

In thirty-two instances during the year prisoners were transferred to Mental Hospitals on certification or for observation. In a large number of other cases the regimen of the prison or Borstal itself brought about a physiological balance which cleared up a condition of instability. There are still a great many persons at present detained in prison who would be better placed in an institution specially designed for criminal defectives. The need for such an institution for the detention of persons commonly known as "criminal lunatics" is becoming more pressing each year. These unfortunates would be a menace to public safety if at large, and a danger to other patients if in an ordinary mental hospital. At present there is really no appropriate place for their segregation, and the establishment of a special colony will have to be faced as soon as public finances will permit. The establishment of such a colony would also relieve the mental hospitals.

In recent years increasing emphasis has been given to the study of the relationship of mental condition to criminality, and in consequence of this I set out hereunder an extract from a report of a special committee set up early this year by the Home Office, in England, dealing with the psychological treatment of offenders :—

"There is a widespread impression that many crimes are symptoms or effects of some mental disorder and that the offender's criminal habits can be cured by appropriate psychological treatment. 'It is our conviction,' said the representative of the Howard League, 'that many persons to-day are sent to prison who stand in need only of medical or psychological treatment or supervision At present many persons are sent to prison for whom punitive treatment is as little justifiable and as little helpful as it would be for a sufferer from any recognized medical disease.'

"The Committee, recognizing the great importance of modern developments in the field of psychological medicine, have been at pains to investigate the question how far offenders should be treated as mental patients, and for this purpose have taken evidence from a number of experts who have specialized in methods of psychological examination and in psycho-therapy.

"It is common knowledge that the motives underlying human conduct may be ascertained with comparative ease in some cases and only with the greatest difficulty in others. The diabetic delinquent may persistently steal food, or the means by which it can be obtained, in order to gratify the hunger of this disease. The unwanted child may react to the lack of parental understanding, and retaliate with persistent anti-social conduct. The man who is overburdened with the feeling of his own inferiority may obtain a spurious sense of power, and mental compensation, if he hoards the proceeds of many thefts. In such cases the underlying psychological factor may be ascertained without difficulty, but there is reason to believe that sometimes it lies much deeper and requires expert methods for its detection and treatment.

"The medical psychologist who sets out to treat abnormal conduct endeavours to ascertain the cause, and to obtain information in regard to any incident or circumstances in the past history of the subject which led up to the event. The subject may not be aware of the connection, and the past incident or circumstances may be forgotten. But if the man reveals himself the underlying cause for his conduct may be discovered. He is then shown the reason why he acts in an anti-social manner so as to free him from past influence and enable him to start afresh. But realization must come from the man himself. When he first unburdens himself he does not appreciate the significance of the various factors which have affected his conduct, and they must be presented to him again in such a manner that a gradual understanding of their meaning is effected. If these matters can be dealt with, he may be brought back to normality. But his co-operation is essential, and it is clear that a person who is addicted to some anti-social act may withhold this if he prefers to retain his abnormality rather than attain a cure which may deprive him of his means of gratification.

"We understand that the technique used by different medical men in the psychological treatment of abnormal conduct varies within certain limits, and may be followed by ill effects unless the practitioner has special skill and experience in this branch of medicine. But there appears to be general agreement that the probability of successful treatment is greater the sooner it is commenced and, in regard to the cases with which we are concerned, before criminal tendencies have become established as criminal habits.

"One witness informed us that his results with adults were disappointing because of the difficulty of tracing the cause back to earlier years, but he considered that effective work could be done with children up to fourteen years of age, and among adults in special cases. He regarded the adolescent period as a difficult one to treat, since the individual then is self-sufficient, and feels that he is master of his own fate; he fails to realize his own need, and consequently is difficult of approach. Other witnesses emphasized the importance of treating cases as soon as possible, but considered that treatment might be successful up to thirty or forty years of age.

"It may well be that some medical psychologists obtain their best results with children, others with adolescents, and still others with adults.

"No witness was able to give us any precise information concerning the curative value of psychological treatment in any large number of law-breakers, and results on the whole have been inconclusive in the few convicted offenders who have been so treated during the currency of their sentences. We believe it is generally admitted that, although a large amount of psychological material and well-proved data have been collected by many workers in many countries, the practical treatment of psychological disorders by this means is as yet experimental, and, although firmly established, still uncertain in its results. We consider it desirable to point out also that, whereas the medical treatment of physical disorders may establish, as a rule, the fact of cure with reasonable certainty, no such claim can be made in individual cases of psychological disorder until proved by actual trial. It must be frankly recognized that some law-breakers who appear suitable for psychological treatment are not so in fact, because of some medical, psychological, or psychotic contra-indication; others who appear suitable, fail to benefit by treatment; others are not known to be failures until they revert to crime when put to the test; and some are treated with success.