

NON-PARTISAN CONTROL OF STATE INSTITUTIONS.

In considering the best means for managing state institutions, caring for the dependent, defective, delinquent and criminal classes, it is well to have in mind the magnitude of the work undertaken by the several states in this respect.

Figures.

The figures of the United States census of 1900, have not yet been given out, and I am compelled to rely upon those furnished in the census of 1890. From them it appears that there were in the United States in that year 106,485 persons who were insane, 95,609 persons who were feeble-minded, 40,592 persons who were deaf and dumb, 50,568 persons who were blind, 82,329 persons confined in prisons and penitentiaries, 14,846 persons confined in reformatories, 111,910 persons supported in benevolent institutions, such as industrial and reform schools, etc., and 73,045 persons who were paupers and supported in almshouses. This makes an aggregate of 575,384 persons. It is said in the report that there are at least 500,000 persons who are defective in intellect, hearing or vision, and a million more who are sick, deformed, crippled or otherwise physically disabled. If we add to the 500,000 defectives the prisoners, the persons in reformatories, those in benevolent institutions and almshouses, we have a grand total of almost eight hundred thousand people.

Dependents are Increasing.

Statistics show, that in the case of most of the above classes of people, there is a steady increase, so that it is fair to assume, that today there are, at least, one million, two hundred and fifty thousand of these people requiring some kind of care or assistance. It is a fact that many of these defective, dependent, delinquent and criminal classes do not become domiciled in state institutions; it seems safe to say, however, that the several states now have more than a million of these people to take care of.

When we consider the vast sum invested in lands and buildings, and personal property, used in the care of these people, and when we compute the enormous sums expended, annually, in their maintenance and care, the figures are appalling and justify every citizen in insisting upon an answer to the inquiry, "Can this great work be carried on more efficiently, and at the same time more economically, than under the present systems?"

Political Management Expensive.

Now, how, if at all, does the system of political management of our institutions for the maintenance and care of all of these unfortunates, militate against the best care for inmates, and at

a less expense? Every right-thinking man and woman desires that the standard of care shall be elevated so that, so far as practicable, by means of medical treatment and nursing, by education, moral, literary and industrial, or otherwise, inmates may be fitted for useful and productive citizenship.

A Question in Economics and Sociology.

The problem of attaining these ends, is one of the most important that could be committed to the people of our several commonwealths. It presents itself in two phases; First, the proper and humane care of inmates; and, second, it is a question of economics.

The situation is rendered more difficult, from the fact that the insane, feeble-minded, epileptic and other defective classes, are, in most states, permitted to marry, and reproduce their species, without let or hindrance.

There is also another view of the question, which deserves thoughtful consideration. It is the fact that a multitude of good citizens, who ought to make the proper solution of such questions their special concern, seem to feel that, having paid their taxes, and borne their share of the financial burdens, and exercised the right of suffrage, they have absolved themselves from any further duty, and the matter of the proper and economic conduct of state institutions has been especially committed to certain officers, appointed for that purpose.

Proper reformation in the management of these institutions, will be slow to attain, until the citizen can be made to feel that what is the concern of state officials, is also a matter to which he must give some attention.

Present Methods.

The present methods of controlling state institutions, of the kind we are considering, are:

First. A local governing board, usually called a board of trustees or managers. These trustees are usually selected, either by the governor of the state, or by the legislature. Usually, their selection is determined by political considerations, and such places are filled by those to whom the appointing power, or his, or its, political friends are supposed to be under obligations for political services rendered. Occasionally, a governor insists upon appointing men, especially fitted for such places, but, in the great multitude of cases, the payment of political debts, is the first and all-important end sought to be attained. In some states no citizen of the city, where such an institution is situated, can serve on such a board, as it is presumed, he might be prejudiced in favor of the institution, unduly. In other states, one member of the board is always selected from the institution town, because it is believed he will be

more fully conversant with the needs of his institution, than one coming from a distant part of the state. Sometimes, it is ordained by law, that the board shall be composed of representatives of both political parties, and where such is the case, and the power of selection rests with the legislature, the selection is made by the party caucuses. These boards usually meet about four times a year, though, in some states, they are required to meet more frequently. The members are all supposed to be present at these meetings, but, in fact, a full board seldom visits the institution. They are expected to thoroughly examine the institution in all its parts, its books, accounts, dietary, condition of buildings, and the care given inmates. Most of these examinations are superficial, and many matters are not looked after at all. Often no examination is made.

Evils of Present Trusteeship.

Most of these trustees are men actively engaged in looking after their own business, and are anxious to get away from the institution as speedily as possible. Hence, in most cases, they give their attention to interviewing the superintendent, as a rule, approving, as a matter of course, all that he has done, as well as all he wants to do in the future. Perhaps, they make a hurried trip through that portion of the institution which the superintendent wants them to see, and they are hustled off to the train, after having dined sumptuously with the superintendent. They have visited the institution, and, except in a general way, they know no more about it than they did before they made the visit. In a great majority of the cases, the so-called inspection is a delusion and results in the superintendent getting all he wants, and being authorized, in the future, to do as he pleases.

No other result should be expected, when we take into consideration how the board is usually selected, and the further fact, that, usually, only mileage and a small per diem is allowed members for their services.

The result is, the duties devolving upon the members of the board, are subordinate to the convenience and private business of each of its members. The members, having been selected from political considerations, and, as a rule, having no especial knowledge or fitness for the work, and, often, no particular interest in it, prove inefficient in the discharge of their duties, and, often, indifferent, to the extent of frequently absenting themselves from the board meetings.

I do not say that this is a faithful picture of all of such boards. I am glad to say that in one state, at least, the governor stood up against all party clamor, and appointed the best men on these boards, but, where one man is found, who can, or will, resist the pressure of political friends, there are a dozen who find it is easier to succumb to the pressure, than to successfully resist it.

Appointing Power Abused.

A personal visitation to many institutions, in a dozen or more of the leading states of the Union, warrants me in saying that, as a general rule, the conditions are worse than I have stated. Usually, under the system I am now considering, the chief executive and other officers and employees of the institutions are appointed by the governor, or the board of trustees; if not so, then the superin-