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THE SYSTEM OF BOARDING-OUT PAUPER CHILDREN

THE now frequent references in the public prints to Boarding-out may seem wearisome and needless to those of our country men and women who for the past quarter of a century have given time and thought to the subject, and they might well be excused were they to cry 'Hold, enough.' But they are in reality few and far between, and the bulk of the nation still knows so little of this plan that it may even be a new topic to many readers. Perhaps this may be accounted for by the system having originally crept among us solely in connection with pauper children—'out of sight out of mind' as most emphatically they used to be. Sixty years ago the country was roused to consider the terrible question of Pauperism by the ruin it threatened to national prosperity; but when it *had* been considered, the necessary legislation obtained, alarm dissipated, and the conscience of the people satisfied that while ruin was averted due provision for the destitute had been made, their attention was transferred to the reform of other abuses. Thus it happened that an important principle embodied in the Poor Law Act came soon to be almost entirely overlooked—the co-operation, namely, of voluntary with paid agency. One lamentable effect was that the inmates of workhouses were practically forgotten by all but those officially concerned with them. True the Guardians' post is honorary, but it has usually been filled by very busy men compelled by the demands of their own affairs to hurry through the formal business of the Board, and leave untouched that personal part which it was expected by the framers of the Poor Law Bill of 1834 would bring those voluntary workers into individual relations with the recipients of relief, and by the knowledge thus gained of their special circumstances enable Guardians, while administering the law with firmness, to develop methods for its application appropriate to the character and needs of each. Want of time, too, has

largely prevented the intending Guardian from making the preparatory study of a very difficult and complicated subject, undoubtedly needed for the successful performance of his duties, so that it often happens that Guardians instead of being competent to direct their officers are really, though perhaps not avowedly, directed by them, and, as a consequence, the administration of the law passes into the hands of the latter. However fitted the officers may be for their duties, it was never contemplated these should be performed without direction and supervision, nor without that influence of the voluntary spirit, lacking which every organisation sinks into mechanical routine. Such, with admirable exceptions, has long been the working of our Poor Law, and those under its operation who have most suffered are undoubtedly the children. Their unchildlike dulness, and utter uselessness when sent forth to earn their living, used to be accepted by their employers as of the nature of things, until at length here and there some benevolent person with leisure to think and power to convert thought into action perceived that this annihilation of all the beauty of child-nature and of its competency for the ordinary duties of life must have a cause, and that that cause must be removed. Thousands and thousands of these blasted young lives had fallen in the struggle for existence for which workhouse upbringing had given them no preparation, before Mrs. Way and Mary Carpenter and Louisa Twining and other enlightened persons taught that individual treatment, the sunshine of home and the sweetness of unpaid-for care, are the appointed means for developing aright a child's character. They sought to supersede bringing children up in masses by opening small Schools and Homes for their reception, and then it occurred to some of these child-lovers that, however good such small institutions may be—fitter possibly for some cases, at any rate as a probationary stage, than any other method yet discovered—the real home must be better than even the best imitation, and that for all but abnormal children the ancient custom of fosterage, indigenous in almost every country, might be revived for those left parentless and destitute.

In some instances it was a Board of Guardians, grieved by the after failure of the children brought up in the workhouse or barrack-like school, who resolved to try the old method ; in others a lady obtained the permission of local Guardians to make the experiment ; or, another, longing to rescue the pauper children from the unfavourable conditions of large towns, prevailed upon their respective Boards to entrust them to her care.

Of these pioneers Mrs. Archer and the late Miss Annette Preusser will be held in especial remembrance by the advocates of Boarding-out in England.

More than thirty years ago Mrs. Archer began the plan by finding a home for a destitute little orphan girl in the cottage of two elderly women. Observing the mutual happiness and the great benefit to the child which resulted, it occurred to her that other little orphan girls, whom as wife of the chairman of the Board of Guardians of her Union (Highworth and Swindon) she knew and deeply pitied, might in like manner be restored to family life. With her husband's effective help she succeeded in achieving this, and by making her experience known to others and bringing her influence to bear to obtain trial of the plan wherever there seemed to her a chance of its adoption, she laid the foundation of the carefully organized Boarding-out system of to-day.

Colonel Grant, a retired officer in the Engineers, and *ex-officio* Guardian for Bath, admirably exemplified that combination of the voluntary spirit with official authority which the Poor Law Act desired to create. It led him on meeting, in 1868, with evidence of Mrs. Archer's successful work, to throw himself into an enterprise in such complete harmony with the purpose of that Act, namely, to relieve destitution and diminish pauperism. He set forth in a pamphlet, so attractively written that a large edition was rapidly sold, information collected from the three kingdoms showing the advantages of Boarding-out, and the best methods of administering it, and soon formulated from these for the use of his own Board an effective plan for obtaining good homes and securing due supervision.¹ He held that a good foster-parent having been selected moderate supervision was best; but with an unsatisfactory foster-parent no amount of supervision would secure the child's welfare.

The example of Bath was followed by Boards in many parts of the country, and when in 1870, mainly by the efforts of Miss Preusser, the Local Government Board, under the presidency of Mr. Goschen, issued an Order (which the President himself drafted) for the general adoption of a method hitherto pursued only by individual Boards of Guardians as a form of out-relief, the regulations for its governance and the forms prescribed by the Department were, I believe, founded on those drawn up by Colonel Grant from models he obtained from Ireland and Scotland. Previous

¹ *The Advantages of the Boarding-out System as Applied to Pauper Children.* Macmillan and Co. 1869.

to the Order, boarding-out was limited in England and Wales to orphans and deserted children. To these were now added the children of persons under sentence of penal servitude, or suffering permanently from mental disease, or out of England. By the amending Order of 1889, the list is extended to include the children of inmates of workhouses who are permanently bedridden, and the Poor Law Act of the same year invests Guardians of the Poor with fresh powers concerning deserted children which further enlarge the class available for boarding-out.

But what *is* this Boarding-out, an uninstructed reader may ask—in what way is it better than life in the workhouse, or at any rate in the handsome pauper schools we see standing in their beautiful grounds, with gymnasiums and swimming-baths, and elaborate staff of officers and servants? Surely the children ought to turn out well who are so grandly provided for!

Let us for a moment consider—Are these the conditions appointed by God for the up-bringing of children? Where is the individual love of the father and mother for each child round their hearth; the affection and unrestricted companionship of brother and sister; the example of the parent's self-sacrifice in want or in sickness, their joy in the health and well-doing, their sorrow in the illness or evil conduct of their little ones? Where the family bond strong to resist adversity, to strengthen success, woven from the common events of home-life even before memory can note whence it sprang; where the daily give-and-take, the opportunity for pity and forgiveness, for remorse and just self-approval, for generosity and gratitude, by which all that is good in human nature is developed?

However anxious to replace the absent parent, how can the school superintendent or teacher do this to the hundreds of children under his care? It takes him months even to learn their names, how then is it possible for him to become acquainted with their individual natures, with the characteristics which need encouragement, the faults which must be checked, with their joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, sympathy which is as essential to the happiness of a child's life as happiness is essential to its goodness? Even necessary knowledge of their physical condition cannot be obtained where children must be dealt with in crowds. It was only by the mere accident of a lady seeking in the infants' department of a large workhouse those suitable for boarding-out that a little girl of three years old, who had been its occupant for four months, was discovered to be deaf and dumb; yet the matron was an especially kind woman, round whom the children would

flock for caresses when she came among them. To train children to love and take pride in their work, how does the never-ending scrubbing of vast dormitories and dreary corridors, the preparation of vegetables by the bushel, the mending of clothes by the hundred, which must be got through in big institutions, compare with the small household tasks of home, each brought within a child's power, and attractive to it because done with and for those it loves? And to strengthen it against evil temptation, which is most likely to succeed, the mechanical discipline by which masses must be governed, cut off by seclusion from the world from ordinary temptations, but among whom evil may run riot if hidden beneath the surface, or individual existence watched by loving eyes amid everyday opportunity of doing wrong restrained whether by the almost certainty of detection, or the higher motive not to pain those we love? Are not the errands done for mother, the help given to father, the care of little brothers and sisters, the sense of responsibility thus created and of dignity in its discharge, the intercourse with neighbours and gradual recognition of the duty of self-support and mutual help, agencies indispensable for the child's moral and mental growth? Many of these may be the subject of general exhortation in the school, but it is in the home alone that they can be learned, learned indeed unconsciously, but none the less effectively. The homebred child goes forth to earn his living with all his wits about him, while the child whose life has been spent in the school has had his dulled by want of use, and in like manner had his affections still more disastrously withered away from lack of drawing out—too often a deadness to all sympathy, or morose selfishness taking their place—while his knowledge of that world in which he must fight the battle of life is *nil*.

The child when boarded-out—placed in the dwelling of honest, industrious, and kindly people of his own rank—becomes grafted as it were on their family tree, and grows up as a child of their own. He acquires by his foster-relationships not only the unspeakable blessing of a good father and mother, but brothers and sisters, cousins, uncles, and aunts; he obtains a sense of ownership—'our garden,' 'our pigs,' 'our chickens,' &c., fall from his lips, and he feels that he shares the rights of his little community. With the rights he insensibly accepts the duties and takes his part in the work of the household. Sure of sympathy he repeats with pride at home the commendation he wins at school; he becomes often passionately attached to the members of the family he has entered, especially to the baby, and the softening influence

of such unselfish love has been known to work wonders in a heart previously hardened by cruelty or neglect.

Such complete incorporation into the foster-family is indeed the ideal of boarding-out—not always fulfilled; but falling short of this the child rarely fails to win and return warm affection which ripens into permanent friendship, so that his foster-home remains his centre of interest until he has made one of his own, and he seldom returns to it without a present for its best-loved members, while more substantial proof of his belonging to the family is readily given in case of need. I saw a lad who had had the chance of visiting the great town of his neighbourhood carrying home with him, besides smaller gifts for other foster-relatives, a costly doll (costly indeed for his means) for the little sister whose helplessness in her cradle had roused him from a brutal insensibility to the sufferings of others which had caused great anxiety and indeed alarm when first boarded-out. He took nothing back for himself. ‘The foster-children [after going out into the world] often visit their foster-parents who now and again receive from those who are gone out a pound note, or a new shawl,’ said Mr. Greig of the city parish, Edinburgh, speaking at a drawing-room meeting at the house of the late Sir Charles Trevelyan. ‘We hear too,’ writes another experienced boarder-out, ‘not only of pecuniary support, but of devotion from a son, or careful nursing by a daughter, perhaps for years,’ and similar facts are constantly related by members of certified Boarding-out Committees. Of these Committees (authorised by the Local Government Board to receive children from Boards of Guardians) there are now 171 in England, where the number is steadily increasing to meet the growing demand for foster-homes, while years ago many died away because they could not obtain children. ‘The *furore* for the universal extension of large district schools,’ as Professor Ingram of Dublin long since expressed it, against which he says Mrs. Archer protested as a pretension on the part of men to introduce without consulting the other sex a plan of education for pauper children which women would unhesitatingly repudiate as unnatural and mischievous, had cost so much that the promoters of the schools felt bound to fill them, little suspecting that by stopping at the initial cost of building, great though that was, and adopting boarding-out they would have effected a vast economy of the rates.

This is a consideration of very great importance, and one which must carry the day for boarding-out whenever ratepayers give the subject their attention. The cost of the latter system in

England, where it is higher than in Scotland or Ireland because the standard of living is higher, averages between £12 and £13 a year. In the Midland counties it is under £11. Within what may be called the metropolitan area extending perhaps 40 miles, *i.e.* where the vast demand of the London market, and the larger rents consequent on the higher value of land raise prices, it sometimes exceeds £13. Let us compare this with the cost in the schools maintained by the metropolitan unions and parishes. It is indeed somewhat difficult to ascertain precisely, and varies much one year with another and one school with another, but a very careful estimate of its various sources—buildings and their maintenance, staff, food, clothing, fuel, &c., and interest on loans, a very heavy item, but seldom included in the calculation—leads me to believe that the average is probably not under £31 per head. Objection is not infrequently urged to boarding-out on the assumed ground that it places the child of the pauper in a better position than that of the labouring man, while in truth a leading feature of the plan is that the pauper child shall occupy the identical position of the offspring of a respectable working man, neither better nor worse. To refuse boarding-out on such a plea while the big school with all its costly conditions is accepted, is indeed a curious instance of straining at the gnat and swallowing the camel.

In the provinces the corresponding schools are frequently, though not always, less costly. Schools within the workhouse are usually less expensive than those apart, but even in these the total cost largely exceeds that of boarding-out. Thus (as regards the large proportion eligible for foster-homes) metropolitan ratepayers in providing for the education and maintenance of pauper children are mulcted of a good deal above 100 per cent. more than will secure a far better article, while in the provinces the excess averages at least 50 per cent. How shall relief from this worse than needless burden be obtained? This question, combined with the inquiry how to get rid of the evils inseparable from dealing with children in masses, suggested itself in our Australian Colonies several years ago. It was answered in some by the abolition of the big schools, except that here and there one has been retained as a depot to give temporary shelter while the arrangements for boarding-out are made; in others (*e.g.* New Zealand and Queensland) the schools are being gradually emptied by a large adoption of boarding-out. For the few children found to need before entering the foster-home a longer physical or moral probation than the depot affords, very small

Homes on the family pattern, whence the children are boarded-out as they become fit in mind and body for free association with others, have been opened in New South Wales, and are found of great value. What has been the result? The latest Report to hand (1891) on neglected children from Victoria says there is 'economy in three directions. . . . First, the merging of the child placed in a foster-home in the general population is more completely *submersive* than it is possible for any institution life to be of the *pauper spirit*. Secondly, there is a direct money saving under the system, the cost of training in the foster-home never exceeding £15 per annum, and being frequently less, as compared with that in institutions running up from £18 (the cost under the old barrack system here) to £20, or often far more. Thirdly, experience shows that the substitution of the foster-home for our large palatial industrial school establishments has had the effect of greatly deterring parents from throwing on the State the maintenance of their children. The numbers chargeable on this department, which, on the first introduction of the system in 1873 stood at 2,384, had fallen at December last to 1,866, a reduction of 23 per cent.,¹ and this notwithstanding the rapid increase of population. Before boarding-out was adopted in Victoria the annual death-rate of State children was 3·16; for the eight years since its adoption it has been 1·25, although a much larger proportion of foundling infants, usually in miserable health, has during the latter period passed under the care of the State.

In New Zealand the decrease in 1890 of children cast for maintenance on the State, compared with that even of the preceding year, lessened the annual expenditure for the Government schools by about £2,000; and though these institutions, besides some under voluntary management, are not yet abolished in that Colony, the increasing proportion of the inmates boarded-out must, one would suppose, soon leave the schools vacant.²

Similar testimony comes from New South Wales. In this Colony, and in South Australia, the admirable 'Massachusetts Plan' has been adopted with possibly some variations to suit local circumstances, whereby all children whether criminal, neglected, or destitute needing State discipline, protection, or maintenance are placed under a voluntary body of ladies and gentlemen (called in South Australia the State Children's Council, in New South Wales the State Children's Board) invested with

¹ Department for Neglected Children and Reformatory Schools; Report of the Secretary. Government Printer, Melbourne.

² Report of the Minister of Education, Wellington, 1891.

the necessary authority for dealing with each case individually according to its special characteristics. Thus in Massachusetts the child may be left on probation with its parents (who, whatever its lot, are required to contribute to the extent of their power to its maintenance), or be consigned to the State Primary School (not a criminal institution), or to a reformatory, or even (though this happens very rarely) a gaol, to be transferred to boarding-out as soon as this seems desirable; or it may be boarded out in the first instance or given in adoption to a suitable person, or made the ward of a voluntary guardian who becomes invested with all the responsibility and authority of a parent until the child reaches the age of 21. Further, when children's cases are before the courts these must be cleared of all unconcerned persons (even the police, unless indispensable as witnesses), the 'child's agent' attending to state the case, and to suggest from his full knowledge of the circumstances the course to be followed. Thus are these young creatures lifted out of the criminal as well as the pauper class, and Massachusetts throws off the disgrace of branding her little ones with shame for acts for which they are not responsible. In South Australia a special court for children's cases has recently been provided, and boys and girls under arrest instead of being detained at the police station are sent to a lock-up at the office of the State Children's Department. Victoria has a similar arrangement in view, and the remaining Colonies are not likely to lag behind. May the time not be far distant when this humane and most successful 'Plan' shall in its entirety prevail at home!

Since the adoption in 1881 of boarding-out in New South Wales 3,910 children have been transferred from institutions to homes. The cost, which has been gradually lessening, was last year £13 16s. 8d. per head. In the exhaustive official Report for 1891, of the Hon. Arthur Renwick, President of the State Children's Relief Department, he says, 'There is no doubt whatever that the system is now effecting a saving of £15,000 a year to the State in the difference between charges for boarding-out and maintaining children in asylums.' The actual number of children has indeed increased, but this increase, says the Report, 'has during the last four years, *since the large institutions were abolished*, been altogether below the usual proportion to the increment of the general population.' The exchange of palatial schools for boarding-out in New South Wales, as in Victoria, deters parents from leaving their children to be brought up by the State, thus showing in the southern hemisphere, as has been discovered in the

northern, that instead of encouraging desertion, as it was at first assumed boarding-out would, it has precisely the opposite effect.

It is true that recently, in South Australia, the number of Children thrown on the State, not by deserting but by lazy parents, has increased, but this is imputed, in the official Report of the State Children's Council for 1891, to the extreme laxity of magistrates in allowing the parents to escape almost scot free from responsibility of maintenance, and justly imputed judging by the following instance given in the report. An artisan whose wife is in a lunatic asylum, can earn from £3 to £4 a week, but his drunken conduct has driven an elder daughter from home who would otherwise have been his housekeeper. He thereupon applies for his four other children to be committed to the care of the Council as 'uncontrollable;' in view of their filthy and neglected condition the application is granted, and he is ordered to pay £1 a week towards their support, leaving him £2 or £3 to spend on himself if he chooses to earn it! I am afraid scarcely less flagrant cases may be met with here both in our magistrates' courts and in guardians' board-rooms. It is a matter urgently demanding the consideration of the respectable working classes, upon whose shoulders their share of the burden thus shirked by neglecting parents presses heavily. But the comparative cheapness of boarding-out is nevertheless still apparent in South Australia in the reduction of cost per head of children supported by the State, and in its saving of life. Only eight children or .843 per cent. died of the 949 who during the year were under the control of the Department, and the latter reports favourably, as heretofore, on the moral effect of the system.

Information concerning the children boarded out from the city parish of Edinburgh gives us the cost and results for a very long period. Mr. Greig adopted the present carefully organised method in 1845, and a report on the subsequent careers of 686 children who became self-supporting between 1860 and 1880 shows that at the latter date 627 'were satisfactory so far as known to Inspector,' 10 were 'unsatisfactory.' Of 49 the information was insufficient for the purpose of a report, but there was no evidence that any had failed. A fuller report for the five years ending 1878 gives more special information of success both while of school age and in after life. One lad taken by the parish 'because uncontrollable' by his mother, became a farm labourer, sent 10s. of his first wages to his mother, and in the words of his master 'there was not a better boy in the whole country side.' Another, calling on his old foster-

mother gave her £1; another, become a commercial traveller, sent the like sum to his foster-father. Of a group of seven who had come to visit their foster-homes all had money in the savings' bank, one girl, £13; a boy, £30; the rest £10 each. Some of the young men were in business for themselves, one of them had become a captain in the merchant service. Another, a sailor, returning at 18 from a voyage round the world brought handsome presents to his friends and £30 in savings. Several of the young people had married, among them a young woman from her foster-mother's house, the occasion being made one of sympathetic rejoicing in the locality. She had saved £17 during a few years in service. Here is a sad contrast. A girl in service with a year's wages due was induced by a woman calling herself her aunt to leave her situation and go with her. When next heard of she had fallen, and came into the workhouse. Such 'aunts,' real or pretended, are in England, too, a curse to warm-hearted and unsuspecting girls with a little money saved. Poor Law authorities cannot be too resolute in using every means with which the law arms them to prevent and to punish these cruel frauds.

The total yearly cost per head of those Edinburgh children while boarded-out was £10 13s. 9½d., and the annual death-rate '66 per cent., although the number included babies placed out sometimes when only a few days old. A further report from the same Board gives similar and equally satisfactory information down to May, 1892.

Some of the earliest formed Boarding-out Committees in England, more especially those of Calverton, Windermere, and King's Norton, have issued statements of ascertained results. The King's Norton Report, dated 1889, epitomises the careers of 82 boys and 127 girls who had ceased to be chargeable between that date and 1873. With many of them communication had been maintained by members of the Committee, as well as by foster-relatives, while others, lost sight of for shorter or longer periods, reappeared with a satisfactory history of the intervening time.

The summary of their conduct is as follows:—

Satisfactory	...	...	...	...	...	168
'Doubtful' and troublesome [who may yet do well]						33
Unsatisfactory	...	...	...	...	...	8
Convicted of crime	...	...	...	...	...	0

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Five only had died during the 16 years over which the Report extends. The yearly cost per head while on the rates had been under £11, that is the cost in money ; the unflagging watchfulness of the Committee, the still more precious love and care of the foster-parents, cannot be estimated.

These Reports are peculiarly valuable in showing that several of the young people who caused much anxiety in the earlier season of their independence, gradually settled down into steady workers and good citizens under the beneficent influence of the family ties created for them by boarding-out.

Early in this article I have defined the classes of children for whom boarding-out is available in England and Wales. Those of all workhouse inmates, by an Act of the last Parliament, have been brought within the category as regards Ireland. It is to be hoped that, before the Session of 1893 expires, this provision will be extended to England, Wales and Scotland. It will then rest with the discretion of Guardians of the Poor to remove every child from the workhouse.

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