

OLD AGE PENSIONS.

In 1896 the British Government appointed a Committee "To consider any scheme that may be submitted to them for encouraging the industrial population by State aid or otherwise to make provision for old age; and to report whether they can recommend the adoption of any proposals of the kind, either based upon or independent of such schemes, with special regard in the case of any proposals of which they may approve as to their cost and probable financial results to the Exchequer and to local rates, their effect in promoting habits of thrift and self-reliance, their influence on the prosperity of the Friendly Societies and on the possibility of securing the co-operation of these institutions in their practical working."

The Committee has just published its report, which shows that, although they investigated and evidently very carefully investigated over a hundred distinct schemes, they are unable to recommend anyone of them for adoption. The necessity of dealing with the question of making provision for the aged poor in England is so obvious that we do not regard the failure of the Committee to recommend a scheme as indication that the subject will be allowed to drop. The publication of the blue book is more likely to bring out new ideas and to set other brains at work upon the problem which has baffled a Committee composed of exceptionally qualified men. The Chairman was Lord Rothschild, than whom surely no more competent financier could have been selected. The Committee included Sir F. Mowatt, Secretary to the Treasury; Sir Courtenay Boyle, Secretary to the Board of Trade; Sir Spencer Walpole, Secretary to the Post Office; Mr. R. J. Finlaison, C. B. Actuary of the National Debt; Mr. E. W. Brabrook, Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies; Mr. George King, Actuary of the Atlas Assurance Company; Mr. A. W. Watson, Actuary of the Manchester Unity; and Mr. Alfred Chipman, Parliamentary Agent of the Order of Foresters. It may be remembered that this is not the first effort that the Government has made to establish some scheme of relief of the aged poor. The Royal Commission on the Aged Poor, of which the late Lord Aberdare was Chairman, also failed to find a satisfactory solution. The German Government has unravelled the Gordian knot in German fashion by cutting it. In Germany the young are compelled to contribute towards the pensioning of the old by a fund raised partly by obligatory deductions from wages, and partly by a tax upon employers. But the Committee did not investigate any schemes involving compulsory contribution, rightly holding that by the terms of their instructions they were required to deal only with the schemes for encouraging, not compelling, the industrial population to make provision for old age. The German precedent had no weight with the Committee, and, like other things made in Germany, probably would not have been popular with the British Public. One scheme which approached the Ger-

man plan in its comprehensiveness was to give everybody a pension at sixty-five, irrespective of necessity or of personal contribution, but it was estimated that this would cost £20,000,000 a year. Another was that, if any person sixty-five years old could show himself to be in possession of an annuity of not less than £6. 10. 0. per annum, he should be entitled to receive an additional £6. 10. 0. per annum from the State.

A scheme which originated in the Committee itself, but did not command the support of a majority suggested that any person who at the age of sixty-five possessed an assured income of not less than two shillings and six pence a week and not more than five shillings should have his income supplemented by the State as follows:—If the income were two shillings and six pence or less than three shillings, an extra two shillings and six pence, if the income be three shillings and less than four shillings, an extra two shillings; if the income be four and less than five, an extra shilling. The assured income must be derived from real estate, leasehold property securities authorized by the State, etc. The Committee rejected it because it would tend to encourage thrift up to the half a crown a week standard and afterwards to discourage it. The man who by his own thrift had acquired an assured income of five shillings a week would be no better off than the man who by his own thrift had only enabled him to acquire an assured income of two shillings and six pence a week. For the purpose of the enquiry, the Committee assumed three limitations; first, the Pension must not commence until sixty-five years of age; second, it must not exceed six shillings a week; third, the pensioner must contribute at least half the pension.

Would it not be possible to devise a scheme by which the Government could utilize the machinery of the insurance companies; for instance, to supplement annuities for small amounts granted by the companies? If this could be done it would get rid of what the Committee seem to think would be a serious obstacle to most of the plans proposed; that is, the prejudice which exists against any form of relief with a taint of pauper suggestiveness about it. The subject will no doubt come up on this continent sooner or later.

THE HAZARDS OF ACETYLENE

In an article treating of the concern of underwriters about the new illuminant, the *N. Y. Evening Post* says:—

The increasing use of acetylene gas as an illuminant is causing underwriters some alarm, and unusual efforts are being made to discover the real hazards involved, and provide proper safeguards. The subject has attracted considerable attention in England, where the authorities have classified liquefied acetylene as a "dangerous explosive," and a committee of the National Board of Fire Underwriters in this country has been conducting investigations with the aid of experts to the end that concerted action may be taken and uniform rules governing the installation of plants, etc., adopted. Several bad accidents have already re-