

## WHAT THE BLIND MAY DO

### A Morning in the Wonderful School in Edinburgh Road

By "The Idler."

It was one of those recent warm spring mornings with scarcely a cloud in the sky. The countryside was just beginning to exhibit the first greenish blush over the brown fields announcing that the miracle of seed germination had again taken place; high overhead a covey of blackbirds circled back and forth and finally settled in orderly precision along the dead limb of a tree near by and set up a terrific chattering; two vendors of multicolored pansies and other flowering shrubs passed singing the excellence of their wares; I idly watched a native gardener transplanting gorgeous red and yellow cyclamens and shell pink primroses—a poignant touch of Home in a foreign land. It was a blue and good day of bright colors and brilliant contrasts, such a day as must have inspired Browning to write "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world."

Returning from my country jaunt, I chanced to stroll along Edinburgh Road seeking an itinerant "Wambatsol" to hie me back to the marts of trade, when high peals of childish laughter caused me to pause and gaze through the apertures of split bamboo palings abutting on the roadway.

Within, were some score of Chinese laddies hilariously playing leap frog and shouting vociferously, the way of young "limbs" world over. Others were going through a calisthenic drill with wooden dumbbells with excellent precision, while still a further group indulged in the intricacies of a folk dance to the count of their instructor. Suddenly I was aware that something was amiss with the whole performance. One of the jumpers in the leap frog game missed his footing and fell, but when he picked himself up, he groped wildly for the line of bending comrades and started running in the wrong direction; two of the folk dancers became confused with the movements and deliberately turned their back on the instructor, but continued the step in perfect time. I was frankly puzzled until a modest sign over the gateway attracted my attention. It read, "Institution for the Chinese Blind, 4 Edinburgh Road." Was it possible that these children were all blind? Could blind children engage in games and other amusements with equal facility with their seeing brothers? I resolved to find out.

Through the courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. George B. Fryer who direct the destinies of the institution, I was initiated into the mysteries of teaching blind children to "see" through their hands. Although I had visited St. Dunstan's in England, and several vocational schools

for blind soldiers both in France, and America, I was not prepared for the work among the blind children, since in a measure it is so much more difficult and requires an infinite amount of patience and tact. The man who has been blinded in battle has always had some previous vocation or training, has the pre-requisite fundamental knowledge of his craft, and in many instances requires but the special knowledge and practice to permit him to become an adept in his former calling.

#### THOSE WHO NEVER SAW.

These Chinese children have never been to any school before, are frequently stunted both mentally and physically, since superstition in China has decreed that the blind must be relegated to the discard, because the gods have cast a blight on the unfortunate individual as a punishment for some misdemeanour in a former existence. Shrunken, shrivelled little bits of human driftwood, they have been starved and beaten so long that any act of kindness is treasured for days.

It was not until a little more than a decade ago that Dr. John B. Fryer (the present director's father), realized the ambition of his lifetime and opened the first school for the blind in China with his own funds. This school is in no sense a home, since the parents are all required to pay a nominal tuition, which helps to defray the necessary expense, but in addition stimulates their interest in the progress of their offspring.

Mrs. Fryer conducted me through the kindergarten where the littlest tots are taught the fundamentals of education by stringing beads and making ornamental "dolls furniture" which has a ready sale among the Chinese. From the kindergarten we went into some of the class rooms where the children were taught both English and Chinese by competent Chinese instructors, several of whom are also blind. Mrs. Fryer explained the difficulties the "seeing" instructors were under when they first attempted to work with their blind pupils.

"It was continually necessary to remind the instructors that it was their duty to teach the children to work for themselves," Mrs. Fryer said "and to refrain from doing anything for them that was not absolutely necessary. At first several were prone to be rather quick tempered, and thoughtless in their criticism over the repeated mistakes, so to help them appreciate the difficulties the children are working under we required the instructors to be blindfolded during the time that they were in class. This quickly demonstrated the error of their ways and we have

never had any more difficulties on that score."

The children all learn to read and write both Chinese and English by the remarkable Braille system, which has recently been translated into Chinese. The Braille is a system of raised dots on smooth paper which the fingers pass over. The dots are arranged in series of raised groupings forming the Braille phonetigrams, which in turn are translated into syllables forming words and phrases.

#### MANUAL WORK AND MUSIC.

After visiting the various classrooms I was shown the large spacious workroom, the recent gift from the Rotary Club of Shanghai, where some twenty older boys were all busily engaged in making wicker and split bamboo furniture. It was most interesting to watch the instructor, who was blind, carefully demonstrating to two recent arrivals the necessity for care and precision of design in manufacture. He gestured and spoke as if he could see the intricate pattern which he was engaged upon and quickly discovered mistakes in the two simple pieces which had been woven by the new comers, by the mere expedient of passing his deft fingers across the surface. I enquired how it was possible for him to tell the difference in the colours, and learned that each coloured strand was of slightly different shape or texture, and since he carried the complete pattern in his head, any deviation from the pattern was a simple matter to detect.

A simple matter. To me it seemed nothing short of wizardry!

Mrs. Fryer informed me that the choir would like to sing for me, and explained that music was one of their most enjoyed recreations. One of the blind students played the organ while the choir, composed of some twelve picked voices, sang several old favourites in English, arranged in four parts. Following the all too brief recital, another student played several organ selections admirably. The students who show any adaptability for music are given the opportunity to learn the organ or any one of the several instruments comprising the band. Naturally the instruction is entirely individual and requires unending patience, since both treble and bass are learned complete in themselves before the harmony is "put together." One little codger of some nine summers played two selections on the organ, but since his feet missed touching the pedals by some eighteen inches, his instructor, Miss Wong, pedalled for him.

At the conclusion of the musical programme Mr. Fryer took me into his typewriting class and I watched while he dictated several paragraphs from "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves." Their little fingers raced over the keys making surprisingly few mistakes, when it is remembered that the majority have never seen a typewriter, have

never seen a page of typed English, have learned to spell English words through the Braille phonetic method, and that the process of transmission of thought from brain to hand border on the mechanical.

#### SELF SUPPORTERS.

Mr. Fryer stated that it was the aim of the school to make all the students self-supporting. He cited the instance of one of the recent graduates who is employed as private secretary to Dr. Peters, of the International Red Cross, who can take more than 100 words a minute direct dictation on the typewriter. Other students are preparing to enter St. John's University at the opening of the autumn semester, while still others will enter one of the recognized middle schools. The example of these successful students, who have so far overcome their mental and physical weaknesses, and who have succeeded in making a place for themselves in the economic life of the nation is constantly kept before the younger students as a goal, and to spur them on to greater efforts when otherwise they might succumb to the perils of discouragement.

After thanking my hosts for their courtesy and eliciting permission to publish a brief account of the noble work that is being accomplished day after day in such a quiet unobtrusive manner at 4 Edinburgh Road I sauntered along in a contrite mood. The late morning sunshine seemed more golden, the colours of the wayside flowers brighter, and the sky a deeper blue. The thought came to me that we do not half appreciate the blessings of health, until chance brings us into close proximity with those less fortunate. In imagination I saw again that game of leap frog, played by children who could only feel the warmth of the sunshine and smell the fragrance of flowers. And then I thought of the blind weaving instructor's enthusiasm for his work, his painstaking care over every detail, and it seemed to me that here at least the ancient prophesy had been fulfilled that "the Blind shall lead the blind."