

EDUCATION AND CARE OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED.

The need for controlling and in the majority of cases for segregating all feeble-minded children is of the utmost importance if the physical and mental standard of the race is to be preserved, and also for the protection of society generally. In fact, the ordinary community holds no place for the feeble-minded child. The parents as a rule are utterly incapable of providing for such children, who can neither derive benefit from attendance at the public school nor can associate with the normal children of the neighbourhood. In the majority of cases it is essential for the sake of the mother and the other children of the family that feeble-minded children should be removed to an institution where they can be dealt with by officers specially adapted for this purpose. The need for the segregation of girls of this type, more especially of those who have reached the age of puberty, is of very great importance. Of the cases already examined a great many are unfitted on account of their low mentality for admission to special schools, although in certain urgent cases admission has been arranged in the absence of any other means of dealing with them.

The inmates of schools for feeble-minded children are given a very simple course of instruction suited to their limited intelligence. Instruction is largely of a manual character, since these children are able to advance very slightly in the arts of reading, writing, and counting. The object of the instruction is to quicken the intelligence and dexterity of the children, so that later on they may be able to take part in some simple occupation and help to some extent in supporting themselves and also find some interest in occupations suitable to their limited capacities. Only in very exceptional cases, if in any, can it be expected that any feeble-minded children can be brought up to a standard approximating to that of even the less efficient members of the ordinary community. It has been found that those who most closely approach the ordinary standard of intelligence and capacity run greater risks and are subject to greater dangers even than those with a very low grade of intelligence. It should be definitely known that all statements relating to alleged curing of feeble-minded children, or to their replacement in ordinary schools under ordinary instruction, or to their becoming able to take their place in the ordinary community, are really the result of a misunderstanding of the types of cases to which progress such as the above refers. Improvement referred to in such statements has been accomplished not in the case of feeble-minded children, but in the case of merely backward children who make unduly slow progress under the ordinary methods of school instruction. There are many children of this type in New Zealand, but they are not placed in schools for the feeble-minded. Children who are feeble-minded in the real sense of the term are unlikely ever to improve sufficiently to make it safe for them to enter the general community. As the great majority of them will need to be under protecting control throughout life, and will not in the ordinary course be more than partially self-supporting even when they attain the adult stage, it is a question whether they should not in the first instance and for the term of their lives be under the care of the Mental Hospitals Department.

The Special School at Richmond for the reception of feeble-minded girls has now been fully established, and good work is being done under capable management. The teaching staff has been strengthened by the addition of another teacher (two teachers in all), and through their efforts an improvement is noticeable in the comportment and dexterity of the children.

At the Special School for Boys at Otekaikae a scheme providing instruction in carpentry, bootmaking, and mat and basket making has been carried out satisfactorily during the year. The younger boys receive instruction by means of kindergarten and Montessori methods, and many of them become quite skilled at handwork. Basketmaking and matmaking are occupations that feeble-minded boys take to readily, but as the majority of them are of low vitality it is essential that occupations involving physical movement should also be available for them. Many of the elder boys assist either in the garden or orchard or on the farm. Considerable improvement has been made during the past twelve months in the methods of farming the 300-odd acres attached to the institution.