

# To Memory Dear

By JAMES C. CORRIGAN

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**THE** sweetest spot of all is the green sod of old Ireland;  
The mallow, fladder times are the ones we used to know  
When romping o'er the hills, by the streams and through the  
meadows.  
In merry, magic days of long ago.

**I** see my mother yet — though so long she has been sleeping  
The shamrocks and the roses her grave are growing o'er —  
Kiss my mother yet as, with basket on her shoulder,  
She stood beside our open cottage door.

**THE** happy winter nights when she knitted by the firelight,  
Her kindly, patient features alight with dancing gleams,  
The lullies on the hearth in minor cadence singing,  
Return to me and haunt my waking dreams.

**THE** low and thatch-roofed cottage, the tree that stood before it,  
The hill behind that seemed to shield its eyes to rest  
And 'on the pile that played about the humble doorway,  
All go to make the picture of the past.

**A**h, well do I remember the joy of summer weather,  
With crinkly hat waves dancing on meadowe neck and fur,  
As we jogged through the lanes and along the happy roadways  
Upon the jolly Irish jaunting car.

**SO** magic is the glamour by memory created,  
So soft and are the scenes her mellow lights reveal,  
I enter levee to dwell in faintest recollection  
On times I blimp prepare the midday meal.

**A** HAPPY group we gathered about our little cottage  
From out the hills where we barefooted used to roam,  
When all the earth was sunny in life's unclouded morning,  
Bubbled and lilted that bore the name of home.

**THE** years have slipped away, and that happy group is scattered,  
For some are o'er the sea, and some are laid at rest,  
So able we not that now the green hills of old Ireland  
Sum 'ris the faded legends of the best.

## THE BACKWARD PUPIL.

Rev. Thomas E. Shields, Ph. D., of  
Catholic University, Washington,  
D. C.

We have always had the backward pupil with us. He has been the trial of every teacher's life. But it has only been within the last few years that there has been any realization of the vast number of pupils that along to this class. Dr. Seguin's work in the closing decades of the last century called the attention of Europe to the possibility of curing a certain percentage of the children that were being classed as defective. The work of rescuing these unfortunate spread rapidly through Germany. In the nineties it was taken up in England and in a few years schools in which special training for these children was given had become a regular feature of the school system throughout Great Britain. Experience showed that two or three years of the right kind of treatment helped these children to such an extent that three-fourths of them were able to take up regular school work. In 1904 the Superintendent of Schools of New York City started to public by his report, which showed that 39 per cent of all the children attending the public schools of New York City were above the normal age for the grade which they were in. The annual reports for the following five years show that this condition of affairs has not changed. A great many causes were naturally assigned for this retardation, and a great many evils in the public school system were attributed to this backward condition of the pupils. In his report of 1908 Commissioner Draper, of New York State, says: "I confess that it startles me to find that certainly not more than two-fifths and undoubtedly not more than a third of the children who enter our elementary schools ever finish them, and that not more than one-half of them go beyond the fifth or sixth grade. Professor Thorndike, of Columbia University, in a bulletin issued by the Bureau of Education in February, 1908, concludes that "at least 25 out of every 100 of the children of the white population of our country who enter school stay only long enough to learn to read, simple English, write such words as they commonly use, and perform the four operations for integers without serious errors. A fifth of the children entering city schools stay only to the fifth grade."

Mr. Leonard P. Ayres, working under the Russell Sage Foundation, has recently given us a valuable study of this problem in a book entitled "Laggards in Our Schools." More accurate data must be had before we can accept as entirely reliable many of the conclusions at which Mr. Ayres arrives, but there is enough in his book that is incontrovertibly true to make everyone in any way responsible for our schools pause and give serious study to the problems there presented.

From the data at our disposal it seems highly probable that there are at present in the public schools of the United States some six million children repeating the work of their grade at an annual cost to the taxpayers of the country of something over \$27,000,000. It should be remembered, however, that the financial consideration is not the chief one. Compulsory education laws compel the children to remain in school in most of our states between the ages of seven and fourteen. It is probable, therefore, that these six million retarded children would be in school in any case. But the statistics in the case show us that the children who are put back and compelled to make their grade over, with few exceptions, leave school just as soon as the compulsory education laws permit. For the most part they drop out in the fifth and sixth grades. The \$27,000,000, therefore, is expended, not for the benefit of these six million children, but for their permanent discouragement. Manifestly, this problem needs looking into. Is the fault to be traced to congenital defects in the children, or to mismanagement on the part of the school authorities? If the former, it is our duty to seek adequate remedies for these unfortunate children; if the latter, it becomes our duty to deal with the school officers who are responsible for this lamentable state of affairs.

The facts in the case show that there are many factors contributing to the retardation of these children. Late beginning, irregular attendance, etc., but they also show that by far the largest percentage of the evil is directly traceable to the maladjustment of the work of the grades to the children who are compelled to take it. In many cities the problem has been met and solved to a large extent by a proper adjustment of the work to the capacity of the children. This is shown by the percentage of retardation which varies from 7 1/2 per cent in Bedford, Mass., to 75 per cent among the colored children

of Memphis, Tenn. Between these two extremes most of the cities of the country will be found to range. Thus, the percentage of retardation in Waltham, Mass., is 10.6, in Meriden, Conn., 13, Boston, 18.5, Springfield, 23.3, New York, 30, Troy, N. Y., 35, Baltimore, Md., 46.3, Cincinnati, O., 58.7, Erie, Pa., 60.1.

Taking the country through it may be shown that the work assigned to the grade is so far above the average capacity of the child that it takes on an average ten years to do the work of the eight grades. The average time required for a child to complete the work of the eight grades in Erie, Pa., is 12 1/2 years, and in none of the twenty-five cities of which Mr. Ayres has made a comparative study does the average child do the work in eight years.

When the child is put back and compelled to repeat the work of a grade, he is humiliated and discouraged. He contracts habits of idleness and by his presence and example tends to demoralize the whole room. When the number of these retarded pupils in one-fourth or one-fifth the entire number in the grade it is easy to realize the disastrous results which must follow.

Our schools are manufacturing billiards on a large scale. It is high time that the process was stopped. The work of the grade must not be determined by the caprice or the ambition of the School Superintendent but by the needs and capacities of children. After this has been done we will still have a large number of children in our schools that are dull and backward because nature has been less generous with them than with other children. To find remedies for these we must turn to psychology and to the improvement of home conditions. At present the backward children, from whatever cause, exert a disastrous influence on the entire work of the schools, and their presence in the schools is responsible for no small share of the failure of our school system, of which so much has been said during the last few years.



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