

## Boarding Schools for Handicapped Children.

OVER £900,000 WILL BE SPENT THIS YEAR ON running London's special schools, while another £360,000 has been earmarked for building new special schools or for adapting existing properties. Nearly 10,000 of the county's 380,000 school children are so handicapped as to need special provision for their education—children who are physically handicapped, blind, deaf, maladjusted or educationally sub-normal. A new booklet published by the L.C.C. and entitled "New Boarding Schools for London's Handicapped Children" tells the story of the needs and problems of these children and of the sympathetic attention paid to them.

The scope of the book is in fact wider than that suggested by its title. It deals in brief with the growth of special education in London, from the first resolution of the London School Board in 1872 on blind and deaf children to the recent purchase of Staplefield Place, a millionaire's home now adapted for physically handicapped girls. The different types of handicap, and their frequency, are then discussed. After referring to the 63 day special schools and the various hospital schools now established in London, the story turns to its main theme of boarding schools—both the old-established ones like Grafham Grange and the new schools such as Dromenagh, at Iver Heath, with its beautiful gardens and woodlands; North Lodge at Wimbledon Park, designed by Sir Edward Lutyens and used for blind children; and Bradstow, surrounded by ten acres of playing fields and open space, yet only a few minutes from the sea. The book concludes with an examination of the needs of handicapped children and the advantages offered for some in need of special care by a boarding school environment. The results, it is claimed, are seen in part by the very high percentage of handicapped children who today obtain and keep work of value to the community and of interest and profit to themselves.

The book, printed on art paper, contains 32 pages, of which 12 are devoted to photographs of the boarding schools and of the children at work and play. An attractive cover has been designed by Mr. A. C. Pilkington, a master at one of these schools. Price 1s. (by post 1s. 1½d.), the book may be obtained from the L.C.C. Information Bureau, County Hall (Room 8, South Block), Westminster Bridge, S.E.1, or from Staples Press, Ltd., Mandeville Place, W.1, either direct or through any bookseller.

Press inquiries about the Council's special schools may be made to the L.C.C. Press Bureau as indicated above.

## Medical Research Forms Basis of a Colonial Scheme.

MEDICAL RESEARCH WILL PLAY the most important part initially in the campaign against blindness and eye diseases in the Colonies, which was launched by the British Empire Society for the Blind last Empire Day.

Six different ophthalmological and entomological surveys in the Colonies are planned, and it is hoped that the first of these combined teams will leave this country early in 1952 for West Africa. Others are under consideration for East and Central Africa and South-East Asia.

The Society is advised on these schemes by a distinguished Medical Panel and is also drawing on the experience and advice of a number of Medical Research Organisations in the U.K. and abroad.

Entomologists are to work with the ophthalmologists because there are so many insect-borne eye diseases, such as trachoma, and the dreaded onchocerciasis, which is carried by the simulium fly, and which is in danger of spreading to river systems in Africa other than those already known in West and East Africa. Effective control of the many pests that carry eye diseases will be a vital factor in reducing the

incidence, since 80 per cent. of eye diseases in the Colonies are believed to be preventable.

The Society's surveys will be the first full-scale ophthalmological research work ever undertaken in the Colonies. They will seek to determine the true incidence of both blindness and eye diseases and to devise medical treatments suited to the climate, the availability of eye hospitals and clinics and of trained staff.

At present reliable information is lacking because only partial surveys have been made, but the British Empire Society for the Blind has combed all the available sources of information. Even the most conservative estimates of eye diseases that can be deduced arrest the attention by revealing the tremendous size of the task the Society has undertaken. Trachoma, for instance, is endemic over much of East Africa, and an authoritative source gives the appalling number of 3,000,000 people suffering from this disease. It is known that 6,000 school children out of 32,000 in a recent survey were infected in one Colony, and there is evidence to show that amongst the Indian population in East Africa 128,000 out of a total of 172,000 may be victims of the disease. In some areas of West Africa onchocerciasis is depopulating villages, and the infection rate in these areas is very high.

Throughout the Colonies the ophthalmological hospitals and clinics are so few that the problem is insoluble under existing conditions, despite the gallant work the handful of eye specialists are doing.

It is encouraging to hear that the British Empire Society for the Blind's co-ordinated attack to cope with this situation is meeting with a wholehearted response in the Colonies themselves, where local governments and influential citizens have rapidly grasped the potentialities of the campaign. Already 26 Colonies have formed local Societies for the Prevention of Blindness and the Welfare of the Blind, the first buildings for the blind have actually been started and teachers and organisers trained in this country are at work.

In one small Colony the stimulus of the Society's campaign lead to the formation of a local Blind Welfare Society, and now this Society has helped to secure active official considerations to the passing of immigration regulations to prevent persons suffering from trachoma from entering the Colony. At present the Colony is almost entirely free from the disease and the measures contemplated would ensure effective medical control.

Three years ago in the whole of the Colonies there were only eight small schools for the blind, caring for less than 300 of the estimated 1,000,000 blind people, and there were no Braille presses. But today plans are being pressed forward for no less than twenty new or extended schools and training centres for the blind, a new eye hospital and more eye clinics and provision of Braille printing presses to print the essential school text books.

The resolute action that is being taken by the Society will not only contribute much to the relief of human suffering, but it will also have an important economic effect. As community life grows in Colonies, such as in Africa, so will diseases like trachoma spread with ever-increasing rapidity, unless urgent preventive measures are begun, and the economic deadweight of the blind and of those rendered unfit by eye diseases will become more and more heavy on the national life.

Inquiries in regard to the work of the Society may be addressed to The Secretary, British Empire Society for the Blind, 53, Victoria Street, London, S.W.

## Age of Marriage in Northern Ireland.

THE MARRIAGE AGE in Northern Ireland is to be brought into line with that in Great Britain. The Government has introduced a Bill by which, in future, marriages of persons under 16 will be void. Hitherto the age has been 12 in respect of girls and 14 for boys.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)