

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06229-9 - Reformatory Schools: For the Children of the Perishing and Dangerous Classes, and for Juvenile Offenders

Mary Carpenter

Excerpt

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## REFORMATORY SCHOOLS.

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### INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

It is not needed, at the present day, to demonstrate the immense importance of the juvenile portion of the community to the future, and even to the present welfare of the state,—or to show the need of education to prepare the young to be good citizens and useful members of the community. The days are past when it was requisite to prove that the labouring classes can work better in light than in darkness, and that even if they cannot, the more favoured few have no right to withhold from the many God's best gifts. These questions we shall suppose to be settled. Nor shall we, in any way, touch on the topic at present so interesting to the public mind,—National Education, or refer to the systems pursued in the various public schools already existing for the labouring portion of the population, any further than to consider how far they can or cannot be applicable to the classes which form the subject of our enquiry. In like manner, if houses of correction and common prisons are alluded to, it will not be to offer any opinion on the plan and principles adopted in them, except as they bear on juvenile offenders.

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The subject of the present work is solely,—The children of the “perishing and dangerous classes,”—and the means to be adopted to raise them from that condition. Many remedies, more or less effectual, have been applied to mitigate or remove the evils, so multiplied and varied in form, amid which the infant population is springing up, rank and noxious as in a hot-bed of vice;—philanthropists of varied powers and in different walks of life, have laboured, and are labouring devotedly, for the removal of the causes of crime, however and wherever it manifests itself. We wish them all God speed, and sympathise warmly in their efforts. Yet none can prove effectual without setting right the main-spring of life, which can be done only by education.

That part of the community which we are to consider, consists of those who have not yet fallen into actual crime, but who are almost certain from their ignorance, destitution, and the circumstances in which they are growing up, to do so, if a helping hand be not extended to raise them;—these form the *perishing classes*:—and of those who have already received the prison brand, or, if the mark has not been yet visibly set upon them, are notoriously living by plunder,—who unblushingly acknowledge that they can gain more for the support of themselves and their parents by stealing than by working,—whose hand is against every man, for they know not that any man is their brother;—these form the *dangerous classes*. Look at them in the

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“PERISHING AND DANGEROUS CLASSES.” 3

streets, where, to the eye of the worldly man, they all appear the scum of the populace, fit only to be swept as vermin from the face of the earth ;—see them in their homes, if such they have, squalid, filthy, vicious, or pining and wretched with none to help, destined only, it would seem, to be carried off by some beneficent pestilence ;—and you have no hesitation in acknowledging that these are indeed dangerous and perishing classes. Behold them when the hand of wisdom and of love has shown them a better way, and purified and softened their outward demeanour and their inner spirit, in Schools well adapted to themselves, and you hardly believe them to be separated by any distinct boundary from the children who frequent the National and British Schools. Yet there is, and will long be, a very strongly defined line of separation between them, which must and ought to separate them, and which requires perfectly distinct machinery and modes of operation in dealing with them.

In the present chapter an idea will first be given of the amount of crime among the juvenile portion of the population in our large cities ; and it will be shown that this is co-existent in a great degree with absolute ignorance of the lowest kind, but still more with a striking deficiency in the nature of the education they have received. It will thus be proved that the present educational establishments for the labouring classes neither can nor will affect these perishing and dangerous ones, and that if we would

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effectually influence them, gratuitous ones of a different character must be provided for them. The objections made by political economists to such Schools will afterwards be considered and answered.

In order to become somewhat acquainted with the extent and heinous nature of the juvenile depravity existing in our very midst, we shall not have recourse to general statistical tables of crime, and for the following, among other reasons :—

The returns are generally of the number of committals, not of the number of individuals committed. Instances are known of one person having been committed 100 times, and among juveniles, re-commitments of 6, 8, or 10 times, are not unfrequent : hence the number of committals may show the frequency of crime, but not the number of criminals. But it will be only an approximation even to this. A clever young thief will go on for years committing daily depredations before his case is recorded in the annals of crime.

Even if we have the numbers before us of the juveniles committed during a series of years, we shall still be in danger of forming very erroneous opinions of the actual amount of crime, from ignorance of circumstances which have led to some particular course of conduct in the acting magistrates. For instance :—when we find that the number of boys from 7 to 14, committed to the Houses of Correction at Westminster and Cold Bath Prisons, and tried by jury in 1837, was only 67, and that in 1846-47, it

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## DANGER OF JUDGING BY STATISTICAL RETURNS. 5

was 277, we are appalled at the fearful increase; and not less so when we find that in this last year the summary convictions were 621, making a total of 898, while in the next, 1847-48, when Ragged Schools were in operation, the summary convictions rose to 1,129, the trials by jury being 131, making the fearful amount of 1,260. Might not the inferences be plausibly drawn from such facts, that in the ten years from 1837 to 1847, juvenile crime in its more serious aspect had quadrupled, and that in the very next year, when Ragged Schools were in active operation, it had increased by nearly 200, thus showing the ill effects of that movement. Sergeant Adams, in his excellent "Charge to the Grand Jury, of the Quarter Sessions of the County of Middlesex," 1849, satisfactorily explains this. In the year 1837, he tells us, "the rage for summary conviction was at its height, during the year of the parliamentary inquiry; and several police magistrates gave evidence in its favour, and the returns show the consequent rapid increase of committals, although the trials by jury remain stationary." (The summary convictions in 1837 were 1,031, making a total increase of 200 juvenile offenders over the preceding year.) "By degrees, summary convictions decreased, and the old constitutional tribunal was resorted to; and the consequence was that in the last year before the Larceny Act was passed, 1846-47, the number of committals *had decreased 200 on the committals of 1837, though the trials by jury quad-*

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*rupted the number of trials in that year.* The Larceny Act has brought summary conviction again into action in another form ; and the consequence has been that the committals of the first year of its operation (1847-48,) exceed the committals of 1837 by 162.” The effects of the Larceny Act will be again referred to ; but we make this extract here, to afford a clue to the detection of the fallacies which may be and have been founded on apparent facts. Another illustration may be given :—The numbers of juvenile offenders in Bristol during the last three years, have been 202, 164, 315 ; these figures would indicate a great increase of crime since the Ragged Schools have been in operation. But this increase is fully accounted for by the fact, that during the last two years a change has been made from 14 to 16, as the age under which young persons are to be regarded as children, thus including in the last returns a period peculiarly prone to crime ; these figures cannot, therefore, give us any certain result as to the increase of juvenile crime, or as to the effect of Ragged Schools in checking it. On the other hand, the last report of the Bristol Ragged School Society, states, “In the Schools in Temple parish, 9 boys were committed in 1848, only 4 were committed in the last year. Of boys attending the St. Philip’s Evening School, 12 were committed from April 19, 1847, when the School was opened, till the close of the year ; 11 in 1848 ; and only 4 in the last year. The diminution may in part be attri-

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#### AMOUNT OF CRIMINAL POPULATION.

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buted to the influence of the institution, and of the wholesome discipline of the Industrial School.” Those, however, who are fully conversant with the actual working and progress of such Schools, with the individual characters of the boys frequenting them, and at the same time with the existence, at least undiminished, of a very great amount of juvenile crime in that city, will probably attribute the diminution of the number of committals from the Schools to the fact, that though boys of vicious character will frequent such Schools at their first opening, and while they continue in a somewhat disorderly state, yet that they will seldom persevere in attendance, or endure the discipline of a well-conducted School, and hence cease to go to it.

Again: statistical returns may give a very erroneous idea of the amount of the criminal population in any district; this is shown in the following extract from the evidence of F. Hill, Esq., Inspector of Prisons, before the Committee of the Lords in 1847.\*

“With reference to the numbers of habitual offenders, in saying that it is smaller than is generally supposed, I do not mean to say that compared with the number of occasional offenders it is smaller, but that the criminal population is much smaller than is generally imagined, in consequence

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\* “First and Second Reports from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, appointed to inquire into the execution of the Criminal Law, especially respecting Juvenile Offenders and Transportation; together with the Minutes of Evidence taken before the said Committee, and Appendix and Index, 1847.”

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of the very large number of distinct offences which any one habitual offender commits where crime is his trade. I may mention in illustration of this, a case that came to my knowledge some time ago, of three families, consisting of 15 members. They were the families of three brothers, and it was ascertained that of those 15 members, 14 had been in the constant habit of making and uttering false coin. I made an estimate of the number of distinct offences which this body of criminals had committed; and it appeared highly probable, considering the issue of every separate coin as a distinct offence, that not fewer than 20,000 separate offences had been committed by those three families, considering every separate issue of a false coin a distinct offence. So large a number being issued by those families, and the families moving about, and appearing first here and then there, it would probably create in the minds of the public who could not put these facts together, a supposition that there was a much greater number of persons employed than was really the case. In many instances I have ascertained by inquiries of the police, the precise number of habitual offenders in a given town—for in small towns the criminals are frequently well known—and I have generally found the prisoners to be very small. By a reference to my second report, which contains much information on this subject, it will be seen, for example, that the town of Kinghorn, in Fife, containing a population of about 1,500, there were at the time of my inquiry just 9 thieves. Even in places of much larger size, the number of offenders appears to be often very small.”

While, then, we shall not enter on a minute statistical examination of the amount of juvenile crime, referring all who wish to do so to the published tables, and to such valuable works as Mr. Fletcher’s “Moral Statistics of England and Wales” (which, however, is not published), it will be important carefully to consider a few tables and statements on the subject, which, having been made by



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## INCREASE OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY. 9

individuals who have had peculiar opportunities of accurately investigating the subject, and delivered in to parliamentary committees, may be regarded as having great weight, as well as calculated to give a more distinct impression than mere general statements.

From a paper delivered in by Mr. Pearson, as part of his evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Lords, the following most important facts are selected :—

“ It appears from parliamentary returns and other authentic documents, that during the present century the number of commitments and convictions for crime has increased in this country greatly beyond the increase of population. In a period of 40 years, the population, 10 years old and upwards, has increased 65 per cent., while the proportionate commitments for crime have been augmented 494 per cent., and the convictions 625 per cent. Until the last 10 years, the returns do not specify the ages of the prisoners ; but, as appears by these later documents, the number of juvenile criminals has increased in a greater degree than even the mass of criminals at large. Thus the number of criminals under 20 years of age, committed to prison in the year 1835, was 6803, or 1 in 449 of the population, between 10 and 20 years of age ; while in 1844 they amounted to 11,348, or 1 in 304 upon the population of the same age. This increase of crime cannot be attributed to an increased degree of poverty and ignorance, for it has gone on in an inverse ratio to the accumulation of national wealth, and to increased means of education afforded to the masses. It is likewise worthy of remark, that although the last 3 years show a decrease in the number of commitments and convictions in respect of the whole population of England and Wales, (which the Premier and Secretary of State have, in Parliament, truly ascribed to the increased prosperity and industrial occupation of the masses of the people,) yet the

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stated decrease during those years is in respect of the adult population only ; as upon comparison of the two periods, the number of commitments and convictions of juvenile offenders has increased in the 3 latter years upwards of 7 per cent."

Mr. Pearson remarks, however, that though crimes have increased in number, they have been less aggravated in character, and that various changes which have taken place between the two periods of comparison may have had effect on the numbers of convictions, and prevent our considering the amount of actual crime, as truly indicated by them. Yet, on the other hand, he adds, "It is believed that the number of summary convictions for petty offences, in England and Wales, which do not find a place in the returns of commitments and convictions from which the foregoing calculations have been made, amount to more than three times the number of convictions at the assizes and sessions which form the basis of such evidence."

"I am very desirous," says Sergeant Adams, "of having this return in my evidence before the committee of the Lords.

The number of summary convictions under the Metropolitan Police Act, of children under the age of 16, in 1834, was . . . . .				1557	} 1820
The number of convictions of those tried by juries				263	
Summarily convicted in 1835 . . . . .				1624	} 1806
Tried by juries . . . . .				182	
Summarily convicted in 1836 . . . . .				1662	} 1825
Tried by juries . . . . .				163	
Summarily convicted in 1837 . . . . .				1819	} 1956
Tried by juries . . . . .				139	

"Among those summarily convicted as 'reputed thieves,' there are no less than 32 children of the age of 7 years ; and