

SUMMARY OF SUGGESTED LEGISLATION.

Briefly, the suggested legislation would provide for the following :—

- (1.) Establishment of Children's Courts.
- (2.) State guardianship of illegitimate children and all orphan and permanently destitute children.
- (3.) Supervision of all children maintained apart from their parents or guardians.
- (4.) Regulation of street trading and the employment of children generally.
- (5.) Regulation of the attendance of children at picture-theatres.
- (6.) Inspection of private institutions for children.
- (7.) Provision for the transfer of incorrigible young persons over the age of eighteen years from industrial schools to reformatory institutions under the control of the Prisons Department.

To which may be added :—

- (8.) Establishment of children's homes for children (1) requiring convalescent treatment and care, (2) whose parents through accident, illness, or childbirth are unable to provide for them in the meantime, and (3) for infants suffering from malnutrition.
- (9.) Establishment of baby-centres for the examination of babies, and depots for the distribution of modified milk.
- (10.) Provision for assisting unmarried mothers and deserted wives with families.

CARE OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED.

At the present time almost every public school has a certain number of pupils who are incapable, by reason of backwardness or mental defect, of receiving benefit from the education offering. This type of child is usually found at the bottom of his class, but he manages somehow to drag his way through the various standards until the age when he may leave school is reached, unless in the meantime, by reason of nomadic habits, truant-playing, or by the commission of petty offences, he falls into the hands of the police and is committed to an industrial school. As a general rule the average teacher of the primary school does not in the least understand this type of child, and even if he did is unable usually to devote any of the school time to other than normal children. These abnormal children may be divided into two groups: (1) The backward child who is not to all outward appearances deficient in intellect, but for various reasons, ranging from lack of opportunity when younger to inadequate home care and control and training, is unable to keep pace in the school with other children of equal age; (2) the mentally deficient child who by reason of such defect is unable to benefit by the instruction in an ordinary public school.

An experienced person has no difficulty in detecting children of the second group. Their physical inferiority is usually evident and unmistakable; and, while they are not idiots or imbeciles, they constitute a distinct type of lesser mental defect with all the characteristics of the imbecile in a lesser degree—inferior physical organization, defective motor power, weak will, and lack of initiative, feeble power of attention and observation, and invariably moral obliquity.

Generally speaking, the backward child is a fairly simple proposition to deal with. He is from a moral standpoint not, in general, unfit to associate with normal children, and by individual instruction in a special or auxiliary class attached to a public school it should be possible to train him sufficiently to enable him to take his place in the world, though at a later date, perhaps, than the normal child.

The feeble-minded child is quite a different proposition to deal with. He may belong to one of three classes or grades: (1) Low grade; (2) middle grade; (3) high grade or moron type.

The low-grade cases are usually best provided for by admission to a custodial home. They are generally regarded as unimprovable from an educational point of view, and as such are fit only for admission to a children's section of a mental hospital, unless the parents are in a position to provide properly for them otherwise. Socially they are not regarded as a menace or danger to the community at large, except in the case of females who have reached the age of puberty.

An attempt, however, should be made in training the middle and high grade and border-line cases. Education as applied to the development of feeble-minded children is understood in its broadest sense not as mere intellectual training, but as uniform cultivation of the whole being, physically, mentally, and morally. The end and aim of all our teaching and training should be to make the child helpful to himself and not a burden to others. It is of very little use for the child to be able to read words of two or three letters, but it is of great use to teach a feeble-minded child to dress himself, to be of cleanly habits, to eat tidily, to control his temper, to avoid hurting others, to act with politeness, to be truthful, to know something of numbers, to go with messages, and numerous other such things.

The progressive games and occupations of the kindergarten, object teaching, manual training, and other attractive methods now so successfully applied in the teaching of normal children are specially adapted to the training of the feeble-minded.

Associated with the strictly mental training, careful attention should be paid to instruction in industrial occupations and manual labour. The idea of "education by doing" not only provides a very valuable means of exercising and developing the dormant faculties and defective bodies of these children, but at the same time trains them to become capable and useful under intelligent supervision. Such industries as carpentering, bootmaking, matmaking, farming, gardening, and the manufacture of clothing represent work that can be successfully carried on by feeble-minded children.

While it is essential that the backward child should as far as possible be associated with the normal child in school as well as out of it, yet on the other hand the feeble-minded child is best dealt with apart from normal children. As a general rule he is not able to join in the play of normal children, who are quick to notice any defect either mental or physical in another child. It is essential, therefore, that whatever scheme is laid down for the education of the feeble-minded, provision should be made for segregation from normal children at least during the time while under instruction.

Some twelve years ago legislation was passed providing for the compulsory education of feeble-minded children over the age of six years, and following on this the school at Otekaiki was established for boys, and some years later a similar institution was established at Richmond for girls.