, more self-respecting and happier, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

M. F. B.

January, 1917.
FOREWORD

by

GEORGE A. AUDEN, M.A., M.D., M.R.C.P.

The definitions of Feeble-mindedness, Imbecility and Idiocy which were accepted by the Royal Commission for the Care and Control of the Feeble-minded, and have, more recently, received legal sanction in the Mental Deficiency Act, lay stress upon the inability for self-support as the main criterion. These definitions, although not altogether satisfactory from a scientific point of view, are valuable in that they reveal the true meaning of the problem of feeble-mindedness, i.e. an incapacity for the complete fulfilment of the duties of membership of a social community. In less highly developed societies, only the grosser degrees of feeble-mindedness will obtrude themselves, and the presence of these less adaptable members is accepted without question, or they are regarded with superstitious awe and reverence as mysterious manifestations of "the power in darkness whom we guess." The attitude of the Muslim world to the idiot and imbecile well exemplifies this atmosphere of superstitious reverence with which such a condition is surrounded. The Muslim does not see in the inability to learn to speak anything intrinsically wrong with the mental development, but he regards the child as endowed with special powers denied to the rest of mankind. If the child is dumb, it is not because it
cannot speak, but because its thoughts are a vision of
God which transcends human speech. Further, it is
only the idiot who can see the garina, or evil double
with which every human soul is indissolubly united.
From the cradle to the grave, this garina is ever on
the watch to work evil on his human mate, and must
accordingly be propitiated or rendered harmless by
charms and incantations. This malign influence is
especially dangerous at the time of child-birth, and,
therefore, a mother, anxious to secure the safety of her
child, tries, by gifts and kindness, to procure the presence
of an idiot.

The gradual raising of the standard of mentality
required for self-support is well exemplified by the
references to the subject which are to be found in
English law, and in the gradual narrowing of the legal
definitions until the present time is reached. The intro-
duction of new terms to describe newly recognized
degrees of mental deficiency is evidence in the same
direction. The term "idiot" originally included all forms
of congenital mental deficiency in contradistinction to
lunacy or acquired defect. The limitation of the word
"idiot," with present connotation of congenital mental
defect of a profound character, appears to have been a
gradual one. The earlier meaning of one without pro-
fessional knowledge, i.e. a simple man, appears to have
existed for some time side by side with that to which it
is now restricted. This is seen in the title under date
1657, "The Devine Lover or the Saintly Ideots De-
votions." A quotation from Boyle's "Experimental and
Natural Philosophy" makes this still more clear: "Idiots
admire in things the beauty of their materials, but artists
that of the workmanship."

The term "imbecile" does not make its appearance
with its present meaning until considerably later; originally denoting weakness or feebleness, e.g., "imbecille wynes," it seems to have acquired its present significance in the earlier half of the nineteenth century, as is seen in a quotation from De Quincey (1845): "But he had the misfortune to be imbecile—in fact, he was partially an idiot." (Murray’s Dictionary.)

By virtue of his inability "to manage himself and his affairs with ordinary prudence," the idiot or natural fool, a "nativitate mente captus," as he is described, was judged by Law to be unable to hold property, which accordingly reverted to the King, who in return was theoretically under the obligation of supplying him with food and sustenance only. Milton in his "Tenure of Kings" puts the matter clearly: "By the civil laws a fool or idiot born shall lose the lands where to he was born because he is not able to use them aright."

The earliest definition of the amount of mentality which constituted the idiot shows that the standard was by no means exacting:

"An idiot or a natural foole is he who, notwithstanding he bee of lawfull age, yet he is so witlesse that he cannot number to twentie nor tell what age he is of nor knoweth who is his father or mother, nor is able to answer to any such easie question." *

As a test of general intelligence these conditions no doubt formed a sound working basis, but if applied under the organized educational systems of to-day, would allow nearly all the children who are included under the provisions of the Education (Epileptic and Defective Children) Act, 1899, to be classified as normal.

A legal definition given a century later by Hale (1670) in connection with the question of criminal

* 1590, Testamento ii. 39.
responsibility shows that by that time an advance had been made, and that some kind of distinction was now recognized between the true idiot and the higher grades of feeble-mindedness:

"The best measure, I think, is this: such a person as, labouring under melancholy distempers, hath yet ordinarily, as great understanding as a child of fourteen years hath, is such a person as may be guilty of treason or felony."

From this ruling it is clear that a person whose mental equipment fell short of the average natural intelligence was presumably unable to recognize the nature of his actions and accordingly could not be held responsible. The subject of criminal responsibility has continued to exercise jurists, and the line of demarcation between the lunatic and the idiot (using the term in its wider sense) has gradually become marked out more clearly, although the distinction still presents very great difficulties in the interpretation of criminal law. Although it attempts no definition of the term, the Idiots Act, 1886, marks a new step in this evolution. It was their contact with the law that first called attention to the existence of the high-grade feeble-minded, who show little or no appreciable intellectual deficiency, but are unable to conduct themselves in consonance with the dictates of conscience, law or convention.

The term "Amoral Imbeciles" appears to have been applied to such persons for the first time as early as the year 1836. It is difficult to determine at what period the phrase "feeble-minded" came first into use. Another term, which though used on the Continent has unfortunately never come into general use in England, is "feebly-gifted," * which admirably describes the slow-

* German "swach begabte." Norwegian "svakt begavede."