

(d.) On account of the probable effect of the introduction of the children of depraved parents into the homes of the poor : It is seldom that children of an age to be boarded out are depraved ; when they are, the remedy is to place them with a couple without any family. There are two factors in criminal heredity—the element of innate disposition and the element of contagion from social environment. One element, as a rule, is not sufficient to determine a child in the direction of crime. When the child of depraved parents is placed in a boarded-out home the healthy environment checks the tendency to depravity. This could be proved by the records of children who have been boarded out.

(e.) On account of the ignorance on the part of the average foster-parent as to scientific methods of dealing with children suffering from hereditary taint and especially bad environment : (In passing I should much like to know what the scientific methods are.) Our foster-homes usually possess the qualities that those who have had practical experience in the training of the morally deformed value through having proved so successful in turning out good boys and girls—healthy moral and social environment ; the training by good, sensible, God-fearing people—people with a sense of their responsibilities and a capacity for carrying them out. It is a pleasure, while writing this report, to look back and recall the really good women I have had as foster-parents, and the deep sympathetic feeling they had for their charges : witness Mrs. M. and J. C., the idiot ; Mrs. E. and the poor boy with the broken spine ; Mrs. R., who did so much for F. D., who ultimately died of hip-disease ; Mrs. C.'s devotion to the sad case she had ; and many others.

Now as to the reputed advantages of the cottage-home system :—

(a.) Suitability of homes : Possibly there might be no trouble about buildings and equipment, but it would be far more difficult to find a suitable person to take charge of a cottage home than to get half a dozen good foster-parents. Every Manager knows how hard it is to get suitable attendants, and how very seldom a woman could be got who would fill such a position.

(b.) Classification cannot be so well carried out as in foster-homes, for the simple reason that in foster-homes one, two, or more children can be placed out—it is even possible to specialise ; and this cannot be done so well in cottage homes unless they are multiplied to a ridiculous number, and become practically foster-homes.

(c.) Thorough inspection : As inspection depends more on the individual than the system, I cannot see how or why inspection of a cottage home should be more thorough than that of a foster-home.

(d.) Separation : I fail to understand what is meant by “ separation.” If it means separation of sexes, then I should say it will be a pity, for families would be divided, instead of being brought up together in a foster-home.

(e.) Scientific training and education : Advantageous, no doubt ; but for our young children can there be anything better than a good home ? What scientific training can be as good or better than the daily training in habits of industry, carefulness, duty, thrift, truthfulness, honesty, to be obtained in a good Christian home—and there are many such among our foster-homes.

I have endeavoured to view the subject impartially, and to express my views honestly, duly recognising my responsibility, on re-reading the paragraph in your circular. A cottage home of over ten becomes a small institution ; under that it becomes a foster-home : it has neither the home-life of the one nor the advantages of the other.

As regards improvement in the boarding-out system : I believe it would be advisable for the success of the boarding-out system to return to the plan of having “ Official Correspondents.” Personally, I do not believe it is possible for a Manager to do justice to an institution, to the inmates at service, visit at times the boarded-out children, and at the same time attend to all the details of interviewing actual and prospective foster-parents, visit proposed homes in town and suburbs, see to making out licenses and preparation of monthly money-orders, deal with reports of Local Visitors, and generally attend to the business connected with the system. An Official Correspondent is a very great help to a Manager, and practically takes off her hands all details, leaving the Manager free to visit and do her other duties.

I would also suggest the appointment of a male Visiting Officer—a man of tact, keen, discriminating, absolutely reliable, who would appreciate the difficulties of Managers, make a thorough inspection of every home in the Dominion once a year at least, and if he report adversely on a home the inmates should be moved. The foster-homes should also be visited once a year by a female Visiting Officer. The Local Visitors would visit at least monthly, and the Manager of the school could either visit all the homes or the one she was doubtful of.

I feel assured that some such system is absolutely necessary to safeguard the interests of the children and of the Department.

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

I have, &c.,

G. M. BURLINSON, Manager.

SIR,—

Christchurch, 24th November, 1908.

(a.) The difficulty of finding good homes fulfilling necessary conditions is said to be greater than heretofore, though some districts have as yet been scarcely tested for this purpose.

(b.) Touching on classification, I have usually found the children suitably placed in homes which supplied their special needs : puny, delicate children placed in plentiful homes in the country ; delicate babies within easy reach of medical advice, and of the Managers, and where also the milk-supply was on the premises. Sturdy boys with healthy appetites are generally placed in the homes of small farmers, who teach them to be useful.

(c.) The foster-parents, with few and temporary exceptions, have assisted and even invited thorough inspection—even examination of their homes. Thus, I have seen the same children at school, in bed, at meals ; have examined their clothing in wear and in stock ; and have made minute inquiry both at home and at school into their habits, disposition, and treatment. With few exceptions a visit of inspection is not regarded as an intrusion, and I know that money could not discharge the obligation incurred for the care of their charges.