

REFORMATORY SCHOOL FOR THE WEST RIDING.

MEETING OF MAGISTRATES.

IN our *Supplement* will be found a full report of the meeting of Magistrates held at Wakefield, on Wednesday last, to determine on the propriety of establishing one or more schools for the reformation of juvenile criminals, in accordance with the provisions of the act of last session, VICTORIA 15 and 16, c. 86. The attendance of Magistrates was considerable, and the discussion was protracted. The CHAIRMAN (the Hon. E. Lascelles, M.P.), explained the object of the meeting, and announced that E. B. WHEATLEY, Esq., of Mirfield, one of the Magistrates of the Riding, was willing to establish a school for thirty boys as an experiment, if the scheme met the approval of the Magistrates. Mr. DENISON, whilst applauding Mr. WHEATLEY'S liberality and zeal, expressed his decided opinion that the experiment should be tried, not as a private, but as a general and public institution, in some central part of the Riding, and on a scale sufficient to test the efficiency of the system. Other gentlemen concurred in this opinion, and the Rev. J. A. RHODES emphatically stated that there were 500 or 600 young persons under sentence, to whom the process of reformatory discipline would be applicable under the new act; and that it would require a great many such establishments as the one proposed by Mr. WHEATLEY, to meet the necessity of the case. Ultimately, a resolution was unanimously carried, on the motion of Mr. SMYTH, seconded by Mr. HARDY, that "the thanks of the meeting be given to Mr. WHEATLEY, for his offer to establish a Reformatory School as an experiment." This resolution opened the way for considering the broader proposition of one or more schools on a larger scale; and after a lengthened discussion, in which the Rev. J. A. RHODES, Messrs. JOHN RAND, CHARLES HARDY, EDMUND DENISON, EDW. AKROYD, and other Magistrates took part, it was resolved, on the motion of Mr. RHODES, seconded by Mr. AKROYD, "That a Reformatory School, capable of containing 100 juvenile male offenders, should be established within a convenient distance of the town of Wakefield; and that a committee be appointed to report on the most favourable site, and the probable cost of building and purchase of site." The committee appointed consists of Messrs. RHODES, GREENWOOD, LASCELLES, AKROYD, WHEATLEY, HARDY, and DENISON.

THE result of this meeting shows that the view taken by us last week, in reference to Mr. INGHAM'S proposal of schools supported by a rate or by national funds, is entertained by the Magistrates as a body, Mr. DENISON emphatically repeating our statement that the institutions which have succeeded are voluntary, and Mr. HARDY reiterating our further statement that Parkhurst, which is a *Government Reformatory Establishment*, has failed. Mr. DENISON also said that Parliament would not be in a temper to grant a rate until the experiment had been fairly tried on the voluntary plan: the question would arise, supposing these voluntary institutions succeeded, simply as reformatory institutions, whether voluntary action could meet the whole exigency, and, if not, then Parliament would be in a position to deal with the whole case. It may be added that, in the same event, the further question of the adaptation of central and governmental action, to secure the ends realised by voluntary agency, will also have to be decided. That, however, is not the immediate question, which is not a magistrates' question only, but concerns the whole Riding down to its humblest inhabitant. The question is—"What shall be the constitution and management of the proposed *one* school?" The proposition as it stands seems to contemplate *a* school, instituted, provided for, and governed by the magistrates. Without any idea of impugning the ability of the magistrates to support and manage such an establishment, it is immediately obvious that, so constituted, the institution will excite little public interest, and, in fact, will be regarded simply as a semi-governmental institution, supplementary to the gaol, and with which the public, as such, have no right of interference; not to say that all experience shows that wherever a mixed governing body exists, that portion of it which sits in virtue of public status and judicial authority, will be, *de facto*, the dominant and really governing body. Such an institution would fail, therefore, to enlist the sympathies and obtain the zealous support of a very large class in the Riding—the men who, though not magistrates, constitute the working staff and the life's blood of its many benevolent and educational institutions; and even if their pecuniary assistance could be secured, there would still be lacking the vivifying moral influence of their personal support, counsel, and co-operation. Unless the scheme is simply a preliminary step towards the enlargement of Government and magisterial authority and action in the punishment, the repression, and, if it may be, the extinction of

crime, it is of the utmost moment to the success of the experiment that the instrumentality which has unquestionably succeeded elsewhere should be employed in the West Riding; and that instrumentality, it seems to us, cannot be secured on any basis less wide and comprehensive than that of any other public voluntary society, not of a sectional or denominational character. It might be deemed impertinent to suggest any course of procedure to the Committee in carrying out the resolution of the meeting, but it may be permitted to express the hope that their Report will not simply give a contractor's estimate of building expenses, with a recommendation of this or that site, but will comprise besides a carefully digested scheme, declaration of principles and objects, and setting forth the machinery of government and administration. If the public are to be enlisted in furtherance of the object of the proposed school, they will require to know exactly what it is intended to effect, and by what means.

A WORD or two on the general question of Reformatory Institutions for Juveniles may not be inopportune. It is to be feared that although the subject is a ripened one in the minds of a section of all classes, it is only vaguely understood by the great body of even thinking and benevolent persons of the middle class. But if voluntary management be an indispensable condition of success, it is of the first importance to enlighten the general mind, and it therefore behoves all who do understand the subject to take effective measures for diffusing information and exciting public action. The Birmingham Conference has done much to popularise the question, but not enough; and it is doubtful whether it has not lacked enterprise and sagacity, in neglecting to organise a society, like many kindred ones, purposely to make the philosophy of the Reformatory Schools for juvenile criminals thoroughly understood throughout, at least, the great seats of intelligence and wealth, which are unhappily also the foci of juvenile degradation and delinquency. The proofs that such schools are fit and adequate means of reformation are many, and are most clear and conclusive. The *law* of their fitness and sufficiency, so to speak, is *moral suasion*, as distinct from, if not opposed to, mere retributive or vindictive punishment, and the only fit instruments are men imbued with an inextinguishable love to their fellows, —a love which will break through the hardened cerements of the most callous heart, will take no repulse, and is indeed inexhaustible, because it is fed from a source which is divine and infinite.

THERE are public spirited and benevolent men in the Riding, who know all this, and who see and feel that the necessities of the juvenile class of criminals are urgent and increasing; for it is to be expected that, as our large towns expand, the criminal class will also multiply. Is there not a loud call on philanthropists not to leave the public mind uninformed on so vital a question of moral reform and of social economy? And if that be so, why is it that, as yet, the attention of the public mind in the Riding has only been called to the subject by one or two lectures before literary and philosophical institutions, and by a meeting of Magistrates, and Magistrates only?