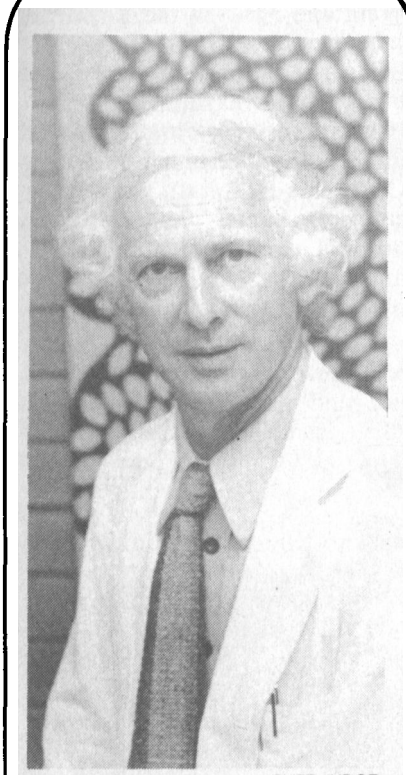

CLIFF JUDGE

Some Children at Risk in Victoria in the 19th Century

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INTRODUCTION

The Gold Rush in 1851 meant sorrow and suffering for many adults. The story of children of this period is not as well known. The roving life of parents in search of gold, their fluctuating fortunes and frequent fatal accidents in the mines contributed to the plight of their offspring. In 1852 Canvas Town on the west side of St Kilda Road, in Melbourne, held over 7,000 people. There were, of course, many waifs and strays who suffered the hardships of a canvas town and the general social misfortune of the times. The ground was swampy and children's diseases often swept the encampment.[8] Death was commonplace. There was also a large number of children in gaols in 1858, not because they had committed any crime but because there was simply nowhere else to go.[19] Finally a number of children during this era were confined to workhouses by magistrates.

ACT OF PARLIAMENT

In 1864 the Victorian Government passed its first *Neglected and Criminal Children's Act* and as a result industrial schools were set up throughout Victoria. The government saw some of them as a kind of kibbutz. They expected them to become self-supporting, and each child was to have a fruit tree. Silk spinning was to be developed, and a castor oil industry began. So much well-meant psychology was intended to stop them from becoming members of the so-called "dangerous classes".

The schools were situated in St Kilda Road, Bendigo (Sandhurst), and on the ship, "The Nelson". Three reformatories were also set up, one in Sunbury, one in Abbotsford, and again on a ship, the "Sir Harry Smith", in Hobson's Bay. The latter was seen not so much as a kibbutz as a Royal Naval College. In the other reformatories children were employed in stonecracking and roadmaking. Most of these schools were not new buildings. A. W. Greig says that, in fact,

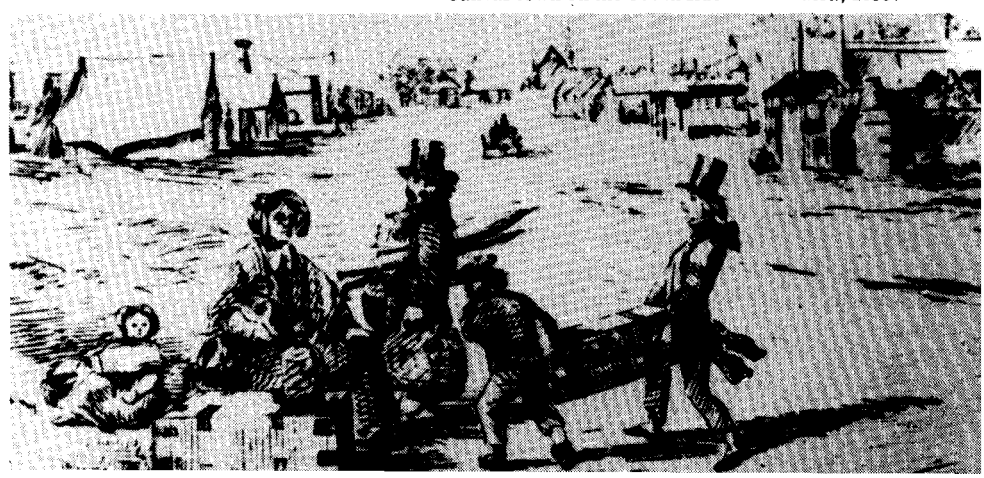
. . . a quarantine station, immigrant's shelter sheds, military barracks, a penal hulk, a gaol, a warship and a powder magazine were made successively to do duty in sheltering of children, the one characteristic being common to the whole, viz.: utter unsuitability.

DISASTER

Industrial schools and reformatories were a total disaster. Even the Premier of Victoria described them in 1889 as little less than prisons, while the reformatories were a little less than hell. One critic of the time described them as being a "legalised gateway to hell". Disease and death among the inmates was an enormous problem. At one time, of 1,095 children in the schools, 400 had measles, and there were many deaths. Even so, many people expressed the opinion that admission to an industrial school provided an easy way out for parents, and that if it were made too easy for a child to come under Government care, more children would be abandoned.

On the other hand, a police

Canvas town on the South side of the Yarra, 1853.

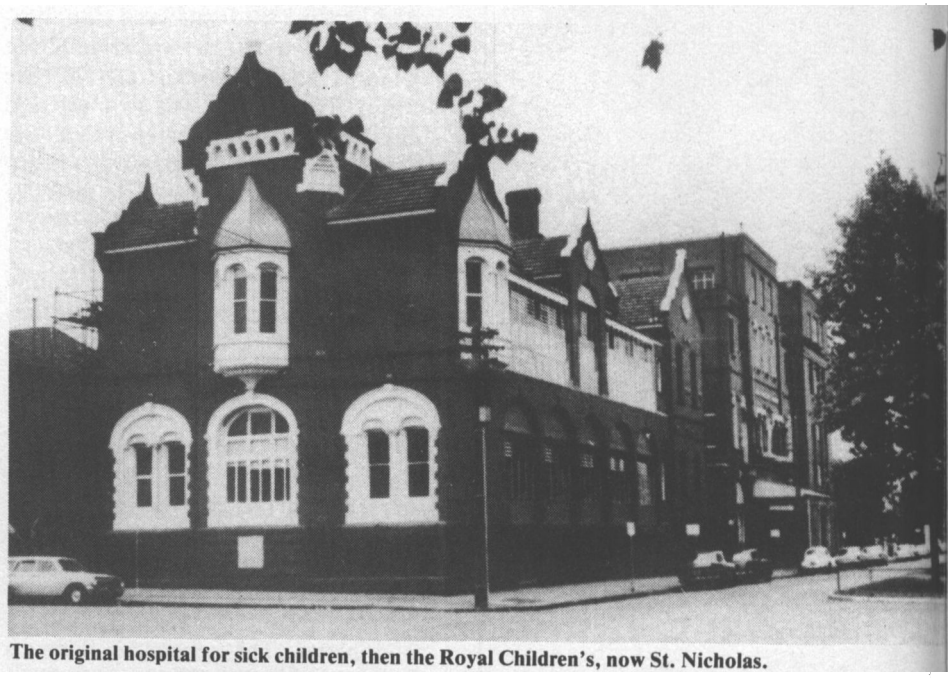


magistrate of the day, Evelyn Sturt, pointed out to a Royal Commission that if in fact the children were not committed, many parents would attempt suicide.

BOARDING OUT

Finally, in 1871, the Government passed another Bill to enable children to be boarded out in private homes throughout the State. They had little alternative, as institutions were finally condemned as being "utterly destructive of delicacy of feeling".[14] Hundreds of children were boarded out immediately, thus relieving the institutions of the problems of terrible overcrowding and disease. One hundred ladies' committees were set up throughout the State to supervise this "baby farming",[6] as it was sometimes called. Occasionally, the committees had to recommend that children be returned to industrial schools but generally speaking "baby farming" was a huge success. Frequent changing of school was one minor problem. Many foster parents preferred to send their child to a State school, but such attendance had to be stopped as soon as a priest found out, as Roman Catholic children were required to attend Roman Catholic schools.[9] "Baby farming" was a forerunner of modern foster care and adoption (there was no legal adoption in Victoria until early in the twentieth century). However, there were anomalies in the system. A number of single parents had to hand their children over to the State because they had to work to live. There were no pensions for widows, while the State paid allowances to foster parents. Rightly, the single parents asked not only for their children to be returned but also for an allowance.

The Government had envisaged that industrial schools would train young men and women to develop Victoria and eventually to populate it, but these hopes evaporated and during the 1880s all the schools were emptied. The schools which a decade previously had accommodated 2,300 children were at last found to have been an extravagant mistake. Commander Evans, who was in charge of the equivalent to the Social Welfare Department in 1883, reported that 18,199 children had been boarded out. There were, of course, no social workers to follow up cases and one can only imagine that the community coped in a way in which the institutions had not.



The original hospital for sick children, then the Royal Children's, now St. Nicholas.

THE PRINCES BRIDGE SCHOOL IN ST KILDA ROAD

This school was sited across the present Prince's Bridge and adjoined the Victoria Barracks. Canvas Town had been sited adjacently. The Princes Bridge School began in 1857 in buildings which had previously been used for homeless immigrants, the so-called "Public Houseless Immigrants' Home".[17] A. W. Greig, whose father conducted the school for the first 27 years, has described the buildings as totally unsuitable for maintaining children.[17]

The ages of the children held there ranged from infancy to late teens,[8] but the majority were under ten years of age. Dr Youl protested again and again in the Royal Commission that such places as Princes Bridge and Sunbury were nothing but "infant asylums". Even the Hospital for Sick Children, founded in 1870 (the forerunner of the Royal Children's Hospital), was unable to care for babies, and indeed this hospital would not admit children under two years of age for a number of years after its opening. When the Hospital for Sick Children did conquer the problem of sterile milk it was only by keeping a "hospital cow" in the grounds of the hospital in Carlton.[4] In earlier years, at the "Immigrants' Home" at Princes Bridge, wet nurses had been employed. It was thought that one of the problems of wet nursing was that some women did it just for the money (12 shillings per week), to the neglect and detriment of their own rightful children who might still need to be on the breast.[15] Eventually, an application to be a wet nurse was considered only from a mother who had lost her child.

Despite the advantages of breast feeding, the mortality rate for in-

No. 7. The wet-nurse must give the whole of her breast-milk to the school child, and give it no other food unless by the directions of the medical officer.

fants and young children in the home was four times the level of mortality in the population generally.

Older children were sometimes admitted to the home in a filthy state and clothes sometimes had to be cut off. The children were often starved and lice in their hair were common. The entire Princes Bridge School was described as being infested with vermin.

One of the most troublesome and handicapping complaints was ophthalmia. This complaint was serious because of its prevalence and the fact that it frequently left children blind. It seldom occurred in the community, but it thrived in the overcrowded industrial schools and reformatories in Victoria. The *Lancet* reported that it also occurred in children's homes in England.[15] The Princes Bridge School was badly affected and in 1865 there were 200 cases amongst some 600 children resident at the time. Such illnesses accounted for a large part of the sum total of sickness which, at any time in the school, affected about 22 per cent of its population.

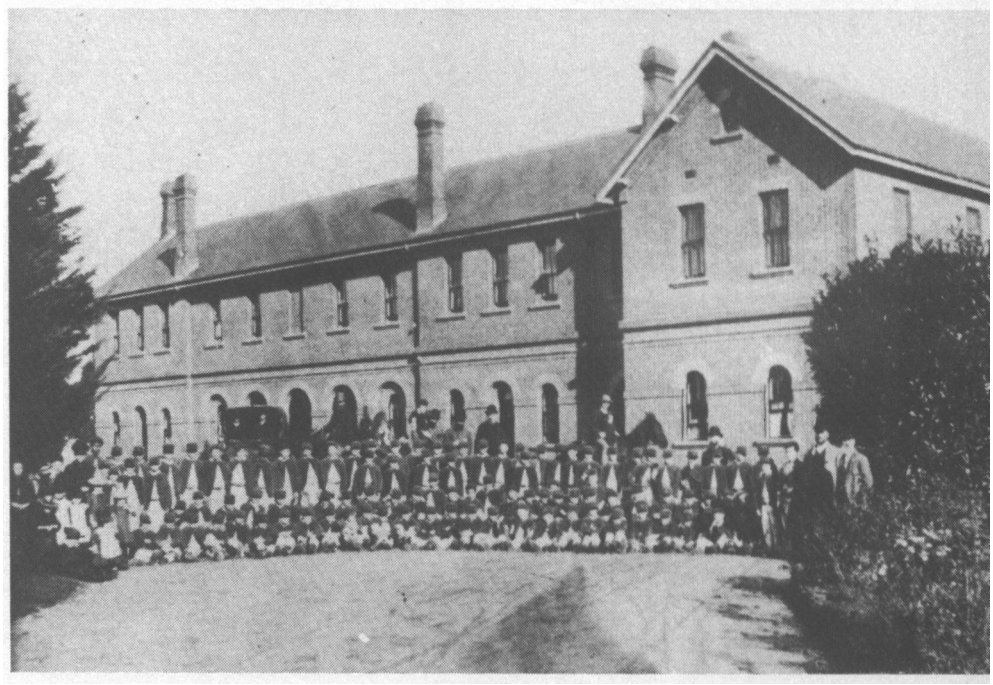
SUNBURY SCHOOL

Church industrial schools of this time, such as the Abbotsford and Geelong convents, were generally free of illness and this was attributed to the careful supervision of the nuns. The Protestant (State) schools were so bad by comparison that Dr Youl suggested putting everyone in Catholic schools regardless of his religion. This was an outrageous suggestion for the period, and a frontal attack on the philosophy of child care of the day, namely, obedience to God. The Ballarat Industrial School (a non-religious body) was the prototype which came to fruition, and the only instance of the nearly successful fulfilment of the Government's dream to train Victoria's neglected youth for life and work. These schools, Abbotsford, Geelong and Ballarat, had the advantages of very small numbers, and it was in the overcrowded schools, such as Princes Bridge and Sunbury (subsequently the Mental Hospital), that the problems really arose. Emotional deprivation may seem in retrospect to be a minor problem compared with starvation and disease, but one wonders how at Sunbury, with a population of some 500 boys under ten years of age, they felt any security at all. It is recorded by Dr Youl, when on a visit there in 1871, that not even the children's names were known to the staff. Birth dates of waifs and strays, of course, were frequently not known. The statutes of the time laid it down that all children whose birth date could not be ascertained should be regarded as having been born on July 1.[13] (Presumably a child's estimation of his own age in years gave some clue.) Dr Youl also complained to the Royal Commission into industrial schools in 1872 that there were no privies at Sunbury and no cookhouses, and that the children were mustered by staff on horseback as though they were sheep.[15] The boys were said to be spiritless and, in perhaps a nice euphemism for masturbation, victims of the "deadening influence of unexercised affections".

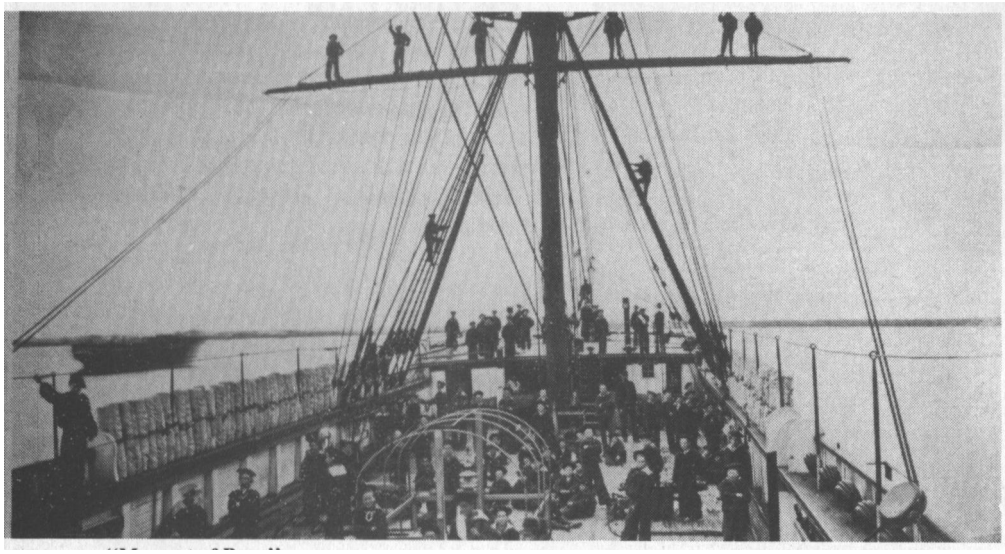
GEELONG GAOL

Another industrial school had been set up in the Geelong gaol, a place considered to be most unsuitable and described as disastrous. Dr Youl described it as too cruel to believe possible. Here the children

The Ballarat Industrial School



slept in corridors. In 1872, a staff member of the Geelong gaol school was found to be guilty of "grievous misconduct toward a child". A leading article in the *Geelong Advertiser* of the time tells that feelings about the industrial schools were running high in Geelong.[5] The local medical officer, Dr Mactier, was held to account for the abundance of skin and eye diseases affecting the children. The populace was also indignant that a nurse from the school had stayed out all night with an officer from a wool ship.[3] A visit from the Inspector of Industrial Schools did not placate the people.[4] His assessment of the situation was not impartial enough, presumably, for non-government opinion. It seems that the subsequent public airing of these events by the newspapers was one of the factors influencing the initiation of a Royal Commission into industrial schools.



"Men out of Boys"
Boys on board a bulk in Hobson's Bay.

THE PENAL HULKS

One solution of the social welfare system of the day was to place criminals and delinquents on hulks in Hobson's Bay (the mouth of the Yarra River). Several of these hulks, the "Nelson" and the "Sir Harry Smith", were for young boys. The then Chief Medical Officer, Dr William McCrea, was a great proponent of the maintenance of this "hulk" living,[14] on the grounds that it made men out of the boys.[8] He also recommended it because the boys would not wear out shoes while there. His critics, and there were many, felt that it made sailors out of the boys at a time when the whole idea was to populate and develop the Victorian countryside; what Victoria needed was farmers and colonists, not sailors.

RIGOROUS LIFE

Life on the hulks was rigorous; even so a number of boys relaxed in homosexual relationships.[15] Finally each boy had to be confined to his own cell. Hammocks were sometimes used, but sleeping on the bare boards was more the order of the day.[16] Dr McCrea at one stage attributed the lowering of the death rate from influenza to the cessation of the habit of sleeping on bare boards. Enuresis also appears to have been a problem and was treated with "sesquichloride of iron".[16] Fortunately disease on the hulks was less prevalent than in the industrial schools, but this can probably be attributed to the fact that to be placed on one of them the child had to be a healthy delinquent, rather than a half-starved waif, possibly with insufficient intelligence to be delinquent.

NED KELLY

Ned Kelly, born in 1854, is known to have been imprisoned in his teens for a short period, and it seems more than likely that he was placed in the hulk "Sir Harry Smith" as this was the only boys' reformatory until the Jika reformatory was commenced.

THE JIKA REFORMATORY

The Jika reformatory was part of Pentridge prison and was set aside for delinquents. The recorded reasons for admissions appear in retrospect to be unimportant, but subcultural backgrounds must often have played a part. The cruelty here was so bad that in 1878 the boys rioted and wrecked the wooden buildings.[12] The riot started after one of the boys called a wardsman a "barracouta", and one of the main conclusions of the subsequent Royal Commission into the riot was that corporal punishment was far too severe. A minor conclusion was that the dormitories were too crowded and that this led to immorality. The rules concerning corporal punishment were strict. No boy was to receive corporal punishment for a first offence. The second and third offences entitled him to six "stripes". More than three offences entitled him to 12 "stripes". A lash was not allowed, only a cane. The bare flesh was not to be caned, but this rule was often evaded by beating the boy in his night attire. Then, if made to bend forward, his nightshirt went above the popliteal fossae and the strokes were nicely inflicted on the calves, although supposedly meant to land on the posterior. However, in the months prior to the riot, no such ploys were needed, as flogging rules were frequently broken. One pathetic instance was of a boy who complained to the Prison Superintendent about unjust treatment from the reformatory school teacher, Mr Robin. (Mr Robin was once a teacher at Scotch College. Prior to his appointment at Jika he had worked at

Sunbury Reformatory. He had been transferred from Sunbury because he flogged the boys too much.) The boy was told that he had no right to complain about a flogging before he had, in fact, received it. The Superintendent gave him a flogging for this. When he returned to the school room Mr Robin gave him another. The Board of Inquiry into the riot thought this unjustified.

dercut heeled shoes, bell-bottom trousers, tight black coat and wide-brimmed hat.

Flogging was advocated as the cure by most experts. Objections, like those of Sir Redmond Barry, were exceptional. Church attendance and obedience to God were seen as the cure of many a social evil.[18] While the polar extremes of a parent's duty were symbolized on the one hand by attendance at Sunday School and beating on the other, there were, sometimes, grey areas in between when the child's own position merited some attention. The still existing system of monitors in our State school system is evidence of the lingering survival of a system of reward which was in 1887 built into the *Juvenile Offenders Act*. "Habitual idleness" was expected to result in crime. Even an outspoken protester like Dr Youl, who had described Sunbury Industrial School as a "legalized gateway to hell", maintained that flogging should be meted out for indecent exposure.[14] A low intelligence did not excuse a youth from this form of punishment. In 1872, a small stunted youth with a weak intellect was brought before Mr Sturt, stipendiary magistrate, for exposing himself in the willow-walk at the Botanic Gardens. He was sentenced to two months' imprisonment and 25 lashes with the cat-o'-nine-tails. Only occasionally in Government reports do any of these eminent gentlemen suggest that a mother might have an important role to play.[14] While the domestic life of the day may have allowed matriarchal discipline, in public men were expected to give lip service to the dignity and adulation of the paternal role. They were also expected to take the blame for wayward boys although occasionally the punishment of parents was condemned.

No. 4. The child must be treated with proper attention and kindness. It must be kept very clean and suitably clothed as regards the season of the year. Special care must be taken to protect the child's head and spine when exposed to the sun in hot weather, without, however, heating or oppressing the child's head with unsuitable covering.

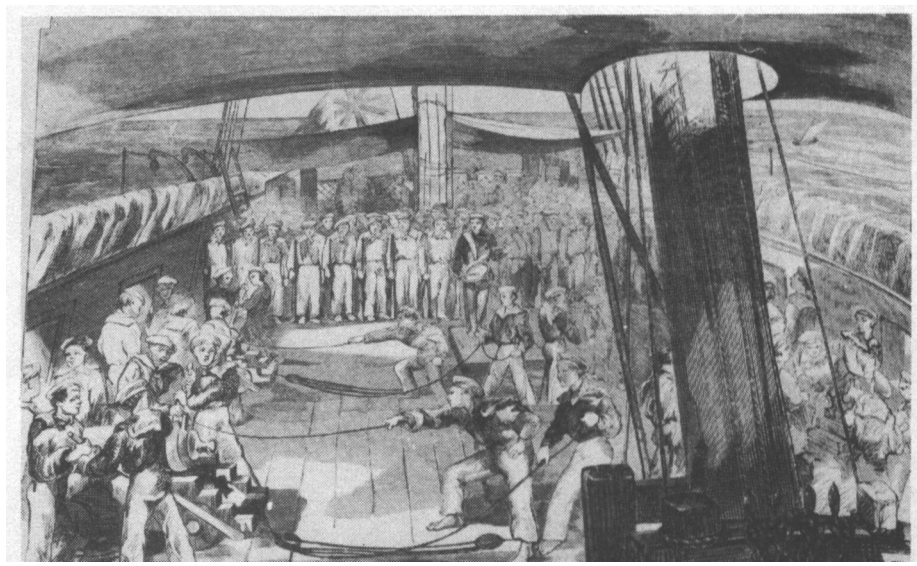
FLOGGINGS

The records show that a number of boys had as many as 70 to 90 floggings to their credit. Reporters were allowed to witness floggings and the prisoners sometimes became heroes. The Board heard evidence of bruises from flogging lasting for six months, and of infected flogging wounds becoming infested with maggots.

PUNISHMENT IN GENERAL

Flogging was regarded as one of the most effective disciplinary measures of the day, not only in reformatories but also in ordinary life. Government reports, with statements by eminent gentlemen of the day, refer time and time again to the fact that the teenage problem ("larrikinism") was due essentially to insufficient paternal discipline on the one hand, and insufficient religious training on the other. The desirable end result of obedience to God was an honest and truthful child. Honesty was a *sine qua non* for the idealized version of childhood. Larrikins were identified by their dress rather than their habits. Their dress resembled contemporary modes, namely, high un-

Within Jika reformatory, flogging was the punishment next in order of severity to solitary confinement. Boys (from nine years of age on) could be put in "solitary" with only bread and water, for up to 48 hours.[13] Unlike adults they could not be kept there for more than this, but could be returned again after a further 24 hours.



Training ship boys to repel boarders

Attitudes to delinquent girls were not as explicitly irate as those toward boys. Boys were larrikins who needed the lash. There was little of a protective nature in such an attitude. Girls were occasionally beaten but the attitude was essentially protective, in perhaps a masculine and patronizing way. A life on the streets as a prostitute was the focus of much of the fear. Housework was advocated as a cure-all, but, perhaps with the exception of carting manure, farmwork was also advocated.[14] Girls could be licensed out for housework at the age of 12 years.[8] Finally, some delinquent girls were sometimes seen as quite beyond the pale in any case. They could not be managed at all[14] and one bad sheep could spoil the whole flock.[17]

PUBLIC CONCERN AND CHARITY

The problem of neglected children was certainly not unrecognized, especially by the wives of many well-known personages. The wife of Bishop Perry was instrumental in setting up the Hospital for Sick Children. The hospital originally was considered necessary, not to provide the most highly specialized type of paediatric medicine, but to fulfil a social need. Dr John Singleton was a general practitioner in Fitzroy. He possessed Messianic drive, and he saw that the social need was as relevant as the medical.[7] He was intensely interested in the development of the Hospital for Sick Children as a solution to social evils. Needless to say, the hospital later had to restrict the admission of purely social cases, as naturally it depended almost solely on charitable donations and deeds for its running costs. The health needs of the industrial schools were in no way answered by the establishment of this hospital, which eventually had to restrict bed occupancy to no more than two children from industrial schools at any one time.[2]

Training ship boys at mess

LESS MOTIVATED

Protestants were less motivated to establish children's homes than Roman Catholics, for the latter provided a disproportionate number of the waifs and stays. However, some of the wives of parishioners of St James Cathedral in West Melbourne did band together, even as early as 1843, to start what was to become the Melbourne Orphanage.[1]

DISEASE

Disease became a problem for this institution, and in 1854 the children had to vacate the premises in the city and transfer to some tents in the grounds of the home of James Simpson, in Kew. By 1876, it was not just an orphanage. Direct aid to the true mothers of the children was being advocated. Such an idea was too radical, however, and had to be rejected. The Melbourne Orphanage still exists under the name of the Melbourne Family Care Organization, but has had several locales meantime. It now practices the policy advocated in 1876 by working with problem families, and not just providing beds.

RAGGED SCHOOLS

Similar groups of community-minded ladies started the so-called "Ragged Schools".[6] These schools were supposedly to educate children in poor circumstances. Julian Thomas, the author of the *Vagabond Papers,* discourses upon them. The children in these schools were poor; for example, they attended school without shoes. It was, however, not their poverty which forced the closure of these schools. The teachers were determined to inculcate strict religious ideas in their pupils. The parents objected to this rigid training and stopped sending their children, so that the schools were finally forced to close.

In the nineteenth century in Victoria the social, medical, psychological, and emotional handicaps which beset many children seem, in retrospect, to be immense.

HARDSHIP

While reports of hardship cannot be ignored, the experimentation in the beginnings of social welfare as we know it today, and the foundations for the institutions which we still maintain, demonstrate the initiative and zeal of those members of the community who recognized the problems around them. Though the panacea for juvenile deviation has

often been seen as institutionalization, there have been exceptions, and the Royal Commission of 1872 was forced to declare that "all systems of public charitable relief have a direct tendency to augment the evil they are designed to cure". It is estimated that there are some 100,000 children in Australia at the present time in "at risk" situations and it is hoped that this review of past experiences may help us not to duplicate the early mistakes.[18]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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