

and I believe that the public sentiment is opposed to it; but I have perused all the papers in connection with the matter, and it is quite clear that the authority was only given after a careful and judicial review of the whole of the circumstances of the case, and under a sense of deep responsibility as to the best course to pursue in most difficult circumstances. There can be no doubt that the main object in approving the punishment was to prevent these two girls from reverting to a life of sin. There is equally no doubt that it had this effect, for the girls are still in the Home, and at present giving no trouble. It will be, no doubt, thought by many people that this result justifies the unusual course adopted.

I think that I ought to refer to one form of punishment that largely obtains at Te Oranga and that calls for some remark, and that is the unrestricted use of what is known as the "punishment dress." This dress, I may state, is an extraordinary garment of many and various coloured hues, most striking in appearance, and eminently unattractive. I understand that several of these garments are in use in the institution, under authority of Regulation 123, which I have already quoted. In no single instance could I find any record of the Minister having accorded his sanction to the use of these peculiar garments. When I found that they were somewhat extensively used, and no apparent record kept of their use, I seriously questioned the right of the Manager to act as she was doing. She has produced to me a record showing that on the 11th October, 1902, on the advice of the then Official Visitors, she was authorised by the permanent head of the Department to use her own discretion in the use of this punishment dress, but was instructed to report all such cases. It seems to me that the Department has no right to go outside the regulations, and certainly not to loosely set aside the prerogative of the Minister. When drawing the regulations it was evidently thought that this form of punishment was sufficiently important to justify it being specially safeguarded. I recommend that the authority I have referred to be cancelled.

Regulation 109 reads: "No stroke on the head or neck can in any case be tolerated under any name whatever, and shaking, pushing, and all similar forms of punishment are prohibited." It is much to be regretted that, in the face of this very precise and stringent regulation, the Manager has had to admit that on occasions she has boxed the ears of some of the inmates, and has slapped them, and so on. She asserts that she has never done this in anger, but it is difficult to understand why she has done it at all. There is no ground whatever for believing that any harm has resulted to any inmate by these acts, but they are a distinct breach of the regulation, and should be absolutely prohibited.

I think that I have practically disposed of all questions affecting the methods of punishment adopted in the school; but there are one or two matters that I must refer to, as properly coming under the heading of the general treatment of the inmates.

The fact has been elicited during the progress of the inquiry that the Manager makes a physical examination of a highly private nature of all girls when first committed to the Home, and also of those who return after absence by absconding. I do not at all question the necessity for such an examination—far from it; but I do most certainly hold that it should be made only by the Medical Officer. This would remove all possible objections, such as have been taken, to the existing practice, and at the same time secure a much greater degree of certainty as to the examination.

A good deal has been said about the outside work that the girls are called upon to do, in the form of cutting down trees, chopping and splitting firewood, and grubbing lupins. I suppose it will be conceded that vigorous physical exercise is an absolute necessity for these girls. The evidence clearly shows that the work they do is in no way hard, and the girls enjoy it, and regard it in a great measure as recreation. Opinions may differ as to whether some of the work done is entirely suitable for young girls, but it is certainly neither oppressive nor degrading, and the institution does not lend itself readily to any other form of physical exercise.

A good deal of evidence was given about the treatment by the Manager of a girl who had been for some time in another institution, where she had done exceedingly well, and whom a lady in Christchurch was desirous of taking into her service. The case of the girl in question is a most peculiar one, and shows conclusively how a change of treatment may operate most beneficially upon a girl whose antecedents would appear to show the probability of quite a different result. I do not propose to refer in detail to the case. The girl is now approaching twenty-one. She is in most respectable service and doing well, and enjoys the confidence of her mistress. The dispute over the girl was a most unfortunate one, and, in my opinion, quite unnecessary. I cannot think that the Manager of the school exercised a very wise discretion in dealing with the case. She evidently thought more of her dignity and authority than she did of the true interests of the girl. This girl was evidently amenable to and capable of making considerable improvement under a milder form of discipline than that of Te Oranga, and it would have been wiser to have granted without demur the opportunity afforded of giving her a further chance in such desirable employment as was offered.