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EDITORIAL.

THE PROBLEM OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED.

No one could listen to the speeches made at the Conference on the Feeble-minded held at 1, Portman Square, W., on Monday last, by kind permission of Mrs. Halsey, presided over by Sir George Savage, and organized by the Penal Reform League, without realizing that a problem of urgent and pressing importance is dealt with in the Bill to provide for the Protection, Care, and Control of the Feeble-minded now before Parliament.

In a resolution moved by Miss Kirby, and seconded by Mr. W. H. Dickinson, M.P., the Conference unanimously supported the above Bill, and further urged the necessity of providing greater facilities for the medical and psychological examination and observation, in Reception Houses adequately staffed for the purpose, of persons brought before the Criminal Courts.

Amongst the many interesting speakers, Dr. Robert Jones, Medical Superintendent of Claybury Asylum, Dr. Saleeby, and Dr. Ettie Sayer, dealt with the medical side of the question.

The former spoke of the moral imbeciles who were to be found, and could be dealt with, in the schools. Every one knew such children—mentally they might be clever, but they were of the type who would pinch other children, throw the cat on the fire, and their mother's jewellery down the well. Dr. Jones said that such children in adult life repeat themselves with absolute fidelity, except in cases in which the condition is not congenital, but caused by subsequent injury. While agreeing to the principle of their segregation in Homes, believing that these "mental cripples" are happier so, he urged that Clause 10 of the

Bill, giving the Commissioners in Lunacy power to detain these cases, should be so amended as to provide for an annual revision of such detention, a suggestion which those present warmly applauded.

Dr. Saleeby said that while it might be expected that children who came of an unhealthy stock on one side, and a healthy one on the other, should exhibit blended characteristics, experience proved that it was necessary that such offspring should be examined individually, for practically it is found that something required for the making of the normal individual is transmitted to some of the children, while in others it is lacking. If both parents are mentally defective, the defect is invariably present in all the offspring.

Sometimes, however, the condition arises *de novo*, in the child of a healthy stock. The speaker suggested that the cause was to be found in the "racial poisons" (alcoholism and syphilis).

Dr. Saleeby believes that, both those who are working against and for segregation are animated by the desire to protect the feeble-minded, those who oppose being inspired by a fear of restricting personal liberty. The speaker contended that these people have greater freedom when under care, and gave as an instance the feeble-minded girl walking down Piccadilly at night with nothing in her pocket, and the same girl happily placed in a well-managed colony.

The Chairman fully agreed with the proposals of the Bill, and thought that the future of the race depends on the elimination of the corrupting element.

It is certain both from the Report of the Royal Commission on this question and from the returns of the Board of Education that present conditions call for immediate legislation.

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