

## Book Reviews

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*The Story of Blindness.* GABRIEL FARRELL. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1956. London: Oxford Univ. Press. Pp. viii + 270. 36s.

There is much to suggest that it is only in recent times that sympathy for the blind has led to any real understanding of their difficulties, and to constructive help. That this understanding has probably been of greater benefit to the seeing than to the blind is suggested by the whole history of blind welfare. An early consequence of attempts to understand the problems of the blind was Bishop Berkeley's *Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision*, with its profound influence on idealist philosophy. Interest in the sensations of the blind was merely an exercise in philosophical speculation with Berkeley and his predecessors, such as Molyneux and Locke. With Diderot, however, philosophy led to concrete results, and to his classical formulation that the senses of the blind are not especially sharpened by the loss of sight, and that education ought to be built on what the blind person has rather than what he has lost. Attempts to put this teaching into practice led by stages to exploiting the sense of touch of the blind, giving Braille to the blind and the typewriter to the sighted; attempts to produce a writing-pen for the blind by using thick flowing ink to give raised letters led instead to the fountain-pen for the sighted. These, of course, are not exceptional developments, for the general community is constantly benefiting from the efforts for the handicapped—a striking example from another field than blindness being the telephone, which evolved from Bell's attempt to produce a deaf aid for his wife.

Nearly 200 years have passed since Diderot formulated the needs of blind education. A hundred years later an American educationalist still had to battle against a largely indifferent society when he insisted that every child has a right to free education to be provided by the community without any semblance of segregation because of wealth, colour, religion or physical infirmity. Though the struggle is now largely won, segregation of the blind is still a problem, and it is still necessary—as in 1949 at an international conference of workers for the blind, held at Oxford—to put forward as demands on the future that 'blind persons, whether children, young persons or adults, should be given full opportunity for general and vocational occupation in schools adequately equipped for the education of the blind, and with fully qualified teachers'.

Gabriel Farrell's *Story of Blindness* is a detailed record of the intense struggles and heartening achievements over the past 200 years. Much of the struggle was centred on the controversies on the best methods of educating the blind, but the best methods were largely determined by the financial facilities

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available. None the less there were problems of principle, such as the different varieties of type to be used for the blind—a problem that dominated the whole of the latter half of the nineteenth century, just as the first half was dominated by attempts to determine finally whether the blind should receive the same type of teaching as that given to the sighted. In creating special methods of education for the blind, segregation of necessity also developed, creating psychological problems in the integration of the blind in a general community. It is these problems, clearly visualized by the pioneers, that still call for solution today. Even in the education of the blind child, as distinct from the employment of the blind adult, the question of segregation is real, and Samuel Gridley Howe—one of the great figures of blind education in the United States—could formulate a hundred years ago that ‘the human family is the unit of society . . . its fireside, its table and its domestic altar—there is the place for the early education of the child. His [the blind child’s] instruction may be had in school; his heart and character shall be developed and moulded at home.’ Early attempts at educating the blind child in day-schools, possibly in special classes, where the blind children could mix with sighted children—and such attempts were made in London as early as 1879—are not likely to be repeated today, but it is not unlikely that day-schools for the blind will emerge. In the United States such schools now accommodate some 25 per cent of blind children. As for the integration of the adult blind into the general community, its feasibility is now generally accepted.

*The Story of Blindness* with its wealth of historical detail contains much critical and important information on blind welfare today throughout the world. The book is no parochial record of work in the United States, and not the least valuable feature of this excellent study is that the problems of today and of tomorrow are discussed in the light of achievements and failures of the past.

ARNOLD SORSBY

*Landmarks in the History of Hygiene.* HENRY E. SIGERIST (University of London. Heath Clark Lectures, 1952, delivered at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.) London, New York, Toronto; Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1956. Pp. viii+78. Illustrated. 12s. 6d.

Dr. Sigerist started as a student of Oriental languages and literature, and from philology he went to science, then to medicine, finally making the history and sociology of medicine his field of research. These broad interests are evident in this series of five lectures, which it is a pleasure to see in print at last, four years after they were delivered.