

law now relating to the granting of pensions and similar allowances to asylum officers in England, as proposed to be amended by the Bill now before Parliament, should be applied.

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#### SIR EDMUND DU CANE ON CRIMINAL TREATMENT.

In the May number of the *Nineteenth Century* Sir Edmund du Cane's article on the Prisons Bill and Progress in Criminal Treatment will be read with much interest. He shows that, under the proposals of the Bill, a complete change of fundamental principles will be possible at the will of the Secretary of State.

The Act of 1865 was designed to remedy pre-existing evils, and specially to provide for separate treatment. This is in all countries acknowledged to be the best system, and it was attained in England after much discussion and great expense. As crime has so markedly decreased, it may be inferred that some credit is due to the Prisons Acts.

Sir Edmund du Cane insists on the necessity for uniformity of regulations, and doubts if there will be found a more efficacious means of reform than punishment for misdeeds. He is strongly of opinion that reform requires time, and states that the average period of detention of boys in reformatories is necessarily some three years, while some of them turn out to be the most incorrigible convicts.

If, as many now think, the reformatory principle should have fair trial, it will be requisite to change the criminal law, so that longer sentences may be inflicted. Sir Edmund du Cane thinks that the worst cases would not really be detained longer than they are under the present system of short sentences. We are glad to note that he states that reformatory and industrial schools are probably chief among the causes of the decrease of crime, and that he advocates a special prison for young criminals, as the most mischievous years are from sixteen to twenty-two.

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#### THE REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE ON DEFECTIVE AND EPILEPTIC CHILDREN.

The appointment of the Commission in December, 1896, the Report tells us, arose from the application, of the London School Board to the Education Department, for increased grants in aid of the special classes for defective children which had been formed on the recommendation of the Royal Commission on the Blind, the Deaf and Dumb, &c.

The Committee reports that it has visited all the special classes with the exception of Nottingham, also the Darenth Schools for Imbecile Children and the Epileptic Colony at Chalfont. Witnesses connected with these institutions have been examined, as well as medical men of special experience, in addition to Mr. Knollys, of the Local Government Board; Miss Cooper, Secretary to the Association for Promoting the Welfare of the Feeble-minded; Mr. Loch, Sir Douglas Galton, and others. Much written information from cognate sources has been also received and considered. The Committee, indeed, seems to have neglected no source of information, and the voluminous appendix to the Report, compiled from the evidence given and information received, is a mine of instruction for all interested in arriving at the best methods of treating these classes.

"Feeble-minded" the Committee interprets as "excluding idiots and imbeciles," and as denoting "only those children who cannot be properly taught in ordinary elementary schools by ordinary methods." The term is used throughout the Report, having been employed in the referendum to the Committee, who, however, recommend that in dealing with these children the term "feeble-minded" shall not be used, but that they shall be designated as "special classes."

The *recognition* of these children the Committee insists must be based on the

history, habits, conduct, and power of learning, as well as on the co-existence of malformations and peculiarities of function; but it recognises the fact that they are physically defective (suffering, *e.g.*, from low nutrition, neurosis, struma, epilepsy, syphilis, &c.), and that their "proper treatment in school depends to a great extent upon medical considerations."

The *proportion* of children requiring special class treatment the Report estimates at 1 per cent.

The physically defective children, unable to attend school from that reason, the Committee estimates at from 1 to 2 per thousand, but has no evidence of the proportion of these who would be capable of attending school if the means of conveyance were provided.

The feeble-minded, the Report points out, are at present under the same law as the normal in regard to school attendance, and there is no direct power to enforce attendance at a special class. Whether this can be accomplished indirectly, by first refusing admission to the ordinary school and then prosecuting for non-attendance, has yet to be tested.

The *powers of guardians* in regard to the feeble-minded are probably the same, the Committee considers, as those exercised in relation to the blind and deaf under 25 and 26 Vict., c. 43, and are therefore of very wide application.

The *initial age* at which the "feeble-minded" are to be dealt with the Committee fixes at seven years, and considers that under that age the ordinary infant school, with its kindergarten exercises, is sufficient.

The *discrimination* of the special classes the Committee recommends should be provided for by the appointment of a medical officer, who should examine and give a certificate (in all cases of non-attendance on the ground of physical or mental defect) as to whether the child is capable of being educated in special classes or is not (and consequently imbecile), and suggests that in the latter case this certificate might be used as a basis of admission to the Imbecile Schools.

*Admission* to the special classes, it is suggested, should be the result of an examination, at which there should be present the child's past teacher (who presents a written report in scheduled form), the special class teacher, a parent if possible, her Majesty's Inspector, and the Medical Officer of the school authority. The medical officer, after receiving a prescribed form (filled up by the teacher who presents the child), and conferring with the two teachers and the inspector, should make a recommendation to the school authority. The recommendation should state that the child is not imbecile, but from physical defect (which should be stated) or mental defect, is incapable of deriving benefit from the instruction in ordinary schools, but might be benefited by instruction in the special classes. If rejected, the medical officer should state the reason of his rejection. Appeal against the decision should be to the Education Department, who should have at their service a medical adviser. The Committee has with great care drawn up recommendations for the records to be made; of the examination of the special case, of the family history, and of the progress in the special class; it advises a yearly medical examination of such classes, or, if necessary, individual examinations, which should be recorded, and that the teacher should be guided by the medical advice in dealing with the child.

*Retention* in the class until the age of fourteen is recommended, with power to retain until sixteen on the advice of the medical officer, and it is suggested that the school authority should have a discretionary power of compelling attendance up to that age. The mixture of the sexes in the special class is not objected to if suitable provision is made for those over fourteen years.

The *size* of the special class the Report advises should be limited to twenty (on the roll) for each teacher, except where there are three or more teachers, when the third, fourth, &c., may have thirty.

The *special training* of teachers is rightly insisted on, and a sketch given of a suitable course. No system of training being yet available, the Committee recommends that certificated teachers should only be recognised as head teachers

of a special class after two months' experience in a class approved by the Department.

The Committee makes careful recommendations in regard to school hours, time-tables, subjects of instruction, elementary manual instruction, physical exercises and games.

*Corporal punishment* the Committee dismisses with the brief comment that it requires great care in this class of children.

Special classes, the Report considers, would almost certainly be required in towns of over 20,000, and would not be necessary in those under 10,000, and prefers the concentration of two or three classes, where practicable, to isolated classes.

The constitution of school authorities, the structure, &c., of schools, their inspection and returns to the Educational Department, are all provided for, as well as the assistance to be derived from voluntary agencies.

The "*conveyance or guidance*" to the special classes in cases where it is needed, and the "*boarding out*" near special classes of children whose homes are not within reach of them, involve questions of expenditure in which additional powers are recommended.

"*Physically defective*" children, who cannot benefit by the ordinary schools, are recommended by the Report for admission to the special class, while those who are unable to attend any class are regarded as affording a fair field for voluntary assistance. The "blind and deaf" feeble-minded should have special arrangements made, the Committee think, in institutions for these classes. Epileptic children of normal intellect are recommended to be left in ordinary schools, whose teachers should have some general instructions in regard to them; the "feeble-minded" epileptic should attend the special class, whilst severe epilepsy should be treated in homes provided for that purpose, in regard to which full details are given.

The Report concludes with a sketch of the legislation required to carry out the various recommendations, and insists on the importance of their becoming law at the earliest possible date.

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#### THE BOARDING OUT OF HARMLESS LUNATICS.

A Conference was held at Larbert, the 17th February last, in connection with the question of boarding out of harmless lunatics, the subject having been brought to the front by the District Lunacy Board with the object, if possible, of rendering further additions to the asylum unnecessary at the present time. Major Dobbie, Chairman of the Stirling Lunacy Board, presided. Representatives were present from each of the counties and burghs in the Stirling Lunacy District, and also representatives from nearly all the parishes in the district—about fifty in number.

The CHAIRMAN, in opening the proceedings, referred to the fact that since the asylum had come under the control of the County Councils a very large sum of money had been expended in extending the buildings, the sum borrowed up to the present being close upon £74,000. The extraordinary rise in the number of annual admissions was again making it necessary to consider the question of additional accommodation.

Dr. MACPHERSON stated that although the increase in the numbers of the insane in the district had within recent years attracted a good deal of attention, yet the increase had been steadily going on all along, and had only now reached such proportions as to make it necessary to deal with it in as practical a manner as possible. While this increase was in one sense regrettable, in quite another sense it might be regarded as representing an increased amount of prosperity within the four counties which formed the district, as the actual increase of insanity depended entirely upon an increasing population, and consequently upon increase in financial and industrial prosperity.