

Reformatory and a Mercer Refuge for Girls. The population of the Mercer Refuge for Girls averaged about 72, with five women officers of this Government in charge as matrons, instructresses and otherwise. These girls were from sixteen to nineteen years of age.

Early in 1905 we took up the question of how far we could dispense with that institution entirely. We set Mr. Kelso to work to see what could be done towards placing those girls in homes with relatives, or otherwise, where the environment would be such as to give them a chance, instead of having them serve their terms and sent back to the old environment only to return again to the senior institution for a worse crime.

He did get to work. One after another of the girls was placed, sometimes with relatives, sometimes in homes far removed from the homes that they first knew, until finally we were left with the Mercer Refuge for Girls with but four prisoners and five officers in charge. We were told that whatever might be said of the others that had gone out, and of whom we had received good reports in nearly every case, that these four could not be trusted out of sight of the authorities in charge. One night they saw their chance and made their escape, and then the situation was terrible indeed. Five officers of the Government in charge of a Refuge for Girls and no inmates. The girls, however, kept together, went to the telephone, and called Mr. Kelso up at 11 o'clock at night and asked to be captured. He took them back to the Refuge, and in course of a short time they as well were placed—always against the terrible warnings of the officers in charge. The result has been most satisfactory, and to-day we have in this Province no longer a Refuge for Girls. The work is better done in another way. The Province has been saved thousands of dollars per year, and the work of reform is being better done in the homes to which those girls have been sent without cost to us.

I mention this only as confirming what those who have given it any attention know to be true, that the short-term prisoner with the first offence is not as black as he is sometimes painted. He would gladly be better if given half a chance. Would the solution that we have in mind here give the prisoner a better chance? I believe it would. If it would do this, it would certainly as well give a solution of the question of prison labor that would avoid all possibility of its being put into competition with free labor. There would be no competition; there would be no Taylor, Scott or other contract.

We do not wish to adopt this solution or any modification of it hastily. We have decided to investigate it thoroughly as applied to the conditions here, and to avail ourselves in this work of assistance, the personnel of which will be known at a not too distant date.

AN AMENDMENT.

I wish to move in amendment, seconded by Hon. Dr. Willoughby :

“That all the words after ‘that’ in the motion be struck out and the following substituted : ‘This House approves of the announcement made by the Government that the whole question of prison labor has been for some time under discussion and will be inquired into forthwith with a view to arriving at a solution which will prevent for the future any competition of prison labor with free labor.’”

The motion as amended was carried.