

DEPENDENT CHILDREN AND CHILD WELFARE.

Reforms in the System.

As a result of a review of the whole system dealing with destitute and delinquent children and juvenile offenders, a commencement was made during the year with the carrying-out of the following reforms:—

- (1.) Extension throughout the whole of the Dominion of the juvenile probation system.
- (2.) Establishment of probation homes.
- (3.) Variation of functions of certain of the residential industrial schools, involving extension of boarding-out system and application of the probation system in approved cases to the inmates of these schools.
- (4.) Establishment of central store and purchasing system providing for the equipment and supplies of all Government receiving-homes, industrial schools, and special schools, and an extension of the system of exchanges of produce and commodities between schools.
- (5.) Adoption of approved system of stores and accounts at all schools, and centralization of collection of inmates' wages and payments for boarded-out children.

Lack of Parental Control ; Street Trading among Children ; too frequent Attendance of Children at Picture-theatres ; Need for Legislative Action.

Of the 204 children charged during the year as not being under proper control, or accused or found guilty of punishable offences, 166 were boys. The increase in juvenile delinquency is due mainly to the early emancipation of the child from the home influences, and to the utter indifference of some parents as to the welfare of their children. At present the streets are the evening schools of many of our young people. The excitement and allurements of the streets and places of public entertainment are often sought in preference to the sordid or monotonous conditions in the home. The lack of comfort in the home, and the failure of the parents to hold the interest of the children, are all factors in accounting for the large number of children who come before the Courts every year. It is estimated that at least 75 per cent. of the boys referred to above were street traders prior to admission, while the passion for the picture-shows probably accounts for a large proportion of the remaining cases. Such public attention has been drawn by social workers, teachers, and others to the pernicious influence that casual trading in the streets, and too frequent attendance at picture-shows, has on the mental and physical condition of school-children that it is hoped the necessary legislation which has been prepared to meet this condition of affairs will be introduced and passed at the next session of Parliament.

Appointment of Juvenile Probation Officers.

In the Statute Law Amendment Act of last session provision was made for the appointment of Juvenile Probation Officers and for the establishment of probation homes. This enabled the Department to introduce a system providing for investigation by Juvenile Probation Officers in all cases of children charged with offences against the law, or coming within the meaning of the various Acts relating to children. In the majority of these cases the children who in the ordinary course would have been committed to industrial schools have been placed on probation either in their own homes or with friends or in situations. The percentage of successes is very great—nearly 97 per cent.—so that in the majority of cases not only is the reformation of the children proceeding satisfactorily in their own homes, but the cost of their maintenance in industrial schools has been saved.

Result of Extension of the Probation System.

The following figures show the number of children dealt with by the Courts in the four centres. In the case of Auckland the figures cover a period of nineteen months, but in the other centres a period of five months only: At Auckland 337