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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

THE GROWTH OF CRIME. It will be within the memory of our readers that we recently quoted certain details and statistics of crime given in a book written by William Douglas Morrison, of H.M. Prison, Wandsworth. We now find that the writer is the Rev William Douglas Morrison, and that he is the chaplain of the prison in question. Mr Morrison publishes an article in the *Nineteenth Century* for June, in which he proves that crime has increased within these last years of which so much is boasted as advancing by long strides in enlightenment. The manner, he says, in which criminal returns are affected by inconstant social factors requires that such statistics should cover a decade at the least. The method employed by the writer is that of taking the number of cases dealt with both summarily and on indictment during the last three decades. Thus the following results are arrived at:—

Yearly Average tried in the Decade.

1860-69	...	466,687
1870-79	...	628,027
1880-89	...	701,060

We must, however, among the causes of the increase shown, consider the development of social legislation. Offences against the Education Acts, for instance, have furnished more than half a million cases. Against this we may set the abolition, in recent years, of several old penal laws, as well as the greater reluctance of the public and the police to prosecute trivial offenders. "In any case . . . the very unwelcome fact remains that in the last three decades they (offences) have been steadily rising in multitude."—But what has been the case with regard to the growth of population? "Basing our calculations upon the estimated population at the middle of each decade, it comes out that in 1860-69 one case was tried annually for every forty-four of the inhabitants of England and Wales; in 1870-79 one case was tried for every thirty-seven inhabitants; in 1880-89 one case was tried for every thirty-eight inhabitants. According to these statistics the proportion of crime to the population has remained almost the same for the last two decades, but if the last two decades are compared with the first, the growth of crime has outstripped the growth of population."—As to the comparative seriousness of crime, it may be gathered from the number and nature of the indictable offences brought up for trial:—

Yearly Average of Indictable Offences tried.

1860-69	...	19,149
1870-79	...	15,817
1880-89	...	14,058

These figures show a decrease, but this can be explained:—Thus, in the first decade no less than 13,189 of the indictable cases for trial consisted of offences against property without violence. In the succeeding decades a very large proportion of these cases would have been dealt with summarily, even before the passing of the Summary Jurisdiction Act of 1879. Therefore, it is advisable to take one particular offence which has not been materially affected either by public opinion or by legislation—namely, murder. "In the decade 1860-69, the yearly average of murders reported to the police was 126; in 1870-79 the yearly average was 153; in 1880-89 the yearly average was 160. According to these statistics the most serious of all crimes has steadily increased within the last three decades, while in proportion to the growth of population it was nearly as common in the last decade as in the first. It would therefore appear, if we take the increase of murder as a criterion, that the decrease in the number of indictable offences since 1860-69 is to a very notable extent to be attributed to a change of criminal procedure, rather than to an actual decrease of serious crime."—It must be remembered, besides, that in 1879 the Summary Jurisdiction Act was passed, the immediate result being that about 3000 cases, formerly classed as indictable, were transferred to courts of Summary Jurisdiction. "Had this great alteration in judicial procedure not taken place, the last decade, instead of showing a decrease of serious offences, would, on the contrary, have exhibited a considerable increase. But, even

taking the figures as they stand, it will be found that, in spite of the operation of the Summary Jurisdiction Act, almost every form of serious crime has increased in the last decade as compared with the preceding one."—The following table shows this:—

Annual Average of Indictable Offences against the Person.

1870-79	...	2315
1880-89	...	2562

Annual Average of Offences against Property with Violence.

1870-79	...	1483
1880-89	...	1850

Annual Average of Offences against Property without Violence.

1870-79	...	10,701
1880-79	...	8,049

Annual Average of Malignant Offences against Property.

1870-79	...	199
1880-89	...	272

Annual Average of Forgery and Offences against the Currency.

1870-79	...	421
1880-89	...	499

Annual Average of other Offences not included in the above classes.

1870-79	...	698
1880-89	...	824

With the single exception then of offences against property without violence, there has been a decided increase in indictable offences of all kinds—"An increase which has, in almost every instance, more than kept pace with the growth of population." The exception must be set down to the operation of the Summary Jurisdiction Act—crimes of this character coming most extensively within its scope. The Criminal Law amendment Act of 1885, on the other hand, has added to the indictable offences against the person. "In short, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, owing chiefly to the rise of new crimes, has slightly increased the total number of indictable offences, whilst the Summary Jurisdiction Act has enormously diminished them; and, after due weight has been given to the effects of both these Acts of Parliament, the conclusion cannot be avoided that serious crime has unmistakably increased within the last decade." The argument, therefore, that intellectual improvement lessens crime is unsound. "Our inquiry into the movement of crime in England and Wales, as tested by the statistics of cases tried both summarily and on indictment," says the writer, "is hostile to the idea that this country has recently entered upon a career of sudden and unexampled moral renovation." The writer goes on to adduce further consideration in support of this decision. "Within the last three decades," he says, "there has been an enormous increase in philanthropic enterprise, in the shape of homes for the young and assistance for the destitute and fallen. But, notwithstanding the good achieved by this vast expenditure of benevolent effort, there has been a continuous increase in the number of cases committed to prison and to reformatory and industrial schools. The following table represents the growth of the prison population:—

Yearly Average Committed to Prison in the Decade.

1860-69	...	127,690
1870-79	...	154,145
1880-89	...	170,827

"These figures not only disclose an absolute increase in the number of committals to prison on criminal charges (civil and military cases being excluded), but if the last decade is compared with the first, they also show a decided increase of commitments in proportion to the growth of the population; and the full extent of this increase is not realised by looking at the prison population alone." Juvenile delinquents, formerly imprisoned, but now to be found chiefly in reformatory and industrial schools must also be considered. "When this is done, it will be seen that, whatever the prisons have lost, these establishments have more than gained:—

Annual Average of Juveniles in Reformatory and Industrial Schools:

1860-69	...	6,834
1870-79	...	17,394
1880-89	...	25,505

Account ought also to be taken of the substitution within recent years of fines and bail for imprisonment. "But, even if this growing