

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

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

No. 1,325

SATURDAY, AUGUST 23, 1913.

Vol. LI.

EDITORIAL.

THE MENTAL DEFICIENCY ACT.

The Mental Deficiency Bill for England and Wales which, before the prorogation of Parliament received the Royal Assent, is an endeavour to deal with the protection of a class of the community who sorely need the care of the State, for they are largely devoid of the faculty of self-protection; and also from the point of view of racial development to stem the disquieting multiplication of defectives at a higher rate than that of the normal population.

The Act includes in the defective class (a) idiots; i.e. persons so deeply defective in mind from birth, or from an early age, as to be unable to guard themselves against common physical dangers (b) imbeciles; persons whose mental defectiveness does not amount to idiocy, but is yet so pronounced that they are incapable of managing themselves or their affairs, or, in the case of children, of being taught to do so; (c) feeble minded persons; i.e. persons in whose case there exists from birth, or from an early age, mental defectiveness not amounting to imbecility, yet so pronounced that they require care, supervision, and control for their own protection, or, in the case of children that they by reason of such defectiveness appear to be permanently incapable of receiving proper benefit from the instruction in ordinary schools, and lastly (d) moral imbeciles; i.e. persons who from an early age display some permanent mental defect coupled with strong vicious or criminal propensities on which punishment has had little, or no, deterrent effect.

Any such defective may be dealt with under the Act by being sent to an institution for defectives, or placed under guardianship, at the instance of his parent or guardian if he is under the age of 21, or if, in addition, to being a defective he is

found neglected, abandoned, without visible means of support, or cruelly treated; or who is ordered, or is liable to be ordered to be sent to a certified industrial school, or who is undergoing imprisonment (except imprisonment under civil process) or penal servitude, or detention by order of a court in a reformatory, industrial school, or inebriate reformatory, or who is detained in an institution for lunatics or a criminal lunatic asylum, who is an habitual drunkard, or who is incapable of responding to instruction given in special schools, or who is in receipt of poor law relief at the time of giving birth to an illegitimate child.

Procuration and prostitution of defectives are punishable with hard labour.

Any manager, officer, nurse, attendant, or servant employed in an institution, or any person in charge of a defective and illtreating him, is guilty of a misdemeanour.

The Act is to be administered by a Board of Control of not more than fifteen Commissioners of whom not more than twelve are to be paid, four of whom are to be practising barristers or solicitors, four medical Commissioners, and at least one of the paid and unpaid Commissioners are to be women; the legal Commissioners are to be appointed by the Lord Chancellor and the others by the Secretary of State. Certain administrative powers and duties may be entrusted to an administrative committee.

The Board is to be assisted by a Secretary, inspectors and other officers and servants who are to include women as well as men, and one of its duties will be to certify, approve, supervise and inspect institutions, houses, and homes for defectives and all arrangements made for the care, training and control of defectives therein. Women are also to be appointed on the Committees for the care of the mentally defective constituted by County and County Borough Councils.

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[previous page](#)

[next page](#)