NOTIFICATION AND CERTIFICATION OF THE BLIND

satisfactory. Later on grass was substituted owing to difficulty in getting sufficient leaves. Soya beans were also used, when available and a preparation of "Tempi" made by them with a mould and then frying or baking them into a quite palatable cake. By these various means the diseases were apparently controlled and in some cases completely cured.

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Memorandum on the Notification and Certification of the Blind, on Definitions of Blindness, and on Blind Pensions

The following memorandum on notification and certification of the Blind has been drawn up by the Institute of Ophthalmology, Royal Eye Hospital.

More perhaps than any other group of physically handicapped persons, the blind are ensured of public sympathy and help. In 1942 there were 75,306 registered blind persons in England and Wales—far too many for unco-ordinated benevolence. Indeed indiscriminate public sympathy is largely responsible for such a problem as that of blind mendicancy. The blind long to feel themselves useful citizens with duties as well as rights. It should be the aim of those interested in blind welfare not only to prevent physical want, but to lessen the sense of uselessness of which blind persons so frequently complain. There are already large numbers of happy and independent blind workers, self-respecting, often self-supporting, performing tasks useful to the community. The promotion of such an economic status should be the ideal of the welfare worker.

Chief among the obstacles to this is advanced age. In 1942 76 per cent. of the registered blind were over 50 years of age. Many had additional disabilities such as deafness, mental deficiency, or deformity and crippling. Blind workers have many expenses not incurred by sighted workers. Prospective employers tend to shun blind workers, lest they should have a greater liability to accident, though actuarial investigations prove this supposition to be incorrect. Finally, in pre-war years there existed the problem of National unemployment. If jobs are not available for the fit, disabled persons and the blind are not encouraged in the labour market. It is not surprising that about 80 per cent. of blind were in 1936 classed as unemployable. It is the task of statesmanship to reduce this figure.

1. Statistics on blindness.—Apart from the difficulty in the definition of blindness it seems that no final estimate of the number of blind in the country is possible. In the past information was
obtained from census returns, but these are generally regarded as unreliable as they were based on lay assessment. It appears that the most complete statistics on the number of blind have been obtained by the introduction of the Blind Persons Act with its statutory aid for the blind. As a result the number of blind people, who have been registered as blind on an expert examination, and data on the causes of blindness are now known to a fuller and far greater extent than in any other country. The increase in the number of registered blind from 26,336 shown by the 1911 census, and a similar figure shown in the first years of registration of the blind under the Blind Persons Act, to 75,306 in 1942, emphasises the margin of error in the older statistics. The collection of statistics is of course not undertaken by Government Authorities for scientific purposes; unless such statistics have a practical implication—such as leading to action in the case of infectious disease or industrial accidents, they are not sought. No convincing case can be put to the central authorities for the collection of full statistics on blindness, for the blind who need relief are covered by the Blind Persons Act. Those who do not fall in this category are essentially personal problems; and it is not a practice of governments to collect data on such matters.

None the less it would be of considerable value to have full statistical data on the blind population, and it is a matter of some importance to know how many people are blind in one eye. There is room for unofficial enquiries in this direction.

2. Definition of blindness.—The dictionary definition of blindness as implying the absence of sight is logical but obsolete. In most countries persons retaining some degree of vision are included by the State or voluntary agencies in the blind category. Logically the State should base its categories on visual criteria; but in England and Wales an ophthalmologist is asked to certify an applicant as blind on an industrial ground as one who is "so blind as to be unable to perform any work for which eyesight is essential," or in the case of children "too blind to be able to read the ordinary school books used by children." Hence the examining surgeon is presumed by the law to possess knowledge of both industrial and of educational criteria, much as he is presumed to know the conditions of grading for military duty, or to determine various degrees of incapacity for purposes of pension.

In these matters the legal view of a doctor's knowledge is too complimentary.

The definition of blindness has recently been discussed by a Sub-Committee of the Council of British Ophthalmologists in conjunction with representatives of the Institute. Apart from recommendations of immediate practicability made by them the following observations are relevant:—
There are no substantial studies on the standard of vision necessary in sighted occupations. The one significant contribution has come from Dr. Albert Snell who found that some individuals can continue with sighted jobs with vision as low as 5/200 (or approximately 2/60).

Granted that changes in industry are constantly taking place, altering the requisite visual standards, we are in the anomalous position that no adequate estimates have been made of the minimum visual standards for any of the ordinary sighted occupations. The 3/60 standard which is used in practice is wholly arbitrary and without scientific authority. At the beginning of the century and in most international statistics 1/60 was regarded as the standard qualifying for blindness. In the United States 20/200 (or approximately 6/60) is the official numerical definition; but in certain States other standards are used—in Pennsylvania, for instance, the standard is 10/100 (or approximately 3/30).

**Tentative evidence that the 3/60 standard is not adequate**

Generally speaking relatively few applications are made for blind pension unless there is at any rate a colourable possibility of success. It is found that quite an appreciable proportion of those actually certified have over 3/60 vision, as the following figures show:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total certified 1935-43</th>
<th>Certified with vision over 3/60</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.C.C.</td>
<td>2,901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlesex</td>
<td>1,054</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In Glasgow the number of applicants for Blind Pension during 1929-35 was 5,140; 37.4 per cent. were rejected. In London 1,995 were rejected out of a total of 10,971 during 1935-43 (or approximately 18.9 per cent.). For the same period there were rejected in the Middlesex County Council area 689 out of 3,280 (or approximately 21 per cent.).

Rejected cases are usually borderline, so that a considerable number of people with difficulty in carrying on work are found not blind by the official definition.

In Pennsylvania on the 20/200 standard there were 20,000 blind. When the standard was altered to 10/100 this became reduced to about 12,000.

Although the 3/60 standard is accepted for the present emergency period, it is suggested that the Government be urged to initiate an adequate investigation over a cross-section of various industries to determine:

1. In which industries full visual capacity is not essential.
2. In which industries declining visual capacity affects efficiency.
3. In which industries continuation of employment becomes impossible when there is gross decline in vision.
4. At what level of visual disability sighted occupation becomes a practical impossibility.
5. A careful investigation conjointly with experienced educationalists into what standards of vision are really necessary to cover the immediate visual requirements for learning.

No dual standard for educational and industrial blindness has been necessary in the United States, where 20/200 is operative for both purposes. Any comprehensive scheme must take note of the fact that in addition to industrial blindness in general there is vocational blindness, in so far as an individual may no longer be able to continue the work for which he has been trained and is too old to be trained to a new occupation.

3. Blind pensions.—In 1942 the total number of registered blind in England and Wales was 75,306. It may be presumed that most of these blind persons had been registered in the course of applications for pecuniary assistance. Few ophthalmic surgeons go to the trouble of arranging for blind certification unless there is some financial advantage to the patient. The number of registered blind, therefore, does not represent the full number of registrable persons.

Difficulties also arise sometimes where children educated at schools for the blind under the definition of "Blindness" adopted by the Education Act, 1921, find on leaving school that they are not registrable as blind persons under the Blind Persons Act, 1920. They have to compete in the labour market as sighted persons, with a less complete education than the average sighted child of school-leaving age. If they are not aided to a vocational training such children inevitably tend to drift into the ranks of unskilled workers.

The population of England and Wales is tending toward a larger proportion of the higher age groups. Since blind persons are more common in the older age groups, an increase in the average age of the population is likely to lead to a proportionate increase in the incidence of blindness.

Another consideration is the national unemployment problem. If unemployment is rife, it may pay to remove the blind largely from the labour market. If labour is short, any labour the blind may perform should be nationally welcomed. From the blind person's own viewpoint, the independence attainable from paid employment is something of the highest importance.

These considerations lead to the following suggestions:—
(a) Blind pensions over the age for Old Age Pensions in the
sighted.—Here the standard for certification should be a visual not an industrial one.

Certification should carry with it a pension higher than that provided for the sighted, as a blind person has expenses from which a sighted person is free. At present many old people are not registered as blind because they are receiving Old Age Pensions already.

This type of pension should be given irrespective of whether the patient is working. If he is encouraged to work, so much the better for himself and the national welfare.

(b) Blind persons of working age.—The present policy is to give Old Age Pensions at the reduced age of 40 years to blind persons. This policy is a reflection of the period when unemployment was rife; and this is not attuned to the present conditions of labour shortage. The Old Age Pensions Act, 1936, lays down substantial reductions of pension, even for quite minor earnings. Yet it costs a blind person more to live than a sighted individual. It is therefore suggested that:

1. A general pension be granted for this age group on purely visual standards as in group (a). This should be considered a "handicap allowance" to supplement the working wage of this group; but should be smaller than the Old Age Pension granted to group (a).

2. Those certified blind and precluded by disability from working, be granted full blind pensions (as group (a)). The addition should be on medical certification which should be reviewed from time to time.

(c) Educationally blind persons reaching working age.—These cases should be reviewed by ophthalmic surgeons on reaching working age. A large proportion will be found to be eligible for blind registration under the group (b) scheme. Some will not be eligible for registration, but generous grants should be made to assist them in the period when they are trainees in their future occupation. This would help those with ability to escape from blind-alley and unskilled work.

(d) Blind children of school age and under.—Generous grants should be made to those parents of such children in need of pecuniary assistance for such special purposes as travel to special schools, etc.

(e) Anomalies and appeal tribunal.—Under any system certain hard cases will fall outside the net. In the present system much hardship is caused by ignoring the patient's previous occupation in estimating visual requirements. Circular 1352 is based on a visual standard which emphasises the "ANY" in the official standard of "too blind to perform ANY work for which eyesight is essential." An elderly tailor, chartered accountant or oph-
thalmic surgeon with lowered visual acuity would be incapacitated at a visual level far higher than that postulated by Circular 1353. It is impossible to include such cases in any general scheme, yet real hardship is often involved. An elderly clerical worker cannot readily undertake rough manual labour.

Such persons are also precluded in sharing in the benefits of the fairly considerable private charitable funds now available for the "indigent blind." It appears that under present conditions a certain amount of such charitable money is sterilised, as those in receipt of blind pensions are not legally considered "indigent." A survey might well be made of such charitable funds, and if the aggregate is sufficient to be significant, the money might be made available to visually handicapped persons by a short Enabling Act. The matter is one for the Charity Commissioners and their legal advisers in the first instance. However this may be, it is unlikely that these funds will be enough without State supplement.

The Committee consider such persons should have access to some appeal tribunal, which should preferably contain lay representation as well as medical. This tribunal should be open to all persons who considered themselves wrongfully refused blind registration and its benefits. Such persons frequently travel from one certifying surgeon to another, wasting time and possibly incurring expense.

Funds should be made available for granting special handicap allowance.

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ABSTRACTS

I.—PATHOLOGY


(1) Julianelle and James describe 5 cases of molluscum contagiosum. One of these had suffered for 6 months from severe follicular conjunctivitis, corneal epithelial infiltrations and erosions and pannus. In this case and in another with milder follicular conjunctivitis the molluscum contagiosum lesion was on the lid margin. In a third case where the lid margin was affected mild conjunctivitis was present. In these three the cornea was involved. In the two remaining cases, the lesion was on the lower lid in one and was generalized elsewhere on the body in the other. In both cases conjunctivitis was mild and there was no corneal complication.