

1846

# Education of the Blind

## by Edward P. Bond

The subject to which I now call your notice, the education of the blind, is one which may well claim the attention of every philanthropist. It is one, however which does not so directly concern the whole community as do many of the great philanthropic movements of the day. The evils of Intemperance, Slavery, War, of general Ignorance & Vice are of such appalling magnitude that the most careless observer must perceive them, & it is comparatively but a light task to arouse the feelings of a large class of the community in regard to them. It is an encouraging circumstance that these questions claim so much of the public attention at the present day. Yet beside the victims to these great destroyers of the souls and bodies of men, there are many other sufferers who demand a share of our attention, our sympathy and our aid.



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No class have higher claims upon our sympathy and aid than the blind. A wise Providence has closed one of the principal avenues to their minds. The beauties of nature are to them as a sealed book. They never see the faces of those they love. The gospel does not lie open to them, as to us, a guide-book on the journey of life, inviting their attention, and promising them aid in all time of trial & difficulty. Yet worse, (for the active, enquiring mind will discern and adopt the truth, though it seem to be shrouded in impenetrable darkness), a prevalent error has led their parents & guardians generally, in mistaken kindness, to cut them off as much as is possible from all means of attaining physical, intellectual & moral strength. This error consists in overrating the unfortunate effects of blindness, & in supposing that those who cannot see are unable to act or think for themselves. While other children are sent to school and are encouraged to engage in labors and amusements, whose direct tendency is to give



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igor to the frame and buoyancy to the spirits, the poor blind child is kept moping by the fireside all day, his every want, (except that of liberty) supplied anticipated, & is never permitted to go out with other children lest he should meet with mishap.

Oftentimes he is regarded merely as an object of curiosity by a whole neighborhood, and his every act is made subject of observation & remark. Thus vanity is excited & the poor child imagines its infirmity to be cause of pride and is content to hold a place in the scale of being but one step higher than that of the learned dog or the mammoth ox.

The sad effects resulting from this mode of treatment may be learned from the fact that, as a class, the blind are generally feeble of body & short-lived, and that a larger proportion of those who enter blind institutions after the years of childhood, are very much weakened in mind—many of them almost to imbecility. True, where the infirmity is natural,



want of sight may be regarded as evidence of a diseased constitution, and this might account for feebleness of intellect. But hardly one half of the cases brought under the care of the institutions are natural; the remainder are the result of accident or illness, & in these the explanation will not apply.

Who that reflects upon the infinite capacities of the human soul for improvement & usefulness, & upon the wrong that is done to it & to the world when these capacities are neglected, can hear such a statement with indifference?

Who is not ready, if there is one human being thus afflicted, — one immortal spirit thus wronged by the cruel neglect or more cruel indulgence of the ~~wicked~~ ignorant, — who is not ready to do all in his power to give that spirit light?

The importance of each soul is incalculable, & no Christian can say that the blind may be neglected because not so numerous as some other



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classes of unfortunates. Yet in point of numbers many will undoubtedly be surprised at the importance of this subject. In Denmark there is 1 blind person to every 1000 inhabitants, in Middle Europe 1 to 200 in Egypt 1 to 300. In this Country an accurate estimate has not been made, but there are it is computed, at least 90,000 blind persons in the United States.

Wherever in the civilized world the cause of the blind has been advocated, good men have been found ready to exert themselves in their behalf. Their claim to relief has usually been urged on the score of charity or policy.

Here we may demand aid for these unfortunates as an act of justice. The foundation of our national liberties & success rest upon the general diffusion of intelligence among the people. Our forefathers understood this, & they regarded it as one of the fundamental principles of a popular government, that every child in the Country has a claim to an education at the



6 Public expense. This claim is still binding, though it has not been always honestly allowed met. It is as fully binding in regard to those whom Providence has deprived of some of their faculties as in regard to any other class. Indeed such persons are generally more dependent upon education for happiness & usefulness, less able to provide the means of cultivation for themselves than others, & hence their claims are the stronger. Let it be understood then that we are not only to ask for the education of the blind in the name of humanity, but we are to demand it as an act of justice.

It cannot be said in answer to this demand that the blind are incapable of education. If any one, in proof of such an assertion, points you to a poor half-witted blind man who has been alternately the wonder & the jest of his native place, whose perceptions have all been blunted by injudicious treatment in infancy & youth, & who has necessarily lost all confidence in himself & all hope of



improvement, — you must say that this is no proof.

Man, not God, has done that cruel work.

One may as well say that the African race are incapable of improvement because the poor down-trodden slave from the rice field cannot, on the day of his manumission, compete in talents & acquirements with the most favored child of freedom, — as that the minds of those who have been carefully excluded from the light, can never be illuminated simply because the windows of the body are closed.

It must be admitted that the blind are often weak in intellect, and society is responsible for this. — each one of us is responsible so far as we have an influence in society which we do not exert. Where persons of this class have been placed in circumstances favorable to the development of their capacities, they have shown that these can be developed. Such cases are, alas! comparatively few.

Among the more striking, is that of John Metcalf, who was blind from infancy. He was fortunately very much neglected in early life, & suffered



to wander where he chose. He became so familiar with every hill & valley, every rock & tree in the neighborhood of the Peak of Derbyshire that he was employed as a waggoner & often as a guide. He was frequently consulted when new roads were to be laid out, & such was his knowledge of the country that he frequently furnished valuable information to those engaged in these works. Indeed, he actually laid out the road from Wilstow to Congleton himself.

Nicholas Saunderson who flourished during the last century, was born blind, yet he became a Professor at the University of Cambridge England. He was an admirable lecturer upon mathematics, every subject connected therewith, & every year astonished & delighted large audiences by his ingenious dissertations upon light, optics, colors &c

Rev. Dr Blacklock of Scotland, though born blind, became a most chaste & ripe scholar, an able divine & a beautiful poet. He published a volume of poems, "which,"



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says a writer in the N. E. Magazine, "bear all the  
marks of genius, and in which, by an extraordinary  
power of description of the visible creation, he  
proves to us that had Homer & Milton been born  
blind, instead of losing their sight in after life,  
they might still have reared those splendid monu-  
ments of genius, the immortal Iliad & Paradise Lost.  
I have not seen the volume referred to, but the fol-  
lowing lines, written by one in similar circumstances,  
prove that the blind may display beauty of thought  
& expression as well as the seeing poet.

A young lady who had recently lost her sight,  
in a conversation with the writer of these lines who  
had been blind from infancy, said, "I love to dream,  
for in dreams I seem to see again."

1. "I love to dream!" The scenes of other days

All rush upon my vision fresh and fair;  
Nature again her lovely face displays,  
And wood and field their former glories wear.



The sun, whose parting smile and glad return  
 I fondly loved in happier days to view,  
 Those lamps of heaven which with mild lustre burn  
 Through the long night, all, all their charms renew.

3 'I love to dream!' Each face to memory dear,  
 Set up with beams of loveliness serene,  
 Each treasured smile, each sympathetic tear,  
 Affection gave, no more remain unseen.  
 The restless eye, the pale and haggard cheek,  
 The trembling hand, the start, the sudden flush,  
 With all their force, their former language speak  
 Of springs whence thoughts too deep for utterance gush.

2. I love to dream the tender forms of flowers,  
 My childhood gazed upon with rapt delight,  
 Spring from the past, and wet with gentle showers,  
 Unfold their beauties to my mental sight.  
 The brook that gently murmured at my feet,  
 The verdant drapery of the lovely Spring,



In the blest land of dreams my fancy greet,  
And to my darkened spirit comfort bring.

4. 'I love to dream!' For then my eyes peruse  
The works by me adored, whose leaves revealed  
Treasures whose brightness still my mind pursues,  
Though their bright caskets be forever sealed.  
Yet, though in dreams my sorrows I forsake,  
And long lost joys return so well defined,  
What pangs of anguish rend me when I wake,  
And find it all a dream! I still am blind!

5. 'I love to dream!' Yet let me not upbraid  
The hand whose mercies still surround my way,  
Whose blessings numerous my life has made  
Bright with the splendor of Celestial day.  
Thanks to that hand! and often as peaceful night,  
Her mantle round my aching heart shall cast,  
In dreams my eye shall view with fond delight  
The cherished Panorama of the Past.



The well known case of Laura Bridgeman shows clearly that the deprivation of one or more of the senses, does not destroy the ability to learn. She has from infancy been unable to see, hear or speak, and until quite recently, her organs of smell & taste were very deficient.

Yet she has been taught to read, write & converse, & is each day making rapid progress in her studies.

From these and similar instances it is evident that the blind can be taught, notwithstanding the unfortunate circumstances in which they may be placed. It becomes us now to enquire what has been done for them. The honor of commencing the good work of instructing the blind belongs to a Frenchman, the Abbe Hange, who suggested the mode of teaching by books with raised letters about the year 1784. He heard some blind musicians, & the thought occurred to him that those who played by ear might be taught to do it scientifically if they could have the notes cut out of pasteboard and fastened upon a plain surface. He tried the experiment, & this suc-



cess cheered him on to new exertions in the cause of those who had been so long neglected. He founded a blind institution at Paris under the patronage of the French government, & afterwards a similar one at St. Petersburg, whither he was invited by the Emperor of Russia. He also established a similar institution at Berlin.

Institutions of the same kind have been opened at Amsterdam, Vienna, Dresden, London, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Glasgow, & other places.

The first important movement in this country was made in 1829 when a number of gentlemen of Boston obtained an act of incorporation under the name of New England Asylum for the Blind. This name was afterward changed to N. E. Institution for the Education of the Blind, & still later to Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind. Some delay arose from the difficulty of obtaining a suitable director, but the trustees were at last so fortunate as to secure the services of Dr S. G. Howe, a man eminently qualified



to commence a work which from its novelty & the nature of its objects, was one of peculiar difficulty & delicacy. Dr Howe spent several months in Europe visiting the various institutions and collecting all the information possible upon the subject. He returned in 1832 and commenced a school with seven pupils. The trustees were so well pleased with the success of the first six months, that they made a report & appeal for aid to the public, which was at once responded to most liberally. Thomas H. Perkins, whose name the institution now bears, gave his splendid private mansion worth \$30,000, on condition that \$50,000. should be raised by others. In less than one month, <sup>more than</sup> this amount was collected, 25,000 being the proceeds of a Ladies' fair.

The second institution in this country was that of Pennsylvania commenced in Philadelphia in 1833. This institution, like that at Boston, was very fortunate in obtaining an admirable superintendent under whose management its infancy was fostered. Julius R. Friedlander



united to an ardent temperament & overflowing humanity, a sound judgement & a highly cultivated mind. With self sacrificing benevolence, he left his native land & the society of beloved friends, & devoted all his powers to the Cause of that Class whose deprivations had claimed his sympathy. No teacher was ever more beloved by his pupils, than he, & their love was most touchingly manifested when his health, never robust, gave way under the weight of his cares, and he was called to part with his large family of blind children. Eyes that could not see refused not to weep, & even now his name pronounced acts as a spell to rouse the attention & call an expression of eager interest upon many a dull & spiritless countenance. Mr Friedlander died in 1839 just after the institution, through the liberality of the state, & a judicious bequest of one of its early friends had been established upon a permanent liberal basis. Beside the two institutions mentioned, four others have been established in the U.S., namely in N.Y., Ohio, Virginia &



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Kentucky, under the patronage of the several State governments. Tennessee & N. Carolina have also taken some steps toward forming similar institutions.

The degree of attention paid to mental cultivation differs very considerably in the different institutions.

During the life of the Abbe Hany, the European Schools made rapid advance, but since that time, there have been comparatively few improvements introduced. In many of them, little or no attention is paid to mental education, but it is thought sufficient to furnish the pupils with a knowledge of some handicraft, by means of which they may be enabled to support themselves. In all, however, some attention is given to music, of which the blind are very fond. The circumstances of their condition give them an accuracy of ear & a retentiveness of memory, of great aid to the musical scholar, & there seems to be no good reason why the blind may not hold rank with the best composers, performers & teachers of music.

The time of the pupils of the Perkins Institution is about



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equally divided between labor music & studies. In the  
work department, they are taught to make mattresses, door-  
mats, brushes, brooms, baskets, & various other articles which  
do not require accuracy of finish. They are thorough workmen,  
but it must be evident that they labor under disadvan-  
tages which must exclude them from all competition with  
singing mechanics in many branches of labor. During  
the hours devoted to music, they are taught to sing & to  
play on the various musical instruments. It is a very inter-  
esting sight to see a choir of blind persons discoursing  
sweet music with perfect accuracy, and with that express-  
iveness which nothing but a deep interest in & love of the art  
can give. Indeed, with the blind, music is much more  
than a mere art. It becomes second nature. It em-  
bodies their ideas of beauty, and they enjoy sweet sounds  
as we do pleasant sights. Ask a blind man  
what idea he has of colors, and he will liken  
them to sounds. Acquaintance with music  
seems to open a new world to the sightless, and



if they could be taught nothing more, the musical education they receive at the institutions affords pleasure and benefit much more than sufficient to recompense the founders for all their trouble and expense.

Beside this, however, they are instructed in all the studies usually taught in our grammar schools, & if they desire, in the languages, the higher branches of mathematics and other advanced studies. Two young men have been thoroughly fitted to enter college at the Perkins Institution. They show generally an avidity for knowledge, other teachers are often obliged to check them lest they should injure their health or neglect their other duties. They read with their fingers books printed in raised characters. The expense of this mode of printing is great though it has been much diminished. Till 1824 the type of the Abbe Moxy were the only ones used, & those gave but 365 letters to 50 square inches of surface. Mr Gall of Edinburgh then printed a few books which gave 526 letters. By a recent improvement, Dr Howe is enabled



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to give 106%, a gain of 150 upon the capacities of the Philadelphia type, which latter has been highly approved. Fifty square inches Common Print such as Palfrey's Howell Lectures give about 3000 letters. There are two Presses for the blind in this Country, one at Phila, one at Boston. Owing to the great expense of the books & the comparatively small number of readers, a large library in this character can hardly be hoped for, the blind must depend upon oral instruction for much of their education.

We accordingly find that a large portion of the instruction of the schools is given in the form of lectures & familiar conversations. There is one branch of study in which blind have, to some extent, an advantage over those who can see. I refer to geography. This is taught by means of maps & globes with elevations & depressions corresponding to the diversities of the earth's surface.

Our knowledge of localities & distances depends much more upon the sense of touch than we are oftentimes aware. Maps & pictures presented to the eye may sometimes give correct



ideas of the situation & appearance of places, yet we all know how frequently experience overthrows all our preconceived notions on these points. The sense of touch is more correct, whether we walk over the surface, or pass our hand over a miniature resemblance of it. This is shown by the accuracy of a blind pupil's knowledge of geography.

For instance, Laura Bridgeman was taken to a globe 4 or 5 feet in diameter on one occasion & the Russian Possessions in America pointed out to her, & she was asked to find Boston. So accurate was her judgement, that she at once placed her finger upon the spot. This was the first time she had ever been taken to the globe for the purpose of instruction. She had used the maps with raised outlines.

The blind easily learn arithmetic. They use a ciphering board in their calculations. This is a metal frame with openings to receive types. They have two kinds of type, & by an ingenious arrangement are enabled to form all the figures necessary in arithmetical calculations with these two.

They can be, and many of them are, good math-



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ematicians. Their attention is not distracted by the sight of objects around them, & they are therefore able to fix it more firmly than most seeing persons can upon the subject of their inquiries. This, in fact, gives them an advantage in all investigations requiring close thought.

A blind teacher in the Perkins institution has recently found much pleasure in the study of Bowditch's Laplace, which would overtask the talents of many who are rightly regarded as skilful mathematicians.

The blind are taught to write upon a sheet laid upon a grooved board, the grooves guiding their pencils in a straight line. Many of them are able to write a fair hand in this way. They are however unable to read the writing of others or correct their own. Various expedients have been devised by which they might communicate freely with one another upon paper, but none with much success. The person who would invent some means by which the blind may record their thoughts so that the record can be read by themselves & others,



would confer a vastly greater good upon them than their Printing Press has as yet accomplished. For beside assisting them in the art of Composition, increasing their libraries indefinitely, (for the blind might then have their collections of MSS vying with those of ancient times) this would relieve them from a sense of dependence ~~at once~~ upon the seeing, which is now dangerous alike to their mental & moral character. Their present situation is liable to produce a sense of mental inferiority ~~alike~~ destructive of all honorable ambition, and to awaken a jealousy of those whom they must make parties to their closest secrets without any claim to a return of Confidence; a jealousy which naturally tends to a love of concealment & a resort to many deceitful practices.

Institutions for the blind have accomplished a great good as all will acknowledge who have given the subject attention. They have afforded means of happiness & usefulness to many who, but for their establishment, would have been condemned to perpetual mental as well as physical darkness. They have been of much greater



benefit by arousing the attention of the public to the situation & wants of this unfortunate class, and showing that they can be educated. Comparatively speaking, they have done little more than this. Out of the 9 or 10,000 blind persons in this country, not more than 500 probably have been put under their care, & many of these had been so neglected at the time of their entrance that their intellects had become hopelessly impaired. There yet remains much to be done, — everything to be done. This branch of education is still in its infancy. What has been accomplished may be regarded as simply an experiment, the success of which should rouse the philanthropist to renewed exertion. He should not pause, but should carry the good work forward until the means of physical, intellectual & moral cultivation are afforded to every blind person in the land, and until public opinion in regard to this class has been corrected & they are regarded as equals by their fellow men, only with greater claims to kindness because of the deprivations &



difficulties of their lot. Labor, time & treasure are necessary to the accomplishment of this work. The blind cannot be taught in common schools or in common workshops.

Institutions must be provided for them and apparatus for their instruction. They must commence any handicraft under disadvantage, & can hardly avoid great waste of material, & often of their instructor's patience, while learning, & even after they have learned, they must compete with difficulty with the seeing workman.

On that account they must be furnished with means of carrying on their trades where these difficulties shall be as far as possible counterbalanced. To effect this, the managers of the Perkins Institution have recently connected with their school an asylum for the industrious blind, where they are furnished with every facility for laboring advantageously and securing a fair return for their toil. There should be such an institution in every state.



I have endeavored to show in this report that the blind have claims to an education on the score of humanity & of justice & that they have capacity to receive & profit by instruction. I have also very hastily glanced at what has been done for their education in Europe & America, & at what remains to be done.

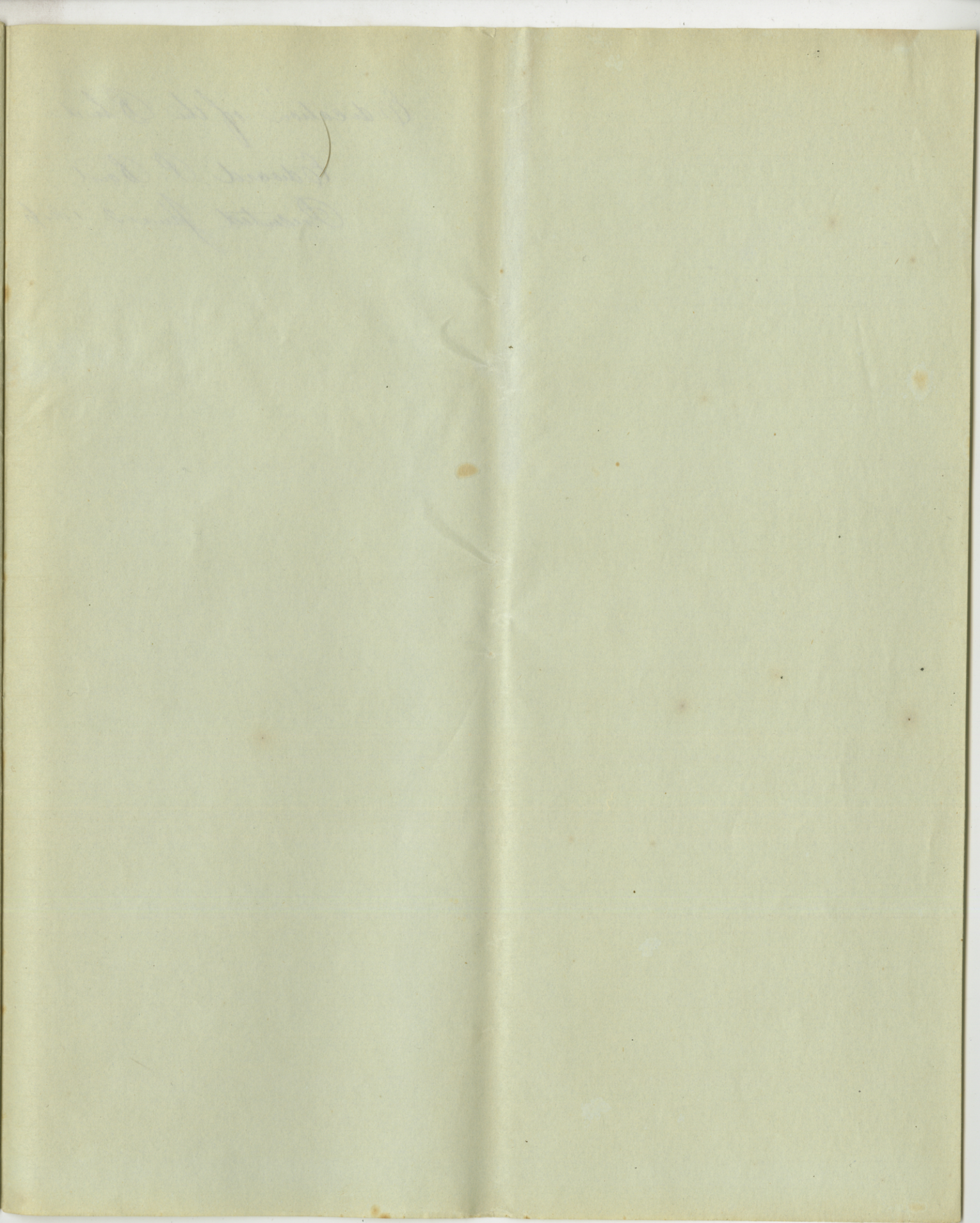
In conclusion I would say that if the views now presented be correct, it is not sufficient for us to acquiesce in the general proposition that the blind have strong claims to the sympathy & aid of man. Each one of us owes a duty to them and to the world. We ought, as far as we are able to enlighten the public mind upon the subject. We ought to show that the blind are capable of being educated, & that their guardians do them a grievous wrong, when, through mistaken kindness, they deprive them of the means of improvement. We ought to declare that society is bound to educate them & place them as nearly as possible on a par with those of us whom heaven has more highly favored.

We shall meet with some opposition and a great



deal of indifference in our endeavors to do this, yet the cause  
is worthy of the exertion. It is the Cause of Justice  
& of Love, one in which we cannot labor in vain,  
for the God of Justice & Love will work with us.







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