

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD
EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 1,038.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1908.

Vol. XL.

Editorial.

THE CHILDREN'S CHARTER.

One of the most humane measures introduced into Parliament within recent years, and of most far-reaching importance, is the Bill "to consolidate and amend the law relating to the protection of children and young persons, reformatory and industrial schools, and juvenile offenders, and otherwise to amend the law with respect to children and young persons," introduced last week by Mr. Herbert Samuel, Under-Secretary to the Home Office. Nurses who are constantly being brought in contact with the misery and suffering caused to helpless children by reason of the neglect of their responsible guardians cannot fail to take a deep interest in the progress of the Bill.

The object is to consolidate as well as to amend the existing law in regard to children and young persons. A child is defined in the Bill as a person under fourteen and a young person as one between fourteen and sixteen. It contains 119 clauses and fills 700 pages. Briefly it imposes penalties on parents who cause the death of their children by overlying, and whose children are injured by being left in rooms with unguarded fires. The penalty for the former offence is a fine not exceeding £10, or £25 if the person causing the death was under the influence of drink. For the second offence the fine is one not exceeding £10. No boy or girl under sixteen is to be allowed to buy cigarettes or cigarette papers, or to smoke in a public place, and the police and other authorised persons may confiscate tobacco found upon them. Persons authorised by the Home Secretary are to have the right of entry into all homes for destitute children supported by voluntary contributions.

In introducing the Bill, Mr. Samuel ex-

plained that from time to time cases of cruelty and neglect are discovered in so-called homes for children, which are really fraudulent institutions conducted by persons who live on charitable contributions subscribed for the benefit of children. Vagrant children are to be compelled to go to school, and there is to be a children's magistrate. The Bill provides also that a special place of detention shall be provided for children, that a child shall not be sentenced to imprisonment or penal servitude, that a young person shall not be sentenced to penal servitude for any offence, and only the most unruly young persons may be sentenced to imprisonment. A court of summary jurisdiction when hearing charges against children shall sit in a different building or room from that in which the ordinary sittings of the court are held, or on different days or at different times. No persons except members of the court, those directly concerned in the case, and bona-fide representatives of the press shall be allowed to attend except by leave of the Court. There are to be special children's magistrates in London, who will go on circuit to the different courts.

Nothing in the Bill is to be construed "to take away or affect the lawful right of any parent, teacher, or other person having the lawful control and charge of a child or young person to administer punishment to such child or young person." But parents are not to be allowed to wash their hands of the consequences of having neglected their children. In all cases where a child is charged the attendance of the parent is required in Court, unless there is valid reason to the contrary.

The Bill is one which should command support on all sides of the House, and we hope it may become law during the present session.

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