

CRIMINAL STATISTICS OF CANADA.

Although the statistics of crime to which we directed attention last week are not an attractive study, generally there are few topics which have a closer bearing upon the public welfare in both a business and private sense. Every nation, and every community therein, has a moral reputation which, according to its character, affects for better or for worse its commercial credit abroad and its prosperity at home. The history of the progress of civilization is the history of an evolution from a condition of lawlessness to one of law and order. The criminal classes are survivals of a social state, out of which the general body of the people have been elevated. The beneficent influences which have implanted higher principles and self-control in the people as a whole, and those stern ones which are intended to hold the unruly in check, are still found ineffective in regard to a certain element in the community. By criminal statistics we learn to what extent such influences have failed in their purpose. Hence, they suggest enquiries into the causes of such failure, and as to the methods needful for bringing the lawless element under the influence of moral restraint and discipline.

Were a complete exhibit made public of the entire cost of maintaining the judicial machinery, of preserving the peace, and of keeping up penal institutions, the country would be startled at discovering how heavy is the tax burden imposed by services required for the protection of life and property. If to this total cost could be added the losses caused by depredators who prey upon the public, it would be found that the aggregate cost of the criminal population amounted to a sum sufficient to maintain the whole of them without work in comparative luxury. We commend the preparation of such a statement to the Government statisticians who have the necessary data at hand.

The official "Report on Criminal Statistics for 1897" divides the returns into two classes, "Indictable Offences," and, "Summary Convictions." Classified by Provinces the Indictable Offences, which comprise felonies and misdemeanours for 1896 and 1897, were as follows:—

Province.	No. of Convictions.		No. of Convictions per 1000 of population.	
	1897.	1896.	1897.	1896.
New Brunswick....	95	116	2.95	3.61
P. E. Island.	42	34	3.84	3.11
Nova Scotia.....	255	279	5.58	6.12
Quebec.....	1,737	1,420	11.05	9.12
Manitoba.....	245	181	12.07	9.36
Ontario.....	2,885	2,783	12.77	12.56
Territories.....	170	144	13.58	11.98
British Columbia..	322	247	21.73	17.86
All Canada.	5,721	5,204	11.06	10.25

The "Summary Convictions," which include minor offences, a large number of which are not crimes, in a proper sense, such for instance, as breaches of municipal by-laws, are thus stated:—

Provinces.	Convictions.	
	1897.	1896.
New Brunswick.....	2,179	2,181
P. E. Island.....	519	
Nova Scotia.....	2,421	3,042
Quebec.....	8,871	9,317
Manitoba.....	1,232	1,148
Ontario.....	14,151	14,109
Territories.....	1,407	891
British Columbia.....	1,477	1,115
All Canada.....	32,257	32,074

We are not prepared to accept unreservedly the return of "Indictable Offences" as a strictly accurate exhibit of the comparative prevalence of serious crimes in the different Provinces. Is it reasonable to believe that in Ontario, for instance, there is three times as much serious crime committed as in the Maritime Provinces, or, that, in British Columbia, the number of graver offences are double the average of the whole Dominion, and nearly four times those in Nova Scotia? Wherever there is a large city population, there is everywhere a very much greater prevalence of graver offences, such as burglary, assaults, forgery, embezzlement, etc., than in rural districts. Observation of a wide field of statistics, covering those of the States and Europe, shows that, in cities, and large towns, offences of the graver sort are from three to four times as numerous, in proportion to population, as in rural districts. This would raise the record of Ontario above other Provinces but it should proportionately lower that of British Columbia, which stands at the head of the list. The discrepancies in the number of serious offences returned for different Provinces arises to some extent, we believe, from a different classification of them being adopted in various places, so that offences grouped as "Indictable" in one Province are, in other Provinces, classified under the head of "Summary Convictions." The Province of Quebec occupies a very honourable position—if the phrase can be allowed in this connection—as regards its criminal record. This becomes all the more manifest when we consider that in this Province is the largest city population in the Dominion, as well as a number of places of considerable size. This claim is supported by these facts, from 1887 to 1897, eleven years, the convictions for murder were, in Ontario, 28; in Manitoba, 6; in Nova Scotia, 4; and in Quebec, 6. Owing to the regrettable want of uniformity in classifying crime in the official statistics of different countries, it is not possible to be as exact as is desirable, when dealing with statistics. But the following comparative exhibit for the United Kingdom and Canada, for the latest year available, is a close approximation to the facts:—

Offences.	Number of Convictions.			
	England & Wales.	Scot'land.	Ireland.	Canada.
Against the person....	78,138	1,643	1,274	4,418
" property with violence.....	26,809	5,126	1,295	827
Ag inst property without violence.....	98,861	11,931	2,936	4,694
Other Offences.....	508,086	123,445	106,076	28,039