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Editorial.

JUVENILE OFFENDERS AND THE LAW.

The humane effects of the Children Act, 1908, are now becoming apparent, and, in accordance with its provisions, an Order in Council has been issued providing for the separate treatment in future of juvenile offenders at police-courts, a method already in force in Canada and Australia, where the benefits of separating children from adult offenders have for long been recognised, both for the children themselves and also for the State. Children's Courts are also provided in some of the States in America. The principle underlying the establishment of the Courts is that child offenders must be guarded from contamination by confirmed criminals, be dealt with in separate courts as a means to this end, and, if possible, have their own special magistrates. To send a child to prison is to draft him at once into the ranks of criminals, from which it is almost impossible for him to escape in the future, and the cruelty as well as the unwisdom of such a system is obvious.

In each district it will be the duty of the police to provide special houses of detention for children, which will be kept under the closest supervision. Children under the age of sixteen may also be released on bail by a police-officer of the rank of inspector. By these methods it is hoped to check juvenile offenders at the outset of a career which might easily lead to a life of crime, without disclosing at once the full terrors of the law.

A wise provision in connection with the Children's Courts is that the public are not to be admitted. Those present will be limited to persons interested in the case and to representatives of the Press.

Very slowly—the more so because the mother element is eliminated from the counsels of the nation—we are learning to

be more humane in our dealings with its children, or we should not for so long have allowed them to be brought up in our criminal courts, to be associated with confirmed evil-doers, and handicapped for life by being committed to prison.

It is not so long ago since we used to hang children for most trivial offences, and (during the late Queen's reign) a child of nine years old—happily reprieved by the gracious mercy of the Sovereign—was sentenced to be hanged for poking a stick through a window and stealing paint worth 2½d. Is it conceivable that, if women had had a voice in making our laws, so monstrous a sentence would have been passed on a little child for so trivial an offence? It is difficult to realise that a judge could be found to pass so inhumane a sentence, and that no one had sufficient imagination to realise that to invoke the whole terror of the law for the punishment of a child for the theft of a few pence, was to bring the law itself into contempt.

A proposal has been made which is worthy of consideration, that women should be added to the police force, and, as the natural caretakers of children, should perform such police duty as relates specially to them. It is a proposal which, if carried into effect, should work well, and no section of women would be better qualified to fill the posts so created than trained nurses, who not only have had experience in the management of children in hospital wards, but who would be quick to recognise symptoms of mental deficiency which might bring the offender under medical treatment rather than under the stern arm of the law. Any nurse in such a position might be satisfied that she was rendering good service to the community. It is a point which might be brought to the notice of the Elizabeth Fry League when it is founded.

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