

"BOARDING OUT JEWISH CHILDREN IN
MASSACHUSETTS,"

MR. MAX MITCHELL, BOSTON.

MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Owing to the lack of adequate means for caring for the large numbers of dependent children in most of our cities, I have advocated the placing out system, which had long been in my mind as the only solution of the growing problem of children in institutions, and especially those not eligible for the institutions. I could see the possibilities of success, while realizing the difficulties that we would have to overcome.

Since 1890 the Free Employment Bureau, supported by the Baron de Hirsch Fund, has placed a great many people throughout the New England states, and many have taken up farming; some have been occupied thus for six or eight years. On Sundays, I spent my time visiting these people, canvassing for homes, and among them we found our first homes, not, however, sufficient for the number of children under our charge. In fact, very few homes were satisfactory for that purpose.

We then advertised in the Jewish newspapers, announcing that we wanted Jewish homes for children, paying from two to two and one-half dollars per week and supplying clothing and medical attendance. For infants and children under two years we pay \$2.50 per week; for children two years and over we pay \$2.00 per week. We received replies (some in "Yiddish," some in English) from all over the country, more from other states than from our own; some wished four and five children; one woman wanted thirty; others wanted one or two. As the Jewish paper is in circulation all over the United States letters came from as far as San Francisco. Again we received a number of applications from our own city, which we declined. We selected the most desirable from our own state and adopted the following system:

Every application made to us by a family desiring to board a child or children must be accompanied by a letter of recommendation from a prominent business man, selectman, a rabbi, or, if there be no rabbi in the community, a clergyman, stating how many rooms the family occupies. Sometimes we have to correspond frequently to obtain a satisfactory application. When a home seems desirable, we send out one of our investiga-

tors, to ascertain the conditions and surroundings. In order that the investigation may prove satisfactory the following conditions must be complied with: The home is not to be in the center of a large city; it must be in the country and have large grounds, to serve the children as playground. There must be good sanitary conditions, and each child must sleep alone. The family must have good morals and a good reputation in the community. There must be provision made for the children's daily attendance at school and assurance that good moral influence will be exerted over them. After this the application is submitted to the state board of charities (Division of Minor Wards), who re-investigate in about the same manner. The homes when satisfactory (in cases of infants) are licensed; for the older children they simply inform us of the result of their investigation. Here I wish to mention that the licensing is done for the purpose of keeping track of the infants placed out and to prevent one family from boarding more than two infants.

After a case has been found deserving and a child or children accepted and brought to our office, they undergo a thorough examination by a physician, and if healthy are provided with the proper outfit and taken by our visitor to the boarding-home; if sick they are placed in the hospital. After that our visitor calls once a month, without notifying the people when she is coming. Thus she always takes them unawares, and is more likely to find out the moral condition of the home than if the people had been prepared for her visit. In some cases the parents call once a month, when the children are first taken; afterwards, if it does not interfere with the bringing-up of the child, they are allowed to visit more frequently. In cases where we find that the visits of the parents may interfere with the bringing-up of the child, or where there are both parents living, but divorced, we have the children brought to our office once a month and the parents are allowed to see them in the presence of our visitors.

The state visitor also calls once a month to find out whether the rules regarding homes are strictly adhered to. If they find them unsatisfactory they revoke the license and we are notified to that effect, and we remove the child.

Each month the boarding families receive the money for the board at the office, or it is sent by mail to their homes. In sickness

we have a reliable physician of the place in attendance. He must be recommended by some responsible people of the community in which he lives. We have been fortunate, however; we have had only two sick children during the year.

In our office the envelope system is used, and all bills and items connected with a case are filed in the envelope, saving time and clerical work. We take only such cases as can be cured; by cured I mean where the parents can be made self-supporting. We received applications for fifty-four children; twenty, which we found hopeless, we turned over to the city and state, and took care of thirty-two ourselves. Of the thirty-two we have been able to return twenty-four, as the parents have become self-supporting during the past year. The other eight are in a fair way to help themselves shortly. Our entire expenditure for caring for these children was \$940.06, which covers only about half the actual outlay for board, clothing and medical attendance; the balance was paid by the parents, who, after placing their children, were in a position to go out to work. Soon after establishing themselves they contributed part and later the whole amount of the board. A close supervision is kept over the parent, and as we place most of them at work, and are in touch with the employers, we manage to keep track of their circumstances. At first, they pay fifty cents, then a dollar, increasing as their income increases, until they pay the full amount of board, clothing and medical attendance.

In this way, not only have the children been cared for, but the ties of responsibility of the parents have not been severed. The burden has been lifted; still the responsibility has rested on the parents. Two of the parents died while the children were in our care, and they were adopted by private families—those who boarded them.

It is a pleasure to notice the attachment that springs up between the children and the families who board them. Whenever a child has to be returned to its parents, I think of the good home and care it is leaving to return to its home, at the best in a less healthful location.

In my opinion there is a large field for this work, and for the state of Massachusetts I have great hopes. It can not be expected that success will come without effort. My experience teaches me that children brought up in these families are more natural

than those brought up in institutions. They receive from the families love and care, which under more fortunate circumstances they would receive from their parents.

It has taught me that through this work we accomplish a triple education: we educate the children how to live; we educate the parents who visit the boarding houses and thus see the different modes of living, and at the same time educate those who wish to board the children to live up to the standard, so that they may be permitted to board our children.

Results prove that we were right to begin this work though it will take years to achieve success. It teaches that unless work is done by capable people it can do more harm than good, and that it requires personal service. You will find that in the history of almost every boarding institution it took years to establish a sufficient number of good families in which to place children, and so it has been with us. Some of our first applicants for boarding children have been weeded out and replaced by others more competent, and the applications made to us now are more fitted for our purpose. Again, after some experience, an association will be better able to select the proper homes for children of different temperament.

It also illustrates that there are numbers of married people without children who will take these children with the actual intention of adopting them later.

"THE ORPHAN GUARDIAN SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA."

DR. BERNHEIMER, OF PHILADELPHIA.

I well remember some references to the Familien Waisen Erziehungs Verein that were made when I went to the religious school and the synagogue under the rabbinate of the late Rev. Dr. Samuel Hirsch, the founder of the society. At that time the references made but a faint impression upon me, for I was not particularly interested in the solution of charity problems. Nor, I must confess, as I grew older and social work began to appeal to me more strongly, did the activity of this society come much more into my consciousness. There was no finely appointed building, no periodical parade of the children under its care, no great hullabaloo about the magnificent showing it was making. For thirty-