

(No. 24.)



1865.

T A S M A N I A.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

**REFORMATORIES FOR NEGLECTED
CHILDREN.**

**COMMUNICATION FROM DEPUTATION OF THE BENEVOLENT
SOCIETY OF HOBART TOWN.**

Laid upon the Table by Mr. Whyte; and ordered by the Council to be printed,
August 4, 1865.



*Committee Room, Benevolent Society,
Hobart Town, 29th July, 1865.*

SIR,

THE undersigned were appointed at the late Quarterly Meeting of the General Committee of the Hobart Town Benevolent Society "a Deputation to wait upon the Honorable the Colonial Secretary, to draw the attention of Government to the urgent necessity that exists of establishing Reformatories in this Colony for boys and girls, not only for those who have committed crime, but those children who have been either deserted or are neglected by their parents."

On the 19th instant you favoured the Deputation with a long interview, during which they brought under your notice, verbally and in writing, data bearing on the object they were appointed to advocate. At this time, however, they were aware, from the Speech of His Excellency the Governor on the opening of the present Session of Parliament, that it was the intention of the Government to lay before the Legislature the Draft of a "Bill for the Amendment of the Law relating to Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders."

It is, therefore, now considered advisable to place before you in a tangible and official form the principal grounds on which the Committee of the Benevolent Society thinks it is "imperatively required that Legislative action should be taken to rescue from their deplorable and dangerous condition the numerous neglected, vagrant, idle, and hungry children who will soon inundate society as men and women, preying upon the industrious, and absorbing in their supervision and punishment infinitely more of the resources of the Colony than would be necessary now to bring them up virtuous and industrious citizens, a priceless treasure to Tasmania."

Every Annual Report of the Benevolent Society has referred to the urgent necessity of Legislative action for the establishment of Reformatories and Industrial Schools to meet the constantly increasing evil of hundreds of neglected children who prowl about our streets, bearing the rudiments of every thing that is vicious and injurious to their temporal and eternal welfare, and so inimical to the well-being of the community of which they are members.

In the Report for 1861, was said,— "At meeting after meeting does this raging plague force itself upon the notice of the Committee of this Society, and cause the deepest grief and apprehension."

At the present time, instead of any abatement of the evil, the Committee cannot find language in which to express how terribly the mischief has increased, and what fearful depravity and misery arising therefrom is constantly forced upon their notice.

At the Annual Public Meeting of this Society in 1862 a Special Committee was appointed to take action upon this subject, and confer with the then Colonial Secretary as to the remedies necessary. Many meetings were held at the Archdeacon's; and, after a minute examination of all the statistical data, and of the results arising in Great Britain from the establishment of Industrial Schools and Reformatories, it was unanimously agreed that the Government should bring in a Bill before Parliament for the initiation of such Institutions, and commence operations with a Boys' Reformatory at Ross, and a Girls' in part of the buildings at the Cascades. One half of the funds necessary to be raised by public subscription, and the other half by the Government. One half of the Managers to be appointed by the subscribers, and the other half by the Government. The Committee subsequently, to strengthen the hands of the Government, joined in a Petition to both Houses of Parliament, copy of which appears in the Report for 1862.

To the great disappointment of the Committee, the Draft of the Bill laid before Parliament by the Colonial Secretary did not embody their conjoint Resolution, but was merely permissive, and did not pass into law.

Mr. Sherwin subsequently brought in a Bill similar to the defective one alluded to, which was carried. However, as private benevolence alone was necessary to bring it into operation without any contribution from the Government, no result of any moment has been achieved.

Late papers from Victoria state "that there are 1000 children in the Industrial Schools in that Colony, the number having been augmented by 400 since the commencement of 1865, and the cost of maintenance, including clothing and education, is Seven shillings per head per week."

Even Queensland, so progressive in prosperity, is obliged to take action upon this subject; and vigorous proceedings are projected to repress mendicancy, and compel idle and dissolute parents to support their children or suffer punishment for the neglect.

In the Hobart Town Report for 1864 it was said—"That the co-operation of all the Australasian Colonies in some comprehensive scheme to repress the gigantic and increasing evil (erratic habits of labourers, and abandonment of offspring, often illegitimate) which is overwhelming so many charitable institutions is imperatively required."

Notwithstanding the Act in force in this Island to prevent men leaving the Colony without providing for wives and children left behind, while almost innumerable cases are known to the Committee where the Act has been evaded, they are not cognizant of one instance in which the enforcement of the Law has prevented such desertion.

The Executive Committee of the Society has ever strenuously endeavoured to procure that all children fed by it should attend some school, and the Registrar has been strictly enjoined in his visits to their homes to enforce this determination. Nevertheless, it is constantly violated; and the Committee having no power of compulsion, can only act upon the parents by requiring the children to eat their food at the Soup Kitchen, and no part of it to be allowed the parents.

The enormous extent to which neglect of education prevails throughout the Colony is palpable by an examination of last year's "Report of the Board of Education."

At the Census in 1861, the children of both sexes from 5 to 15 years old in the whole Colony of Tasmania amounted to 19,349. There can be no doubt the number in 1864 was considerably more, yet the average daily attendance at the Public Schools, at the corresponding ages, was only 3448. Supposing that as many more are attending private schools or being educated at home, a calculation that is thought by some to be more than the reality, then not more than one-third probably of the present number of children from 5 to 15 years of age are being educated in such a way as to fit them for intelligent and useful members of the community hereafter.

Even Hobart Town itself, with public schools within a very short distance of every person desirous of having their children well taught, shows no superiority in school attendance in proportion to population than the Colony at large. At the 1861 Census, the children from 5 to 15 years old numbered 4279. The average daily attendance last year at the public schools was 757, many being under 5 years old. If there were an equal number privately taught, then little more than one-third were receiving a scholastic education. Supposing, however, that all the children above 12 years old not at school were employed in some industrial way, domestic or otherwise, then we have about 1500 children in the City of Hobart Town alone receiving no scholastic teaching whatever.

The contemplation of such a mass of ignorance as this festering in the midst of a city where education is so easy to be obtained must cause every far-seeing philanthropist the direst apprehension for the character and welfare of Tasmania in the future. It is evident that nothing but stringent compulsive measures can induce many parents to have their children educated. While heartless parents can pander to their own vicious and dissolute habits by trading on the earnings of their children as beggars, thieves, or prostitutes, in vain will public schools throw wide their portals to give them secular instruction, in vain will Christian temples gladly receive them to be taught their duty to God and their neighbour.

With deep thankfulness have we learnt that the Government contemplate to endeavour to provide a remedy for this deplorable condition of the youth of Tasmania, by laying before the Parliament now sitting a liberal, comprehensive, thoroughly statesmanlike scheme to be passed into law. May the Giver of all good be with our Legislature, and overrule their judgment to adopt a Bill so wise, beneficent, and necessary, and, in our opinion, so well calculated to avert the dangers we have depicted!

It will then remain only for the Government to promptly and vigorously carry its provisions into operation; and it is to be hoped that every good Colonist in the Island will liberally and earnestly second their philanthropic exertions.

We have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your very obedient humble Servants,

E. SWARBRECK HALL, *Chairman of the Executive Committee.*

WILLIAM JOHNSTON.

ARTHUR DAVENPORT.

T. J. CROUCH, *Hon. Secretary.*

The Hon. JAMES WHYTE, Esq., M.L.C.
Colonial Secretary.