

General considerations and the statistics of our industrial schools alike tend to show that causes (a) and (b) are far less operative in New Zealand than in older countries; but (c) is an important factor, inasmuch as the tendency to flock into the towns from the country is not unknown as a feature of the life of these young countries.

II. The more immediate causes of juvenile depravity are,—

(d.) Inherited low physical and moral nature;

(e.) Weakness and want of control on part of parents, commonly producing as its fruit absence of self-control on the part of children;

(f.) The neglect and bad example of parents.

The causes we have principally to deal with are therefore (c), (d), (e), (f). Of these causes (c), and therefore also (b) and (d), would be partly met—

(1.) By any remedy that so ameliorated the economic condition of the rural population that they would not be tempted to forsake the comparative wholesomeness of the country for the temptations and vicissitudes of the towns (this is the form in which the case is stated by Morrison: in New Zealand the great loneliness of country life in remote places, the absence of opportunities for reasonable recreation, the greater attractiveness of town life, and to some extent, perhaps, also the too exclusively bookish training given in our public schools are causes of the influx into the towns that actually takes place).

(2.) By removing back into the country those who are in danger of succumbing to the temptations and vicissitudes of the towns.

Want of parental control (e) might often be lessened by bringing home to parents their responsibilities towards their children. It is not therefore desirable to diminish the burden of maintenance, or to take away from parents the duty of control, so long as there is any reason to hope that the evil will cure itself without depriving the child of its natural guardianship.

For the most part the course of juvenile delinquency passes through the following stages:—

(1.) The acquiring of nomadic habits, exhibited in truancy and vagrancy;

(2.) Petty thefts and other isolated offences against property;

(3.) More serious and habitual offences against property and offences against the person.

These stages correspond to successive periods of physical and moral development, that may be described as—the period of childhood, eight or nine to thirteen or fourteen; the period of growth towards maturity, thirteen or fourteen to sixteen; and the period of maturity, fifteen or sixteen to twenty-five.

In the great majority of cases young criminals begin by becoming accustomed to a nomadic life, and the greatest blow to juvenile delinquency would be dealt by stopping this at the outset. Too much emphasis cannot be laid on the necessity for preventing children from acquiring the nomadic habit. Day industrial schools (or truant schools) would afford a good means of stopping incipient nomadism, without lessening the responsibility of parents. A greater stringency of the compulsory clauses of the School Attendance Act, and a substantial increase of the fines for irregular attendance and habitual truancy, would bring home to parents the duty that, through weakness or neglect, they too often overlook, and the danger their children are running.

The truant schools should be staffed more fully, and with adult teachers only. Children whose school attendance was unsatisfactory could be committed to a truant school instead of being committed to an industrial school, or could be sent to a truant school even when committed to an industrial school, as a first attempt towards improvement. The parent would thus still have the onus of maintaining and controlling his child thrown upon him, and the lesson learnt would often be sufficient. Sometimes distaste for school or for any mental effort affords the first incentive to truancy; the instruction in these schools should therefore be shaped as far as possible so as to overcome that objection on the part of the child. If marked improvement were shown, a child could be sent back after a short time to the ordinary public school. It should be distinctly understood that the teacher of the truant school has duties and powers out of school hours, as well as in. It would be his duty to visit the homes, to ascertain the cause of absence, and to report at once any truancy or irregularity of attendance. Children for whom this remedy proved insufficient could be committed, as now, to an industrial school.