

## THE CHALLENGE OF FALLING MORAL STANDARDS

**C**RIME is not a matter of statistics; it is a matter of human beings: of parents and children, wives and their husbands, families and homes. Because of this, it is not a matter Christians may disregard; for behind the careful tabulations of the annual *Criminal Statistics (England and Wales)* are living men and women in need of help. It used to be said that, on the whole, a nation will get the government that it deserves: and, in the same way, a society probably gets the criminals that it deserves. If you look, on a world-wide canvas, at the way adults have been behaving since 1939, it is not surprising that most nations are having trouble with their children. Forty thousand children and young persons will be convicted of indictable offences in our own country this very year.

Because crime is human, it is also complex; and all the easy, simple answers cannot be right. 'Bring back the cat' or 'Abolish punishment' are both solutions attractive in their simplicity to those who do not believe the subject needs care or study, but only drastic action.

But care and study *are* needed; and as the literature of penology and criminology grows, certain facts emerge, certain theories are confirmed or confounded; *real progress*, however slow, is achieved. We should welcome therefore the establishment of an Institute of Criminology in Cambridge.

Other practical help is needed: in the creation of an informed public opinion; in the undertaking of voluntary and of 'professional social service'; in the changing of our cities, our homes, our schools, our prisons. Have we as Christians forgotten our Lord's concern with the social misfits, the moral outcasts, the 'offenders' of His day? Have we, who find it so easy to do nothing, forgotten that in His great parable of judgment, condemnation was pronounced on the basis, not of what men had done, but of what they failed to do? '*Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.*'

If every reader of this issue would visit the public gallery of his local courthouse, and watch the men and women in the dock — especially when sentence of imprisonment is passed — and reflect on what lies before, we might witness the stirrings of a new 'evangelical concern', not unlike that of our evangelical forefathers of a hundred and fifty years ago. The secret of their vigorous compassion was simply this: that they saw the naked wretch of Bedlam or of Newgate, the street-arab of Jack Ketch's warren, the poorest slave on a plantation in the Indies, the cripple child of a Bradford mill, as 'souls for whom Christ died'. God give us eyes in our own day to see the same.