

## REFORMATORY SCHOOLS FOR THE WEST RIDING.

WHAT should we think of the policy or humanity of a law which, in so many words, provided that a lad of twelve years of age, who had been convicted of stealing goods left outside a shop, should, as a punishment, be sent to a school where he might be taught the catechism of larceny and be fully initiated into felony,—where all the good feeling which he had not already lost might be obliterated or perverted,—and where he might learn doggedly and shamelessly to call good evil, and evil good? If, indeed, the object of the framers of such a law had been to inflict the most cruel punishment upon the youthful offender, without any regard to his own interests or to those of society at large, then, indeed, such object would be fully attained, because they would, so far as in them lay, have irremediably ruined his happiness, both for this and for a future world. But, surely, any well-considered scheme of human punishment must contemplate as its wished for result the reformation of the offender and the protection of society, and such a plan as that we have described must utterly fail in attaining either of these ends. A moment's reflection, however, will show that, until very lately, our criminal law did, in fact, thus deal with juvenile criminals by sending them to gaol, there to learn from those more abandoned in depravity than themselves, all the fearful lessons of crime. If the young convict closed his ears to the evil counsels of his prison companions, his character was gone and the avenues to honest industry were shut against him; for what prudent man would employ a lad who, since his conviction, had herded for weeks, or perhaps months, with the most hardened criminals? But the chances are, that his heart would have been utterly corrupted by his vicious companions, and that as soon as the prison doors were opened to him by the expiration of his sentence, he would return to crime as his daily occupation and means of livelihood, without an effort to regain his lost character, and so become a pest both to himself and to society. If compassion for the unhappy criminal himself should fail to move us to seek his redemption, and to pluck him as a brand from the burning, by the adoption of some other mode of treatment, self-interest alone might prompt us to take another course; for that we have been detailing is most expensive to the honest part of the community. The depredations alone committed by the criminal class amount annually to many thousands of pounds, and when to this we add the immense sums spent in the costly apparatus of police, gaols, and prosecutions, we shall find that the old system of punishing without attempting to reform the juvenile offender is a terrible tax upon the country.

Would it not, then, be advisable to take a different course with those youthful offenders whom religion and common sense alike forbid us to consider as utterly hardened and depraved? We must indeed *punish*, but punishment should be attended by measures having the reformation of the criminal and his restoration to a creditable place in society as their objects, and this no less for his own sake than for the future well-being of the community.

THE combination of reform with simple punishment has been already attempted, and with distinguished success, in this country and in France. The establishment of M. DE MERZ, at Mettray, is of European reputation, and has been productive of the happiest results upon its inmates, while the manager of the Philanthropic Society's Farm School at Redhill, in Surrey, testifies that he has good reason for believing that out of every 100 boys who have passed through that institution, 89 have become permanently reformed characters and useful members of society. These are two of the oldest and largest Reformatory Schools (for so such establishments are now called) in existence, that of the Philanthropic Society having been founded so far back as 1788; but those which have been more recently established, and which are of narrower limits, have been attended with very great success, and have fully answered the hopes of their benevolent founders. In 1854, the Legislature recognised Reformatory Schools by an Act commonly known as the Youthful Offenders' Act, which, after reciting that reformatory schools for the better training of juvenile offenders had been and might be established by *voluntary contributions*, and that it was expedient that more extensive use should be made of such institutions, authorised offenders under the age of 16 years to be sent at the expiration of their sentence to any reformatory school the managers of which should be willing to receive them, and to be detained there for not less than two, or more than five years. Formerly the managers of Reformatory Schools could only receive such children as might enter with the permission of their parents, and of course they had no power of detaining them against their parents' will; but under the provisions of this

statute, their admission, or their remaining in the school, does not depend upon the will of depraved, or at all events negligent parents. They are now handed over by the sentence of the court alone to the Reformatory School. A power is also given to the Treasury to defray the expenses of the child while at the institution, and to the Court which pronounces the sentence to charge the parent of the child with his maintenance, if he is in possession of sufficient means.

SINCE the passing of this statute, Reformatory Schools have been founded in different parts of the country, and Mr. E. B. WHEATLEY, with the assistance of several other gentlemen, is now engaged in establishing one at Mirfield, which will accommodate twenty-five boys. The West Riding Magistrates met in April last for the purpose of taking steps for establishing a Reformatory School for the Riding, but the meeting separated without coming to any satisfactory result, and informed the HOME SECRETARY "that difficulty and delay would arise, unless some other means than voluntary aid were provided for the establishment of these institutions." A most lame and impotent conclusion, when we consider that all the Reformatory Schools which have hitherto been established in England, and that of Mettray, owe their origin to voluntary effort, and that MR. BAKER, of Hardwick-court, and MR. C. B. ADDERLEY, both of whom have been foremost in the good work, have emphatically declared their adhesion to a doctrine entirely differing from that laid down by our Magistracy. The former gentleman "feels very strongly indeed, that if the Legislature should empower the county to give public funds, it would do very much injury to the cause, instead of profiting it. If the building were to be established out of county funds, it must be entirely under public supervision, and the managers would be to such a degree servants of the county that they would not be able to succeed in it."

... "He felt he could not work as a manager of a Reformatory School, without a great deal more freedom than he should ask as a visiting Magistrate of a Gaol or Asylum." MR. ADDERLEY also adds his testimony that "private beneficence is more likely to supply the kindness and sensibilities of home than a cast iron institution, to be supported by the public funds." It is, moreover, the opinion of those best conversant with the subject, that the institution should not have too many inmates, and that it is better to have several small Reformatory schools than a single large one; whereas the West Riding Magistrates seemed to contemplate one gigantic institution for the whole Riding.

WE believe that the school founded by the beneficence of MR. WHEATLEY and his friends will be able to commence operations before the end of the year, but it is obvious that as it will only accommodate twenty-five boys, it will be altogether insufficient for the wants of the West Riding. Why should there not be at least four Reformatory Schools in this Riding, able to receive thirty boys each? We believe that the matter only requires to be fully and fairly brought, not merely before the Magistrates but, before the benevolent and prudent men of the West Riding (for in this case benevolence and prudence go hand in hand), to ensure speedy, decisive, and *satisfactory action upon it*. We would suggest that a public meeting should be called, at Leeds, of persons from all parts of the Riding, who feel an interest in the reformation of juvenile criminals, to consider the subject, and to take such measures as they may be advised for establishing Reformatory Schools. It has not been the wont of the West Riding of Yorkshire to lag behind in the prosecution of well-considered schemes for the promotion of the well-being of the body politic, nor have we any fear that it will do so in this instance.