

As the industrial-school system has grown up it has become more and more possible to pay an increased amount of attention to the classification of children committed under the Industrial Schools Act. Speaking generally, no difficulty has been found in providing suitable foster-homes for all very young children, and for most of the other children under twelve years of age; of the latter, some (for whom, though not actually vicious, a firmer control seems, for a time at least, desirable) are received into the schools. The schools also contain some children from twelve to fourteen for whom foster-homes are not so easily found. Burnham and Caversham have day-schools attached to them where the children receive instruction similar to that given in the ordinary public schools and are examined by the Inspectors of the Education Boards. On passing the Fourth Standard, or at the age of fourteen, "inmates" are placed at service as soon as suitable situations can be found for them. The resident inmates of service age who are waiting for employment are instructed in garden, or farm, or domestic work. Boarded-out children generally remain with their foster-parents until they can be placed at service. The State, through the managers of the schools and the official visitors, exercises a parent's care in guarding the interests of those placed out at service; and in many cases of boarded-out children it is gratifying to note that great assistance is rendered by the foster-parents—indeed, not infrequently the latter have shown themselves ready to pay for the services of the children they have in a certain sense adopted rather than break the home-tie that has been formed. Even when circumstances have not made this course possible, evidence is not wanting that the children boarded out for some years with foster-parents often come to regard them as real fathers and mothers, and that the moral influence of the foster-home has been that of a true home for the orphans of the State.

Both foster-homes and service-homes are inspected from time to time by the managers, by the Visiting Officer, and by the Official Correspondents; and are under the constant supervision of ladies who voluntarily undertake the work of visiting in different districts, to whom, therefore, the thanks of the community are due for their unselfish labours.

The really difficult cases are comparatively few in number; when it is undesirable that individuals should be received into the industrial schools, special arrangements have to be made for them at corrective institutions or elsewhere. In the schools there is separation of the sexes, and the explanation already given shows that in the main there is classification as to character also.

It is to be feared that there are some of both sexes who, being above the age of committal fixed by the Industrial Schools Act, escape control altogether. For them, and for the more difficult cases already mentioned, it may be necessary at an early date to establish reformatories.

In regard to the classification of inmates in the industrial schools another side of the case has recently been set forth, supported, unfortunately, by many unfounded statements and much exaggerated suggestion of possible evil in the existing system. The question has been raised whether, even with the strict rules in force, and with the careful oversight exercised both at Caversham and Burnham, it is expedient to continue the practice of placing boys and girls in the same institution. Apart from any misunderstanding of the facts or exaggeration of the actual circumstances, the objection to the present practice is mainly a sentimental one, but it cannot be altogether overlooked on that account, and the matter appears to be one that should receive the early attention of the Government.

It will probably be a matter for early consideration whether a much larger amount of really industrial or even technical training should not be given to the children before they leave our industrial schools. It is doubtful, however, whether in the case of boarded-out children it would be desirable to snap the home-ties; it would appear a better course to allow them to receive manual or industrial training either at their homes or at the ordinary schools they have been attending.

During the year 1898, 244 inmates passed out of the control of the schools, namely: Discharged, 213; having reached the age of twenty-one years, 18;