

## TREATMENT OF INCIPIENT MENTAL DISORDER.

DR. ADDISON, the Minister of Health, presented the Ministry of Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill in the House of Commons on Monday, August 16th.

Clause 10 relates to treatment for incipient mental disorder. It sets out that :

"(1) Notwithstanding the provisions of any Act, a person shall not, if the required conditions are complied with, be liable to any penalty for receiving to board, lodging, or taking charge of for a period not exceeding six months, or such longer period not exceeding in all twelve months, as may be approved by the Minister, and whether for payment or not, any person suffering from mental disorder which is incipient in character and of recent origin, but not being a person who has been certified as a lunatic under the Lunacy Acts, 1890 to 1911, or in respect of whom an order has been made under the Mental Deficiency Act, 1913. Provided that nothing in this section shall authorise any person who has been received into any institution, home, or house under this section to be detained therein if he delivers to the superintendent or other person, by whatever name called, having the charge of the institution, home, or house, or sends by post to the Minister, notice in writing that he desires to be discharged therefrom.

"(2) The required conditions for the purposes of this section are as follows : (a) The institution, home, or house in which the person is received must be approved for the purposes of this section by the Minister. (b) No such person shall be received into the institution, home, or house except with his previous consent in writing and except on a certificate in writing by two duly qualified medical practitioners to the effect that that person is reasonably likely to benefit by treatment therein. (c) The superintendent or other person, by whatever name called, having charge of the institution, home, or house, shall on the demand of any person having authority to inspect the institution, home, or house produce all such written consents and certificates as aforesaid. (d) The reception under this section of any person into the institution, home, or house shall be reported to the Minister by the superintendent or other person aforesaid.

"(3) Any institution, home, or house approved by the Minister under this section shall be periodically inspected by officers appointed for that purpose by the Minister.

"(4) The Minister may make regulations for the purpose of carrying this section into effect."

The maximum penalty for a contravention of the section is a fine of £100 or imprisonment for six months, or both fine and imprisonment.

Regarding Dr. Addison's proposals in this connection, the *British Medical Journal*, August 28th, makes the following observations :

"Among the medley of clauses in Part 2 of the Ministry of Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, Clause 10, dealing with incipient mental disorder, alone has the appearance of a step in constructive legislation. This lays down that, provided the required conditions are complied with, it shall not be an offence to receive for six months (or such longer period, not exceeding in all twelve months, as may be approved by the Minister of Health), and whether for payment or not, any person suffering from mental disorder which is incipient in character and of recent origin, but not being a person who has been certified as a lunatic, or in respect of whom an order has been made under the Mental Deficiency Act, 1913. Attached to this is the proviso that nothing in the clause shall authorise anyone who has thus been received into an institution, home or house, to be detained there if he delivers to the person in charge or sends by post to the Minister notice in writing that he desires to be discharged. Stated shortly, the clause enables a person suffering from incipient mental disorder, but not certified under the Lunacy Acts, to be received, with his own consent, in an institution approved by the Minister, for a period of six months, without exposing those who receive him to penalties under the Lunacy Acts.

"The required conditions are: (a) The institution, home, or house must be approved for the purpose by the Minister; (b) no person shall be received therein except with his previous consent in writing and except on a written certificate by two medical practitioners to the effect that he is reasonably likely to benefit by treatment therein; (c) the superintendent or other person in charge shall, on the demand of anyone having authority to inspect the place, produce all such written

consents and certificates; (d) the reception under this clause of any person shall be reported to the Minister by the person in charge. Lastly, it is provided that any institution, home, or house approved by the Minister shall be periodically inspected by officers appointed by him for that purpose, and that the Minister may make regulations for carrying the clause into effect.

"These provisions follow roughly the lines advocated severally by the Board of Control in 1917, by a special committee of the Medico-Psychological Association, whose interim report appeared in November, 1918, and by the Guildhall conference on asylum committees in February, 1919. Clause 10 approximates most closely to the proposals of the Board of Control, of which a full account was given in our issue of April 10th, 1920, at page 515. It is to be observed that this clause takes the form of an amendment to, and not a comprehensive revision of the Lunacy Acts. It is purely permissive in character, leaving the whole question of the provision of accommodation and treatment for these cases to the interplay of demand and supply: whereas the Medico-Psychological Association urged the need of imposing upon local authorities the duty of providing the requisite treatment either directly or through voluntary organisation, and insisted that there should be special staffing and special management for these institutions. If, however, Clause 10 is read with Clause 11 (which we discuss elsewhere) it will be seen that some provision is made for development in this direction. We may note also that Clause 10 provides for cases of mental disorder 'incipient in character and of recent origin.' This seems a less elastic definition than that offered by the Board of Control, which implied a distinction between cases incipient in character and those of recent origin.

"The Bill states that inspection will be by 'officers appointed for that purpose by the Minister,' but until the regulations are made known it is not clear whether the new arrangements contemplated for incipient and recent cases of mental disorder are to be administered and supervised, on behalf of the Minister, by the Board of Control or not. Many of those who have pressed for this reform have insisted on the importance for its success of separating these arrangements entirely from the ordinary lunacy administration, whether central or local, for fear that any association with it would fatally prejudice the new method in the eyes of the public. A memorandum on the Bill, published this week by the Ministry of Health,<sup>(1)</sup> implies that this separation will be brought about under the operation of Clause 10. 'The importance of early treatment of these cases,' it says, 'wholly dissociated from the machinery of the Lunacy Acts, is now generally recognised, and the powers given by the clause will be especially useful in cases of shell-shock and similar nervous disorders.' Unless the public can be induced voluntarily to make use of the facilities proposed at the very onset of the disorder, and before things have come to such a pass that something drastic has to be done, they will fail to attain one of the most important objects in view, which is to arrest the disorder and restore the normal balance.

"The proposed method of detention under this Bill is in its essentials an extension of the 'voluntary boarder' system, and the formality of a written application for admission is still required as a necessary step previous to reception. Such a requirement often deters the patient from making use of the present provisions and we regret its retention. It would be better, we believe, to assume that a person desiring treatment under this clause consents by implication to such restriction of his liberty as is necessary for his treatment, subject to the provision that he can at any time resume his liberty by giving notice in writing to that effect. This is practically the way in which cases of mental disorder occurring in patients in general hospitals have been dealt with informally in the past without difficulty and without abuse.

"It is satisfactory to note that provision is made for the extension of the period of treatment from six months, as originally foreshadowed as the standard period, to one of twelve months, with the approval of the Minister. Six months is sure to be inadequate for complete recovery in many cases suitable for treatment under these provisions. It is, however, not quite clear why a person who has once been certified under the Lunacy Acts and has recovered should be debarred from taking advantage of these provisions in the early stages of some later onset of disorder."

(1) Cmd. 898. H.M. Stationery Office. Price 1d.