

---

**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**  
**The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945**

**Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension**

---

**File No. 334**

**1929 July 13**

**Chautauqua, NY - Rehabilitation of Physically &  
Mentally Handicapped Persons**

At Chautauqua, N. Y., July 13, 1929

*Extension of Work of Rehabilitation, of Mentally and Physically Handicapped Persons*

719

At the end of a week's trip across the State of New York inspecting State hospitals and schools, it is natural that my thoughts have run to the tremendous strides made by mankind in health and in education during the past generation. Take some comparisons. It is less than fifty years ago in this State, and an even shorter time in some other States, that the care of the insane was definitely recognized as a responsibility of the State itself. Many older people can remember the day when mentally deranged members of families were kept at home in seclusion, or else locked up in some local institution which treated the unfortunate victim as a prisoner and not as a patient.

Today, because of an awakened public responsibility and because of great strides in medical science, mental derangement is treated in modern, well-equipped, State-conducted institutions as an illness from which a growing number of patients may and do recover. It is a fact that the percentage of cures is increasing year by year.

Take then the class of cases which falls under the head of mental deficiency, and not insanity. It is only a few years ago that the backward child, the boy or girl who did not seem "normal," was classed as an imbecile or an idiot and practically laid to one side by the family in the community. Today the State recognizes the obligation of turning the backward child into a useful citizen, able to take his or her part in life, and modern science proves that this end can be accomplished in the great majority of cases.

Take next the boys and girls who are broadly classed as juvenile delinquents. A generation ago these children were given either sharp physical

punishment in their own localities and turned adrift, usually to repeat their petty crimes and misdemeanors, or else were thrown into a common jail and forced to associate with hardened criminals. Today, Government recognizes its responsibility to the juvenile offender, and the fact that in the large majority of cases these boys and girls can be made law-abiding, hard-working citizens. Again the records show that the million of dollars expended by the State in this great cause are well invested, and that potential criminals are, in large numbers, being turned into law-abiding citizens.

Medical science and a new public conscience are also obtaining magnificent results in the field of physical, as opposed to mental, disabilities. At one of the institutes for the deaf the other day I spoke of the deaf and dumb. The superintendent corrected me immediately, saying:

"They are very few deaf and dumb people in the world. They are deaf and, as a consequence, have not been able to speak, but they are not dumb."

The instruction of these deaf people is working wonders. Girls and boys are being taught to read lips and to make themselves understand sufficiently to make their own way in the world. It is an interesting fact that there is ready employment for all graduates of our deaf schools.

Next we come to the problems of the cripples. A generation ago the crippled had no chance. Today, through the fine strides of modern medical science, the great majority of crippled children are enabled, even though the process may take years, to get about and, in many cases, find complete or practically complete cures. In other words, that large part of humanity which used to be pushed to one side or discarded is now salvaged and enabled to play its own part in the life of the community.

This sketch of the development of a generation brings one naturally to the question, What can be done to take further steps in the generation to come? The answer is a simple one. Further progress must of necessity depend on a deeper understanding on the part of every man and woman in the United States. Knowledge of the splendid results already accomplished is not widespread. You can go into thousands of farming districts in this State and you can go into thousands of closely populated wards in our great cities and find ignorance not only of what has been accomplished but of how to go about utilizing the facilities which we already have. There are literally hundreds of thousands of cases of boys and girls in the United States hidden away on the farm or in the city tenements, boys and girls who are mentally deficient or cripples or deaf or blind. Their parents would give anything in the world to have their mental or physical deficiencies cured, but their parents do not know how to go about it.

In other words, education as to simple facts is of vital importance in every State of the Union, and this education is necessary not only for the dwellers on the remote farms and in the crowded tenements, but it is equally necessary for millions of people who now consider themselves well educated.

I wonder, for example, just how many members of the legislatures in the forty-eight states, just how many members of the Congress of the United States know what is being done by their own State Governments or by the Federal Government in taking care of the mentally or physically crippled. I wonder how many of them have taken steps in their own home districts to bring forward those who need care and are now not getting that care.

I wonder how many so-called leading citizens in any town in the United States know what facilities are offered by State, and private institutions or know what great possibilities for cure exist today with the development of modern medical science.

In other words, the progress which will be made in the coming generation will depend not only on the development and extension of governmental activities and of medical discoveries, but just as important is the education of the already so-called educated people in this development. Through their efforts thousands of children will receive benefits of modern science which they would otherwise not receive.

This is a problem that demands a crusade. The progress of the past fifty

years has been great, but we have marched only a short way. The extension of the work must go on until every child in the United States can be assured of the best that science, government assistance and private aid can give.

It is a task that appeals to our humanity, but it is a task that appeals also to our future economic success. Every citizen, man, woman or child, who is unable to take his or her part in the normal life of modern civilization is a drag on our economic life. Good humanity and good economics demand that the work must go on.

---