

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY.

The Government is seriously impressed with the rapid increase during the past few years in the number of boys between ten and sixteen years of age who have been sent to industrial schools. To some extent this increase is attributable to the increase of population, and to the greater recognition by Magistrates and the police of the fact that these schools are not merely places of detention, but that they are a powerful means of giving boys and girls who are not under effective parental control a moral and other educational upbringing to fit them for the duties of citizenship—an acquirement that is of great importance to the public welfare, whether considered from the moral or the financial standpoint.

There is, however, a more cogent reason for this increase. A careful investigation of the particulars respecting boys of this age who come under the operation of the Industrial Schools Act on account of vagrancy, want of control, or being charged with punishable offences, shows that in no less than 77·3 per cent. of the cases either one or both of the parents is of good character. This fact is a very strong indication of the laxity or inability of parents in the discharge of their responsibilities. As further showing that the fault is mainly in the children's improper upbringing, it is to be remarked that authentic information obtained years after discharge from control shows that only 8·1 per cent. of the young people who have passed through industrial schools can be classed afterwards as of bad character.

Arguing from these premises, the Government has decided to approach this problem from another direction, and, relying upon the approval and support of Magistrates, which is essential to effective working, confidently hopes that the object in view will be successfully reached. Briefly, the scheme is that when a boy is first brought before the Court for delinquency and the Magistrate is satisfied that the moral influence of the parents' home is not detrimental but that the control is not strong enough to prevent further trouble, the Magistrate, on being satisfied also that the case is not one necessitating such a serious step as the actual admission of a boy to an industrial school, should at his discretion make an order formally attaching him to an industrial school. That having been done, he, by arrangement with the Education Department, would be allowed to remain with his parents, but would be under the friendly direction of an officer of that Department. Such officers would be chosen for their special experience and qualifications in dealing with boys, and the objective would be, of course, to supplement weak parental control, and by doing this to avoid committal to industrial schools, which implies the breaking of the family tie, the lessening of direct parental responsibility, and an upbringing in conditions that can never take the place of a good home, no matter how high a level of sympathetic and enlightened administration is attained by the officers of these schools. If a youth after being placed on probation in this way failed to behave satisfactorily, the order for his admission to the school would by direction of the Minister of Education become operative without need of further court proceedings. The same remarks apply, of course, to girls also.

The Government is very hopeful that such a scheme as is here outlined will be successful in reducing the number of children in residence at our industrial schools; and, looking at the financial aspect of the matter, the consequence will be a distinct decline in expenses of maintenance; further, the need for establishing new institutions at a cost of many thousands of pounds will be indefinitely postponed.

INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL ACCOMMODATION.

The accommodation at the boys' industrial schools is severely taxed at the present time, the Weraroa Boys' Training Farm, the Stoke Industrial School, and Burnham being all full. It is hoped, however, that means that are available, particularly the scheme for placing certain delinquent boys and girls on probation instead of sending them to industrial schools, will have the effect of considerably relieving this pressure in the near future.