

One hundred years ago

Scotland. Baldovan Asylum for Imbecile Children

THE jubilee report of this asylum, which claims to be the first institution for imbeciles in Scotland, and the second, as regards date of foundation, in the British Empire, contains an interesting narrative, from the pen of the Medical Superintendent, Dr. C. M. Greig, of the rise and progress of the movement for the care and training of mentally-defective children, dating from the middle of the last century. Early in 1853 Sir John and Lady Jane Ogilvie took steps to found "an orphanage or hospital for orphans and imbecile children," with the idea that when the imbecile children reached a certain stage of cure, their association in play with the orphans would help to raise them towards the normal development, an idea, however, which subsequent experience proved to be erroneous and

impracticable. The two institutions, indeed, continued to exist side by side till 1901, when the orphanage was removed to another site, but in the meantime the imbecile institution was considerably enlarged, and from 17 pupils in the school at the close of 1858 the licence was extended to 40 children in 1867, and to 52 in 1870. In 1892 the pupils numbered 72, and in 1902 a licence was granted for 150 children. A new building had previously been erected on a site at Balneydown Farm, and a legacy of £7,000 opportunely becoming available in 1904, the directors increased the accommodation, which at the present time is available for as many as 160 children, with staff.

In the fifty years of its existence 676 children have passed through the institution, and of this number 212 are recorded to have been discharged relieved, 58 not improved, while as many as 256 have died.

This high mortality, equivalent to about 37 per cent., is in marked contrast with the death-rate of the English idiot institutions, in which a mortality of 5 per cent. would be considered large; but it must be borne in mind that the directors of the Baldovan Asylum, unlike those of the English institutions, have resorted to little, if any, selection of cases, throwing open their doors widely to all sorts and conditions of defective children, not excluding epileptics. The rates of board are extremely moderate, £77 per annum for first-class patients, £31 for second class, and £28 for third class, including clothing.

REFERENCE

British Medical Journal, 23 June 1906, 1476–1477.

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