

Juvenile delinquents – Wolfred Nelson Report – 1852

Wolfred Nelson (1791–1863) is an interesting character. An English-speaking doctor in Lower Canada (as the province of Quebec was then called), he became a leader in the Rebellion of 1837 for responsible government. From 1827 to 1830 he served as a member of Lower Canada's Legislative Assembly.

Nelson was a strong and vocal critic of the government. He agitated for reforms that would give the French-speaking majority some real power in the affairs of Lower Canada. When the British blocked these efforts, Nelson decided that the government would have to be changed by force. Thus, in the fall of 1837, he became a leading speaker at political meetings in urging the people to take action.

During the open rebellion that soon followed, Nelson organized the defence of the village of Saint-Denis, where on 23 November 1837 he led a group of rebels in repelling a far larger force of professional British soldiers. The victory of the insurgents was significant, but the only one they achieved. For the rebellion was quickly put down, and Nelson was arrested. After seven months in prison, he was banished to Bermuda in 1838. His confinement there soon ended, however, for he was released in the same year. In 1843 he took advantage of an amnesty to return to Canada and resumed his medical practice in Montreal. From 1844 to 1851 he sat in the Legislative Assembly. In 1851 he withdrew from active political life and took a government position as an inspector of prisons. His interests in social issues continued, however, for in this new capacity he released a report in 1852 on the state of prisons in Quebec. The report was wide ranging and dealt in part with the treatment of juvenile delinquents. As this section provides insights into the prevailing ideas of the time on the proper treatment of minors, it is presented here, both to facilitate comparisons with current approaches to the question and for the sake of its own interest as a document of social history.

The subject of juvenile delinquency has as yet scarcely engaged the attention of the public in Canada; it is consequently fortunate that we can find elsewhere information and precedent by which to be guided in the formation and adoption of laws for the punishment and correction of such as so early in life offend against the laws of their country, and threaten to become its very worst subjects and enemies. It is therefore with pleasure that reference can be made to such high authority in these matters, as Lieutenant-Colonel Jebb, in England, who is perhaps the very first authority in these matters. In the second Report on Prisons, in 1847, he uses this language while treating on youthful criminals: "There is great difficulty in maintaining a really effective discipline suitable for juveniles in almost all prisons, in consequence of the small number of prisoners justifying the expense of an adequate staff for their special instruction and

management;" but he states, in another place, "in most of the new prisons, there is a ward specially designed for juveniles" – an example it would seem deserving of notice in Canada; it is, however, to be hoped that but little expense will be incurred in repairing and making additions to old gaols, or in the purchase of old houses or buildings to be converted into prisons for this class of offenders; but where it is required, and can be done at comparatively small cost, a few cells could be made in some of the present gaols that would answer all the ends of justice for some time to come, more particularly if the suggestions about to be made are deemed worthy of notice and are carried into effect. Lest the additions alluded to should be carried into operation, it may not be out of place to give a few details for the better construction of the cells. They should not be more than three feet wide nor more than eight feet long, and should connect with a room sufficiently spacious to serve as a school room and workshop, where the utmost silence should be observed, and where they should be always under the surveillance of their keeper, who should also act as schoolmaster, and, as soon as the tasks and teaching are over, the children should be taken back to their cells, which should be their dormitories, as well as a place of confinement during the day, when disobedient or vicious. It should ever be kept in mind, that, in the majority of instances, it is impossible to succeed in taming these perverse juveniles, except by subjecting them to silence and seclusion; a fact of which Messieurs DeBeaumont and DeTocqueville were well persuaded, and who thus express their conviction in their "*Système Pénitentiaire*." –

"La séparation individuelle des prisonniers dans les maisons d'arrêt, est le point de départ de tout bon régime d'emprisonnement;" and, a little further, we find these words: "L'isolement, qui comme moyen préservatif de la corruption est un si grand bienfait pour les détenus eux-mêmes, est aussi de toutes les mesures de discipline, celle qui leur fait sentir le plus vivement toute l'étendue de leur peine."

The expense of juvenile retreats is such, that Colonel Jebb makes the following suggestion: – "It would be advisable to facilitate the union of counties and boroughs, for the purpose of building and maintaining prisons or houses of detention, expressly for juvenile offenders under the age of fifteen years." It may be well to cite, as a proof of the expense attending such institutions in England, that the cost of keeping each boy in Packhurst prison, one of the best managed in the Kingdom, is one shilling and three pence *per diem*, or twenty-two pounds annually. Now, if in

England, where the appliances are so abundant for the economical direction of such places, the above expenditure is incurred, certainly in Canada it can scarcely be less, where there exists fewer means of employing the culprits profitably. It should also be kept in mind, with reference to the expense, that the population is comparatively small, and is scattered over a vast extent of territory, with few large towns and places for the resort of the vicious; and it is to be hoped that for very many years to come the pauper population will not be so dense as to necessitate the building of establishments solely for the detention of vicious and vagrant children; and it is not to be presumed, that any idea is entertained which may afford facilities, or hold out inducement to the poor, idle and immoral, to cast their ill-bred offspring on the State for support and sustenance.

It must be admitted, that the outlay attending similar institutions in the United States is sometimes less considerable; still, the lowest average, it is believed, is never under fifty dollars per head, and, if the writer's memory serves him, at the admirable institution at South Boston, which he lately visited, the cost is double that sum. It may be remarked, by the way, and it will be only doing justice to the Charlestown Penitentiary, South Boston House of Correction and the juvenile retreat there, to state that these institutions appear to be conducted in the most praiseworthy manner, and whilst a rigid discipline is observed, the treatment and diet are quite unexceptionable, and though all are kept closely at work, none are over-taxed, and all have a healthy, and, it may be added, a contented countenance.

The cost for a suitable building for this class of prisons cannot be much under twelve thousand pounds; even the little State of New Jersey has appropriated the sum of forty-five thousand dollars for one, and it is thought that a pretty large addition will be required to complete it.

As already observed, it does not appear that the population, as yet, require the establishment of such an institution; besides which, to the imperishable honor of an institution lately established in Canada, there is every reason to believe that the rising generation here will furnish a far less number of juvenile delinquents than perhaps at any other place in the wide world, and for this, thanks are due to that noble and benevolent Society, the "Christian Brothers," who educate gratis not only the poorer class of children, but also the children of the wealthy; and these excellent schools are not confined to the catholics alone, but are open to all who

feel disposed to profit by the admirable system of education which they pursue, a purely secular system of education; during school hours religious topics are never broached. Catholic children regularly attend divine service in the parish church, nor would it inflict much injury on protestant children if they were compelled more strictly to attend their churches.

The philanthropist and the friend of order cannot but witness with infinite delight, hundreds of children marching in a long line to and from the school, in a most decent, modest manner, with a little fellow, decorated with a medal, at certain distances, marching on one side, seeing that order is kept. No racing, no pulling nor bad language, but all decent and peaceable; and although the great majority is poorly clad, yet there is an aspect of tidiness about them that at once conveys the conviction that notwithstanding that the parents were in humble condition, they are yet fully alive to the vast advantage their offspring derive from these matchless charity schools, and make every effort that they may benefit by them. Such schools are indeed the best guardians of public order, honor and prosperity, and confer benefits a hundred fold greater than can be derived from prisons and penitentiaries; one costs nothing to the State, but confers upon it a name and a character, whereas the others are attended with immense expense, and reflect little credit on the land; one will prevent crime and foster virtue, while the other punishes crime, and but too frequently only makes the bad worse.

Instead of paying tens of thousands for the retreats which have above been alluded to, let a few scores of pounds be appropriated for the purchase of elementary books, to be distributed to the children of the more destitute, for it has come to the knowledge of the Inspector that many children have not been sent to school, in consequence of the want of means to purchase a few books, paper, and a slate.

It should in all reason be deemed sufficient that these public benefactors devote their whole existence to the education of the poor, neither asking nor expecting fee or reward in this world, without compelling them as it were to provide stationery, at an expense far beyond their means.

It is only a few years since these excellent schools have been established in Canada, and the number of children attending them may already be counted by thousands, and the numbers will increase annually; still bene-

ficial as they are, it cannot be expected that all the youth in the country will be good and virtuous, but there is every reason to expect that the number of bad will be so small as to find accommodation in common gaols, without erecting expensive establishments expressly for them, for with comparatively little alteration our present gaols will suffice for their temporary detention, and for graver cases, while undergoing the probation that will precede their transmission to the provincial penitentiary, where the staff is very complete, and where there are appliances for their punishment, and their instruction in useful trades, and where their moral and their religious duties will be duly attended to. But by far the best mode of detaining, punishing and correcting these unfortunate subjects, would in the generality of cases be found in *model farms*, a certain number of which, there can be no doubt, will ere long be established in the province, if merely for the purpose of extending agricultural knowledge, where they would learn the best of all avocations, *farming*, where their instruction in every particular could be faithfully attended to, where they would acquire vigor of constitution and a love for rural pursuits, and which would not leave a stain or an opprobrious impression behind. In support of this position the following short extract is taken from the "Pennsylvania Journal of Philanthropy and Prison Discipline": – "Schools of reform, where outdoor or field labor has been the chief occupation of the pupils, have received advantages, avoided evils, and obtained results, which do not appear in the history of other institutions, from which land labor has necessarily been excluded;" and in another place it is stated, "we cannot avoid the conviction that a discipline is practicable for juvenile offenders, which should be more wholesome, appropriate and efficient, than that which now prevails with far less semblance of prison architecture, and far more appropriate employment for the inmates;" and again, a little further, it is said, "the indenture of boys to farmers leads to a life free from temptation, and far more friendly to virtuous habits than any other, and the taste should be cultivated at the earliest possible period."

In the Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society for 1850, page 488, it is stated, that "the apprentices generally give satisfaction, and are a blessing to others as well as themselves," and again, page 489, "No person can spend a day at the State Farm without being convinced of the great blessings conferred upon the juvenile delinquents here assembled."

This is an important subject, and there is every reason to be convinced that, the head of the Agricultural Bureau will turn that new and interesting office to good account, even were it only in the matter of destitute and offending children; were it for this alone, the new department should be hailed with pleasure, and meet with universal approbation and support.

The farms alluded to, should be situated far away from the contaminating influence of large towns, and even of villages.

Besides the model farms, or in their absence, large numbers of vagrant children and petty offenders could be well provided for among the farmers in the country, where even small children are made to be serviceable, while at Fredericton, in New Brunswick, the Inspector was confirmed in the truth of this position, which accorded with his own ideas, as he was assured by the keeper of the Alms-house there, that there were daily applications made by respectable farmers for children, and that they were readily taken, even so young as at the age of four or five years, and that it was impossible to supply the demand.

At all events the hints here thrown out, may be deserving of some attention, and may possibly lead to the adoption of measures, whereby the community may rid itself of youthful beggars, lead these poor abandoned little creatures from a course of idleness, vice and infamy unto useful and industrious habits, and thus make of them at a future day, profitable and respectable members of society.

It is very probable that measures may be adopted by the legislature, with reference more especially to juvenile offenders; in that case, it ought to be advised, that the adoption of some means by which the authority of parents of bad and dissolute character should be superseded, be enacted, whereby their children might be apprenticed to farmers or tradesmen.

This practice obtains in several of the neighbouring States; the children of dissolute and vagrant parents are taken from them, and bound out to persons worthy of confidence and respect; the authority which a parent usually wields is taken from him, and his child is regularly indentured, but under articles which secure the child's safety against ill usage and oppression, together with good training, and a proper domestic education.

It may likewise be expedient to constitute some tribunal, where summary and corporal punishment may be administered, and possibly regeneration may follow without leaving the indelible stain that ensues from imprisonment. This important subject has for many years been under deep consideration in England, and some of the most eminent legal authorities have advocated summary chastisement, a few of these, it may not be thought, irrelevant to cite here. Lord Mackenzie made the following statement among many others, before a committee of the House of Commons, in 1847: "Bodily pain being the great means by which nature deters man from what is to be avoided, I doubt if we can abandon whipping entirely in criminal justice, without a sacrifice of expediency." Sergeant Adams uses the following language before the committee: "We have substituted at Middlesex, whipping with a birch rod, and it is a singular but indubitable fact, that boys who laugh at being put into a dungeon, and at flogging with a cat, are upon their knees, blubbering and praying not be flogged with a birch rod. It deters more than anything else." Evidence to the same effect is borne by several persons, but more particularly by the governors of prisons in England, and Baron Alderson, who also gave evidence on the same occasion, makes the following addition to what he had before said in support of the necessity of flogging; he said: "I believe that the humanity which advocates a slight punishment for a first offence is real inhumanity; I am fully persuaded that a judicious plan of reform for juvenile offenders would be the most economical arrangement which could be made, the expense now incurred by repeated committals and trials, greatly exceed the probable cost of an attempt at an effectual reformation, and to cure this class of offenders, would be to cast off one most prolific source of adult crime." It is furthermore the opinion of the high individuals above named, as well as that of many judges in England, as far at least, as can be collected from the proceedings before the committee alluded to, that "magistrates should be empowered to decide, in a summary manner, many of the most ordinary offences of the common herd of young criminals; and it is recommended that there should be annexed to Police Courts, some place, where, for minor crimes, a sound but not cruel scourging, with a birch rod should be administered, after which to be dismissed to their homes," with this mark of what they will be exposed to if erring again, and they also be told that to this punishment would be added, a long sojourn either in a prison or in a penitentiary.

It would not, perhaps, be amiss to add a few more distinguished names, whose opinions corroborate the above views. Baron Rolfe, states: "I think it would be advantageous to give to magistrates a power of summarily convicting young offenders for petty thefts, and perhaps for some other crimes, and awarding the punishment of whipping either with or without imprisonment for some fixed period." And the Lord Justice General thus expresses his sentiments in this matter: "I have certainly sometimes had occasion to regret that a power to inflict moderate chastisement by whipping, was not sanctioned in regard to juvenile offenders as being entirely more calculated to deter from a repetition of the offence than the punishment of imprisonment alone. Let it be recollected that the fears of the criminal are the safeguards of society." – Crawford Russell.

The sentiments and opinions of such able and distinguished men, it is fair to suppose, will have due influence in this country; and that no *ultra* humane feelings will deter really benevolent and kind hearted men from putting to the test means that come so highly recommended, and that seem so well adapted for the suppression of crime, and through very fear, lead wayward youths into the paths of industry and propriety.

As the Inspector was about closing his report, it occurred to him, that he should visit the Friar's School for the purpose of acquiring all the information he could, in regard to the system of education followed there, as well as the benefits it was calculated to impart. This visit resulted in a manner far beyond his anticipations, for besides what he sought, he had the happiness of seeing, in the person of the head of that praiseworthy school, a gentleman of vast acquirements, who had consecrated uncommon talents and a long life to the most exalted of all occupations, that of striving to make the people better, or in the language of the motto of the institution, "Pour rendre le peuple meilleur," and who had been for eight years the chief director of a large juvenile penal establishment in France, where he had the most ample opportunity for studying the character of the inmates, the progress they were capable of making in secular and moral education, and how far they were influenced thereby. He stated, with tears in his eyes, that he feared greatly that more evil than good resulted, notwithstanding the unceasing efforts and vigilance of his brother Friars; duplicity and hypocrisy seemed to usurp the place of bold, reckless and manly daring. So perfectly unsuccessful had been their every effort, that it would appear as if the spirit of evil paraded every part, as if moral

leprosy infected the very atmosphere of the place, and had fixed its vengeful arrows in every heart.

At the request of the Inspector, this estimable man undertook to commit to paper, in a concise manner, those views that he had entertained towards such institutions – views that are the result of great reading, extensive and patient observation, as well as from a vast amount of personal experience; and, two days after, the Inspector had the honor of receiving a visit from this true philanthropist, who put at his disposal a paper full of interest and information, and of which is subjoined a translation, and the original will be found in the Appendix, lettered E.f. It is a document well meriting record and the serious consideration of the government:

"A FEW OBSERVATIONS ON THE SUBJECT OF ASYLUMS FOR CHILDREN

It was expected that great service would be rendered to society in establishing houses of refuge for vagrant children, or such as commit offences against propriety or sound morals. It can affirm from a full, lengthened and conscientious investigation, which the experience of eight years has enabled me to make, a period during which several of these establishments were placed under my direction, that a more fatal gift, I am convinced, legislators cannot bestow upon society, than the establishing such retreats. In fact these asylums, instead of being adapted to the purpose of education and correction, are only places of corruption, where a generation of thieves is reared, and all sorts of vices imaginable prevail. I look upon a child that is thrust into such a house as irretrievably lost.

Youths continually brought into contact for a number of years with others more depraved than they are themselves, acquire such vicious habits that vice no longer can make them blush; on the contrary, they would be ashamed to practise virtuous actions; occupied from morning till night in evading the vigilance of their guardians, they become hypocritical, deceitful, and impious. Accustomed as they are to a system that never leaves them in want of anything, but being ever supplied with the necessaries of life, they acquire the habit of providing or caring for nothing; and, when they get out of these houses, as they no longer have anyone to furnish them with what they need, they take it where they can find it; nay, they soon even regret being out of the house where they were kept, looking

upon it as their own, and will enter a prison with as much pleasure as would a son entering his father's house after a voyage; they, besides, can find no sympathy but among the inmates of like places, and feel well nowhere else; I have seen youths enter a penitentiary as cheerfully as if going to a wedding.

It is in vain that legislators expect to train them to order, or to work, or to make them learn a trade. If order be attained, it will only be through coercion or enslavement, a species of order which is calculated to degrade man, but never to bring him to any good; that order alone, which springs from love, can lead mankind to virtue. If there be any labor, this also must be effected by compulsion, and they will work only as slaves do, with the sole view of escaping punishment, and perform as little labor as possible, and that without application or taste.

But, it is said, they will be taught a trade, in order that, on their going out they may have some resource. I can affirm that, out of a hundred, not one will leave that knows any trade whatever. Contractors for work will go to them to gain money, not at all to show them any trade. Their object is to have their work done as cheap as possible, that they may dispose of it on advantageous terms, and procure a market; this is all they aim at. They will only show a part to each, in order to have the greatest possible amount of work produced, and it must be acknowledged that it would be very difficult for them to act otherwise. Let us suppose, however, that these youths do learn a trade, it must be such a trade as can be exercised only in cities, where lies the cause of perdition of the best educated youths, operating therefore with greater effect in regard to youths who own no family, and are taught to blush at nothing. Thus, even in the above supposed case, an injury is inflicted both on these youths and on society. This conclusion is derived from experience.

It is in these establishments, and nowhere else, that is to be found the reason of the increase of the number of crimes on the old continent, whether in France or in England; and what is more lamentable, the truth has never reached the ears of the legislators, for they have never been able to investigate results but through false and deceptive reports, made by interested parties, who strive to make themselves appear useful, and are afraid of losing their situation. I could make such statements on this subject as would not be credited.

There is but one way, that I am aware of, in which these asylums can be rendered useful to society, and that would be, by converting them into model farms; that would provide men fit for agriculture, which is the only means of making a country grow rich and prosperous. Model farms could be established at very little expense, and, after two or three years' time, would be able to support themselves; but to arrive at this result, and secure success, they must be placed under the direction of men more practical than theoretical, whose deeds will tell, and who do not like to write or make reports; men who do good for the sake of good, and await their reward from God alone, faring like settlers, unprovided with large salaries, and who will take these children and look upon them as their own. Without these conditions success could not be obtained. This also is from experience.

When men are placed at the head of public establishments who love fame, can write, or address the public through the medium of the newspaper press, who wish to make themselves a name, or obtain preferment, all their occupation consists in finding a way to deceive the public, and especially the legislators, which is a thing easily done by publishing theories, that fail afterwards only through the inattention of their subordinates, never through theirs: what they care for, is their fortunes, not the good of the country. Let us not forget that these men must be guided by a religious feeling, and that it is only in this spirit that good can be effected in a firm and durable way.

It is above all of importance in the beginning that we lay down the basis of a rigid discipline, both in the moral and religious point of view, for if ever corruption creep into the establishment, all will be lost – to reform it would be impossible. Corruption in an institution is like an infectious disease, it will attach itself to its walls, and all attempts at remedying the evil will only palliate, but never entirely root it out.

If new countries wish to guard against the misfortunes of the old, they must avoid falling into their errors; this would be a very dangerous mistake, which, if added to the one that has already been committed in establishing so many small colleges, would very soon be the ruin of the country. It were much better to give a good primary education and instruction adapted to the wants of the country, than to create institutions that would tend to nothing but to draw away the people from the labours of the field, and make of them lawyers and notaries, often without any

talent, their only merit consisting in labouring to make humanity more wretched. A good primary education is not attended with this defect, it never draws men from their station but makes good workmen, that are intelligent, laborious, economical, of good morals and who are polite, but it never teaches man to be proud and scornful towards his fellow-beings.

The following is the number of children that attend the Friars' schools in Canada and the United States: Montreal, 1869, children at the other stations, 2508, total, 4377. In the United States, in 9 different houses, 4211; making a total, 8588."

The Inspector will not disguise the fact, that he derived much satisfaction when he found that sentiments which he had cherished for many years, had met with such complete confirmation from a quarter so thoroughly unbiassed and deserving of every confidence and respect, and the Inspector hesitates not to assert that the noble efforts of the teachers of the "école chrétienne," would on every consideration be deserving of the countenance and favor of the government, as the most efficient auxiliary it could possibly have in the instruction and education of youth, thereby fostering good habits, and consequently the best safeguard against crime and its sad and multifarious consequences.

In addition to the opinion entertained by the Inspector, and hereinbefore expressed, that the present state of the country and its population, taken into consideration, no immediate necessity apparently exists for the establishment of houses of refuge for youthful offenders; if, indeed, such a contingency should ever occur, it may with no little plausibility be urged, that the child who has passed several years in one of these retreats becomes habituated to it, and acclimatised as it were, it loses in his sight the character of a prison, and he becomes attached to it as to a home; the plasticity of his young mind leads him readily to assimilate his ideas with all that surrounds him, the very restraint he is placed under loses its irksomeness, and becomes congenial with his feelings, and thus ultimately and insensibly he cherishes his abode, nor, is it at all singular that it should be so, for he is well fed, comfortably clad and lodged, kindly treated and little worked; and during sickness he receives every necessary attention and comfort.

Under such influences is it at all marvellous, that he should ere long entertain a desire to return to a place in which he has passed his happiest

years, and where he had been saved from the privations and miseries he had been subjected to from the unkindness of his, perhaps, vicious parents.

It is of no avail that he is told that he has escaped from a prison, for his most intimate convictions impress indelibly upon him, that there he has been humanely treated, sheltered and protected; hence it would be no punishment for him to be remanded to his old quarters, and asylum he would be disposed, and would most readily seek, should he suffer any privation or ill treatment from his parents or from some harsh and cruel master; so that the remark is true, that "prisons are more dreaded by those who have never been inmates of them, than by those who have."

Besides the above mentioned attractions, which should militate against the establishment of such institutions, there is yet another very manifest objection to them, and this is, that it has been abundantly proved that reformation seldom or never results from a sojourn in anyone of these asylums; on the contrary, the bad are usually made worse, and the well disposed are sure to be corrupted; the association even, with spirits of so kindred a nature, may be another inducement for them to return to their former abode. The pernicious influence which throughout pervades such institutions, is well depicted by the Good Friar, in the valuable document, of which a transcript and translation has just been given, the original whereof, in the vernacular tongue, will be found in the appendix to the report of the Inspector, by which it is clearly shown, that it is next to an utter impossibility to reform youth, that are congregated together in large numbers, notwithstanding the best devised means for preventing contamination, and truly has the worthy superior said, "that the moral atmosphere of the place is tainted and poisoned by the very presence of its inmates." It is also recorded, that the benevolent Harriet B. Stowe, stated that, "the subtle atmosphere of opinion maketh itself felt without words."

The impudent leer, the independent strut, and the swaggering gait, exercise a singular influence, and it is to such a demeanor, which can neither be controlled nor corrected, that may be attributed in a great measure, all the evils resulting from the association of a number of ill bred children, who are continually in each others company, although silence may, even at all times, be enjoined.

The excitement incident to the labors of the field, the constant change of position and occupation, the separation from each other while engaged in these field labors, and the physical efforts that are continually made by them, exhaust as it were the superabundant mental action resulting from a vigorous bodily frame, hence is attained a quiet, placid, and contented disposition.

If there be aught of truth, or even *vraisemblance*, in the above allegation, it should lead to deep reflection before determining on any public institution for juvenile delinquents and vagrants.

It is very true the example of England, France, other European nations, and even the United States, may be considered as definitive on this subject, and it may be deemed presumption on the part of any private individual to suggest any objection to the following such example; still, the Inspector feels so thoroughly convinced of the correctness of the position he has assumed, on this really momentous subject, that he scruples not to subject himself to any remarks, however harsh, that may be made respecting his hazarding an opinion opposed to dogmas so generally received. Another very cogent reason could be adduced against such institutions, even if they were not subjected to the objections above stated, and that is, that the trades taught there are only such as generally can be exercised in towns and cities, the very hotbed of vice and corruption, and this is so much the case, that the same population in a city, sends twenty culprits to gaol, for one that is sent from a rural population of equal number; nor must it be forgotten, that the unfortunate inmates of the house of correction were, in the first instance, contaminated in a large and close population, and after having suffered the penalty for faults, which in the majority of cases, did not originate in themselves, they are sent back again, older in years, but quite as corrupt as when they left the scene of their former vices, having greater bodily strength, more intelligence, less dread of a gaol, and ready to enter anew upon their sad career of crime, pests to society and burdens to themselves.

Now, if this picture has any resemblance to reality, would it not be a duty incumbent on the legislature to prevent results which experience proves, are as much to be anticipated as dreaded.

The Inspector may, perchance, be accused of enthusiasm in this matter, that he magnifies dangers and sees results beyond the ken of other men –

it may be so; yet, seeing that model farms are about to be established in divers parts of this province, it might be prudent to test their use as places of correction and instruction for the poor child of degraded parents; there he will be taught an avocation that can alone be followed up at a distance from the allurements and corruption of the city; and, there he will learn to eschew vice, cherish industry, and at last become a valuable member of that society, of which he might, under other circumstances, have become the bane and the terror.

Wolfred Nelson
Montreal, 8th September 1852

Note

This text is an excerpt from the following document:

Report of Dr. Wolfred Nelson,
one of the Inspectors of the Provincial Penitentiary,
on the present state, discipline, management and expenditure
of the district and other prisons in Canada East
Quebec, John Lovell, 1852

Obvious spelling or typographical errors have been corrected.