

No. 2.

The INSPECTOR-GENERAL of SCHOOLS to the Hon. the MINISTER of EDUCATION.

The Hon. the Minister of Education.

THE enclosed extract, from a circular recently issued by the Howard Association, describes a method of dealing with juvenile offenders which is not only new, but is also apparently the most reasonable, humane, and effectual that has ever been proposed.

Wellington, 11th August, 1881.

WM. JAS. HABENS.

 Enclosure in No. 2.

MASSACHUSETTS AND JUVENILE OFFENDERS.—STATE AGENTS.

THE Howard Association has just been furnished (through the courtesy of two of its American correspondents) with the proceedings of a "Conference of Charities and Corrections" held at Cleveland, Ohio, in July, 1880, and published at Boston, U.S. One portion of this document describes the Massachusetts mode of dealing with juvenile offenders, which is probably the best system in the world, as tested by results. A very brief outline may be of public interest.

From 1846 to 1866, Massachusetts established several State reformatories, and industrial schools for criminal and neglected children. These and similar institutions proved advantageous. But it became manifest that even such good things as reformatory and industrial institutions involved some danger of collateral disadvantage (as in this country), such as, for example, a risk of relieving vicious parents of their natural obligations, and of pauperizing both them and their children at the expense of the honest taxpayer; and, further, of training young persons in large masses in ignorance of many of the lessons to be imparted only by virtuous family life.

Hence, in 1869 and 1870, the Massachusetts Legislature, with a special view to more preventive effort, committed the general care of juvenile offenders to a special State Agency, acting as follows: Every complaint against any boy or girl under the age of seventeen must, before being brought into any Court, be first laid in writing before the State agent, or one of his assistants, for investigation. When the case comes into Court (and special portions of the time in Courts are exclusively devoted to juvenile cases), the agent, or sub-agent, attends personally to act for the State as watcher, counsel, advocate, or prosecutor, according as the circumstances require. If the complaint is a first charge against the offender, and for a light offence, nothing follows but a simple admonition or the passing of a suspended sentence, a small fine for costs being however enforced, if needful, on the parents of the child, if not an orphan.

If there appears to be a prospect that the child will need some further restraint or influence than its existing caretakers seem likely to exercise, the agent requests (and obtains from the Court) a sentence of probation for a given time, he undertaking (for the State) to bring up the young offender again, if needful, and meanwhile to watch over him and devise measures for his benefit. Such sentence of probation formally places the child under the oversight of the State agent, but the child still continues at home. The term is renewed when needful.

But in cases where there is reason to apprehend an utter absence in future of suitable home care or restraint for the child complained of, the agent is authorised by the Court to take it away, for the State, and to put it entirely at the disposal of the Massachusetts Board of Health, Lunacy, and Charity. This body usually places its young wards in private families, on the boarding-out system, under due official conditions and with regular supervision. This course is almost always tried before having resort to a reformatory or industrial school. But the latter is used where boarding-out appears insufficient in disciplinary influence.

Finally, where the subject of this care proves too intractable for a reformatory, then, and only as a last means of control, a prison is resorted to. But so efficient are the successive stages of admonition, probation, boarding-out, and reformatory found to be, that it is reported that rarely are any children now sent to gaol in Massachusetts.

This system has been carried into operation without any laxity or impunity to juvenile offenders. For, in the first place, more than 75 per cent. of all the children brought before Courts in Massachusetts are convicted. Yet only about one-fifth of these convicted ones are sent into other homes or institutions of any kind, and only one-ninth to the State schools or reformatories. Nearly one-third of all the convicted ones are put on "probation." About one in twenty is committed by formal witnesses to the custody of the State Board of Health, Lunacy, and Charity. This Board, as already mentioned, chiefly disposes of its young wards by placing them out in carefully selected homes, under the regular supervision of unpaid but officially appointed visitors. These visitors include, for the oversight of girls in particular, fifty ladies, each of whom acts under the authority of a warrant from the Chairman of the Board. Their services are most valuable. The Volunteer Visitors, in subordination to the paid State Agency, find suitable homes for the children (and there are many such to be found), and then, by their oversight, increase the efficiency of the influence of those homes.

Both the moral and economical results of this system are remarkably satisfactory. Only one-tenth of the children sentenced to "probation" reappear before a Court within a twelvemonth, and very few at all in after years. There were, in 1880, three hundred fewer juvenile offenders under State care in Massachusetts than in 1870, notwithstanding the increase of population in the decade. The two school ships have been given up, as reformatories, and sold. The number of children in the reformatories and industrial schools has also diminished by 50 per cent. And meanwhile there have been very few juvenile committals to prisons. The criminal and neglected children of the State cost upwards of £10,000 (52,000 dols.) more in 1869 than ten years later, in 1879. (These facts and figures are quoted chiefly from one of the State School Superintendents, Mr. G. Tufts.) It is added that the chief part of this economy, prevention, and reformation results from keeping the children out of the "institutions" of all kinds, and securing their better oversight, either in their own homes, or in adopted ones. The report remarks "Almost all juvenile offenders are found to be without homes, or healthful home influences. Rarely does one come from a good family."