

Education And Work For The Blind

By LUXWELL

TO every person who has a difficult time, the expression "How can we help?" means sympathy and co-operation on the part of his friends and more than once a word of this nature has done a great deal in bringing encouragement and comfort to the disappointed man. It is very encouraging for the public to have sympathetic feelings towards the blind and be ready to render them assistance of any kind. The lack of knowledge of the right ways, however, has been the main reason why nothing of a constructive nature has been done for blind members. To give money, food and clothes has been regarded as virtuous acts since the very early days, but the condition of the blind in China today is in no way better than that of two or three thousand years ago. It is not advisable for us to adopt everything that we find in Europe and America as we have entirely different civilization and culture. What other countries did for the blind in the past together with what they are doing for them today will, however, be of invaluable help to us in our efforts to better the condition of the Chinese blind. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to introduce to the reader what other nations did in the past and what they have accomplished at present. How to help the blind members in our own country is, in fact, a problem that requires our serious consideration. In order to give the reader a clear understanding on the subject, let us first see the blind in ancient times then what they experienced in the Middle Ages or before the development of present system of their education, then what the modern countries are doing for their training and care, and lastly, along what lines we can help the blind members of our own community.

Blind in Ancient Times

Eye troubles and blindness came to the world as early as man himself. It is difficult for us to gather much information in regard to the actual number of blind people in the ancient world, but here and there in literature we find references to the blind. Blindness was found to exist in even the primitive communities. In the papyrus written over one thousand and five hundred years before Christ and discovered in the latter half of the nineteenth century there was a list of twenty eye diseases; and Egypt had so large a blind population that Hesioid called it "The Country of the Blind." In the Hebrew literature the blind was given over five different terms and around nine poetical equivalents. Eye diseases were treated by magic. As the primitive people had to depend upon hunting and fighting for existence those who were unable to participate in such activities were considered as parasites. The early Greeks disposed of their blind and defective children by leaving them in the woods and the Romans carried away their defective children in special baskets which they bought from the market. A real humane attitude towards the blind and the defectives did not begin until the founding of the Christian church. Humane provision, however, was not entirely lacking. Laws restricting the disposal of blind and defective children were passed in Egypt, and the Hebrews regarded children as given by God. The Thebians sold their

blind and defective children as they did with other commodities. Those who died right after birth had escaped all the sufferings of life but those who unfortunately lived had no one to care for them. Blind men were forced to end their lives as wandering beggars while blind women had to earn their living as prostitutes. From the story of Oedypus we learn that blindness was a punishment inflicted upon the people by gods for the evil deeds they had done and blind people were regarded as sinners. While they were unable to see with their physical eyes, the blind were considered to have attained a position to communicate with the gods. The Greek blind soothsayers were consulted by every walk of life and the Chinese fortune-tellers of even today play a quite important part in determining marriage relations or other matters of the people.

The advent of Christianity marked a great change of attitude towards the blind. Instead of leaving them alone the church took upon herself the responsibility of relieving the sufferings of the poor and the blind. The sermons of St. John Chryston and the letters of St. Jerome exhorted the early Christians to be helpful to the poor and the blind. Hospitals were established one after another and the blind were taken care of along with the defectives and the poor. The idea of destroying the blind was no longer cherished during the Christian era, but the blind were still regarded as objectives of pity and no one had ever dreamed of enabling them to become honourable members of the community. Those who had been fortunate enough to enter homes of hospitals were sheltered and fed while the majority of the blind were unable to receive assistance of any kind and the life that they led was a miserable one.

Blind in Middle Ages

Soon after this, the state took over the care of the poor and the blind from the church when they confiscated her properties, and in Germany, Italy as well as several other places laws and ordinances regulating the care of the blind were enacted. The condition of the blind in general, however, was still miserable; for neither the church nor the state had the necessary funds to provide for so large a blind population. The church had to spend a large proportion of her funds for her own maintenance and the state was unable to raise money to be used for the care of the blind. Begging was, therefore, the chief means whereby the blind secured their living. The church leaders could find no way to be of practical help to the poor, blind and the only way to save them from starvation was to allow them to beg. Both Ambrose and St. Thomas permitted the blind to beg at the entrance of the church. The life of such a blind beggar was extremely miserable. He wandered from place to place sometime led by his guide and sometimes by a dog to get whatever he could from the passers-by. Sometimes he went to the rich to secure alms. The individual beggar soon found his life to be more and more difficult for he had not only to struggle with beggars from other cities but also to struggle with the blind friends of his own town. Moreover, the public became tired of their

useless begging and was no more ready to give them help of some kind that would reduce their sufferings at the end.

In spite of the many difficulties the blind did not give up their hope to live. As a means to guard their rights and to prevent fighting among themselves they soon organized themselves into some kind of a union with a leader and a set of regulations to govern their duties and rights. No definite name was given to such an organization. In some places such organizations had such names as the "Brotherhood," "Pilgrims" and in other places they called themselves "Never Laughing Friends or Pilgrims." The leader of such a union had the power to settle disputes among the members of the organizations, to lay down routes for begging or even to allow members of other organizations to beg in his territory. Each group had its own language known as "Gegatsche" with a small vocabulary. The name of such a union sounded to be other religious. But however religious the name seemed to be, the real religious motive was entirely lacking. The blind beggars had quite many ways to get their living. Sometimes they sang or played their musical instruments to the passersby or in churches and some of them were able to recite poems and got their living thereby. Dr. French of the California School for the Blind has given us a very vivid picture of the life of such a blind beggar and his craft in the following paragraph which he quoted from the writings of Lazarilo de Tormes a sixteenth century Spanish writer:—

He was a veritable hero in his profession. A hundred or more prayers he knew by heart. When he prayed the church rang with his sonorous, soothing God-given voice; he put on a modest and pious face, but without lifting up his eyes after the manner of other worshippers. He knew a thousand and one ways of extracting money. He knew prayers for all possible afflictions and diseases, for women who got no progeny, for those who lay suffering in childbirth, for those who had married badly and were not loved by their husbands, showing the latter how to win back the lost love. He foretold for pregnant women whether they would bring forth son or daughter; in the matter of medicine the blind man actually knew less than half of what he pretended to know, particularly with regard to bad teeth and female diseases. In short no one ever made a complaint to him but that he would say off hand to do this, do that, boll up those herbs, gather such-and-such roots. He was never lacking in a crafty device, especially when ladies were concerned, for he had a way with women that made him trusted and he was consulted more by them in a single month than a hundred other blind men would be in a year.

The foregoing paragraph has given us a general idea of the methods that the beggars employed in exacting money from the public. Groups of blind beggars could be seen in the streets of nearly every city in Medieval Europe. Soon people became tired of their crafty ways and began to hate them. The church, on the other hand, attempted to relieve their sufferings in various ways. In France, she granted Quince Vingts,—the home for three hundred blind people (founded by St. Louis in 1254 in Paris),—the right to sell Indulgence and to hold special services that even the king of France attended two or three times a year. The privileges and rights of the blind occupants were taken away one after another by the seeing people in charge of the home and the premises were later

sold by the man in charge to himself under a false name. The people of France, however, did nothing to a man who had done so unkind a deed to the poor blind. Had they been given to understand what they should do to the blind the public would never allow such profit-seeking people to take charge of a home for the blind and the blind would not be forced to live in their crowded new quarters. In spite of the large sums of money spent every year on behalf of the blind, their condition, however, was in no way improved. It was not simply because there was no school or vocational training, but that the chief cause was a lack of proper knowledge on the part of the public as to the needs of the blind which made it possible for the one in charge to make the whole undertaking enrich himself and friends who were not blind. Even today the problem of how to prevent the work for the blind from becoming a gainful employment for those who manage it deserves our serious consideration. Unless the government or public can keep a check upon those in charge of organizations for the blind and insist that the good of the blind be made as the goal of the work the condition of the blind cannot be improved in a true sense. The majority of the blind in Europe in the Middle Ages, then, had still to depend upon begging for life. The various cities could find no way to clear their streets of the beggars.

Modern Aid for the Blind

Work for the blind in nearly every country in the world has made a splendid progress and the blind of today are no more regarded as helpless people or objects of charity but as respectable members of the community; for, besides the fact that the blind now sit side by side with the seeing in the classrooms, they work alongside with their seeing friends and are playing the part of bread-winners of their families. But before we think of the blind of today together with the facilities and privileges they enjoy, let us ask "What has led society to do so much for the betterment of the blind?" Without the painstaking efforts on the part of some blind people to demonstrate their ability to learn and to achieve something with success, it is extremely doubtful if society would have done so much for the blind.

The eighteenth century was a very significant era in work for the blind, as it had brought to the world some remarkable accomplishments of the blind before there was any system of training established or school opened in any country. In England, a blind man by the name of Nicholas Saunderson, had succeeded in mastering mathematics and for some years he occupied the chair of a professor at Cambridge University. John Metcalf was another remarkable blind man in England. He enjoyed riding and swimming and took contracts of road building or other works as his business. He was therefore known as an engineer. In Germany, Jacob of Netra, who made his books in his own system of cutting notches in sticks, succeeded in acquiring an education and was known as a great scholar and herb-doctor. In Austria, Maria Theresia von Paradis who took up the study of music in her early years and played before the Queen, Maria Theresia, received a grant, which enabled her to visit other countries to continue her music, and finally to become a famous

musician of the day. The success of Maria Theresia von Paradis as a musician had convinced Valentine H'auy that with a proper training the blind people could be enabled to become useful members of society. On another occasion H'auy saw at Sainte Ovide's Market that the people made the blind people put on quaint garments and caps. With some kind of a musical instrument in their hands they amused the passerby in order to get money for their masters. Valentine H'auy was greatly moved by the way those blind men were treated and decided to do something to educate the poor blind. To open the first school was not an easy task, for H'auy could not find blind children to become his pupils. He then got a blind beggar, by the name of Francois Lesueur, in the street and made him his first pupil. After years of arduous labour H'auy had succeeded in giving him an education, the boy was now able to write a poem.

Following the example of Valentine H'auy schools for the blind were started one after another in England, Germany, Austria, the United States of America and finally in nearly every civilized country in the world. In China there are over thirty schools for the blind today. The world has now realized that money spent in the cause of the blind is not an economic loss, for the training of the blind not only relieves the family of its burden to support them but the training of the blind increases the happiness of the family to no small extent, for besides the fact that they can receive an education, the blind now work among their seeing friends and earn sufficient to support themselves.

It will be too much for us to go into the details of the various activities that are now being carried on for the betterment of the conditions of the blind, but it will not be wasting time to mention them and see the significance of each.

1. *Prevention of Blindness.*—To save the vision of those who see is really more important than to open schools or homes for the blind. In order to reduce the number of people becoming blind special organizations for the purpose of fighting against blindness have been formed in all the civilized countries of today. With oculists and medical experts as officers such organizations make investigations into the causes of blindness, publish and distribute books and pamphlets to educate the public on such subjects as the care of the eye-sight and the prevention of eye troubles. The officers often give talks to schools and other groups to show them the importance of the care of the eyes. The clinics that can now be found in many of the countries are making splendid progress in curing eye diseases, and the number of people becoming blind has thus been considerably reduced. In both England and America the number of people becoming blind is much smaller today than ten or twenty years ago, and is estimated to be only fifty per cent of the figure of one of the earlier years.

2. *To Aid the Already Blind.*—In spite of all measures taken to cure eye diseases, the world is still unable to wipe out blindness altogether, so a number of children and adults are continually losing their sight in nearly every country. Work for the blind in each country is therefore being carried on as one of the important activi-

ties of society. In the United States for example, "Sunshine Homes" with specially trained nurses and workers have been organized for the care and training of pre-school blind children. As soon as they reach school age they are entitled to enter schools for the blind where a free education is given. Should they be able to prove themselves as promising scholars and desire to receive an advanced training, universities and technical schools are ready to accept them. Printing houses for the blind have been established where embossed text-books, relief maps, novels, magazines, and daily papers are printed or prepared. The blind can receive such valuable books or supplies either free or at an extremely low price. Libraries for the blind can be found in every state. The blind who reside in the state have no difficulty in borrowing books on all subjects whenever they desire. The free or low postal rates for Braille books and magazines facilitate the circulation of reading matters to no small extent. With a typewriter supplied him at a reduced price the blind man or woman is free to communicate with his or her seeing friends or to express himself in a language comprehensible to the seeing people. With a radio receiver either purchased at an unusually low price or obtained as a loan from some organization the blind person is kept in constant touch with the outside world. Special organizations for the purpose of correlating all works that are being done for the blind can now be found in many countries. The National Institute for the Blind in London, England, the Canadian Institute for the Blind in Canada, the American Foundation for the Blind in New York, U.S.A., and others are making wonderful progress in solving the many difficult problems that arise in connection with the different phases of work for the blind. To summarize the various works that such an organization is trying to do we find that it correlates all workers for the blind, finds out the works that a person without sight can do, gives advice to blind graduates in regard to employment or other matters and finally finds positions for those who are able to work. The governments of England, America and other countries besides subsidizing Braille printing establishments or financing the embossing of books for the blind, appointed special commissions or officers to look after their affairs, and passed special acts for the benefit of the blind. Workshops are found in England, America and other countries. Some of those shops are operated by the governments while the others are run by private agencies. The main purpose of the workshops, however different they may be from the others in management, is to furnish a chance for the blind to get an employment and to earn sufficient to support themselves. As to the different kinds of work that the blind are doing, it is difficult to enumerate them at this time, but chair-caning, basketry, brush-making, broom-making, shoe-making, weaving and knitting are some of the industries upon which a great many blind men and women depend for living. In Germany blind men and women are allowed to join factories; for the German government has ordered all factories to employ a certain number of blind workers. In the United States those who do not like to do manual work may earn their living by selling newspapers or operating vending machines in front

some large buildings or at some important spots in the city. The willingness of some railway and tram companies to allow a blind man and his guide to travel on the fare has made it extremely easy for the blind man to go from place to place. Then, with a white stick in his hand the blind man can get help from the policeman or other pedestrians in crossing a busy street. The "Seeing Eye," a specially trained dog is now used to lead the blind in place of a guide. Those who are unable to work on account of ill health or old age are looked after in specially founded homes. Those who remain in their own homes are entitled to receive a weekly payment from the government, known as pension. An unemployable blind man in England receives a sum of around twenty-seven shillings per week. In order to help those who lose their vision after twenty years of age or late in life home-teachers have been specially trained. These teachers travel from place to place to teach the adult blind methods of Braille or other types of reading, industries and at the same time give them every assistance that will help them to re-adjust themselves to their changed surroundings.

So far we have mentioned the various activities that are being done by the different countries for the Blind. They have done a good deal for their blind, and their blind members are of course feeling happier today than others in ten or twenty years ago. Along with the activities there are undesirable influences or traits that we must try to avoid. *The Horizon*, a Braille magazine published by the International League of the Blind in England and Great Britain, tells us that instead of devoting all the funds for the blind to the sole purpose of helping the blind, enormous funds are wasted in making the outward appearance attractive and supporting a large army of seeing people. Teaching the blind is a lucrative job and the blind schools are "becoming happy hunting ground for sighted teachers." The same magazine gives us the story of a man by the name of Rubens who raised large funds on behalf of the Hodda Institute for the Blind. He agreed to give the organization a sum of fifty pounds and "his profits have been exceptional, for the police estimate that he is making several hundred pounds a week from his collections." From these points we can see that it is undesirable for us to imitate the West in the waste of money as well as making the activities for the blind to benefit those who are not blind. Let us remember the story of Rubens and hope that such a thing will never happen in our country.

Help for the Blind in China

Whenever we attempt to help the blind in our country we must try every means to reduce the number of people becoming blind. The promotion of hygiene in schools and other organizations should never be neglected and hospitals and clinics must be established in cities and rural districts. The midwives, who know nothing about disinfection and the care of the baby's eyes, must be forbidden by law to continue their work and all child-bearing cases must be taken care of in government-owned hospitals or by qualified experts. As soon as such an idea can be put into practice, the number of people becoming blind will be greatly reduced.

China, unfortunately, has a very large blind population, and the point that requires our attention is that

most of them are extremely poor. Novels, magazines and a good many other things that have been valuable to the blind of England or America mean very little to the poor blind of China. Food, clothing and shelter are what they need and it is still too early for us to think of things that require time and money. Work for the blind has already begun, but it is still in its infancy. It is not our purpose to describe the new venture in this article but what is necessary for the reader to get is some ideas that will show him how to help the blind.

For the majority of the blind population in China, homes for the blind appear to be a practical help. An expensive training that may be of help to a selected few and do not equip the majority for more than the ability to read or write Braille or to do a few "surprising but useless things", as an American writer puts it, is not needed in our country today. While we are still unable to obtain large funds to be used for helping the blind, it is not practical to propose the building of special homes with a large army of officers, each one of them with a dozen nice sounding duties. An additional department for the blind in the Relief Yuan or a special class for the blind attached to some existing organization similar to the one that was started in Lanchow, Kansu, will be just as helpful to the poor blind as a school. A trained teacher must be engaged to teach Braille reading and writing along with some industries that will ultimately help the blind to earn at least part of their own support. Those who prove themselves to be exceptionally good scholars, however, may be sent to special schools for advanced training. The rest who fail to show good results in learning must not be sent to a school; for a school that keeps a large number of mediocre students who cannot or will not study is a financial loss to society. If the majority of the blind can be cared for or trained in such a way, it is not necessary to start a school in every *hsien* or district.

As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, schools for the blind must be maintained for the promising few and its success or failure is determined by the number of self-supporting citizens it turns out rather than by its large expenditure, nice looking big classes, and a staff of workers. It is not our purpose to go into details of blind school management but let us keep in mind that, whenever we plan to organize a school, the emphasis should be placed upon quality and results instead of quantity and appearance. The man who is appointed to take charge of a school or work for the blind must be honest in character and willing to serve the blind as did his predecessor Valentine H'auy who gave up his time and money for the good of the blind. Unqualified workers and profit seekers must be kept out of the work altogether. In short, besides opening schools the government must exercise its power of supervision or control.

To give the blind an education,—especially one that enables them to earn their own living,—is an effective way to help those deprived of sight, but it is equally necessary for society to buy their services and products whenever possible. As long as the blind man remains to depend upon the earnings of others for living, they can never hope to be considered honorable members of the community. To

employ the services of blind workers is, of course, not an easy matter, for the usefulness of blind workers are limited in certain respects. Nevertheless, let us remember that whatever we do to care for, educate or employ the

blind, we are not only relieving the suffering of those of our own countrymen who are unfortunately blind, but also helping society and strengthening our country in the long run.

The Work Done By And For The Blind In China

By HOMER S. WONG (元湘王)

THE world has evolved from a world of competition and struggle for supremacy into a world of correlated interests which demand mutual assistance, for the light has penetrated the darkest nooks and given root to countless humanitarian schemes to alleviate the lot of the blind. The editor of *The China Critic*, Mr. Kwei Chungshu, requested me to write presenting the problems of the blind in China and although I have been unable to do much research work on account of my studies in law, philosophy and music, I shall venture to offer a concise, general and unbiased sketch of work done for the blind in the past and present, and my criticism and suggestions for the future. Since the bulk of social work is still in its infancy in China, very little actual data are available. I must first touch on the general, political, social and economic background of China, which has exerted deep influence on the subject in question.

1. *The Chinese Blind in the Past*:—Very little can be stated as to the unfavorable material condition of the blind in olden times in China as material well-being entailed no further struggle for existence. With a population of four hundred millions the Chinese enjoyed ample production for all. For this reason China was known, prior to the 19th century, to be a rich, luxurious and peace-loving country. Revolutions occurred at the end of dynasties bringing starvation and suffering in their train, but on the whole the Chinese in general had plenty to satisfy their needs, consequently the blind did not constitute a burden on society as they do now. The Chinese had, as they have today, the strongest sense of family ties and family responsibility, and the well-to-do always took care of their blind relatives themselves. The traditional conviction, inherited from Buddhism, that blindness is a punishment inflicted on those whose parents or ancestors had committed rape and forgery before the birth of these blind individuals, has led the blind to accept their fate with philosophical and superstitious contentment. They were not despised by their family as they were considered martyrs of the family. Kwei Ku-tze (2700 B. C.) initiated a profession for them, that of fortune-telling, divided into various forms of prophecy and *Chi-ko*. These vocations were monopolized by the blind. Moreover, Confucius honored "*Lee Yo*" (formality and music) with significant functions of government, and Mencius applauded Sze-Kwan's genius in "understanding administration as well as his ability to distinguish musical notes." Sze-Kwan was a blind official of the highest rank before King Lu in the Chow dynasty. Ne-Chen, an enemy of the tyrant Chin-Hsi-Hwang, was

blinded by the latter in order that he might become an accomplished musician. The present frequent belief that the blind are born musicians may date back to that ancient time as it was usually held that the blind could interpret the prophetic language expressed in music. The character of Chinese music (about which I wrote an article in the September, 1930, issue of *The Braille Musical Review*)—as harmony, counterpoint and staff system were then unknown—aided the blind more than the seeing, to become accomplished musicians if they were endowed with a good memory and ornamenting ability. Blind officials in charge of marriage, funeral and coronation ceremonies are known to have existed in palaces and courts, and hundreds of blind musicians were engaged in private castles as personal retainers.

The Chinese character system of writing is extremely unfavorable to the blind—yet some blind men followed literary pursuits, which was achieved through oral instruction on the part of the blind students. Wang Hsi E-chi, the most celebrated artist in writing Chinese characters, was known to have achieved his unsurpassable merit by practising his writing with closed eyes. Whether art and beauty can exist apart from perception and sense experience is a question of philosophy and not within our scope of discussion. I cite this to stress the point that the lack of sight was not looked down upon when such talent was manifested and the compensation gained from blindness was appreciated. Poets were known to rhyme with closed eyes and Tso Chiu-ming wrote volumes of historical works by dictation when he was blind. Unfortunately no record is available as to an accurate account of the achievement of successful blind people throughout history. For ordinary blind individuals fortune-telling was and continued to be their chief vocation until the dawn of Western civilization in China.

2. *The Present Condition of the Blind*:—China's reverses in several foreign wars (1842, 1894) and the Revolution in 1911 can be considered the starting point of the entry of Western civilization in her midst. Her eyes were opened to her demerits, excess of self-confidence, superstition and corruption; but the introduction into China of new ideas, modern accommodation, methods of production and social environment left the life of the blind untouched, as reforms can only take place in forms of government and systems of education. The population is still largely illiterate (though illiteracy is steadily decreasing) and the general interest of the people is still unchanged. This is favorable to the blind for a reason which will be explained hereafter.

At this period the Braille system was first intro-