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EDITORIAL.

THE CONTROL OF THE FEEBLE MINDED.

Of all the problems which the nation is called upon to face, none is more urgent than the efficient care of the feeble minded, for the present lack of control and supervision of this class, who are incapable of self-protection and self-control, leads to its multiplication at a rate which menaces the health and stability of national life. No classes of workers realize this more keenly than the trained nurses and midwives of the kingdom, who constantly come into contact with the evil results of present conditions in the wards of workhouses, infirmaries and maternity hospitals, where feeble-minded women, the easy prey of vicious and sometimes feeble-minded men, bear children, who, in their turn repeat the almost inevitable tragedy, and become a burden on the State, and still further deteriorate the standard of national health, upon the soundness of which the future greatness, and even the very existence of the nation depend.

Nurses also know—none better—that in the crowded slum tenements of great cities, and in cottage homes in rural districts, where grown men and women related and unrelated, fathers and children, brothers and sisters, male-lodgers and growing girls share the same bedrooms, virtue is well nigh impossible, and that the offspring of illegitimate and incestuous intercourse too frequently go to swell the ranks of the feeble-minded, also that the conditions of life in too many common lodging-houses render a moral life for the women, compelled by poverty to make use of them, almost impossible, and, once again, the result is that often unwanted, and too often feeble minded, children are born to be a burden on the State.

Further, there is at present no provision for the detention and supervision of feeble-minded persons over sixteen years of age, and we learn with pleasure that the National Association for Promoting the Welfare of the Feeble-Minded, and the Eugenics Education Society, have drafted a Bill of an uncontroversial character, which is to be introduced into the House of Commons next session, and which, pending a larger measure based on the conclusions of the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble Minded, will, if passed, grant immediate powers for the detention of persons who would otherwise be a source of danger to themselves or to the community, and the promoters believe the happiness and welfare of the feeble minded would in this way be best consulted. The class should in fact be treated through their lives as children, and the power thus to treat them conferred on the principal of an institution would, in most cases, be all that would be needed.

The group to be dealt with thus consists of persons who though not held to be lunatics, idiots, or imbeciles, are nevertheless a source of danger to themselves or to others, and who by reproducing their kind may inflict lasting injury upon the race. It is, in fact, only for those members of this group whose mental defect renders them likely, if not properly supervised, to act unsocially or to be in any way mischievous to themselves, that provision is made in this Bill. It is suggested that the new powers created under the Bill shall be vested in the Lunacy Commissioners, and that the places in which such control is exercised shall be duly recognised and inspected. We may add that it is of the greatest importance that the Lunacy Commission should be increased by the addition of Women Commissioners.

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