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EDITORIAL.

CHILDREN IN WORKHOUSES.

We publish in another column a letter which has been addressed to the President of the Local Government Board by the officers and members of the Executive and Parliamentary Committees of the State Children's Association, in relation to the Draft Poor Law Institutions Order, so far as it affects children. We have already shown that those best qualified to judge consider the Order retrograde in so far as it affects the nursing in rural workhouses, now it appears that those concerned with the welfare of the children, under the care of the Poor Law, are equally dissatisfied.

It is well known that the years from three to five are some of the most impressionable in a child's life, and association with adult paupers at this period cannot fail to be detrimental to children of this age. Poor Law Children of three have frequently to be removed from the workhouse nurseries, and at present it has been the practice of many Boards of Guardians to pass them on to scattered homes, where their presence is welcome and useful to the older children, or to board them out, thus removing them from the workhouse environment at the earliest possible moment.

But the new Draft Order, while making it impossible for Boards of Guardians to retain children permanently in workhouses, fixes the age until which they may be maintained there, at five years, and the State Children's Association are naturally apprehensive that the less progressive Boards of Guardians will think themselves justified, by the new Draft Order, in adopting this retrograde course and indeed, since its appearance, the Children's Committee of one Board have already advised the Guardians not to remove the children from the workhouse until that age.

The Association insist on the importance of the years from three to five in the children's mental and moral development, and draw attention to their meaningless existence in the workhouse, to the lack of open-air life, to the fact that those responsible for them can do no more than attend to their physical needs, and that even in this particular they are frequently assisted by pauper women.

To nurses the importance of the children's physical development specially appeals. These children of the State are often the offspring of diseased, mentally deficient, under-sized and sometimes vicious parents, and the great importance of these years in regard to their physical development if they are to be afforded the happiness and health which are the right of every human being, and grow up of value to the State instead of a burden upon it, cannot be over-rated. Every nurse knows that these children handicapped as they are by their parentage need the utmost care, and the details of their health need constant supervision and attention. Indeed it is not too much to say that to establish homes for Poor Law Children both under and over five years of age in charge of experienced nurses, on the lines of the Home for Homeless Children at Fallow Corner, N. Finchley, which has done such good work under the supervision of Miss Kingsford and Miss Wright, would be of incalculable benefit in raising the standard of the national health.

There the children when they arrive at school age attend the local school, still remaining part of the big family in the only home they have ever known. We commend the principle upon which this happy and well managed Home is founded to the attention of the President of the Local Government Board. The mothering of Poor Law Children is a work to which trained nurses might well devote themselves.

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