

home and placed in the care of foster-parents selected by the local "Ladies' Boarding-out Committee," who exercise a kindly, but not fussy, supervision. The children, therefore, now being committed, undergo no long years, nor months, of "incarceration" in any institution, unless, indeed, which seldom happens, by their own misbehaviour, such as persistent truancy, it becomes necessary, after trial, to withdraw them for a time from the privileges of life in a foster-home where, if retained, new intimacies and affections soon spring up to replace those ties of which circumstances had deprived them.

II. Further, it is the rule and practice of the department *to return children to their parents on application at any time after committal*, provided, on careful inquiry, it be found that the characters and circumstances of the applicants render such a course desirable in the children's interests. I am very glad of the opportunity, through your columns, of making this more widely known. Even should there be some doubt as to the parents' ability to exert over the child an adequate control, he is not infrequently, if they apply, placed with them provisionally, subject to recall at any moment. This, however, is only one of several directions in which the department carries out, on behalf of these its wards, a recognized and consistent policy of *short actual detention* at the public cost, but extended supervision and control afterwards. Should one parent be worthless, and have deserted the home, the other parent is often allowed to receive back the children, and is secured by the action of the department, while thus in charge of them, from any attempt on the part of the other parent to molest or remove them. Should it be the case that *both* parents are unfit to bring up the children reputably, they are often confided to a more distant relative—a grandmother, an aunt, a married sister, or *even a friend of the family*—who is similarly secured in the undisturbed possession of them until they reach the age of sixteen, or, indeed, where further protection seems expedient, until the age of eighteen, the State from the date the children are handed over being relieved of all expense in regard to them. Nor does the department wait in such cases for the reputable relatives to apply. Sometimes half a dozen branches of the family are addressed, and invited to apply for one or more of the children, and often the appeal is responded to on its being explained that they *can be secured in the undisturbed charge of them*. In the case which called forth your remarks the parents had already been communicated with, a week since, through the secretary of the hospital of which they are inmates, and informed that the children could be boarded out at an early date in a comfortable foster-home, but that they could apply for the discharge of all or any of them whenever they themselves, or any respectable relative, should be in a position to receive and maintain them.

III. One of the minor and incidental advantages of the boarding-out (which system has in Victoria superseded, except in the case of one or two assisted schools, the old barrack system), is that, while an unspeakable boon to the children, providing them with that family life which gives each one a home, it is very deterrent in its bearing on slothful and self-indulgent parents, and tends to largely reduce the number of the children thrown on the care of the State. Persons of the class referred to—who would be too ready to part with their children with a view to their entry into what is practically a large boarding-school, where they could see them weekly, and look forward to again claiming them as they became old enough for work—hesitate now to part with their offspring under a system which enables the child's address to be effectually withheld from them until he has attained the age of sixteen or eighteen, and has been some years settled in a country service home, earning his own livelihood.

IV. Under the present system of boarding out children in cottage homes, during their stay in which they are required to give regular attendance at school, it is the experience alike of Scotland (see evidence before Royal Commissioners, Model Schools, Great Britain, 1883), of Massachusetts (see Report, 1883, of Board of Health, Lunacy, and Charity, page cxiii.), and of this colony, that they develop more rapidly, obtain their educational certificate sooner, and become self-supporting at an earlier age than those trained even in the best institutions. Though the children are all under supervision until sixteen (and for those who fail in gaining a certificate the Education Act at present requires school attendance until fifteen), a very considerable proportion of the Victorian children who have been received young, and not applied for by friends as above, gain their certificate and are secured a suitable situation by the time they are thirteen years old. Where boys or girls are of that age and can read and write fairly, though they may have failed in gaining the school certificate, they are nevertheless, if of sufficiently robust build, licensed out to employers, but with educational conditions.

V. But for the length of this letter I should have been glad to allude to a kindred subject, which has lately been referred to more than once in your columns, namely, the recovery from parents of fees accruing under Magistrates' orders for children's maintenance while a cost to the State. I should, I think, have been able to satisfy you that, taking into account the many difficulties which beset the question, principally the impoverished circumstances of those liable, or their absence from the colony, considerable progress has been made of late in augmenting the receipts from this source, which it is expected will be further and very largely increased whenever, by legislative enactment, deserting parents outside the colony, or the next nearest relatives in Victoria, can be proceeded against. I will only add that the outlay by the State upon friendless boys and girls in moulding them into honest and hearty colonists is as remunerative an investment as could be made in a young country where hands are scarce and work in abundance awaiting them.

I am, &c.,

GEORGE GUILLAUME,
Secretary, Industrial and Reformatory Schools Department.