

punishments; at any rate, I am perfectly convinced that such means will never lessen the evil. One might as well attempt to quench a raging fire with a spray of rosewater, or to cure a cancer by the prick of a pin.

The treatment of young offenders presents much more difficulty than that of the classes previously mentioned, and it is hard to say what course it is best to adopt not only to punish such offenders, but to deter others from committing similar crimes; for, in my opinion, the chief object of punishment is that it shall act as a deterrent to those people who are endowed with criminal propensities rather than an act of revenge by society upon the wrongdoer, and this is why I advocate severe sentences for those who continually set the law at defiance. Prisoners under sixteen years of age are not often sent to prison in New Zealand, except on remand until they can be sent to an industrial school or otherwise dealt with, only two such offenders having been received in this Prison for the year, and they were sent for the above-mentioned reason. The general impression appears to be that when a young person is sent to prison he or she must inevitably become a hardened criminal, but I must confess that this is not my experience. No doubt many do return, some again and yet again; but so also do many of those who have been on probation, dismissed with a caution, or ordered to come up for sentence when called on—that is to say, there are certain people who, through one cause or another, appear destined to become confirmed criminals, many of them well educated, coming from respectable parents and good homes; nothing is able to turn them from their downward career. The two great factors in bringing about this state of things are drink and gambling, both growing evils, the latter particularly so. The English Prison Commissioners in their last report mention this difficulty of dealing with young boys, and they quote from the reports of Prison Governors strongly against imprisoning such offenders for very short periods. The Visiting Committee of the Bedford Prison urge that no juvenile offender be sent to prison for less than three months, "as it is impossible in most cases to gain any influence over a boy in a shorter time." There was a case in point in this prison some little time ago: A boy of thirteen was sentenced to six months' imprisonment with hard labour for wounding with a knife. His father strongly objected to the desire of the Court to send his son to an industrial school, and said he (the father) would rather have the boy sent to prison, which was done. While here he was, of course, kept entirely separate from adult prisoners; but the officers took a good deal of interest in the lad, and gave him much kindly advice, and when he was released he was physically and, I firmly believe, morally a different boy from what he was on admission, so great was his improvement in appearance and manner.

We have the First Offenders' Probation Act, under which the greater number of young offenders are dealt with, often, no doubt, advantageously to themselves; but there is, unfortunately, another side to the shield, and that is the very great increase of young colonial-born criminals. We used to pride ourselves that nearly all our criminal population was imported. Can we say so now? I think decidedly not. Out of the 213 prisoners received into this Prison during the year charged with felonious crimes, 120 were born in the colony, ninety-two being of European descent and twenty-eight Maoris; for less serious offences the number born as above was 256, of whom fourteen only were Maoris. Now, the majority of the first offenders among this large number expected to get off on probation without punishment. This shows the hold which the idea of probation has upon the minds of the people who are tempted to do wrong, and how little of a deterrent such ideas are likely to be; in fact, by very many the Act is looked upon as one which allows one crime to be committed without punishment, and I am convinced that any one who has more than a superficial knowledge of the subject, and who has studied it with an open mind, must arrive at the conclusion that this Act is responsible for a large increase of crime amongst youths and servant girls. All this shows the extraordinary difficulty there is in finding a panacea for crime, for no more humane Act was ever passed than the First Offenders' Probation Act, the weak spot in it being that it is the reverse of deterrent. No doubt many people will dissent from these conclusions, and they are entitled to their opinions; I simply give mine as one who knows the inner workings of this Act from the day when it became law up to the present time. I know also that many people say that our prisons do not act as deterrents, because there are such a number of recommitments. Well, to a certain extent this is true, but the prison system is not to be blamed for this, for, as I have already remarked, there are people whom nothing short of death or lifelong imprisonment will deter from committing crime.

Some few years ago there appeared in an English publication an article written by a clergyman, in which the writer came to the conclusion that the present system of prison discipline was less deterrent than that in vogue a century ago; and he arrived at this very startling theory by the study of statistics, which showed that there are now more recommitments than at the earlier period. This appears to me to be a most fallacious argument, and one which will not bear analysis. In the days when hanging was a penalty for sheep-stealing, &c., one would hardly expect to get a recommitment; nor would such a thing be probable if the offender had been transported for life or died of gaol-fever. Also, in those times photography was unknown, as were all the modern means of identification, so that it was quite possible for a person to leave a gaol in one county and enter one in the next as a first offender. But the chief reason for the number of recommitments is the modern practice of passing very short sentences for offences which would previously have been punished by death, transportation, or imprisonment for life. No one would dream of returning to the old brutal and degrading system (or, rather, want of system) under which prisoners were treated in those bygone days; but in our horror of it there is a danger of the pendulum swinging too far in the opposite direction, and a false sympathy arising if not for crime, at least for the criminal.

There were no escapes or attempted escapes during the year, but I have reason to believe that there was a plot on foot to make such an attempt; if so, the precautions taken at once and the vigilance of the officers proved sufficient to frustrate it.