

A SUGGESTION FOR CHILD-PLACING

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Baltimore

The law of demand and supply fails, unfortunately, at the very fundamental necessity of human life. Demand something for the weal and progress of the race and ingenuity and skill will devise some means and ways of supplying the demand, but demand private homes for the dependent children and the supply is very far from adequate.

Possibly the future may better be enabled to equip the individual child with an individual home, which method of child-caring is now generally recognized as the best, but until that happy period comes our leading Jewish communities are alike, one and all, confronted by the same problem: How to find the proper homes and a sufficient number of them in which to place the dependent child.

In Baltimore the Jewish Children's Bureau, an organization composed of representatives from the various Jewish benevolent and child-caring agencies in the city, has, for its several years' existence, done most excellent and efficient work in caring for all the dependents brought before it. Regarding the private home as the superior method of placing the child, the Bureau has employed capable investigators to find proper homes, and while some homes have been found that came up to the requirements, there are still not enough to cope satisfactorily with the problem. Homes willing to accept children for a compensation of so much per week or month were often not up to the standard required, and those eminently suited to raise children were not willing to accept a child with or without compensation. When, as it often happens in all cities, the child-caring institutions are taxed to their utmost capacity, the problem then becomes even graver.

Why not try to find homes among the Jewish rural inhabitants? This question presented itself to me after observation of the good results obtained by the Henry Watson Aid Society in placing children in the rural districts.

The Jewish farming population has increased considerably in the past decade, particularly in the Eastern States. Through

the aid of the Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society, which offers both educational advantages and modern farming facilities to the men on farms, the average Jewish farmer today is intelligent, up to date and receptive to new ideas. Would not a home found in the country, which would bring the usually half-starved and wholly neglected little waif to the soil and make it acclimated to an agricultural pursuit in the very years when its mind is most susceptible to the influence of surroundings and environments, be of more benefit than any of the usual homes found in the city? And who could tell but what from this crude recruit to the soil might yet evolve the Jewish farmer of the future?

At the recent Convention of the Federation of Jewish Farmers, held in New York city, I had the honor of representing our Children's Bureau and making a formal proposition to the assembled farmers regarding the child-placing project. I had previously made inquiries and investigations to ascertain what degree of success had attended the placing of children in country homes by a New York institution and had found, on the whole, very favorable results, in fact, more satisfactory than that from the average city homes.

In making the proposition to the farmers I suggested that the Federation should establish a child-placing bureau, under the immediate supervision of the organizer or special field secretary already employed by the Federation; this executive, or an assistant, if need be, to find desirable homes, make all preliminary investigations and correspond with the various children's bureaus or organizations which should desire to place children in the country.

Also that each case should be carefully followed up by proper visitation and monthly reports submitted to both the Federation and the various child-placing agencies. The extra cost of administering this department would be met by a per capita charge upon the organization placing the child, which should also be responsible for the fare and other incidentals necessarily incurred in sending the dependent to its desti-

nation. To properly establish and develop this new department, the various child-caring agencies of the Eastern States should be interested and, if possible, be induced to co-operate with the Federation.

The farmers themselves seemed greatly impressed with the idea, even more so than had been expected. Their questions were both intelligent and pertinent to the subject. A goodly number seemed cognizant of the responsible task and duty incurred in caring for the well-being of a strange child. It is quite possible that some of them would make excellent foster-parents.

While the majority may have been attracted by the remunerative consideration, there were some who actually were willing to care for a child without recompense, but in nearly all cases very young children were requested—some with an aim to adoption, others desiring companions for their own young children. Undoubtedly, there were some also who hoped to profit by child-labor, but these could very readily be eliminated after proper investigation.

Another question of interest that awoke critical discussion was the religious education to be given the children, as the farmer confronts a problem in giving a school, and especially a religious, education to his own children. From the general consensus of opinion expressed by them, it seemed that they hoped for a happy solution of the educational problem when they had a sufficient number of children in the vicinity to warrant the employment of a Hebrew teacher.

It appears that the idea took root with some of the representative farmers, who, subsequently, on their return to their homes,

did not wait for an executive committee to be appointed to act upon the question, but individually made inquiries as to the qualifications necessary for a foster-parent. In one case a secretary from one of the local rural communities wrote on behalf of the entire community, requesting particulars. It was intimated that it would be desirable to introduce the project as a communal activity. Should the child-placing agencies meet the farmers half way the experiment would undoubtedly be interesting and useful.

No fear need be entertained that the child on the farm would be exposed to more hardships or in any way taken more advantage of than the child in the city home. As efficient and careful supervision in the country as prevails in the city would practically eliminate all undesirable homes, while the advantages over the city homes are many.

The country environment is both wholesome and invigorating to the physical and moral development of the child, and instead of the lurking evils of the city streets and the nickel theatres, with their indiscriminate pictures, there are the live pets, plants, flowers, insects, etc., most potent in their appeal to the heart and brain of the average child. Even the doing of chores (not overdoing, of course), such as the farmer's own child often does upon the farm, would be productive of energetic endeavor that could not but be of service to the child in later life. A healthy mind in a healthy body!—would not that be a splendid asset for the community to give the dependent child for a proper start in life?

WORK OF A SISTERHOOD

Josephine Miller

Newark, N. J.

The Jewish Sisterhood of Newark has a day nursery where children are cared for whose mothers are compelled for economic reasons to become bread-winners. Children are admitted from six weeks to six years and are kept after they enter public school until they are twelve years. Under this minimum age limit we obtain from the charities support for mother and child. The improvement noted in children

after the care given here is self-evident. Bathing, fresh air, sunlight, clean clothes and healthful food show the results desired. By this part of the work many cases of aid from the charities are avoided, while in numerous instances the home is kept intact that would otherwise be disrupted and necessarily add to those now in orphan asylums. As the children are regularly inspected by physicians, sickness is much