

## “PAUPER CHILDREN.”

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SEVENTEEN thousand eight hundred and seven children are under the care of London Guardians; 16,444 are in great establishments which have cost £1,284,334, where each child lives at the expense of £29 5s. 6d. a year. This great outlay is necessary, it is claimed, so as to dissociate children from pauperism.

But each child has had to spend some time in the workhouse, and has been brought to the school by the relieving officer. Each child knows to which parish he or she is chargeable, and by frequent reference is made conscious of being a ward of the Poor-law authorities. The children, that is to say, are **first associated with pauperism, and then much money is spent in the effort to make them forget the fact.** They are first subjected to treatment which deeply dyes them with the workhouse colour, and are then subjected to another treatment which has for its object the removal of this colour.

The second course of treatment has not been successful. The Guardians have in many cases been generous of thought and of care, they have in all cases been generous of the ratepayers' money. But the children leave the schools, we are told, with a peculiar sort of temper—they are **dull, sullen, and mechanical**—unfitted by education to grapple with difficulties, and very often **crippled by defective eyesight.** They are without the memories which make friendships, and without the friendships which shelter most other boys and girls as they first venture to



try the rough ways of the world. They remain, after all the care and expense, a class apart—paupers who have never enjoyed the “golden age” of childhood. Every child who has been relieved by Guardians has been a pauper, and no treatment alters the fact.

The plain man in the street, considering these things, asks, “Why should children be put under the Guardians? **Why make them paupers if it be so necessary and yet so impossible to unmake them?** Why put children under the care of the same authorities who have to deal with sturdy beggars and loafers and cheats? Why let them come into contact with the machinery which exists to relieve poverty?” The plain man’s question is especially hard to answer in face of the fact that another authority exists, which has education for its special object.

It would be better surely that these children, who by misfortune have become wards of the State, **should be under the education authority**, and be associated during their childhood with children in other and happier circumstances.

“Let us abolish pauperism” is a cry of idealists condemned as unpractical; “**let us abolish pauper children**” is an object to be at once attained.

The day that Parliament decrees the transfer of children from the Local Government Board, with its Poor-law machinery, to the Education Department, **pauper children cease to exist.** The children would then be taken to a receiving home managed by the same people who manage the schools of the neighbourhood. They would from this home be placed out to live as nearly as possible a family life, and certainly to take part in the school life of other children. It might be that some would go to a village, and in a cottager’s home form friendships and tastes; it might be that others would go to live in groups of



eight or ten under the charge of a good woman, where they would have the mixture of freedom and control necessary to growth. During their whole career the children would have **nothing to remind them of the workhouse** or Poor-law, nothing, indeed, to suggest to them that they formed a special class.

**"Let us abolish pauper children."** It is not often that so great a reform may be so easily accomplished. There is a clause in the Education Bill now before the House which allows of the transfer of Poor-law children to the care of the Education Department. All that is necessary is that the clause should be strengthened. **When the transfer is effected there will be no longer any pauper children.**

But there will still remain much to be done. The Poor-law Schools Committee's report has shown that the children in the **barrack schools** suffer from inefficient training and education, and very often from ill health. The report has stirred the national conscience, and changes will be required. **These great aggregations of children, where laws of order have to be enforced to the destruction of free child life, where seeds of disease find fertile soil, and family love never grows, must be broken up.**

A system of training and apprenticing, which fits the children of the State for unskilled and ill-paid labour must be changed. Great reforms will be required, and it is obvious that they will be more certainly carried out under a new than under an old Authority.

The Guardians and the Local Government Board have made many improvements. Their improvements now need improving, and yet they would be more than human if they did not look with too fond an eye on their own work. They are too much associated with what is, and too concerned to justify the past, to become



leaders in reforms. The Education Department and the Education Authority will, on the other hand, take up the duty, not only with the knowledge and sympathy which they have by their very office, but with the ardour of those whose reputation largely depends on the changes they make. They will not do too much—no department of Government is ever in a hurry—but there is much to do, and more will be done by this means than by any other.

It may be a far cry from the state of things revealed in the Committee's report to a state of things such as every citizen must desire for the children of the unfortunate, but **the first step onwards is the transfer of all children to the care of the Education Department, and of that Education Authority which it may establish in every locality.**

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Do your part to secure this by urging your Parliamentary representative to support this reform; and by your efforts among your fellows create an irresistible public opinion in its favour.

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[For a full description of the present condition of Poor-law children, especially in London, and exact statistics, see the Report of the Departmental Committee on Poor-law Schools. C 8027. Price 1s. 6d.]