Introduction

This issue of *Youth Studies Ireland* went to print very shortly after the publication of the *Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse*, or the ‘Ryan Commission Report’ (Dublin: Stationery Office, 2009). The Commission (originally the ‘Laffoy Commission’) was formally established by legislation in 2000, one year after the government issued an unprecedented public apology ‘to the victims of childhood abuse for our collective failure to intervene, to detect their pain, to come to their rescue’. The Commission was concerned with the experiences of former residents of the industrial schools, reformatory schools and other institutional settings.

The reformatory schools dated from 1858 when the Reformatory Schools (Youth Offenders) Act certified a number of voluntary (mostly religious run) institutions as suitable for the reception and reformatory treatment of 12- to 16-year-olds committed through the courts. The industrial school system, also run for the most part by religious orders, began some ten years later and catered for younger children and those who committed only minor offences or none at all. As the Ryan Commission itself says, ‘although reformatory schools were established first, industrial schools soon surpassed them, both in numbers of schools and of pupils’ (p. 36, par. 2.08). There were never more than ten reformatories (and that was in the early years of their existence); while the industrial schools grew steadily to reach a peak of 71 just before the end of the nineteenth century, with a total population of 7,998 residents.

The following article was first published in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* in 1884 (vol. iv, 437–45), the same year that there was a strong endorsement of the industrial schools from the Aberdare Commission of Enquiry, leading to a rapid expansion in their number. The article is itself strongly supportive of, indeed enthusiastic about, the schools. The history of the industrial school system is probably not sufficiently well developed for the modern reader to judge conclusively the accuracy of what the writer, John Curry, Adm., had to say of the schools in his own time. But in the light of what the Ryan Commission has recently revealed (or confirmed) about the workings of the system in the twentieth century at least, there cannot but be bitter irony in reading such lines as: ‘What an advantage to have such homes for the poor destitute children in our midst! What blessings they bestow! What happiness and prosperity they create!’

Maurice Devlin
There is scarcely a priest in Ireland who does not frequently feel embarrassed by finding, in the region of his ministration, helpless and destitute children. To provide for such is always a work of great charity, and to do so satisfactorily is frequently a task of great difficulty, if not, an impossibility. The relieving officer, in most cases, will give them temporary relief, and the Poor Law guardians will offer them the shelter of the workhouse. But the workhouse is, admittedly, a bad place to bring up children. Idleness, meanness, and a spirit of dependence, together with a tendency to crime, are frequently the habits acquired in our Poor-law institutions. Nor is the system of sending out children to ‘nurse’ – ‘baby-farming’, as it is sometimes called – a satisfactory one. As a rule, such children are not well clothed, nor well housed, nor well fed; while their education, both secular and religious, is frequently neglected. Besides, the example and associations in which they move are not always such as children should have. Hence, the Poor-law system for relieving destitute children is not a good one, though if properly looked after, in some instances it may be turned to good account.

There is a better way to provide for such children than by sending them to the poorhouse or by ‘farming’ them out, and that is by having them committed to Industrial schools.

These institutions, if not called into existence in Ireland, were first legally recognised and subsidised by the Industrial School Act passed in 1868. This Act was slightly amended in 1880; and it is by virtue of these two pieces of legislation the schools in question do so much good to the poor classes and to the country at large. As Catholics enjoy them, they may be described as institutions under religious management and supported by public funds, where destitute innocent children, or juveniles who have manifested only slight tendencies to crime, are legally detained till they attain their sixteenth year, for the purpose of being so educated and trained that they may afterwards become useful and respectable members of society.

Industrial schools differ from Reformatories, as these suppose the juveniles to be convicted of some legal crime. The Industrial schools are open to juvenile criminals too, but only when the “criminals” are under the age of twelve. Juveniles convicted of crime under that age may be committed to either class of school, but the Governmental Inspector of Reformatories, in his report published in 1883, strongly urges on magistrates to send them, in preference, to Industrial schools, unless their criminal tendencies be very much developed.

Industrial schools are strictly sectarian. They are, as we have them, either exclusively for Catholics or for Protestants: and those for Catholics are all under the management and control of religious, and subject to Government inspection. There are Industrial schools for boys, and Industrial schools for girls – all separate institutions; and, in both classes of schools, the juveniles who would otherwise be the arabs of our streets, or the inmates of our workhouses, or prisons, are healthily housed, comfortably clad, abundantly fed, trained in secular knowledge and in handicraft for their success in after life, and carefully brought up in the knowledge and practice of their holy faith. A visit to one of our Industrial schools will convince even a person prejudiced against religious institutions of the superior care taken of the inmates of these places. The rooms are cheerful and healthy, the food is good and abundant, the clothing neat and warm and the children are clean, mannerly, healthy, and happy. Under the care of religious – generally of holy nuns – who feel a Christian love for
them, and who minister in a Christian spirit to all their corporal, mental and religious requirements, what an advantage children in Industrial schools have over those brought up in workhouses somewhat in the Oliver Twist fashion!

As proof of their efficiency we subjoin two extracts from the Government Inspector’s report published in 1883, one showing the interior working of the Industrial school at Strabane, selected at haphazard from the report, and the other showing the high name our Industrial schools in general have acquired:

**St. Catherine’s Industrial School for Roman Catholic Girls, Strabane.**

Certified 30th November, 1869

Inspected 20th September 1882

Average number of inmates paid for by Treasury 100

Voluntary inmates 7

Externs who attend the school-on rolls, 420 ; average attendance 297.9

*State of premises.* – A sum amounting to pounds £1,065 2s.6d was expended on the buildings of this school in 1882. It is now becoming perfect in all its details, and meets the warm approval of everyone in the district. The new dressing room and lavatory have been completed. Two new dormitories have also been provided.

*Health and general condition.* – One girl died from consumption and another from disease of the bowels in 1882. The health of the other children was excellent, and I never saw a finer set of girls that I have met amongst pupils of this school.

*Conduct and discipline.* – Very satisfactory. The manager reports that no serious fault was committed by any of the children during the year. They are very cheery and happy.

*Education state.* – This school is managed in connexion with the Board of National Education, and is examined by the District Inspector, as if for results. He writes:

I have not had time to examine this large school since the results examination last August, but no school in my district needs a second examination in the year less. There were about 350 children examined (including externs) for results last year, of whom a more than average proportion stood in the higher classes. Their answering in the ordinary subjects was excellent, especially in arithmetic, writing, and dictation, while a large number were presented in French, music, drawing, cookery, and other extra subjects with success. In fact this school was specially exempted from the operation of the rule limiting the number of extra subjects, owing to the very favourable reports made on the ability, method, and industry with which all subjects are taught, the elementary subjects not having been sacrificed as is in other schools sometimes the case, to the extra subjects.

Signed:

W. Nicholls,
District Inspector, National Schools
French, drawing, vocal and instrumental music are well taught. Some of the Industrial school pupils are paid monitresses under the National Board, and passed most creditable examinations for the appointment.

*Industrial training.* – The public laundry continues to give the greatest satisfaction. The work of the girls cannot be surpassed. The whiteness of the linen washed in the school is, I am informed, due to the water for the laundry being filtered before being used, and also to the bleaching on the hill.

Needlework in its different branches is well taught. The girls make all the clothes they wear, and work for the shops. They upholster mattresses and palliasses. They work fine embroidery in gold and silk.

Ten cows are on the farm, and a number of calves and poultry are reared. The girls milk cows, and make butter. They bake all the bread used in the establishment and are instructed in cookery and confectionery. The elder girls care their younger companions; each is instructed according to her capacity in the work, by which she can earn a livelihood when she leaves the school.

*Staff.* – Mrs. Atkinson and 12 Sisters of Mercy, with a laundress and school teacher, form staff of this establishment.

Total cost of the school in 1882, £3,091 16s. 4d. of which £1,065. 2s. 6d was for building. Cost per head, £18 18s. 9d. Industrial profits, £226 15s. 7d.

*Results, 1879–80–81* – Fifty-five discharged; 51 doing well, 2 since dead and 2 re-admitted to school. Many of the girls trained in this school are now in good situations.

Those who reside near the school visit it often, and a regular correspondence is kept up with others living in England, Scotland, and various parts of America. Several applications were received during the year for servants from ladies who reside in England, and know the girls from this school who are living in their neighbourhoods. One girl sends money from America to educate her brother before bringing him to that country. And another (also living in America) pays to further her sister in industrial training in this school.

So much for the efficiency of one of our Industrial Schools. What follows is the character the Inspector gives of our Industrial schools in general.

The Industrial schools of Ireland need no comment from me. They are considered by the most distinguished publicists of Europe who have visited them to be models on which a general system of technical instruction might well be founded. Their future progress depends on the reports of the two Royal Commissions now sitting. The members of both Commissions have, I am happy to say, expressed to me their approval of the management of the Irish Industrial Schools, and, I have no doubt, the system will develop, and tend towards the spread of technical education throughout the country.
What an advantage to have such homes for the poor destitute children in our midst! What blessings they bestow! What happiness and prosperity they create!

From the same report on Industrial schools we learn there were in 1882 forty of these institutions for Catholic girls and 12 for Catholic boys, 62 being the entire number in Ireland. The number of children in the institutions on the 31st December 1882 was – boys 2418; girls, 3660 = 6078. Adding 377, who were then absent on leave, we have a total of 6455 destitute children, most of whom are Catholics, who were being usefully, comfortably, and religiously brought up, saved from the criminal habits that poverty so frequently teaches, and protected from the snares of proselytizing societies.

It is pleasant in a country overtaxed with demands for charitable objects as Ireland is supposed to be, to find that the charitable work of Industrial schools is carried on by aid from the public funds. The Industrial Schools Acts allow this, but it is to be regretted they do not enforce it. They allow no grants for the erection of Industrial schools, nor for their enlargement, nor their improvement, though Acts authorize such expenditure for Reformatory; but they allow interest on the money expended on the buildings to be charged in the accounts, and they allow grand juries in the several counties to contribute for each child sent to an Industrial school from their county, and they authorize the Treasury to supplement the grand jury allowance to a sufficient amount. Accommodation being provided, and the house and premises approved of by the inspector, a certificate describing the building as an Industrial school, and able to accommodate a certain number, is given to the manager; and thereupon he is authorized, though not obliged, to admit suitable persons after a certain legal process has been gone through. On their admission the grand juries of the counties, or of the counties of the towns, or of the cities from which the children are sent, are at liberty to contribute out of the funds at their disposal for their proper maintenance. The Treasury supplements such contributions, so that considerable, if not adequate, remuneration is given to the managers.

On looking over the report of 1883, it is seen that 36 grand juries are ‘contributories’, and that only three in Ireland – those of Carlow and of the two Ridings of Tipperary – are not. It is not to be concluded that all the grand juries that contribute act up to the spirit of the Act; for, some of them give only a very limited patronage to it by paying towards the support of a very limited number of destitute children; while others contribute in a very miserly way even for a limited number. The contributions of the grand juries vary from half a crown to a shilling each week per child. The system is evidently very faulty, but nevertheless the amount given the Industrial schools annually is considerable. In 1882 grand juries gave £26,702; the Treasury £74,997; and the incomes from all sources were £120,177 against £143,843 expenditure.

The report so often alluded to in this paper is very satisfactory where it shows the efficacy of Industrial schools in the after life of those trained in them. Everyone knows how badly workhouse children turn out in after life, and it is therefore all the more to be rejoiced at when, as an almost universal rule children, of the same class brought up in these schools go on well in their subsequent career. In recent years, upwards of a thousand on an average leave them annually. Most have suitable employment provided for them before they leave. Some join Her Majesty’s forces, and some seek prosperity in foreign lands. A knowledge is kept up of almost all of them, and the influence their
education and training exercises upon them, is clearly shown by what is reported of those who left in the years 1879, ‘80 and ‘81:

Total number who left the schools in the three years 1879, ‘80–’81 was 3,029, viz., boys 1,308; girls, 1,721.

Of these, 15 boys and 8 girls were committed to Reformatories, 104 boys and 114 girls died in the schools, 18 boys and 32 girls for whose detention orders were deemed insufficient were discharged by the Chief Secretary, and 119 boys and 44 girls were transferred to other Industrial schools.

The total to be reported on up to 31 December, 1882, was therefore, 2,575, viz., 1,052 boys, 1,523 girls.

Of the boys, 24 died after discharge, leaving 1,028 to be reported on, of whom –

- 930, or 90.5 per cent were reported as doing well
- 22, or 2.1 “ “ “ “ “ doubtful
- 6, or 0.5 “ “ “ “ “ convicted
- 67, or 6.5 “ “ “ “ “ unknown
- 3 recommitted to school

Of the 1,523 girls, 46 have since died, leaving 1,477 to be reported on, of whom –

- 1,405, or 91.5 per cent were reported doing well
- 23, or 1.5 “ “ “ “ “ doubtful
- 43, or 2.9 “ “ “ “ “ unknown
- 6, or 0.4 “ “ were recommitted to an Industrial school.

The preceding table gives a proportion of 90.5 per cent., of males and 91.5 per cent, of females discharged from Industrial schools during the three years 1879 – ’80–’81 who are reported to have been doing well since they left the schools, and ‘in no instance can I trace’, says the Inspector, ‘that of the 1,523 girls discharged from Industrial schools during the period, any one of them was convicted of crime during 1882.

There is abundant proof in the above quotations of the advantage Industrial schools are to this country, and of how satisfactorily the system fits in with the conscientious requirements of its people. Though they are now pretty large and numerous and though they shelter thousands, yet they are not large enough for all they contain, nor are they adequate to the wants of the poor. They were overcrowded in ‘82, the Inspector tells us; they are so still. The writer of this paper had recently to make application in a score of schools before finding vacancies for three destitute orphans, and he finally succeeded in getting admission for them only after waiting a considerable time for vacancies to occur. There is no more meritorious charity then to relieve and train, as Industrial schools do, the helpless and destitute young; and it is to be hoped that such abodes for them will increase and multiply till juvenile beggars disappear from our streets, and our workhouses have none but the old and infirm. There are destitute children in every county for a least one male and one female Industrial school; and even if money had to be borrowed for its erection, its interest would be admitted as a proper charge in the accounts submitted to the Government Inspector. Seeing the vast strides made in sixteen years in the erection of upwards of fifty such institutions, it may be
reasonably hoped that the charity of the faithful, the sacrifices of religious, and the zeal and tact of the bishops and priests of Ireland, will soon supply all that is needed.

It may be useful to specify the classes of children that are fit subjects for admission to Industrial schools, and how an order for the detention is to be obtained. The Act of 1868 states that any two justices at petty sessions, or a divisional magistrate in the city of Dublin can make the required order on the application of anyone in a suitable case. Thereupon, the police take charge of the child, and are responsible for its safe delivery, free of all cost, to the Industrial school for which the order is made. Previous to the application, it is well to have the consent of the manager to admit the child in case the magistrates commit it, but if that be not done, the police are to take it to the workhouse till a vacancy is found, which is to be done within eight days. The Industrial school named in the order must be one ‘under the exclusive management of persons of the same religious persuasion as that professed by the parents, or, should that be unknown, by the guardians of such child. In all cases in which the religion of the parents and guardians of such child is unknown the said child shall be considered as belonging to that religious persuasion in which he shall appear to have been baptized, or, that not appearing, to which he shall profess to belong’ (31 Vic., cap.25, sec 14).

The following is a summary of the grounds upon which a lawful order for admission to Industrial schools can be made:

Under the Industrial Schools Act (Ireland), 1868 (31 Vic., c.25, s.11), the child must be apparently under fourteen years of age, and must also be –

1. A child found begging or receiving alms, whether doing so actually or under pretext of selling anything or offering anything for sale; or
2. A child being in any street or public place for the purpose of begging or receiving alms whether actually doing so or under pretext of selling anything or offering anything for sale; or
3. A child found wandering, and not having any home; or
4. A child found wandering and not having any settled place or abode; or
5. A child found wandering and not having proper guardianship; or
6. A child found wandering and not having visible means of subsistence; or
7. A child found destitute and being an orphan without any parent; or
8. A child found destitute and having a surviving parent who is undergoing penal servitude or imprisonment; or
9. A child who frequents the company of reputed thieves.

The 13th section of the Industrial Schools Act (Ireland) 1868 (31 Vic., c.25) specifies also a class additional to the classes above enumerated, and requires that the child shall be apparently under twelve years of age ad charged before two or more magistrates in petty sessions, or before a divisional magistrate in a Dublin police court, with an offence punishable by imprisonment, or a less punishment, but who has been convicted of felony, and who, in the opinion of such magistrates or divisional magistrate, ought (regard being had to the age of the child and the circumstances of the case) to be dealt with under the Act.
In any of the foregoing cases the detention order may be made by two
magistrates in petty sessions, or a divisional magistrate in a Dublin police court.

In addition to the classes above specified the Prevention of Crimes Act 1871
(34 & 35 Vic., c.112, s.14) enacts that, when a woman is convicted of crime, as
defined by the 20th section of that Act, and a previous conviction is proved
against her, her child or children, fulfilling all of the following conditions,
namely:

(a) Under fourteen years of age,
(b) And under her care and control when she is convicted of the last of such
crimes,
(c) And who have no visible means of subsistence; or are without proper
   guardianship

may be sentenced to detention under the Industrial Schools Act (Ireland), 1868,
either by the court before which such a woman is convicted, or by two magistrates
in petty sessions, or by a divisional magistrate in a Dublin police court.

By the Act of 1880 (43 and 44 Vic., c.15) a child under fourteen years of age is a fit
subject for committal to Industrial schools – who is 'lodging, living or residing with
common or reputed prostitutes, or in a house resided in or frequented by prostitutes
for the purpose of prostitution', or who 'frequents the company of prostitutes'.

From this summary, which is taken from authentic sources, it is evident that the
Industrial Schools Acts could be very extensively availed of in this country – even much
more so than they are – to the incalculable advantage of the poor. An amendment of
them, however, is much needed, giving means for the erection of suitable buildings,
making it compulsory for magistrates to commit in the cases specified, and requiring
grand juries to contribute uniformly and adequately. Were the laws improved in these
particulars, schools of Industrial education that a Catholic country could accept, would
soon be sufficiently numerous for our destitute poor. Industrial learning would spread,
and tend very considerably to revive the prosperity of Ireland.

John Curry, Adm.