

1866.
[SECOND SESSION.]

VICTORIA.

M R . . C O N N O R .

REPORT of the Board appointed by the Governor in Council to inquire into and report on the Charges preferred against Mr. Connor, Superintendent of the Prince's Bridge Industrial Schools.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 23rd May, 1866.

APPROXIMATE COST OF PAPER.

DETAILED PARTICULARS.	AMOUNT.		
	£	s.	d.
Cost of Preparation—Nil.			
Printing	1	17	4

[COPY.]

66 | 632

Sheriff's Office,
Melbourne, 26th April, 1866.

SIR,

I have the honor to forward herewith, for the information of the Governor in Council, the Report and Proceedings of the Board appointed to inquire into certain Charges which had been preferred against Mr. Connor, the Superintendent of the Prince's Bridge Industrial School; and I beg also to return the letter addressed to you by the Inspector of Industrial Schools, dated the 28th March, together with the enclosures relating to the case, and which were forwarded to me with your letter, No. 1148.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

The Honorable the Chief Secretary,
&c., &c., &c.

(Signed) CLAUD FARIE,
Sheriff.

[COPY.]

REPORT.

THE Board appointed by His Excellency the Governor in Council to inquire into and report on certain charges preferred against Mr. Connor, the Superintendent of the Prince's Bridge Industrial Schools, as contained in a letter, dated 28th March, 1866, addressed to the Inspector of Industrial Schools by Mr. Macfarlane, the clerk and storekeeper of the department, have the honor to furnish the following report, for the information of the Governor in Council:—

The Board assembled at the schools on Thursday, the 12th instant, and after hearing certain evidence, adjourned from time to time, as fully detailed in the proceedings appended hereto. It will be seen that the evidence, on oath, has been taken at great length; and although some of it may be deemed somewhat irrelevant, the Board considered that in an inquiry of this kind the utmost latitude should be allowed in the evidence on both sides, in the hope of eliciting the truth in a matter of such vital importance, not only as regards the character of the officer more immediately concerned, but for the interest of the important public institution with which he is connected.

The evidence—as will be seen, is principally that of the inmates of the institution—who almost, without exception, have sprung from the very dregs of society; and from their early

training not likely to be very reliable witnesses, and the contradictory and frequently improbable accounts which they give of many of the details of the different charges alleged against Mr. Connor render it very difficult to distinguish truth from falsehood.

The Board, however, feel bound to report that there is not apparently the slightest foundation for the gravest of all the charges preferred against the accused, viz. :—that he had introduced his hand under the clothes of one of the girls, “*and applied her hand to his privates.*”

The Board beg further to report that there is not sufficient reliable evidence to sustain any of the other charges as contained in Mr. Macfarlane’s letter.

But, while the Board acquit Mr. Connor of the very serious charges which they were specially called upon to investigate, they deem it their duty to report their opinion in reference to certain very improper and objectionable practices which came to their knowledge in the course of the investigation, and which, if permitted to continue, would strike at the very root of the usefulness of such an institution.

It appears to have been a common practice with Mr. Connor to go round and inspect the dormitories of the girls while they were undressing for bed, and even frequently to enter their bedrooms after they were in bed, without being accompanied by any of the female officers. This is admitted by Mr. Connor himself, *vide* his evidence, pages 67 and 68.

From the evidence of the attendant Nixon, page 44, Mrs. Kerr, page 15, and of Mrs. Briscoe, pages 5, 6, 7, and 8, it is obvious that Mr. Connor was in the habit of permitting some of the girls to indulge in too much familiarity with him, and also that he did not on all occasions observe that delicacy which he should have done in approaching at night the dormitories where a number of young girls growing up to womanhood were in bed. In Mr. Connor’s own evidence, page 75, he admits going into the girls’ bedrooms *when it was necessary*; but the Board consider such a thing should never have been necessary for him to do alone, when there were female officers on the premises whose special duty it should have been to attend on the elder female inmates and young children of both sexes.

At page 82 Mr. Connor again admits, in answer to the Board, that he went into Annie Welsh’s ward “*when she was ill and took tea to her at some such times.*” In the same page he says, he on one occasion found a little girl lying on the floor and crying, and that he put her into the bed with her sister Lizzie Murphy (one of the elder girls, with whom many of the witnesses allege he has been guilty of so many improprieties). On both of these occasions the Board are of opinion that Mr. Connor did what should have been performed by female officers only; and his doing so unaccompanied by any female officer, if not absolutely indecent, was certainly highly unbecoming and indiscreet.

In conclusion, the Board deem it only a matter of justice to all the officers concerned to record their opinion that they have had great difficulties to contend with in the establishment of such an institution, from the large number of inmates brought hurriedly together, in premises so utterly unsuited, both from the nature of their construction, and the insufficiency of accommodation, for the large number that have had to be provided for. The character and antecedents of the children and their parents have also, in most instances, been such as to render the task of looking after them anything but easy or hopeful, and it is most earnestly recommended that more suitable accommodation should be provided without any unnecessary delay, and that definite and peremptory regulations should be framed for the guidance of all the officers, having strict regard to the separation of the sexes, both officers and inmates, except, of course, in the case of infants, and young children, say under eight or nine years of age.

The appendix hereto comprises 144 folios of evidence taken by the Board. Seven exhibits marked from A to G inclusive, and Mr. Connor’s written statement, handed in after the conclusion of the evidence and marked H, but to which he has omitted to attach his signature.

There are also a number of original testimonials of Mr. Connor’s previous character and qualifications forwarded herewith, for the information of the Government, and which should be restored to him when the case has been finally dealt with.

(Signed)

CLAUD FARIE,
W. TEMPLETON,
F. CALL.

Melbourne, 26th April, 1866.