

Letter from Dr Conolly, to Dr. Browne, Commissioner in Lunacy in Scotland, on Idiot Schools.

Hanwell, London, W., October 17, 1860.

My dear Dr. Browne,—Among the many important subjects which occupied the attention of the distinguished persons collected at the late Meeting of the Association of Social Science at Glasgow, I was glad to find that the care and education of Idiots were not thought unworthy of consideration. To you, who have paid so much regard to the actual position of this unfortunate class of human beings, I need not describe their miserable condition in all parts of the country, in which it has failed to attract the notice of the thoughtful and the benevolent.

What it may be made, to what extent it may be ameliorated, your own active observation in this and other countries has, I know, thoroughly informed you. From what you have seen on the Continent, and at our large Institution of Earlswood, near London, you have been able to decide how possible it is to raise apparently hopeless Idiots from a degradation, and a state of helplessness, which reduces them below the level of the lower animals, to a state of comparative intelligence, usefulness, and happiness.

The patient and well-directed efforts made in Asylums already existing for the Imbecile and Idiotic children, have proved that the senses may be educated, the muscular movements and power improved, and the mental faculties in every case more or less cultivated. The faculty of speech may, we find, be, we may almost say, *bestowed* on many who appear at first sight unable to employ articulate language; all their habits may be amended; industrial power may be imparted to them; all their moral feelings awakened, and even devotional aspirations given to those in whom the attributes of soul were so obscured as to seem to be wanting. You have, as I well know, rejoiced to witness the change thus effected, from wretchedness, and dirt, and a mere moping existence, to all the decencies, and comfort, and activity of rational life.

Scotland is seldom behind-hand in any great and good undertakings, and I know the subject of the care and training of the Imbecile and Idiotic has already interested several persons of talent and philanthropy in Edinburgh, so that I trust you will soon see the commencement of a noble Insti-

tution for the reception, and shelter, and education of these poor outcasts of society.

As my own share in the great work already effected at Earlswood has been very small, I need not hesitate to say to you, with whom I so lately visited it, the gratification, not unmixed with wonder, with which I contemplate that model Asylum. The spectacle of 300 children there assembled; each child rescued from solitude and neglect, from misery, from semi-starvation, from mockery and persecution, is one that does honour to humanity. The cleanliness, the order, the comfort of all the apartments; the extensive grounds and pleasant gardens in which so many groups of children are generally seen, some at play, some at work, and all pleased to see the visitors, whom they approach with confidence and trust, and even with affection;—the schools in which they are variously educated, and with never-ceasing patience and kindness;—the lively workshops in which they are taught many useful occupations; the abundant and good food provided for them; the various amusements and recreations; the large hall in which they meet on different occasions, and in which their voices are so often to be heard united in simple prayers, or thanks and devotional song;—all these things combine to give a distinct character to the Establishment, as one where goodness and mercy prevail, and to form a scene most impressive upon all who take an interest in the poor creatures, who are the least finished among the works of the Great Creator of all things.

When I remember from what small beginnings all this has arisen, and in how small a number of years, I feel that the practicability of all this good being effected by the appeal of a few earnest and benevolent men to wealthy communities, is so undeniably proved, as to give the fullest encouragement to attempts of a like kind elsewhere.

I most fervently hope that such an attempt will be strenuously made in Scotland, where of its complete success there cannot be a shadow of a doubt.

Cordially wishing that you may be able to give your valuable aid to such a work, and live to witness its happiest operation,

I remain, my dear Dr. Browne,
With much regard, and very faithfully yours,
J. CONOLLY.