

is no entrance fee. The meetings of the English Branch will be held in London, and there will be Congresses in Paris every few years."

PUNISHMENT OF WEAK-MINDED PRISONERS.

We find the following paragraphs in the Annual Report of the Howard Association for the year 1900:

"There was lately laid before the Howard Association a detailed and serious complaint, which appeared to carry some evidence of being, at least in part, founded upon fact. It related to the punishments of bread and water inflicted, under existing rules, upon prisoners certified as '*weak-minded*,' '*epileptic*,' or '*insane*,' and it complained of a number of such punishments being repeatedly inflicted upon a few individuals, whose names and circumstances were given.

"On the matter being brought by the Howard Association before the Prison Commissioners, the latter thoroughly investigated the case, and communicated to the Association, in full detail, the results obtained.

"The Committee, from their own previous acquaintance with the management of the prison in question, had good reason to believe that no charge of inhumanity could be attached to the *personal* action of the local authorities—but the very reverse.

"And the investigation afresh confirmed that impression. For it was found that, out of the class of '*weak-minded*' inmates of the establishment, considerably more than half had not been reported once, for any misbehaviour, during a period of six months. It was also shown that the officers in charge of that class treated them kindly, as well as firmly.

"But the important point which the investigation in question did *not* disprove was this—the fact that the *existing rules impose it* as a duty upon the officers to punish partially or wholly *insane* and epileptic prisoners for such offences as '*foul language*,' for example; and that such punishments amount *occasionally*, but not often, to from thirteen to fifteen days on bread and water, during a year.

"No question is here raised as to *sane* prisoners, or wilful and responsible offenders. The Howard Association's Committee have never taken the view that prisoners are to be pampered, or to be exempted from justly penal treatment.

"But with the wish to make every allowance for the difficulties of administration, and with a hearty and thankful recognition of the great improvement which has taken place of late years in the *personnel* of British prison management, the Committee cannot but feel that the *existing rules* and *prescribed system* impose an unduly harsh *régime* upon the particular class of '*weak-minded*,' who are not only partially insane, but some of whom are admitted to be actually so.

"In well-conducted asylums, and even in *Criminal Lunatic Asylums* (as *distinct* from prisons), a reasonable latitude is rightly allowed in regard, for example, to foul language. Recently, whilst the Secretary of the Howard Association was walking around the Scotch CRIMINAL LUNATIC ASYLUM at PERTH, in company with the Governor, one of the inmates accosted the latter in an offensive manner, bordering on the '*foul*' or obscene. But no notice was taken of it, and the offender quietly walked away. All around, in the same yard, were murderers and other insane persons of violent and dangerous habits. But they are treated, at least with regard to *language*, with that wise consideration which makes allowance for their natural lack of self-restraint, or for their irresponsibility, except where actual injury to others might result. Tact and kindness, with firmness and admonition, or even silent disregard for verbal breaches of order, suffice to maintain good discipline, and, indeed, to promote it far better than by dietary and other punishments. Similar wisdom characterises the administration of the other Criminal Lunatic Asylums, namely, Broadmoor in England, and Dundrum in Ireland.

"Hence it may fairly be urged upon the authorities that prisoners who are, after competent medical examination and observation, pronounced to be '*weak-minded*' or epileptic (and certainly those who are insane) should, if retained at all in a prison, be governed by the rules, and in the manner, of Lunatic Asylums.

"This matter requires the serious consideration of the Commissioners of Prisons and also of the Home Secretary."