

# How the Blind Are Educated

Work Being Accomplished by Infinite Patience with the Physically Deficient—Pictures from Photos Made at the Nebraska School for the Blind.



GEOGRAPHY CLASS AT THE NEBRASKA SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND—Photo by a Staff Artist.



TEACHING THE BLIND TO USE A TYPEWRITER—Photo by a Staff Artist.

**T**HE first school for the blind organized in this country was begun by Dr. Samuel G. Howe in rooms in his father's house, Boston, Mass. This developed into what is now the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind, the most famous institution of its kind in America, if not on the globe. It was brought into prominence particularly by the education of Laura Bridgman, the reports of whose progress issued by Dr. Howe were sought in all civilized centers of the world. Charles Dickens added to its fame by his American Notes, while its present director, Dr. M. Anagnos, has added to its prominence by his education within its walls of Helen Keller.

Since the founding of this school in 1832 others have been established in various states, until there are now in this country forty-two such schools, with an enrollment during the last year of 4,358 pupils. The course of study is practically the same in all, being that, with a few modifications, in use throughout the public schools of the country.

The Nebraska School for the Blind, legally known as Institute, was established in 1875, with Prof. Samuel Bacon as superintendent. Himself a blind man, he is typical of what can be accomplished by ability coupled with perseverance, by a sightless person. A college graduate, he was also the first superintendent of both the Illinois and the Iowa schools for the blind. Past 80 years of age, he now resides on his farm but a few miles from Nebraska City.

It is desirable that a blind child enter school early in life, before the various peculiar habits too often noticed among blind persons have become fixed, as it is found difficult, and often impossible, to break up such habits. Six or seven years of age is early enough, unless the school is provided for work with kindergarten methods. At home it is probable that the sightless child has been so humored and petted that he is practically helpless, and it is the first work of the school to encourage him to do for himself. Simple work with the fingers, such as stringing beads or buttons, is given him. He is taught to feed himself and to be neat in his habits. Obedience very often has to be taught, though not much diffi-



TEACHING A BLIND BOY THE ALPHABET—Photo by a Staff Artist.

culty is usually experienced, as he is influenced by the example of those about him.

Soon will begin the work of learning to read. The teacher places a finger of the pupil upon a letter embossed, or "raised," upon the surface of the paper, and the name of the letter is told him. After a greater or less number of trials, depending on the aptitude of the child, he is able to distinguish the various letters by the sense of touch. It is the old "alphabet" method of former days, the modern "word" and "sentence" methods not being found generally practicable in the teaching of sightless children, their field of "vision" being limited to the small area covered by the tip of their finger.

The usual work of the common schools is taken up. Number work is done by the aid of blocks and other objects. As the child progresses, mental exercises of increasing difficulty are given until the pupil finds little difficulty in carrying in mind problems that to the average boy or girl in the common schools would seem an impossibility. The mind of the sightless child is not distracted by the multitude of objects impressing themselves through the sense of sight upon the attention of his



BLIND MAN AT THE PIPE ORGAN—Photo by a Staff Artist.

more fortunate seeing brother or sister. In geography, maps with a relieved surface are used, rivers being indicated by a shallow groove, while cities may be shown by means of tack heads of varying size and shape, denoting relative importance. As text books on the various subjects are now available in the embossed system, the teaching of grammar, algebra, geometry, history, etc., presents little difficulty. These books may be had in either the "line" or "point" system. In the former the letters resemble in outline those with which we are familiar in our ordinary ink-print books and papers, while in the latter the letters are represented by a dot, or combination of dots, partly punched through the paper. For example, the colon (:) of the ink-print book, if embossed, would be the letter "I" of the "point" system, while the period (.) would be the letter "e," and the upper dot of the colon, or the period inverted, would be the letter "c." Two colons placed side by side (::) would give the combination "th." Taking three colons (:::) we have what is known as the "number sign," indicating that the character following is a figure rather than a letter. Thus we say a letter is one, two or three points long,

while it cannot be more than two points high. The letter "n" would be represented by two periods, thus .. or two dots on the lower line, while two dots on the upper line is "a." Nebraska would be made as follows:

The point system is rapidly displacing the "line" system for two reasons: It can readily be written by means of a simple device, hence is used for taking notes by the student, and for correspondence; and can be read by a person losing sight later in life, while the "line" letters must be learned in early childhood.

A considerable amount of literature is now available for the blind, the output of the American Printing House for the Blind at Louisville, Ky., supported by the interest derived from \$250,000 set aside for the purpose by the federal government in 1879, and invested in 4 per cent bonds.

Music is taught, not by "ear," but from music written in the music "point" notation. This is often written by the pupil himself, the teacher dictating from an ordinary musical score. If it be work for

the piano, the pupil seated at the instrument reads his music with one hand, playing with the other. A few measures only are assigned as a lesson, but with regular daily work and practice many soon acquire a considerable repertory.

Piano tuning is found a profitable trade for those having the requisite aptitude, though, comparatively few blind can become successful tuners, lacking in either "ear" or mechanical skill.

Carpet weaving, broom making, hammock netting, etc., are taught and afford a more or less remunerative occupation. Girls are taught to cook, knit, mend, etc.

The Nebraska school has at present an enrollment of sixty-three, though eighty could be accommodated, and it is to bring before the notice of parents of blind children the advantages of the school that the tour by its members about to be undertaken was planned. During the last summer a letter was received by the superintendent from the superintendent of the Boston school, in which the latter says: "I have learned from a lady in England of a blind boy in western Nebraska, 17 years of age, desirous of attending a school." The boy is now in school, doing well,

