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HOME AFFAIRS.

by THÉO CHOPARD.

At the Congress of the Rotary Club, which was held in Lucerne, Helen Keller, that great American woman writer, who is both blind and deaf, gave, to those who are in possession of their five senses, a striking proof of what can be accomplished by means of intelligence and of courage, and expressed her satisfaction at the progress which has been accomplished in regard to the education and the technical training of blind children. Helen Keller added, however, that an immense effort is still necessary everywhere so that numerous schools may be set up all over the world in order that these children may be reintegrated into society and may be given appropriate training. This appeal made by Helen Keller is not only applicable to blind children, but also to the countless children and adolescents whom the war, an accident, or an illness have mutilated or disabled. In spite of the progress already achieved a great deal remains to be done still in order to ensure their rehabilitation, and this, notwithstanding the fact that modern legislation is being founded to an increasing extent on the principle that the reintegration of disabled persons into the social and economic life of a country is preferable, from every aspect, to relief. It is obvious that assistance which is merely of a financial order, even when it constitutes a right guaranteed by the Law, nevertheless preserves a certain taint of charity. Moreover, relief, pure and simple, does not create any economic wealth. The disabled person, however, once rehabilitated and reintegrated into society and into economic activities, is a creator of wealth. Participating in the daily effort made by the nation, and no longer living on the fringes of life, he or she is once more a citizen, just like other people.

This idea is gaining ground with every day that passes. But it has not yet triumphed to the extent to which it should. Public opinion, more especially in those countries which have not known the horrors and the mutilations of war, is not yet sufficiently influenced by the human imperative of the re-integration of disabled persons. It is just as if it still doubted as to whether disabled persons were like other human beings. Public opinion of this kind is not sure whether disabled persons are capable of managing their affairs by themselves and of furnishing an economic output of the same value as that of able persons. However, experience has proved that because of the difficulties which they encounter and because of the constant effort demanded of them by these difficulties, such handicapped persons bring to the performance of their duties in their respective trades or professions a will-power, a tenacity, a degree of attention and a force of character which render them superior in many respects to those persons for whom life has proved kind. I know one young girl who has lost both her legs; nevertheless, she now dances, swims, skis, and earns her living in a normal way. The fact that she has proved capable of surmounting such great difficulties, shows that she is just as capable of making a place for herself in life as any of her unhandicapped companions. This is only one example taken from a great many.

In spite of the progress realised the effort made to rehabilitate disabled persons, more particularly

children and adolescents, is not sufficient — especially, as we have already mentioned, in those countries which have not been affected by the war. Educational programmes ought to take into account to a far greater extent the problems which are special to handicapped children and adolescents, as well as the necessity for extending to them the same possibilities as those granted to healthy children of obtaining the training which is best adapted to their capacities, as well as to their preferences. The last point is of great importance; that work is always best done which corresponds to our individual preferences.

Disabled children and adolescents should be able, to the extent to which their particular handicaps allow, to benefit from *the same* schooling and technical training as their normal companions, and this in their company. They should not be separated from them unless their disablement makes it impossible for their training to be carried out in common with their able-bodied schoolmates. There still exists a far too great tendency to separate them from each other.

The constant progress made by technique and the appearance of numerous new machines steadily increase the possibilities which now exist to assure for disabled persons work which brings in normal earnings. Technical progress makes it possible to adapt the various machines and apparatus in use, both in plants and in offices, to the requirements of the handicapped worker. Social Laws, everywhere, should be legislated in such a manner as to ensure the financing of the transformation or adaptation of the machines or apparatus in question, as well as of the special courses of apprenticeship that are necessary. It is with this aim in view that the new Swiss Law on Disablement Insurance is now being elaborated. It is not sufficient to oblige plants — as is provided for in certain legislations — to employ a certain number of disabled persons; what must be done is to render these persons capable of carrying out this work, by means of proper training. As Helen Keller stated, in spite of all the progress achieved there still remains a great deal to be done.

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