

Radio Blesses the Lives of the Blind

Blind People in All Parts of the Country Are Benefited by the Wireless Telephone—Instruction and Entertainment Obtainable in No Other Way—Society's Greatest Gift to the Sightless

By Ward Seeley

THE lot of the blind in history has been ever sad. The most that they could expect was pity; neglect was usual up until very recent times; in the ancient world, cruelty toward them was not unusual, and it was not until the coming of Christianity that charity began to be shown to those bereft of sight, the first institutions for the blind having been erected in the Fourth Century A.D. by St. Basil at Caesarea in Cappadocia. Today, the coming of the latest marvel of science, the radiophone, promises to be the greatest blessing of the centuries since Christianity brought compassion into the heart of Rome.

By means of the radio telephone the world is brought to the blind as it never has been before. Radio receiving apparatus to a blind person is at once education and recreation; it is intellectual meat and drink; it brings to the blind the musician, the preacher, the lecturer, the news; it is to the sightless the newspaper, the book, the theater, the opera and concert, the church, and the lecture platform. Not one per cent. of the blind have ever enjoyed save spasmodically and occasionally the benefits of these things that sighted people take as a matter of course. A blind person must be unusually gifted, insensitive to either public pity or annoyance, and amply financed if he or she is to take advantage of the resources of modern society. Only the newest of those resources, radio, brings easily within the ken of the blind all that can be represented by the spoken word or musical sound.

There are now 52,617 blind persons in the United States, according to the U. S. Census of 1920. This figure shows a ratio of 49.8 per 100,000 of population. The census tabulation shows 30,199 male blind, 22,418 female; 45,783 white, 6,306 negro, and 488 Indian.

These figures are considered by authorities on the blind to be greatly in error. Large inaccuracies have crept into the census in regard to the blind, due to the reluctance of many families to report to the census takers, and to the carelessness of these latter, few of whom made the specific inquiry, "Are there any blind persons in the family?" A measure of the error is afforded by the New York State Commission for the Blind, which found, through painstaking survey, 10,982 blind persons in New York State, while the Census to-

OF the blind much has been written. Their misfortunes and their sorrows, their struggles and their attainments, their fortitude and their heroisms have all received commentary. At the story of those who sit in darkness, of the lot which they endure, and of the things which they have overcome, a sigh of compassion has arisen to many a lip, a tear of sympathy to many an eye, a glow of admiring pride to many a cheek. It is perhaps well that this should be. The deprivation of sight is verily a grievous one—one to which mayhap none other befalling the sons of men is to be likened. That commiseration for the state of the blind should so widely be evolved in the breasts of their fellow creatures is a tribute for the great heart of humanity.—from "The Blind," by Harry Best, Ph. D.

tal for that state is only 4,205. If that proportion holds in the other states, and there appears no reason why it should not, the number of sightless persons in the United States must be in the neighborhood of 104,000, or about 100 per 100,000 population.

Society's attitude toward these people is one of compassion. Society's action toward these people is to provide education for them, more or less haphazardly, and to give them alms indiscriminately. The blind traditionally have been beggars through the centuries, and today many of them, if not

most, still stand with outstretched hands for the coins that mean so little compared to the great wealth of the world now passing through their very bodies in radio waves.

Those who are born blind, it is true, now have great care taken of them in many of the states, being placed in institutions where they are taught minor trades, and instructed in such elementary school subjects as the schools may decide it is feasible to teach. One or more of the embossed type reading systems of course is essential.

It is after the children are old enough to leave their school and return to their homes that the great time of testing and trial of the blind comes. In many cases the want of sight creates a situation beyond the power of the blind to meet. The family, often ashamed of its afflicted member, is inclined to neglect to give more than the barely essential care. Such things as reading aloud of books or newspapers seem too great a burden to the sighted. Leading the blind abroad for walks or to attend the theater, concerts or lectures, is distasteful.

Only those blind who can afford to employ a nurse can be assured of a limited freedom of movement and a flow of intellectual stimulus. The majority are condemned to dependency, distress and want. In the instances where they have been taught a trade,



Charles Burrows, blind Civil War veteran, listens happily at his receiving set. He posed for this picture especially for THE WIRELESS AGE, in token of his gratitude to radio