

expensive mode of achieving their object; and, moreover, that in a longer or shorter time, it must break down from the evils which accompany it, but not before it has led them into troubles and difficulties greater than those which attended our abandoned transportation system.

I need only refer, perhaps, to one of these. The formation of a community composed mainly of persons of low moral type was proved by our experience to create a frightful condition of depravity, of which the records are to be found in the inquiries of Royal Commissions; and after the trial of many systems, it was found that transportation was only possible where there was a free community of untainted character, among which the exiles could be absorbed. To secure this result, it was found necessary, in our last experiment, to undertake to send out a free emigrant for every convict transported. These free emigrants, as well as the prisoners, had to be provided with passages, and secured from pauperism. The system, therefore, became exceedingly costly, and the Home Government found itself obliged, by liberal expenditure, to foster the accumulation of capital and the development of the colony. But since the chief benefit the colonists derived from the introduction of convicts, consisted in the large supply of cheap labour, it soon became apparent to the free emigrants that they might do better elsewhere, and, as nothing could prevent their re-emigration, it was soon found that they trickled away, and left the community to be formed of the convicts, who could not escape, and whom the other colonies would not receive. The system, in fact, broke down in that respect; we have been forced to retain our convicts at home, and, wonderful to relate, we find that, concurrently with the adoption of this system, our convicts, instead of increasing in this country, as was by some anticipated, have decreased in the most marvellous manner, so that, with a population 50 per cent. more than it was thirty years ago, we have less than half the number sentenced to penal servitude in a year, and the convict population whom we are maintaining in prisons has steadily decreased in numbers from nearly 12,000 in 1870, three years after transportation ceased, to below 10,000 at the present time.

If, then, we ask the French Government to refrain from inflicting such dreadful evils on our colonies, as must follow from their persisting in their purpose, we can also show them a better way of effecting their object, and one which will be much less costly than that which they contemplate. It may be well to point out, also, that if the French convicts get away to Australia, which is the only possible way they can ultimately dispose of themselves, they can of course get back to Europe; and, indeed, the Australian Colonies will probably find it necessary to return them either to the French colony or to the Mother-country.

Your obedient servant,
E. F. Du CANE.

Enclosure 3.

SIR,—

To the Editor of the Times.

The powerful letter published in your issue of yesterday, on the proposed deportation of French convicts, will be a valuable aid to Lord Rosebery in his generous efforts to arouse the attention of Parliament and the public to the attitude of the Australasian Colonies on this vital question. In your article of to-day, however, it is suggested that the writer "has perhaps exaggerated the political effects of the step which he so warmly deprecates." Permit me to point out, that the danger of conflict between France and the Australasian Colonies, and, therefore, presumably, between that country and the British Empire, is not only possible but imminent. There stands at present in the Statute Book of Victoria, an Act entitled the Criminals Influx Prevention Act, passed by the Victorian Legislature, and assented to by the Imperial Government in 1854, directed, it is true, against criminals from British possessions, but only needing the addition of half-a-dozen words to render it applicable to all countries or colonies. Such an amendment could not be disallowed by the Imperial Government, and would be in accordance with the opinion expressed by a former Minister of Foreign Affairs in France, M. Barthélemy St. Hilaire, that no objection could be made to the enactment, by the Australasian Colonies, of any regulations "to prevent the influx of criminals or to enforce their return."

It may be assumed as absolutely certain that not only in Victoria, but also in the remaining Australasian Colonies, laws similar to the Victorian statute of 1854 would be enacted within a very brief period of the passage by France of their *Récidiviste* Bill; and it is, therefore, to the practical working of this Act that I would invite public attention. Its provisions are made applicable not only to criminals who may have escaped from custody, but to any person whose sentence or sentences "shall not have expired for a greater period than three years previous to his arrival in Victoria." Any two Justices of the Peace before whom any such suspected person shall have been brought, are entitled to adjudicate on his case, and, if he be convicted, either to take bail that he shall leave the colony within seven days, or to cause him to be conveyed in custody to the country from whence he came, or to sentence him to hard labour for any period not exceeding three years. Additional punishments are provided for convicted persons remaining after expiration of their sentences, and penalties for all who may harbour them. Further, any master of a vessel bringing such person to Victoria, is made liable to a fine not exceeding £100, or to imprisonment not exceeding six months, or to both penalties, at the discretion of the Justices.

It is in the last-named provision that every one must perceive the probability of collision between the Australasian authorities and the French nation. Any master of a *Messageries Maritimes* steamer may, without his own knowledge, have on board an escapee, ticket-of-leave man, or ex-*prisonnier* from New Caledonia, and may naturally resent being treated as an accomplice in a crime; while, on the other hand, experience has taught the Australasian authorities that it is to this provision they must specially look for a check to the threatened influx of desperadoes to their shores. And should such collision take place, as, in the event of this Bill becoming law, appears inevitable, the Imperia