

The employment of boys by unscrupulous marine-store dealers as bottle-gatherers is responsible, according to Inspector Sullivan, for a large proportion of juvenile crime. While boys are in the back premises of houses ostensibly to ply their business "it is a great temptation to steal anything they can lay hands on, they knowing well that dealers will buy anything they bring without questioning how it was obtained."

Parental neglect, want of control, truancy, &c., and the employment as bottle-gatherers, are the means of making the boys criminals; and the following may be put down as the incentives to steal.

- (1.) Tobacco smoking.—Almost every boy (even those of nine years of age) confesses to spending stolen money in the purchase of cigarettes and cigars.
- (2.) Betting.—Numbers of the boys (from ten years up) committed admit that they stole in order to obtain money to bet by means of "place totes"; and the experience of the police is that "this evil is growing very much amongst boys now, and they will by any means, fair or dishonest, obtain money for this purpose."
- (3.) The desire for fruit, lollies, &c., is accountable for a good deal of petty thieving, much stolen money being expended in them.
- (4.) Bicycle riding.—Large numbers of boys are in the habit of hiring bicycles by the hour, and the Inspector of Police says that boys will do anything to obtain money to indulge in this pastime.
- (5.) Immorality.—Some of the older boys received state that they stole for the purpose of spending money in driving and treating girls with whom they had immoral relations.

In conclusion the Council is of the opinion that the question of the increase and decrease of juvenile criminality depends very much upon the economic condition of the community, for boys and youths who find difficulty in obtaining employment and are compelled to idle their time away are more likely to yield to temptation than those in regular work.

So also the enforced idleness of parents is responsible for much misery, vice, and crime, for it is beyond doubt that the many older boys and girls who are seen in numbers in the streets and parks are induced to thus seek distraction and pleasure, with the risks of contamination by vicious companions, because of the disorganisation and unattractiveness of their homes.

It appears evident that owing to the neglect of parents, the temptations of street life, illegal betting, and tobacco, numbers of children are being led into criminal practices. The Council is convinced that the matter is one of serious moment, and it urges that legislative action be taken to so amend and add to the existing laws as to enable the police and this department to successfully minimise the evil influences to which children are now subjected.

It is recommended that the Amending State Children Bill, which the Government has authorised to be drafted, should contain the following provisions in addition to those already suggested:—

- (1.) Power for the police to warn children under a fixed age found in the streets at night to go home, and if necessary to take them home; also power to punish parents who wilfully allow children to be in the streets after the hour fixed.
- (2.) Making it penal for any person to supply tobacco in any form to a child.
- (3.) Making it penal for any person to bet in any way with a child.
- (4.) To prevent the sale to or by children of impure and demoralising literature.
- (5.) Power for magistrates when dealing with juvenile delinquents, in addition to existing methods, to—
 Fine the child and require the parent to guarantee payment in a lump sum or by instalments:
 Order the child to be whipped, or require the parent to give security for his good behaviour:
 Order the child to be sent to a probationary school.

The Council also suggests that—

- (1.) Power should be given to the police to license and supervise marine-store dealers and their premises.
- (2.) A probationary school should be established as contemplated by the State Children Act, 1895.

The police have in the past so willingly and ably assisted this department in its efforts to control and supervise children, and the Commissioner and his inspectors are so deeply interested in the welfare of the children more particularly concerned, that the Council has no hesitation in suggesting that the constables might be requested when on duty to pay special regard to any children who appear to be in need of control, and to show a friendly interest in such children by advising them to go home, and thus prevent many from becoming criminals, &c.

The Council regrets that the practice, which was in force for some years until the last few months, of trying all children charged with offences at the office of this department has been departed from. It is of opinion that all charges against children should be heard here instead of at the Police Courthouse. An officer of this department could then have the opportunity of being present at trials and would be able to assist the Court in obtaining the fullest knowledge of cases, so that possibly fewer children might be committed.

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Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation, not given; printing (1,500 copies), £5 8s. 6d.