

A Plea for Parental Schools.

[Halifax School Report.]

Experience teaches that truancy laws lose much of their beneficent effect when not supplemented by parental schools.

Even among respectable people there are many children whose misfortune it is to have parents or guardians weak in discipline. But among the poor, on account of the very unfavorable circumstances that sometimes prevail, such cases are very common, especially in towns and cities. Many of these unfortunate children, who might otherwise become useful citizens, go to swell the criminal classes. The strict enforcement of the compulsory act would greatly lessen the number of those who would become habitual truants, and it would save many of them; but they would be saved partly at the expense of those who were made examples, who became the victims of the weakness of their parents, of their own waywardness, and of the false economy of the state.

From general apathy, and from fear of expense, these unfortunate children are made to consort with criminals, and often return to their homes worse than they left them. * *

The fact is that the law, which is very good as far as it goes, will not be efficiently administered, until parental schools are established.

It is good homes, with strong and kindly control, that we need for the boys; not prisons. * *

There are in Halifax many, perhaps thirty, or forty, or fifty children, who are almost certainly going to become criminals if left to themselves, or if sent to some penal establishment to associate with the hardened and to lose caste.

In Massachusetts every county but one has a parental school. Some other states have them also. Toronto has a model school of that kind, a school in which the children are brought up under the most elevating influences.

In England truant schools are kept entirely distinct from all kinds of penal schools, and are managed by the school boards. Many parents voluntarily send their children to them, paying their expenses; just as some parents in this city, having partially lost control of their boys, send them away for a time to some private school, where by a good disciplinarian, they may be educated into habits of obedience and industry. It is not looked upon as a disgrace, for they are merely sending their children to a specialist.

Now the establishment of a school of this kind is plainly necessary for Halifax; for if our education is to be universal it must be free and compulsory. Other parts of the province need such a school as well as Halifax. This has become evident in every town where the compulsory law has been honestly tried, as in the town of Dartmouth.

It would then be economical, if at the beginning, a parental school were established for the whole province by the Council of Public Instruction. Such a school would, for several years, develop by experience the best methods, and serve as a model for other similar schools

which, no doubt, will be established in every county within the next twenty years.

Now as to the character of the school to be established. It should be in a country district, and should consist of one cottage, or more than one, according to requirements, each with a few acres of land. The cottages should be large enough to accommodate about twenty five pupils each. There should be a neat school room having a department for manual training. There should be a well kept garden, and the whole establishment should be entirely home like, with no high fences or other jail like appurtenances. The cottage should be in charge of a male teacher, his wife, and one male assistant, and perhaps one or two servants. And here arises the chief difficulty, that of obtaining a suitable teacher. He should thoroughly understand human nature, should be apt to teach, should be gentle and strong, and should be familiar with many forms of manual labor.

In this parental home the utmost regularity would prevail, and good habits would soon be formed. So far as the number of pupils would admit of it, they should be grouped in the different cottages according to age and moral conditions. All housework would be done by the pupils under competent direction. Three hours each day would be spent in school instruction. A few hours each day would be devoted to manual training and to gardening, and a few hours to play.

The cost of such an establishment would not be great, and would be borne in part by the parents according to their ability to pay; in part by the municipality to which the pupils belonged; and in part by the Provincial Government.

It may be said, why not let this work be done by the churches and by charitable organizations? For the very reason that they are unable to do it. For centuries they grappled with the subject of general education and did magnificent work, yet half the people were illiterate. The state, in every civilized country had to step in and aid them. The churches and various societies have been doing a great work in Halifax, and yet there are dozens of vagrants in the streets, and others not yet criminals, are being made to associate with criminals. The churches have neither the money nor the legal status to enable them to cope fully with this crying evil. Experience everywhere shows that the work will not be done unless the state does it.

When dogs, cats and other animals carried long distances on cars and steamers, sometimes confined in bags and baskets, can without asking any questions find their way home, and birds travelling thousands of miles come back year after year to the same nests, and carrier pigeons to their dovecotes, it is pretty sure that they know some things, to a knowledge of which no human being has yet attained. There is a vast field of animal intelligence to be studied, and the more we study, the more we shall be filled with wonder and admiration. *Our Dumb Animals.*