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REFORMING DELINQUENT CHILDREN.

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY J. J. KELSO, TORONTO, AT THE THIRTIETH NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CHARITIES AND CORRECTION, ATLANTA, GA. MAY 8, 1903.

FEW subjects are more important and none can more worthily occupy our attention than the proper care of neglected and dependent children, especially those who through petty delinquencies are in danger of drifting permanently into the criminal class. The destiny of children is controlled by early training and environment, and life with all its possibilities may be made or unmade by the circumstances surrounding the boy or girl when he or she is merging into manhood and womanhood. The superintendent of our Industrial School said not long ago that he very seldom received a thoroughly bad boy. There were mischievous boys and boys who from lack of proper advantages or from extra ebullition of spirits had got off the right track, but there was rarely a case where the boy was sufficiently bad to be classed as in any degree hopeless or incorrigible—and this has been my own experience. Children look to the future with eagerness and hope, and they are ready to respond to any call upon their faith or activity. Taken in the right way and by the right persons, the boy or girl who has gone astray, broken the law or given evidence of waywardness, can, if separated from hurtful environment and association, be reformed, or at least given an impetus toward reformation, almost instantaneously and without the necessity for years of special training and drilling in an institution. There is such a thing as an instantaneous awakening of the soul to the realization of higher and better things by the magnetic influence of one soul reacting upon another. If we earnestly desire the reformation of a child, and let the child feel and know that we have such a desire, the response will in almost every instance be prompt and sincere.

To illustrate what I mean let me tell the following incident: Years ago when I first entered upon philanthropic work I was conducting a Fresh Air excursion on the lake for some two or three hundred neglected children. There was one girl about fourteen years of age who had given a great deal of trouble; she was bold, defiant, profane and quarrelsome, and at last after a serious dispute with two or three of the workers, a request was made to