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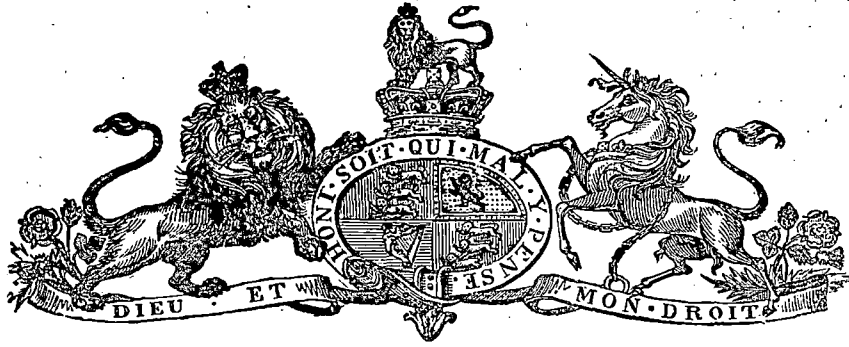
T A S M A N I A.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

QUEEN'S ASYLUM.

CORRESPONDENCE RELATING TO APPRENTICING CHILDREN
AND POWERS OF GUARDIANS.

Laid upon the Table by Mr. Scott, and ordered by the House to be printed,
June 17, 1873.



Queen's Asylum, New Town, 4th February, 1868.

SIR,

I TAKE leave to forward you copy of a letter I had the honor to address to your late predecessor in office, in reference to apprenticing children from this Institution.

Owing mainly, I believe, to the change of Government that shortly afterwards took place, no action was determined on; notwithstanding, the principle was highly approved of by His Excellency the Governor.

As, however, I have no hesitation in stating,—quoting from Report of the Royal Commission,—“that the vices to which so many of the children apprenticed have been addicted” is *not* from “the neglect of moral training and teaching” whilst in the Asylum, but in a great measure from the treatment and want of consideration shown them by their employers whilst out of it, the necessity for some change is apparent.

By the 12th Annual Report of the Melbourne Orphan Asylum it appears that Girls are bound until they arrive at the age of 17 years, and Boys until they reach 16 years of age.

At the time of engagement the employer is required to pay the sum of £5, to be placed in the Savings' Bank for the benefit of the employed at the end of term of apprenticeship, if fulfilled satisfactorily; but if otherwise, it is apportioned to a fund for other objects. And should the employer not be satisfied with the child within 3 months, the child may be returned, and £2 of the five be retained as a forfeit to the funds of the Institution.

It would be difficult, I am aware, to adopt a similar arrangement in this Colony: and, therefore, shortening the periods of apprenticeship, and compelling money payments however small, from 6*d.* a week and upwards as pocket-money, would most surely act beneficially.

I would therefore repeat my conviction,—

1st. That no child be apprenticed for a longer period to one service than 2 years.

2nd. That, for the first 2 years of apprenticeship, proper clothing, maintenance, and Sixpence a week as pocket-money be given.

3rd. That, for the second period of 2 years, independently of clothing, &c., the sum of One Shilling and Sixpence be paid per week.

4th. That, for any remaining term, either Two Shillings and Sixpence a week, or, if desired by the employer, a fixed rate of wages sufficient to enable the apprentice to supply proper clothing for him or herself.

These suggestions vary but little from those enunciated two years since: a maturer consideration of the subject, however, has led me to believe the ideas now submitted will not only be more practicable but more advantageous in every respect.

I have, &c.,

J. COVERDALE, *Principal.*

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.

(Copy.)

Queen's Asylum, New Town, 20th March, 1866.

SIR,

THE system of apprenticing children from this Institution has of late more particularly been forced upon my consideration, and I have, therefore, the honor to address you on the subject.

The present method of apprenticeship consists in binding a child to a particular service until it attains the age of 18 years.

The time thus indicated depends of course upon the age of the child when indentured, and varies from 4 to 6 years; and the only equivalent given for services during that period is comprised in necessary clothing and maintenance.

Such are the conditions, but without waiting to enquire to what extent they are properly carried out, I will at once proceed to state the alterations I think desirable on the subject:—

1st. That no child be apprenticed to any single service for a longer period than two years at any one time.

2nd. That the first two years of apprenticeship clothing, &c. as at present be provided; that, for the second period of 2 years, a small rate of wages, say, £6 per annum in lieu of clothing; and that, for the remaining term of years until 18 a larger rate of wages, say £8 per annum, be paid, also in lieu of clothing.

By this or other similar kind of arrangement the relation of Master and Servant will be better established; and except in extraordinary instances, when the Law allows of the cancellation of Indentures, neither the employer nor the employée need look hopelessly forward, when they do not suit each other, to the termination of the original engagement for a longer period possibly than a few months.

Irrespective of this, money payments will hold out more inducement to good conduct, together with more self-respect in the matter of clothing, and will tend at any rate to give a status to that class so disparagingly known as Orphan School Apprentices.

Again, in a common sense point of view, whilst short contracts are desirable, it is equally clear that "a labourer is worthy of his hire;" and although there can be no objection to an employer re-engaging an apprentice, that apprentice should have the benefit of improved services expected to have been acquired by previous labour.

In conclusion, I would add that I see no difficulty in carrying out the proposed measure for the future; nay, farther, that advantage might be taken in respect of it with the present returned apprentices.

I have, &c.,

J. COVERDALE, *Principal.**The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.**Colonial Secretary's Office, 1st May, 1873.*

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to forward the enclosed Memorandum, addressed to the Guardians of the Queen's Asylum for Destitute Children, which you will be good enough to submit to them at the next meeting.

(Signed) JAMES R. SCOTT.

The Principal, Queen's Asylum, New Town.

MEMORANDUM.

I HAVE the honor to forward to the Guardians of the Queen's Asylum for Destitute Children an outline of amendments to existing legislation which the Government deem desirable to propose with the object of improving the condition of children apprenticed from the Institution; and I shall feel obliged if the Guardians will favour me with such observations on the question as their experience may prompt them to offer.

1. *Wages to Apprentices.*—I am desirous to introduce a system adopted in some kindred Establishments, and recommended by the Royal Commission on Charitable Institutions in 1871, of requiring a small amount to be paid to apprentices as wages; and am inclined to suggest that an apprentice should as a rule receive Sixpence (6d.) per week until he or she attains to the age of fourteen (14) years, with a gradual increase thenceforth in each year until during the last year of the term the amount would be Three Shillings (3s.) per week for Boys, and Two Shillings and Sixpence (2s. 6d.) for Girls. In fixing this average amount we have to consider on the one hand the probable value of the labour rendered, and on the other the danger of seriously diminishing by too high a rate that demand for apprentices which I believe is at present quite equal to the supply. I propose also, in consideration of the ages and qualifications of many of the inmates, to fix by legislation merely a maximum or ordinary scale, giving full discretion to the Guardians to lower or forego in special cases. Of the wage proposed, it is intended that one half shall be paid to the apprentice and the other half to the Guardians, to be by them placed in the Savings'

Bank, and paid to the apprentice at the end of the term. The Guardians could thus hold out an incentive to good behaviour on the apprentice's part, by having power to make forfeits in cases where misconduct caused a child to be returned to the Asylum, or to become again a burden upon the Revenue.

2. *Sending Children on trial.*—I think it would be beneficial that definite powers should be provided, in cases where the Guardians see fit, to send children on trial for a short period prior to entering into the ordinary Indenture of Apprenticeship.

3. *Guardians to cancel Indentures.*—Also, that the Guardians should have power to cancel Indentures where they consider that the course now necessary—of proving misconduct in a Police Court—would have an undue influence on the career of an apprentice. I would observe that, although it is most desirable to abolish the existing legal necessity of resorting to a Police Court in every case, consideration must be given to the abuses which may arise from a too easy release on the part of employers from the obligations of the Indenture; while the disposal of discharged apprentices is a question also involved.

4. *Army, Navy, and Merchant Service.*—I observe that boys trained to the Band have been, in the Mother Country, readily received into the Army and Navy. 277 boys were thus disposed of from the various pauper schools in England during 1870. I see no reason why local legislation should place any restrictions on the choice of the Guardians in respect to the Navy, Army, or Merchant Service, although the existing Admiralty Regulations may render the Naval Service impracticable at the present time.

5. *Maintenance by Parents.*—I believe that there exists a disinclination on the part of the Guardians to initiate legal proceedings under the 18th Clause of the Act 25 Victoria, No. 5, for recovering the cost of maintenance, mainly on the ground that it has been represented as doubtful whether Justices of the Peace would issue an order against parents who might plead in defence that they were willing, as well as able, to maintain the child at their home. I am, moreover, aware that the Guardians in dealing with applications from parents, are bound to consider the welfare of the child, and not the mere ability and inclination of the parents to have charge of it; while I suspect that many applications are made by parents when the children, after an education at the public expense, are approaching an age fit for being apprenticed; parents then discover their ability to maintain their children, and desire to have them restored when their labour is becoming of some value. On these grounds I would suggest the adoption of a system in force elsewhere, that the Guardians need not surrender children to parents until the cost of their past maintenance while in the Asylum has been defrayed.

In the Report of the Royal Commission before alluded to, there are other recommendations specially affecting the Queen's Asylum which can be, if thought desirable, carried into effect without new legislation beyond the supply by Parliament of any additional money required. The extension of industrial training, and the supply to an apprentice of an outfit free of any distinguishing feature, and other minor suggestions, would involve additional expense which must be first sanctioned by Parliament, while the age, qualifications, or duration of training of children at the Asylum before they are apprenticed are, I believe, at present all carefully considered by the Guardians in every case.

I shall be glad to receive from the Guardians any further suggestions they may desire to make.

JAMES R. SCOTT.
Colonial Secretary's Office, 1st May, 1873.

*The Guardians of the Queen's Asylum
for Destitute Children.*

Queen's Asylum, New Town, 2nd June, 1873.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to return the enclosed paper of suggestions, which you were pleased to forward me for the information of the Guardians of this Institution, and to inform you that those suggestions have been fully considered by the Board at its meetings with the following results:—

“Suggestion No. 1—Wages to apprentice.” Passed.

“Suggestion No. 2—Sending children on trial.” Passed.

“Suggestion No. 3—Guardians to cancel Indentures.” Passed, with addition of the words “with the consent of the Master.”

“Suggestion No. 4—Army, Navy, and Merchant Service.” Passed.

“Suggestion No. 5—Maintenance by Parents.” *Not* passed, it being considered that sufficient powers are embodied in existing Acts of Council on the point.

In conveying the decision of the Board upon the several foregoing points submitted, I am requested, on behalf of the members, to acknowledge the courtesy shown them in referring the matter for their opinion, and also in asking “for any further suggestions they may desire to make.”

The question “of an outfit free of any distinguishing feature” to apprentices leaving the Asylum, as mentioned in your Memorandum, was unanimously adopted; whilst, at the same time, it was deemed advisable that the minimum age for apprenticing children should be 13 years.

As respects the powers of Guardians, the following are the Resolutions adopted by a majority of the Board:—

“That the control and direction of the Queen’s Asylum should be vested in a Board of Guardians appointed by the Governor in Council, to consist of not less than five members.”

“That, among other matters of detail, regulations should be framed by the Government for the guidance of the Board.”

“That the Board should appoint a Chairman, who should be the recognised medium of communication between the Government and the Institution.”

“That the Board should nominate, for the approval of the Governor, all officers of the Institution.”

“That the proposed expenditure for the Institution should be annually recommended by the Board.”

I have, &c.,

(Signed) J. COVERDALE, *Principal.*

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.

Colonial Secretary’s Office, 12th June, 1873.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 2nd instant, containing the result of the consideration given by the Guardians to the suggestions forwarded with my letter of the 1st ultimo.

With reference to the latter portion of your communication conveying the Resolutions adopted by a majority of the Board with reference to the powers of the Guardians, I have to request that you will inform the Board that, though press of business will prevent that consideration being given to them at the present time which so vital a change in the government of the Institution demands, I shall take the necessary steps to acquaint Parliament with their views upon this important matter.

I have, &c.,

(Signed) JAMES R. SCOTT.

The Principal, Queen’s Asylum.