

# Children in Difficulties

**L**AST week we saw how the Child Welfare Division looks after hundreds of deprived children, acts as a vast clearing house for the adoption of children, and helps many families to solve difficulties which are distressing to themselves and their children. This week it is the other side of their activities we shall be looking at—the treatment of problem or delinquent children. "This treatment may range from friendly and informal oversight of a child in his own home, supported by discussions with parents and teachers, through many intermediate stages to the extreme step of arranging for a child's removal from his home and placement in a training institution," says the Division's report and it also states that many delinquent children have been deprived of a normal home life.

Each year about 2,000 children come before the Children's Court for a wide range of offences. These children, unless in very unusual circumstances they are sent to a Borstal institution, then come under the care of the Child Welfare Division. Despite the Welfare Officer's supervision the child who has stolen a bicycle may in a few years' time convert a car and once again make a Court appearance. At this stage he will probably be given another chance and for a few years everything will appear to be going smoothly. Then a greater crime

## *The second of two articles on the work of the Child Welfare Division of the Education Department*

may be committed and a Borstal sentence may be the prelude to a life spent in and out of prison. On the other hand the Welfare Officer's advice may mean that the first appearance in Court is the last.

The Listener recently visited the Head Office of the Child Welfare Division where we were able to learn a little more about the kind of children who come up against the law and to discuss typical cases.

"We have all kinds of children with a great range of intelligence," said an Officer. "Here, for instance, is a boy who first came under our notice when he bit and kicked his teachers. On investigation we found his home was very unsuitable so we took Court action which deprived his parents of their rights of guardianship and placed him with foster parents. He still proved very difficult to manage and frightened the life out of his foster-mother by an outburst of cowboy and Indians stuff. He has a very poor social sense so we decided to try him out in a boys' home. It is difficult to say at this stage what success we will have with him here."

"Then there is a boy like Alan. He first came under notice when at the age of eight he stole money at school. The Headmaster reported it to us and one of our Officers soon discovered that there was virtually no home supervision. The

father was away for long periods and the mother sometimes went out working. The father agreed to "preventive supervision" and for a few years there was no trouble. Then came another outburst of stealing, this time a bicycle and money from a women's cloakroom. Our officer reported that while the family seemed concerned about the boy's behaviour there was still something lacking in their control of the boy. He recommended that he be placed under the care of the Superintendent and he was then sent to one of the four boys' homes we have in the main centres.

"The lad stayed here for a year with no further trouble and when he left school we found him a job on a farm. Shortly after this, on his first visit to town he broke into a shop and stole another bicycle. Fortunately for the boy he was not sent to Borstal but returned to our care. We found him another job and at present things are going smoothly. The striking thing about this case is that the boy can advance no real reasons for his actions. It seems as though there is some disturbance which has upset the boy's personality and so far we have failed to touch it."

Quite often psychological treatment is tried but the Officer first does his best to improve the situation by trying to understand the boy, his home, his environment and making changes or sug-

gestions here. If these methods fail a boy can be sent to the re-education centre at Levin.

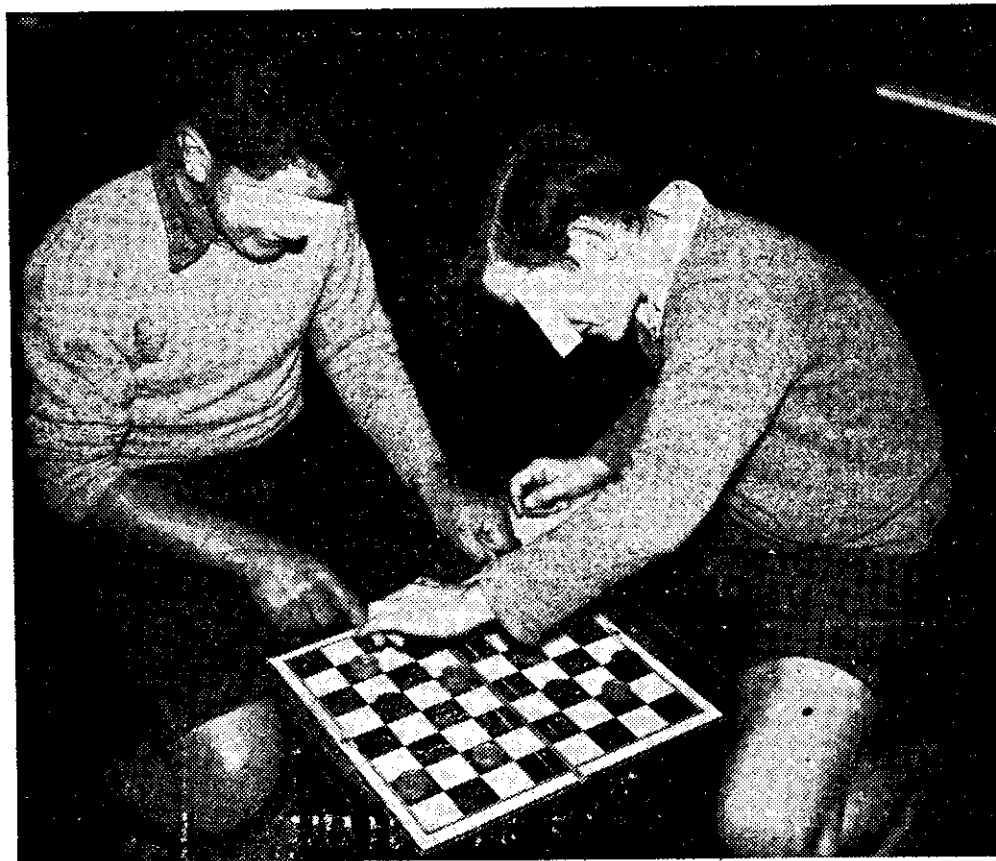
We asked about the kind of re-education that takes place there and by way of an answer we were introduced to the Superintendent of the Division, C. E. Peek, a former Manager at Levin.

Mr. Peek, from his years of experience at the centre, warned us that it was very difficult trying to give an impression of Levin as so many aspects of it had to be appreciated. Levin is an open-establishment with no forcible restrictions. They have room for about eighty boys who are divided into two groups, junior and senior. They are given vocational training, which is secondary however to the main aim of providing social training and helping the boys to adjust socially.

"There's a very fine workshop," said Mr. Peek, and he pointed to the furniture in his room which had been made there. "If a boy becomes intensely interested in something we find his special problems may go—the new interest in what he's doing may fill his thinking. The recreational side of the place is also very full. Some of these lads experience for the first time what it is like to play in a team. They might have been lone wolves before but now they can feel the responsibility of an individual to a group."

With an open institution such as Levin, the tie that holds the place together is the goodwill of the boys.

"We try to get the boys to see the part he has to play in a small fellowship," said Mr. Peek. "Our control methods are positive. There is a range of privileges the boys may qualify for—picture outings and so on. A very important aspect of the Centre is the way in which it has been integrated into the Levin community. The boys have made themselves useful in a practical way and



HOMES of different kinds are maintained by the Child Welfare Division. The two boys playing draughts are in a home for "difficult" boys; the lad at right is doing vocational training at Otekaika, a home for intellectually backward boys