

lives of the children are a tragedy. Of such children it may be said that they have never had a childhood in the real sense. It would be surprising if they grew up to be normally efficient citizens.

It has often been urged that, rather than the children, parents who have proved themselves unfit to be parents should be placed under restriction. It certainly seems to be the height of folly to take children from a home which is judged to be unfit for children and from parents who are unfit to rear children, and yet to wait year by year for the succession of additional children which proceeds from that same home. In many cases the evil effects cannot be remedied even if the children are taken charge of from infancy, for physical or mental infirmity are often stamped on the children for life through the moral or physical degeneracy of their parents.

#### HOUSING CONDITIONS.

The question of the eradication of the slum areas of our towns and cities is one which demands the most careful consideration. It is a crime to place children in conditions that almost defy them to become healthy, decent citizens. More care is taken over the rearing of stock than the rearing of children. The free kindergarten associations, however, are doing splendid work towards brightening the lives of city children, and in many cases stimulating parents to do more for the welfare of their children, and I have, as far as possible, recognized the value of this work by arranging for an increased capitation and an improved status for the free kindergarten schools.

Reference will be made later to proposals for regulating street trading by children, and for checking undue liberty in roaming the streets or in going unattended to public places of entertainment in the evenings.

#### PRACTICAL EDUCATION.

As the prison reports clearly indicate, a large proportion of criminals and of minor offenders are people who have had a poor education and who have drifted into the ranks of unskilled labour. I may here mention that proposals have been adopted to provide for such modifications of school instruction as will tend to keep at school till they complete the primary course those children whose capacities lie more in the direction of manual work. Further, by means of continuation classes for both boys and girls who have left school, it is hoped not only to extend their general education, but to provide for reasonable opportunities for receiving instruction relating to their trade or calling. This should give a distinct bias towards the more skilled trades as against blind-alley occupations, and help to eliminate the undesirable results often accompanying poor education and the lack of a skilled occupation.

Still further to assist in setting our boys and girls out properly in life after they leave school it is proposed to establish juvenile employment bureaux through which children and parents may receive advice and assistance in the selection and securing of occupations suited to the capacities of the children.

#### METHODS.

The reforms that have recently been effected or are in progress or under consideration are dealt with under various sections which follow. Mention should be made here, however, of a difficulty which frequently presents itself owing to a want of understanding by the public of the main principle that should guide all industrial-school methods: this is that the Department, having become the foster-parent of a child, must place the child's interests before everything else.

Constant trouble is caused through well-meaning people listening to the complaints of parents, or foster-parents, or employers of children under the care of the Department. Parents whose own conduct has caused their children to be taken from them often plead their parental affections as a reason why their children should be returned to them. This is very frequent when the children begin to earn wages. These parents, as well as foster-parents and employers who for reasons of their own wish to keep a child with them, often gain the ear of sympathetic listeners who do not know all the facts of the case. The result often is that undue and unwarranted pressure and criticism are brought to bear on the Department when,