

upon parental or governmental application. The Mental Deficiency Act as it was finally passed by Parliament represented the work of the best minds in England in the various professions directly concerned with the problem. Some objections were raised in the early stages of its progress upon the ground that it interfered with the liberty of the subject and created a class in the community not contemplated by the law. This objection was met by the statement that the Mental Deficiency Act was in reality a new charter of liberty for the feeble-minded. It extended to them for the first time assurances of personal safety and opportunity to compete for happiness in life on even terms with their equals—rights which are among the most sacred possessions of a free people. It took them from the streets and the highways where they had been the defenseless prey of lust and greed and placed them in an environment created especially to meet their very particular needs. It lifted from the few who were ill-fitted to bear it the heavy burden of their maintenance and placed it upon the whole community. It enabled the watchful eye of the State to follow them in all their relations of life and its strong arm to protect them wherever and whenever danger might threaten. The purposes of the English Mental Deficiency Act were primarily humanitarian and directed toward the welfare of the most helpless subjects of the King, but it provided a means by which to stop a steady and increasing drain upon the nation's resources. By providing life-long institutional care or life-long community protection for those who could transmit their defect to others, the passage of this Act constituted the first real step towards the extinction of hereditary feeble-mindedness.

ATTEMPTS TO ADAPT ENGLISH MENTAL DEFICIENCY ACT TO CONDITIONS IN THIS COUNTRY.

In spite of the very apparent difficulties in the way of adapting to the needs of one country a law devised with reference to the local administration agencies to another, there have been a few attempts to apply some of the principles of this great English law to the needs of our own States. The best example of a commitment law based upon the English Mental Deficiency Act is that which became effective in Illinois in July, 1915. The Illinois commitment law was framed by a committee appointed by the State Charities Commission representing the medical and social organizations most interested in mental deficiency. It defines a feeble-minded person as one who by reason of mental defectiveness of a certain specified type requires supervision, control and care for his own welfare or for the welfare of others. It provides for adequate medical testimony as to the existence of mental deficiency and adequate testimony as to circumstances which make the individual so afflicted in need of care and control. It gives the criminal courts power to inquire into the mentality of those who are brought before them charged with crime, it provides for commitment to guardianship and it makes provision for the protection of feeble-minded persons in the community. The weak feature of the Illinois Law, compared with the English Mental Deficiency Act, is that it does not provide an institutional system, a plan of central and local supervision and administration, and facilities with which the schools may perform the important part of the task of dealing with the feeble-minded which is by common consent assigned to the educational authorities. Those interested in this matter would do well to study carefully the Illinois law because it represents the most important effort in this country to provide a legal mechanism for dealing with more than the institutional aspects of mental deficiency.