

It is now eighteen years since the Industrial Schools Act was passed, and there is no doubt that by means of the powers granted therein an immense amount of good has been done for the "children of the State," and therefore for the State itself. But the time seems to have arrived when the working of the Act and other questions connected with the care of orphan, destitute, neglected, and criminal children may be passed under review. The ideas set forth by Mr. Douglas Morrison ("Juvenile Delinquency"), and by other writers, have changed many of the opinions formerly current in regard to these matters; but in this colony these ideas require some modification in view of the almost entire absence of a hereditary criminal class, and in view of other circumstances in respect of which New Zealand happily differs from older countries.

Children that come under the care of the State may be roughly classified as—

(1.) Those who are orphans or those who are simply destitute, without any other abnormal characteristics.

The duty of the State towards these appears to be that it shall take the place of a parent, and accordingly put them as far as possible in the same circumstances as those in which they would have been placed if they had had parents capable of bringing them up in a normal manner. Boarding-out to carefully chosen foster-parents, under due restrictions, seems at once the most natural and most satisfactory method of dealing with these cases.

(2.) Those that exhibit various degrees of juvenile delinquency, including, of course, those who, being orphan or destitute or both, have not escaped a perceptible taint of evil. And it may be remarked here that the destitute child is more frequently than not of this class.

Unfortunately juvenile delinquency has not shown a marked decrease of late years in any civilised country, but in most countries it has, on the contrary, increased.

I. Its causes are to some extent the same as those that operate in the case of adult crime, and the problem cannot be attacked as a whole without dealing with the conditions that produce crime in modern society. The chief external causes of juvenile crime are,—

- (a.) The stress of the struggle of life;
- (b.) Bad hygienic surroundings, and consequent inferior physique;
- (c.) The temptations that result from overcrowding, and from the greater facilities for committing petty thefts with impunity that exist in towns as compared with the country.

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.