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## Part I.—Original Articles.

*The Improvable Imbecile: his Training and Future.* By A. R. DOUGLAS, Deputy Medical Officer, H.M. Prison, Portland; late Deputy Medical Superintendent, Royal Albert Asylum, Lancaster.

THE cause of the Imbecile has for some time past been a plea which has never failed to elicit the practical sympathy of the public; yet much remains to be done before we have fulfilled our obligation to those who are not lunatics, and are capable, under suitable conditions, of being made self-supporting members of the community. As in this paper I intend to deal chiefly with the future of the improvable imbecile, I think that in the first place the statement that such an individual after training is independently capable of earning his own livelihood is as absurd as it is impossible. I shall presently endeavour to show that without supervision little or nothing can be expected from an imbecile, however highly trained and educated he may be; his whole disposition and temperament away from control completely negatives the supposition, and actual cases have proved that, unless under sympathetic and intelligent guidance, the life of the imbecile as far as usefulness is concerned is not only a blank, but that the individual himself is a burden, and in some instances a nuisance to society and his friends. Secondly, there can be no doubt that much of the careful and patient instruction bestowed upon such cases at the educational establishments is wasted, for the simple reason that at the expiration of their term there many improved imbeciles gravitate to conditions totally unsuitable for



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them, and under which it is almost impossible to expect that the training which they have received will, so to speak, have a fair chance. On completion of their term of training it may be that in some cases the parents are dead, and there are no relations or guardians to look after them ; for a large number there is nothing but the workhouse. Again, their imbecile temperament causes others, perhaps in a moment of pique, to abandon the work which has been obtained for them possibly only by a vast amount of trouble, and they thus become a burden to their relatives. A third section are, away from supervision, incurably vicious, and many in the course of their career become gaol-birds and convicts. The imbecile is one who is totally, or in part, bereft of the faculties necessary to enable him to take a successful part in the battle of life, and I think that it may be safely assumed that, in the whirl of this nineteenth century, with its attributes of high pressure and overcrowding in every direction, the imbecile can of himself secure no place. His appearance, his mental and often physical deficiencies, are all dead against him, and his unstable equilibrium, manifested in uncertainty of temper and morals, renders him in many cases quite unfit to be trusted away from proper care and supervision. In fact, it is unjust and unfair to forget this by exposing these individuals to risks by trusting them too far.

With respect to the training of imbeciles, much admirable work is done at the great educational establishments at Lancaster, Earlswood, Colchester, and Exeter, the first named under the able superintendence of Mr. James Diggens. Here the results of training are as hopeful as could be expected when one considers the material which is dealt with, and which at first is often terribly lacking in promise for the future. It is, however, in the industrial departments that one really sees what improvable imbeciles are capable of learning, and what really excellent tradesmen many of them have become under the intelligent supervision and control of instructors, who are, as far as possible, chosen because they possess the requisite qualifications of temper and disposition calculated to gain confidence, which is vitally necessary to manage lads who are often wayward in temper, and prone, from their very infirmity, to idleness and vice.

All who are familiar with imbeciles are aware of those cases

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showing remarkable talents, one of which I shall now describe. Here is a lad of twenty years of age: he can read and write well, and is particularly clever at arithmetic; but when we narrowly observe the boy we find that he suffers from severe athetosis, is quite unable to walk, even with assistance; one arm is practically useless, and the expression of his features is contorted constantly into horrible grimaces through muscular twitchings. We find that he has a violent temper, is very malicious, a confirmed masturbator and liar. Now here is a case where sufficient education has been imparted to enable him to hold a humble post, but he is so terribly handicapped physically and morally that he is totally debarred from earning his livelihood independently. I adduce another example of this very constant feature in these cases, this unstable equilibrium in varying degrees of intensity. The instance I have in mind is a very different one from the case just cited; this is a youth with but little of the imbecile in his appearance: smart, bright, and intelligent-looking, he can read, write, and count, and is employed as messenger in an important department of the institution. This youth has times out of number been trusted with money, and, as far as that is concerned, has on every occasion proved himself to be worthy of confidence. His history, however, shows that he on two occasions made his escape from the asylum. The first time he went to a neighbouring watering-place, where he secured employment, and took lodgings at a figure nearly three times as much as he was to earn at his work. He was before long discovered and brought back, and after a short period of resentment returned to his usual frame of mind and went on steadily for about two years, when he again disappeared. On this occasion he went to his native town, some eighty miles distant, having for some time before escaping saved his pocket-money to pay his railway fare. He was brought back by his mother, when it was ascertained that he had proposed marriage to a young lady, to whom he represented himself as a clerk in receipt of a regular salary.

Instances of this marked feature of instability might be multiplied, but I only advance these two in order to show the fallacy of the belief that these improvable cases can be rendered capable of independently earning even the most modest competence. A few, and only a very few, are successful; but it will be found in nine out of every ten that they have had some advan-

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tage in the way of supervision, and that there is encouragement and a helping hand somewhere. That a number of criminals of a certain class are mentally defective in varying degrees of intensity I have no doubt whatever, and many now undergoing penal servitude would never have been there at all had they been fortunate enough to have had the advantage of suitable control, instead of having been left to themselves, cursed with congenital infirmity, rendering them the victims of wild impulses and rampant passions, ungoverned and unrestrained by defective and enfeebled inhibitory faculties. I should be sorry to say that all imbeciles of the type now under consideration are incapable of the elementary education necessary to fit them for holding situations in the humbler walks of life; for many, as far as the possession of this knowledge is concerned, are quite eligible, but of what avail is this education when mental instability is almost universal? Surely of no value at all unless such cases are to be continuously subject to superintendence and control. Those who are familiar with imbeciles are well aware how much depends upon the nature of their environment and the character of their associates. One has only to reflect upon the lamentable results following their location in wards with the insane, to be very forcibly impressed by the vital importance of proper surroundings for them, and by the equal importance of supervision by persons possessing qualifications which fit them for undertaking this responsibility. By this I mean individuals of quick perception with keen insight into character, ready to note and understand the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of those under their care. Above all, such persons ought to be endowed with ready sympathy and kindness of heart. It must never be forgotten that but little can be done with an imbecile unless his confidence is first gained. But where, if we except the training institutions, are we to find these necessary conditions? Most assuredly not in the office or workshop of the ordinary merchant or artisan; there the well-being of the unfortunate imbecile would not, in the usual course, be considered before business, and did we succeed in getting an ex-patient into either of them we should possibly find that his "imbecile temperament" was unable to cope with what might strike him as unsympathetic surroundings: if, when instructed as to his work, his superior was in any way curt or brusque, then he would resent it, and immediately

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become unsettled. Again, if he had any physical deformity, or happened to be of abnormal appearance, the jeers of his fellow-workmen would cause him acute misery, and an imbecile of this type is always more or less sensitive. This is the hardship which very often handicaps many of those poor lads, for they are often made to feel their inferiority by being made the butt for cruel jest and bitter ridicule. I have already said that much good work is done in the industrial departments of the training institutions. Nearly all these improvable cases are capable of being taught trades, and I know several who are really almost proficient workmen as joiners, basket makers, tailors, and shoemakers. It is most important that in deciding upon a trade to be taught, careful selection be made, and individual aptitude and predilection considered. Farm labour is eminently suitable, and is of course very healthy employment. But of what use is all this training when one considers that the object of this excellent attention will most assuredly, unless placed under suitable conditions, tend to gravitate to the workhouse, the lunatic asylum, or even the prison? Surely it is both time and money wasted if there is not some reasonable prospect of this education being turned to some kind of practical utility.

There can be no doubt that it is the duty of the State to provide some means of permanent guardianship and supervision for these cases. Private charity has been the pioneer of the movement for the training of the imbecile, and the State ought to see that the results of this excellent work, begun and carried on with such conspicuous success, are not wasted or lost by taking steps to enable the improvable imbecile to cease to be a burden, and to help him to lead a useful life. This could admirably be met by the establishment of custodial asylums for idiots and low-grade imbeciles, and would afford a thoroughly satisfactory means of final disposal for a large number of improvable cases who, after having undergone their period of training, could be drafted into the workshops of the tailor, shoemaker, joiner, &c., or do farm or garden work under the supervision of a labour master; and I cannot but think that this system, or one akin to it, if given a fair trial, would prove a great success.

There is one consideration in respect to low-grade, purely custodial cases; as long as the training institutions receive them in large numbers it is not to be expected that such

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institutions, supported solely by charity, can, by reason of the absorption of staff which the retention of these patients necessitates, extend the scope of their educational departments to the degree possible under less adverse conditions.

The addition to the county asylums of suitably equipped annexes for the training of imbeciles is a step in the right direction, and it is to be hoped that, failing an effort on a larger scale, we may soon see annexes of this description attached to all the large county asylums. This departure does not, of course, materially approach the question of final useful disposal, yet it will attain a very desirable object in securing a period of training for many imbeciles who would, from the limited accommodation, have been unable to obtain admission to any of the older institutions. Dr. Shuttleworth has pointed out another advantage in the connection of such an annexe with a county asylum, which is that the latter can supply the former with a convenient market for its industrial products.

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## *The Inadequate Asylum Provision for the Insane immediately above the Pauper Class.*

By DAVID BOWER, M.D., Springfield House Asylum, Bedford.

DURING a period of nearly twenty years' management of a private asylum for middle-class patients, and a like period of consultation practice in our specialty, I have had constantly brought to my notice the difficulty—very often, indeed, the impossibility—of finding proper accommodation for insane patients unable to pay fees of more than fifteen to twenty-five shillings per week, and the difficulty has vastly increased with the increasing numbers of pauper lunatics who now crowd out the already very small number of private patients provided for in county and borough asylums.

This great want in our asylum system has impressed me more strongly recently during the three or four years I have been on the committee of the Three Counties Asylum at Arlesey, and I consider it sufficiently important to bring before you to-day for consideration and discussion.

Often, when patients have been unable to pay, or to continue

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