

✓ Advertiser

MENTAL DEFECTIVES.

MOVEMENT TO ESTABLISH A CLINIC.

"A CRUSADE AGAINST IGNORANCE."

A public meeting was held in the Lister Hall, Hindmarsh-square, on Tuesday evening in connection with the Public Health Week, to consider the desirability of launching a movement to raise £5,000 for the purpose of establishing a mental deficiency clinic at the University. Sir Josiah Symon, K.C., presided over a good attendance.

A little more than a year ago a resolution was carried at the close of a lecture by Professor Berry, affirming the desirability of taking active measures "for the study, investigation, and solution of the problems associated with the status and mental development of the children of South Australia." A committee was appointed, with Sir Joseph Verco as its chairman, meetings were held, and the sub-committee formulated the following "ultimate ideal" of the problem:—

- 1. A scientific survey of South Australia regarding mental defectives of all ages and all classes.
- 2. The mental examination of children at school-going age, and later, if charged with truancy or committal for various offences.
- 3. Special treatment of mentally defective children, before and after the school-going age.
- 4. Correlation of institutions for the care of mental defectives and establishment of suitable colonies for employment after school-going age.

As a foundation upon which to build so as finally to reach this "ultimate ideal" the sub-committee recommended—

- 1. That a special department of psychology for the study of mental deficiency should be established, preferably in association with the University, and accommodated in the Darling Building, and directed by a lecturer, who should be an expert in this section of psychology, and whose duties should be—(a) to train educational and medical students in methods of examining and grading children; (b) to examine and mentally grade children; (c) to advise and arrange methods of treatment.

It was estimated that the amount required for such a psychological department, institute, or clinic would be about £1,000 a year, and that a period of five years would suffice to conduct the experiment of testing its value for these purposes, so that the sum of £5,000 should be secured in cash or promises. At the end of this period it should have proved its utility, and there would then be a demand for its permanence.

A Notable Campaign.

The Chairman said Health Week constituted an invitation to the community to take part in a notable campaign by which it was sought to secure a higher average degree of health for the community. It was a crusade against ignorance and laziness in respect to health matters. It proceeded on the maxim that prevention was better than cure. Man's happiness depended very largely on good health. Sweetness and light, if they included fresh air with them, were of vital importance. Cleanliness was said to come next to Godliness. He was not sure that it did not, in some respects, come before Godliness. It could be practised in the cottages of the poor as well as in the mansions of the rich. It was as easy for the poor man to have his cottage clean, attractive, wholesome, and light as it was for the rich to have these things in their palaces. With physical health they were not concerned that evening. They were met to consider mental well-being. "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased?" was the question before them, and to one branch of the answer they were turning their attention. The sound mind and the sound body must go together. The former required the latter as its casket. The mind was a precious jewel without which the casket was of little use. The ancients

rightly put the sound mind first. It was the sound mind that they were to be especially interested in that evening. They were initiating the movement which aimed at preventing the mind becoming diseased. They had in South Australia a very valuable institution in Minda. About a quarter of a century ago several gentlemen, including the late Mr. George Ash and Mr. Samuel Johnston, initiated the movement which resulted in the establishment of Minda. They were shocked to find, at the time, that weak-minded children were herded with the mentally afflicted in the asylum. The speaker and others took part in a movement to remedy this state of things. Minda came into existence, first at Fullarton, and later in its present splendid home at Brighton. He paid a tribute to Sir Joseph Verco for his interest in the movement. There was to be no conflict between the new movement and Minda. The latter was intended for the permanently weak-minded, who were quite shut off from the ordinary activities of life. There were children who had sufficiently recovered to be able to return to their homes, but they were the exception, not

the rule. The new movement was being launched in the interests of those who were susceptible to mental improvement, and who might be rescued from the mental deterioration to which otherwise they might be subject. After referring to the different mentality of children of the same family, or of the same school, Sir Josiah Symon said the fragile flower would be cared for under the movement, which it was proposed to initiate. An endeavor would be made to induce parents to exercise vigilance and care in respect to the mental development of their children. Teachers, too, would be brought under the influence of the scheme. They would be urged to be tender and patient with the weak-minded. There was great scope in the organisation of the movement to teach the teachers to be forbearing, and to exercise the utmost patience in their dealings with the weak-minded children entrusted to their care. The teacher should acquire experience in the work of mental differentiation. That could be achieved by practice and observation. Parents, too, should co-operate in this practical observation. He thought the Education Department should instruct the teachers to record and tabulate the results of their observations. The ascertainment of facts in relation to a child was necessary to interpret some of the things which might be observed. A vacant look, for instance, did not always bespeak a dull mind. The teacher, too, should carefully discriminate between inability to work and mere laziness. He suggested for the consideration of the committee that they should invoke aid from all classes and creeds in the community. There should be no discrimination in the matter. He also thought they should prepare a short, clear, and definite statement of the objects and aims of the movement. When an appeal was made to the public for £5,000 it might be asked what it was proposed to do. Accompanied by such a statement as he suggested he felt sure that the appeal would meet with a ready response. (Applause.)

The Position Explained.

Sir Joseph Verco, after explaining the objects of the movement and outlining what had already been done, said surely no one could question the desirability of action of some sort in respect to the matter of mental deficiency. An attitude of "laissez faire," a policy of drift, was inexcusable. Something ought to be done—at least in the way of attempt—in the interests of abnormal children—their mental, moral and social interests—not only while they were children and under parental care, but when they had grown up and were thrown upon their own resources, resources altogether too feeble, and not only in their interests but as much, if not more, in the interests of the community at large, among whom those defectives mingled, very often unrecognized as such, and almost always to the mental, moral and social degradation of those with whom they mixed. Though at present everything could not be done which they thought should be done to make the campaign as perfect and as effective as they could wish, the campaign should be launched at once. And it should be launched in such a way that the first thing which should be done might be done first. Let there be someone who could teach what must first be known, namely, how to recognise the deficiency when it existed, how to determine its kind, and its degree. To that end they wanted the clinic and the clinician. They had been promised accommodation and help from allied professors, by the University of Adelaide, provided they financed the enterprise, and now they needed the funds. To that point their efforts must be directed. Some might suppose it easy enough without an expert to recognise mental deficiency, gauge its degrees, and decide what had best be done. But such a supposition was far from correct. Mental deficiency was necessarily just as varied in kind as were normal mental faculties themselves, just as different in acuteness as those faculties could be, and just as intricate in the relations of its several forms as the normal faculties with one another. And properly to estimate it demanded an intimate acquaintance with the normal mind and with scientific methods of examining it. An expert was required to distinguish those who were actually and primarily mental defectives from those who only seemed such, owing to lack of education or to some defect not of their brain substance, but of their perceptive organs, such as their eyes and ears, or who had some general bodily infirmity due to decayed teeth, diseased throats or obstructed noses or other more constitutional causes. These conditions might make a child dull and keep him backward, but did not constitute him a mental defective. The expert would speedily detect these casual conditions, and by their removal the mental dullness might completely disappear and the child prove himself quite normal. Mental deficiency might be partial and very limited. Some people were color-blind, could not tell red from green. Some had little or no idea of musical pitch, they could not sing, or tell one song from another, or distinguish between harmony and discord, they were tone deaf, though their hearing was otherwise perfect. Some were stone deaf and could not hear anything.

So with other faculties of the mind, some were born mysthematicians. They could skip through arithmetic and algebra, trigonometry and comic sections, and were "lightning calculators." But in languages they were dunces, and always would be. They could not master even their mother tongue. But, for one defect they might be quite normal. Geniuses in some departments might be imbeciles in others. Dear Dr. Oliver Goldsmith was a poet, a historian, a naturalist, and at least he could play the flute, one who adorned everything he touched, but one who though he wrote like an angel, yet talked like "poor poll," and though so versatile and lovable, was nevertheless so devoid of common sense as to be the dupe of every trickster. Some abnormally clever persons were seemingly without any notion of moral responsibility criminals from infancy to old age, or the gallows, in spite of reasoning and pleading and every form of punishment.

Defective or Genius?

Some children were in no manner or degree defective, but were natural and normal except that in some respect they were specially gifted, it might be in mathematics, languages, science, natural history, poetry, music, drawing, or painting. But their special gift was unrecognized by teachers or relatives, or if noted, was regarded as a curious peculiarity and not as an asset valuable to its possessor and to the world at large. Straitsened circumstances forbade or failure of appreciation neglected the cultivation and use of the child's superior gift, and that was wasted in the sordid or trivial interests of the common lot. A psychologist expert would recognise it, and estimating it at its true value, would recommend the line of study which would develop it and the courses of higher education to be followed so as best to utilize his brilliant endowment. Some defectives trained along the lines of their associated brilliance would shine as geniuses, but they must not only be trained, but guided and protected from themselves and from others. Those strange anomalies and contradictions were markedly present, only occasionally. In slighter degree they were far from uncommon. In less manifest instances they were liable to be overlooked. An expert was required to detect them. The study of those conditions had developed a science, a special department of psychology, demanding as its basis some knowledge of normal psychology. And before, therefore, they could detect with confidence and accuracy the existence of mental deficiency or super-efficiency, recognise its kind, determine its grade, or indicate the combination of deficiency and brilliance, they must be properly educated in the particular department of psychological science. How could they possibly suggest or apply the proper treatment for the individual until they could detect and designate and measure his deficiency and recognise any associated special efficiency? When in practice as a physician his first concern was to diagnose the disease, to find out its nature, its site, its severity, and its complications. Till this was effected my forecast was a guess and my treatment an experiment. But when once the diagnosis was made my course of action was clear. The proper line of treatment could be followed, what could be done was done, what ought not to be done was avoided. So was it with mental deficiency. They must first be able to detect it, to define it, to measure it, to relate it, before they could forecast its issue or lay down the line of treatment. To do that they must be taught what had already been learned by others, become acquainted with methods already tested and accepted, and be trained to use proper methods of investigation and to interpret their results. To be taught they needed an expert special psychologist—the mental deficiency psychologist. And he must have his school in which to teach. He must have material on which to demonstrate his teaching. He must have his students. He must set them to examine the children. He must show them how to collect, interpret, and correlate all the facts needed, how to draw up their reports. He must correct their mistakes until they had learned to make a diagnosis and to make it exact. Just as diagnosis was the essential in the science of medicine, so was it in the branch of psychology, and as the clinic and the clinician were absolute necessities in the former, so were they in the latter. And so the recommendation of the committee was that an appeal should be launched with that as its first objective, the institution of a mental deficiency psychological clinic as the first step towards that "ultimate ideal," the scientific treatment of mental deficiency in the interests of defectives and of the community at large. (Applause.) He moved—

Dr. F. S. Hone, in seconding the resolution, commended the scheme to cordial support. Whatever the difficulties in the way might be they should go ahead with the matter. He supposed there had been some improvement during the last 25 years, but he did not think that matters were very much better now in regard to the subject under consideration than they were a quarter of a century ago. They wanted an ultimate aim in what they did. They were face to face with two possibilities. There was that of a scheme being launched with too ponderous machinery, which would fall to pieces of its own weight. On the other hand, they might have a number of little, partial schemes which were not co-ordinated. They wanted a scheme which would ultimately embrace the whole ideal. If that was launched and carried out on right lines he believed that in, say, five years sufficient interest would be aroused to ensure a public desire that it should be pursued to its complete achievement. Medical men were continually being confronted with four different classes of medical defectives, and each of which required special treatment and care. There were at present a number of people in the State who were willing and even anxious to undertake the care of mental defectives, but they were unable to obtain the proper training in South Australia to qualify them to do so. There were problems, some of them of national importance, which could be solved only as the result of investigation. The present tests in the Education Department had regard to attainment. They wanted tests of mental intelligence. A child might be backward, and yet not be dull. He might be dull, but that might be due to some reasonable conditions. Would not the expenditure of £5,000 for the purpose of such investigations as were proposed be money well applied? (Applause.)

On the motion of Professor Brailsford Robertson, seconded by Mrs. J. C. McDonnell, the following officers were elected:—The Lord Mayor (Mr. L. Cohen), Sir Joseph Verco, Senator Vardon, the Director of Education (Mr. W. T. McCoy), Professor Mitchell, Professor Brailsford Robertson, Messrs. E. Anthony, M.P., F. W. Birrell, M.P., and H. B. Crosby, M.P., Drs. Gertrude Halley, Helen Mayo, Dorothea Pavy, H. K. Fry, F. S. Hone, R. H. Marten, B. H. Morris, and R. S. Rogers, Mesdames Hubbe, J. C. McDonnell, Misses Hornbrook, Jackson, and Stirling, Messrs. E. Ashby, Russell Booth, Owen Crompton, D. M. Hollidge, A. S. Jackman, and F. W. Reid.

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ECLIPSE PARTY.

"EXCELLENT RESULTS."

PERTH, October 12.
The Waial eclipse scientists returned to Fremantle by steamer this morning. The leader of the party (Dr. Campbell) said that the day of the eclipse was the most perfect of all during their stay. The star images were steady, which meant that the definition of the coronal structure would be splendid. The party had attempted to do the developing of the eclipse plates at Waial, but the conditions made the task almost impossible. The work had been completed at Broome, and showed success with all the instruments. The study of the photographs would for the most part have to be postponed until the astronomical and eclipse plates reached California. Possibly he would make a statement before leaving Australia, giving a preliminary summary of the result of the investigations. The party will leave on Saturday, spending one day in Adelaide and two in Melbourne, and will sail from Sydney on November 6 by the Niagara for Honolulu. Dr. Trumpler will sail from Broome for Java, and thence via Suez and Switzerland to California.

Board of Governors.
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LAPSED FOR WANT OF A QUORUM.
A meeting was to have been held at the Adelaide University on Thursday afternoon for the purpose of electing two representatives of the University on the Public Library Board. For want of a quorum the meeting lapsed, and the appointments will be made by the council of the University on October 27. The present representatives of the University on the board are Professor Henderson and Mr. W. J. Isister, K.C.