

For children of ordinary health and ability I should be sorry if the boarding-out system were superseded—first, because the respectable working-man's home is the right place for rearing forlorn children. Foster-parents in country districts are usually thrifty people, industrious and economical too, who make full use of time and opportunity. There is always a garden, and generally a dairy and some poultry. The children share the duties and pleasures too; they have before them a good practical standard of life and of conduct, and have also learned the value of money. They have probably learned, too, the necessity of considering other people as well as themselves.

At fourteen, when sent out to earn a living, the boarded-out child has intimate friends in the foster-parents and their connections, and the child's conduct is regarded as creditable or the reverse to them, and in their warm interest he almost forgets his real origin, and certainly is by no means a waif. Many of the boys and girls spend their holidays with foster-parents, who frequently show presents, affectionate letters, and photographs from young men and women who have been thus reared.

Cottage Homes.

The development of the child nurtured in even a small institution is on different and less natural lines. The institution child is more sedate, probably better clad and more tidy in appearance; but on leaving is a mere infant in readiness of comprehension and of alertness, and has no knowledge of money-values. All actual wants are supplied without effort on the part of the recipients. They have no knowledge of the struggle for daily bread, nor yet of the self-denial and strenuous effort to make both ends meet that prevails in decent homes of working-people. The training has been theoretical more than practical. The institution child on going out in the world meets only strangers; he does not know their ways, and longs to get back to the familiar environment of the institution. To this fact in part was due the establishment of the boarding-out system in Scotland during the early seventies. In this connection I may say that in England I have been aware of four generations of a family dwelling in the same union workhouse at the same time. The place had no terrors for them, and was, in fact, their abode.

I have seen the cottage homes instituted by a union of parishes in the north of England, and under Government control. There were three homes for boys and three for girls, each house having about thirty children. These children had nothing like the health, capacity, and initiative of our boarded-out children.

In another grade of life I have also seen the children of St. Anne's, Brixton, London; the Infant Orphan Asylum; and the London Orphan Asylum: all providing for children of persons once in prosperity. The educational advantages were good, but there was the same helplessness on leaving the school.

On the other hand, I should welcome the establishment of cottage homes for the reception of (1) children tainted or deficient mentally; (2) for those suffering from physical defects; (3) for those children for whom severity is considered to be at times necessary. These unattractive children obtain less loving interest, and in cottage homes would receive skilled care, with just and equal treatment, and also be better controlled.

I have, &c.,

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

C. F. SCALE, Lady Visiting Officer.

SIR,—

Industrial School, Auckland, 13th November, 1908.

I gather from your letter of the 4th instant you desire that, besides comparing the boarding-out system with the cottage-home system, I should give you my views respecting child-saving, and the training of children committed to the care of the State. I will begin with the general question before touching the particular. In considering this, one has to remember that, in regard at least to the larger number of children dealt with, the work is remedial as well as educational. Poor heredity has perverted the normal type, and has produced a growth whose natural tendencies must be recognised. The first consideration, therefore, is remedial work, and this can only be systematically done by educationalists with special knowledge, special gifts, and special training. The object to be attained is the conversion of the abnormal as far as possible to the normal, in order that the individual may be able to adjust himself to the ordinary circumstances and environment of life as we find it to-day, and that inherited tendencies may be modified before being transmitted to a future generation. The general educational aim being to develop and to foster in children those powers of mind and body which they possess, and which will best fit them to hold their own in the struggle for existence, and to do their part to promote the social well-being of the State, it follows that the work of training the children dependent upon the State is twofold. In every question, therefore, respecting these young lives, these two aims must be kept in view, the conversion of the abnormal to the normal, and the fitting of the individual for the place which he should occupy in after-life.

For the very young the boarding-out system is ideal. It follows the Divine plan of the child in the environment of home and family. For the well-being of the State it is essential that the idea of the family should be fostered. It is fundamentally right, and, being a natural law, may only, I believe, be disregarded at our peril.

A hospital for defective and delicate infants might be of great use, but anything like a foundling hospital is, I firmly believe, fundamentally wrong. It is essential to a child's normal moral development that the instinct of love be awakened. In an institution where nurses take their turn in attendance it is the general rule to refrain from fostering in the child any personal predilections. A child's earliest impressions are the strongest, and unless we wish to create an abnormal type, the child must be placed where the impressions it is to receive will be of life in its normal aspect.

(a.) The difficulty of obtaining suitable homes is a very real one, but let it be remembered that the homes in which we each and all of us grew up might not be considered by the unprejudiced as absolutely ideal, yet who of us would say that anything better could have been provided for us?