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PUBLISHED BY THE
Federation of Associations for Cripples

EDITED BY
DOUGLAS C. MCMURTRIE

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THE EDUCATION OF CRIPPLED CHILDREN

GWILYM G. DAVIS, M.D.

Philadelphia

When it was suggested that I address you¹ on the subject of the education of the crippled my first inclination was to decline because I felt that I had not given sufficient attention to it. It is a subject, however, that appeals to me so strongly and seems to be in such an unsettled, early and primitive stage that I thought it best to do what little I could to aid in its discussion and further its progress.

Educators and the general community have not succeeded in establishing any standard for the education of the normal child, and yet we, have not only the problems of general education to deal with, but, in addition, those arising from the crippled condition of the scholars. It is evident that the methods employed in the two classes of cases must be different. It is perhaps recognized that to keep normal people well, exercise and hard work are desirable agents to employ. They can not only endure being driven but they actually flourish under it, but when a person is sick and diseased then rest and soothing and supporting measures are needed. Crippled children seem to me to constitute a sort of middle class, we should not drive them as we would the totally well children nor nurse them as we would the sick ones. In other words, they should have a distinct, separate, special method of treatment of their own adapted to their peculiar needs.

The education of crippled children is intimately associated with their bodily care. The two cannot be separated but must

¹Read before the Orthopedic Section of the New York Academy of Medicine, December 4, 1913.

be considered together. We therefore find that we are confronted with the following problems—(1). Their maintenance, (2) the care and treatment of their disabilities, (3) their general education, (4) their character formation or moral education, (5) their vocational training and, finally, (6) their later supervision. While some of these can be isolated and treated more or less alone, as a rule, several of them will have to be dealt with at the same time; this of course adds to the difficulties. To conquer a difficult subject it is well to analyze or dissect it and attack it in sections. To let us begin with the subject of maintenance.

1. Maintenance. Maintenance has to do with the method of living and support of the child. It is influenced by its financial position. The children of the well-to-do usually have those interested in them that have both the ability and desire to see that they are well taken care of in all respects. They do not become public charges and do not frequent our charitable institutions; therefore, for the present at least, we can leave them and confine ourselves to those less favored. It is the poor child that is to be considered. These constitute by far the greater number of the crippled. How shall they be taken care of? We know that their home conditions are such that in many cases it is absolutely essential that they be removed elsewhere. It is generally recognized that it is best for the child to live in its own home provided it is a good home but many of these children are orphans, with no home at all, others have dissolute parents. These and many other reasons necessitate that the child be maintained elsewhere if it is to be made a fairly useful member of the community and not become a burden and public charge. The number of cripples is so great and their education and maintenance so expensive that in the present state of society it has been found necessary to establish institutions for them. While the substitution of an institution for a home is admitted by all as an undesirable thing from many points of view, still in some cases it seems to be the only solution that we have at present.