

No. 3.

REPORT OF THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF SCHOOLS.

The Right Hon. the Minister of Education.

I HAVE the honour to bring under your notice a few of the aspects of the work of the industrial schools that seem at the present time to call for most attention.

The most important feature of the work of last year is, I take it, the commencement of the buildings for the new boys' industrial school at Levin. Those for whom it is intended do not belong to the criminal or criminally vicious class, and with proper training most of them should become good average citizens, who are a help and not a burden to the State. Proper training is, however, impossible for them so long as they are crowded together in the unsuitable and decayed buildings which they have occupied for many years at Caversham, with land limited in extent and unsuited in character for farming pursuits. The fine estate on which the new institution is to be founded at Levin will give opportunities of training these neglected but not necessarily vicious boys in the various industries directly connected with land; indeed, while I fully recognise the many advantages possessed by the boarding-out system, especially the fact that it gives to those who have lost their own homes, or have never had any real home, the training under suitable foster-parents that nothing else but a real home life can supply, and the quiet but strong aid to the growth of truly social and moral character to which the formation of home ties is the best stimulus in the youth of either sex, yet I consider that, in those cases where the foster-home is not likely also to afford reasonable opportunities for learning a trade, boys should be withdrawn from their foster-homes, say, for two years before reaching the age of employment, and should receive the definite training in practical work which I hope will be given at Levin.

Although only one cottage home is so far approved for erection, I trust that before long all the four cottages that formed part of the original plan will be erected, so that the school shall be arranged on the cottage-home system, and not on what is known as the "barrack system." With twelve or fourteen boys in each home, and a suitable married couple in immediate charge, the elements of home life will be to a large extent present; and yet, with the grouping of these homes round a central institution, there will be full opportunity for industrial education at very little additional expense.

Gradually the schools are becoming more and more worthy of the name they bear—"industrial schools." It may be a commonplace fact, but one very easy to overlook in the routine of official work or in forensic discussions that sometimes arise on these subjects; nevertheless, it is well to repeat it from time to time—that if our industrial-school boys and girls are taught how to work, and so, in some degree, to love work (as people nearly always like to do what they can do well), then, unless they are morally or mentally degenerate, the Police Courts, lunatic asylums, and the like will hear very little of them in after-life. I therefore welcome the great progress that has been made in this direction in the last few years.

Burnham and Te Oranga, the reformatories for boys and girls respectively, naturally cause more anxiety and require greater thought and care on the part of the Department and managers and other officers concerned than the ordinary industrial schools. In these institutions we have presented to us in their initial stages some of the most difficult problems connected with the modern social system—some of them problems that society has as yet scarcely attempted to face, and for which certainly it has hitherto failed to find any satisfactory solution.

As it is impossible to go over the whole of the ground embraced under the head of "industrial schools," I propose to touch upon one or two of the matters demanding the most urgent attention.

The most serious problems are those arising out of the cases of mental and moral degeneracy, which may or may not be associated with obvious weakness of physical constitution or with other symptoms, such as symptoms of an epileptic character.

It would be out of place for me to attempt a scientific classification of human degeneracy; but some indication is needed of the divisions into which, for practical purposes, it may be convenient to arrange the cases that come up for treatment.

Taking mental deficiency first, and avoiding the discussion of causes, and disregarding for the present the fact that it is commonly and almost necessarily accompanied by some degree of moral deficiency, or even by serious moral degeneracy, we may follow roughly the classification of Dr. Charles Mercier, and refer to those who are mentally deficient under the following heads:—

(1.) *Defectives* (using the word in a restricted sense)—that is, those who are markedly below the average in intelligence, and without special training would be unable to earn their own living, but who with such training could at least earn a bare subsistence and not become a burden to the community:

(2.) *Imbeciles*, the term being used to include those who, while incapable of being trained to earn their own living unassisted, are yet capable of keeping themselves out of personal danger, and of doing, under constant supervision, work which will keep them in good health and at the same time help to lighten the burden imposed by their affliction, upon their friends or the community:

(3.) *Idiots*—that is, those who are to no appreciable extent capable of any kind of education, who cannot be trusted to keep themselves out of personal danger, and must be under kindly but close supervision as long as they live.

Now, it is evident that, still leaving out of sight the moral element, the defectives, if properly educated for simple trades, may after a time be left to look after themselves, and their education is an important thing for the State to undertake—inasmuch as every "defective" who is set, so to speak, upon his own feet makes one less in the number of useless members of society. When a properly trained "defective" reaches the age (twenty-one) at which he passes out of the control of the industrial school, it will therefore be unnecessary for the State to make further special provision for him.