

Wellington it is something surprising. One of our leading papers calls them 'juvenile prostitutes,' and thinks the police should have power to clear the streets."

We have heard of the conduct of the juveniles in Dunedin lately; Auckland has the same story to tell; and in Christchurch the subject is exercising the minds of our Church dignitaries, newspaper editors, the members of the various Women's Societies, and, indeed, of all who wish to see a better state of things brought about. The fact is that the

#### PROBLEM IS SO COMPLEX

and many sided that, to find anything like a real solution, we should have to dive deep down into the very heart of things; and, while such a search might in one sense stagger us by its immensity, yet, by an honest attempt to get at some of the primary causes of the evil, we should be more successful than in being content merely to scratch its surface or begin on the outside and work inwards.

But, before stating what we believe are some of the causes which lead to this conduct on the part of our young folk, we would first say that often the evil itself is, we suppose unintentionally, very much exaggerated. In every boy and girl there is, or ought to be, a latent energy, which, if it does not find a natural outlet under favourable conditions, will seek one in forbidden paths, which is often the beginning of untold mischief.

Scientists tell us that "dirt is matter in the wrong place," and we believe that perverseness in children is energy in the wrong direction. Isolated cases of juvenile depravity are apt to cause a scare in the community, and create a feeling among good, respectable people that young New Zealand is literally "going to the dogs." Owing to statements of this kind having been made

in Christchurch recently,

SPECIAL AND CAREFUL ENQUIRIES were made, the result being that, while it was found that some actual evil did exist, most of the evidence went to show merely instances of rude, rough, and boisterous behaviour, and of keeping late hours.

Taking all such favourable evidence into consideration, however, we are bound to admit that the evil is a real one, and the sooner some measures are taken to stop its growth the better it will be for the community.

In a short article like the present we can only touch the fringes of the subject, and so will only point out what we believe to be some of the exciting causes of the evil, leaving the question of a remedy for a future issue.

Heredity is a factor in the physical, mental, and moral tendencies of human beings, and it is acknowledged that the children of

#### DRUNKEN AND DISSOLUTE PARENTS

are those who are easiest led astray, owing to their inherited weakness. Mr. B. O. Flower, editor of the *Arena*, contends that it is the children of loveless marriages—those "loveless children" who are "cursed at the beginning of life, and canopied by bitterness and gloom in the pre-natural state" that swell largely the great well-spring of immorality. But if the influences of heredity are strong, those of environment are still stronger. When one thinks of the homes in which some of these children are "dragged up," one can hardly wonder that our streets are thronged with larrikins.

Many causes are responsible for these homeless homes. In some cases both parents are drunkards, and the children are neglected in every way, and do much as they like. In others, the father drinks and the mother, between wretchedness of body and spirit, "lets go," and the children are again neglected. In some instances a large

family is crowded into a very small house, and the parents are often glad when the children go out. Again, there are families the fathers of which have either died, or have been obliged to go elsewhere to look for work, leaving the mother to

#### STRUGGLE WITH POVERTY

and to look after the children. Such children are sometimes more than the mother, single-handed and severely handicapped, can manage, and they often get quite beyond her control. It is almost a foregone conclusion that most of these children are badly fed. Want of money, want of time, want of knowledge, and sometimes want of interest on the part of the mother, all help to produce ill fed children. But it is not always want of money which is responsible for many of our ill-fed children. There is a culpable ignorance among a certain proportion of our mothers, the result of which is incalculable.

Unwholesome foods badly cooked; white bread instead of brown; too many rich dishes and condiments; and too much butcher meat, produce "ill-fed" children. A diet of too stimulating a character is as bad in its way as an insufficient diet, both producing morbidity of body, and, consequently, of mind. It has been remarked that "we rarely see a robust, healthy

#### MAN IN THE DOCK,"

and that the "criminal classes are in the main not only under-fed, but ill-fed." So that, in considering the causes of juvenile immorality, we must take the question of foods into account.

But there are still other causes to be considered. There are homes where the parents are querulous, and impatient of anything like fun and frolic among the children. Is it any wonder that these young folk get as far away from such parents as possible, and gradually form the habit of going out to seek the pleasure denied them at home?