

SCHOOL FOR DEAF-MUTES.

This school has continued its valuable work in the education of deaf-mute children on the same lines as heretofore, instruction being given in the pure oral method, by which the deaf are taught to understand ordinary speech and to speak themselves so as to be readily understood by others. The power of language thus acquired is made the means of mental development to an extent which does not appear possible under any system of signs, manual or otherwise. It would be thought that the advantages to be gained by placing those thus afflicted more or less on an equality with their hearing fellow-creatures would be sufficiently obvious to make all parents of such children willing to send them to an institution where they are carefully looked after and educated. Such, however, is not the case; for although the roll of the school includes, with one or two exceptions, all the deaf-mutes of school age and of sound intellect in the colony that have been brought under the notice of the Education Department, yet there are the exceptions already referred to, and many instances are met with from time to time of deaf but naturally intelligent young men or women who have escaped the notice of the Department and have been allowed to grow up without education. If the fact were not so clear it would be difficult to imagine that there should be parents so shortsighted or so selfish as to stand in the way of their children's best interests. Nothing short of compulsion will move these people to send their deaf-mute children to Sumner, and it would probably be to the interest of the State to see that the necessary compulsion was used.

The law in England in regard to the compulsory education of blind and deaf children is worthy of note:—

“It is the duty of every school authority to enforce the law of compulsory attendance in the case of blind children between the ages of five and sixteen, and of deaf children between seven and sixteen (56 and 57 Vict., c. 42, sec. 11). The fact that children may be blind or deaf is not an excuse for parents not providing education for them, and the fact that there may be no suitable public elementary school within a certain distance is not a reasonable excuse for not causing a blind or deaf child to attend school (*ibid.*, sec. 1). School authorities are responsible for the provision of suitable education for such children, but it is not intended that the whole expense shall be borne by the school authority. The Act provides that the parent of a child shall contribute towards the child's expenses such sum as may be agreed upon between the school authority and the parent. Notwithstanding anything in the Elementary Education Acts, or in the by-laws for the district in which the child is resident, a deaf or blind child must attend school full time until the age of sixteen is reached. Failure to enable blind and deaf children resident in the district of the School Board, for whose elementary education efficient and suitable provision is not otherwise made, to obtain such education constitutes default on the part of the School Board.”

At the end of 1899 there were 43 children—22 boys and 21 girls—at the institution. Three boys were admitted in 1900; 1 pupil, a girl, died during the year; there were therefore 25 boys and 20 girls—45 in all—in residence in December, 1900.

The gross expenditure for maintenance during the year ended 31st December, 1900, was £3,158 9s., as against £3,444 2s. 5d. for the previous year. The total was made up as follows: Salaries of Director and teachers, £1,257 9s. 10d.; steward, matron, and servants, £506 8s. 3d.; rent, £155 14s. 7d.; house-keeping, £689 10s. 3d.; travelling-expenses, £203 12s. 4d.; school material, £3 2s. 5d.; repairs and works, £91 12s. 5d.; clothing, £11 8s. 9d.; medical attendance and medicine, £25 8s. 5d.; water-supply, £38 8s.; sanitary precautions, £37 12s.; boarding-out of pupils, £24 7s. 1d.; sundries, £113 14s. 8d. Less amount contributed by parents, £147 18s. 6d. Net expenditure, £3,010 10s. 6d. (The net expenditure in 1899 was £3,244 7s. 5d.) There was also paid to complete the purchase of the new site, £2,233 6s. 3d., making the total cost of land and buildings purchased, £4,933 6s. 3d.

The plans for new buildings are in hand, and it is hoped that it may be possible shortly to begin the work of erection.