

The Commissioner directed that the papers should be produced.

Mrs. Ada Wells was called by Mr. Cassidy. She was now in her sixth year of membership of the Charitable Aid Board. Witness was very sorry Mrs. Carpenter had been forced into such a position. She thought the matron had carried out the work under the dominating influence of a dominating person on the Board, and the Board was largely to blame. She did not think Mrs. Carpenter would be aggressively unkind; the Board was very largely to blame. Since the enquiry the children who had given evidence had been dispersed in various directions. She had never been satisfied with the physical condition of the children. All mothers knew that children ought to have a bath daily, instead of once a week, and that without supervision. Then, as to morals, the diction of the children had shocked her, and savored of Billingsgate. And there had been no proper amusement or recreation provided, the whole being very unsatisfactory. Witness repeated that she did not desire to attack Mrs. Carpenter; she was sure that had the matron attempted to carry out witness's ideas she would have lost her position. She (Mrs. Wells) would never begrudge money spent on the Orphanage, but she considered that they were not getting a proper return for the outlay. After Mrs. Temby had left the Orphanage, witness visited the institution—allowing a reasonable interval to elapse—and found it in 'an indescribable state of filth.' 'The kitchen and scullery were,' said witness, 'shamefully neglected, and there was half an inch thickness of grease. The dining-room was in a similar state, and there appeared to be no tablecloths. The bedrooms were in a corresponding state of misery—dirty old beds and bedding, unclean blankets and sheets, of which there were very few.' She was forced to make public allusion to the state of affairs, and on subsequent visits found an improvement had taken place. Then the old Orphanage was burnt down. Witness went on to detail the circumstances under which the charges against the Orphanage were brought to her notice by Mr. Melish and Mrs. Peachy, and went on to the case of the boy Percy Whittle. At a committee meeting after Messrs. Harris, Horrell, and Scott had seen the boy in the hospital, Mr. Harris said he had seen a sight which shocked him, and he declared, in effect, that the services of the matron ought at once to be dispensed with, or the Board would have the town about its ears. After all the enquiry into the matter, Mrs. Carpenter sent a letter to the Board, practically dictating her terms, and the Board took the very undignified course of accepting her demands, although Mrs. Black fought strenuously against it, witness not being present at that meeting. Then the children were gradually boarded out, and the Orphanage had become practically a receiving home. At subsequent meetings of the Board the Orphanage had been the cause of much discussion. At the November meeting Mrs. Carpenter reported that May Burbury had been guilty of insubordination, and the Board took the very mean and undignified course of trying to shelter itself behind that little child. That meeting was talked about in Wellington, and probably led to the institution of the present inquiry. The boy Frankie Hammond was a tuberculous subject, and ought never to have been beaten. She had remonstrated with Mrs. Carpenter, but the matron said the boy was well. Witness entirely disapproved of the 'silence' system.

Further examined by Mr. Cassidy, witness said she had opposed the motion at the Board Meeting that a master and a matron should be appointed; she thought it would be better to have two women, who would be more likely to criticise and keep themselves and things in order. She had had to make complaints publicly, because it was absolutely useless to hope that the secretary would attempt to carry out her wishes. She would not wonder at any children having 'fits of misery' at the home, from what she knew of it. Children—and especially those in such circumstances—needed brightening influences brought to bear on their lives. The child Attwood was always in the kitchen when witness visited, and looked dirty and uncared for. There had been no attempt at bathing at all, until the Board was brought to indulge in the 'new-fangled idea of hot baths.' In reply to the Commissioner, witness declared that she had been kept off the institution's committee, and that a persistent effort had been made to exclude her from it. She was keenly interested in the children, as all members well knew.

Mr. Cassidy: Is it not a fact that a circular was issued to members asking them to keep you off the institution's committee?

The commissioner said he would not take secondary evidence on such a point. If such a circular had been issued, it must be in existence, and could be produced. He should be very much surprised if such a circular had been issued.

Mr. Cassidy said a copy of the circular could be produced.

Mr. G. Scott: I will bring it this afternoon.

In further reply to the commissioner witness said Mrs. Carpenter's diction was not choice, as a rule. She had frequently objected to Mrs. Carpenter's written reports, as they contained 'objectionable terms and allusions.' Witness thought there should be a regular dietary system at the Orphanage; the food that the children were given was not the sort to build them up. It was quite wrong to give them dry bread as a punishment.

Mr. Lane then proceeded to call witnesses on behalf of the Board.

Hugo Friedlander, Chairman of the Charitable Aid Board for two years, stated that it was his desire to assist the enquiry in every way. Mrs. Carpenter was appointed in 1900, while an inspector under the Board. The following year she was relieved from the inspectorship. The complaint he received from Mrs. Wells was the first he had heard. He had paid surprise visits to the Waltham Orphanage, and as far as he could judge the children had plenty to eat, and the food was wholesome. They had always told him that they were given as much as they wanted, and were never allowed to go hungry. At one dinner he saw there was vegetable soup, Irish stew, containing meat, and afterwards a nice milk pudding. The table was very nice and clean and neatly set out. At the tea he saw them having bread and butter and two kinds of cake. As to breakfast, Miss McArthur told him that a jug of milk was put on the table with the porridge for the children to help themselves, as some did not like the milk. When Mrs. Wells complained, however, the matron thought she had better put milk on all the porridge, whether they liked it or not. He made it his business to talk to the children, took them lollies, etc., and questioned them as to their happiness; during all the time he never had a single complaint from the children. He had visited the Invercargill Institution without being known, and could honestly say that the children of the Waltham Orphanage compared favorably with those at the former institution in every respect. The Invercargill Orphanage was better managed in some respects, but there an expenditure of £11,000 had been incurred. Mrs. Carpenter, although not an ideal matron, had done her duty to herself and to the Board. A big question was opened up, but he held that it was not the duty of the Board to bring up the children 'as ladies and gentlemen.' So long as the children were taught to be honest, truthful, and able to take care of themselves, he considered Mrs. Carpenter had done her duty.

On resuming after the luncheon adjournment, Mr. Friedlander read a list of about 28 children who had passed through the Orphanage, under Mrs. Carpenter, not one of whom had a bad record. After reading various letters received in connection with the complaints, witness said there was no doubt that after the children began visiting Mrs. Peachy, discipline could not be maintained as well as previously. Witness repudiated the statement that the Board was controlled by the secretary, and quoted statistics of the work done during the year. Referring to the case of Percy Whittle, who was admitted to the hospital on August 28, witness read a letter he had received from Dr. Crooke, house surgeon, as follows:—'I examined him on admission, and found his general condition fairly good. He was thin, but that, in my opinion, was accounted for by his having had pneumonia three days before admission. We have frequently had children from the Orphanage here, and, in my opinion, they all seem to have been thoroughly looked after and attended to. Percy is a delicate child, and frequently ailing, and were he not well looked after he would soon show signs of it.' As to the statement made by Mrs. Wells that she had been deliberately kept off the committee she would like to be on, witness said they had to have regard to equity. It was left to the members whether Mrs. Black or Mrs. Wells should be appointed to the Institutions Committee. As to the boarding-out system, some of the homes were by no means suitable. He made visits and enquiries; and it was decided to remove children who were not in approved houses. The Board authorised him to advertise for suitable homes, and over a hundred replies were received. All the houses were carefully inspected, and when suitable homes had been obtained, the children were drafted into them from the undesirable places, and also some from the Orphanage. With reference to the 'silence' punishment, he had been repeatedly at the Home, especially during the past twelve months, and he had never seen the children in any way repressed; he had seen them playing about in the garden as happy as children could do. The behaviour of the four children who had been called as witnesses, ought to be a proof of their brightness. As to the 'stick' used for punishment, it was not much thicker than a penholder, and about twice as long.

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