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## JUVENILE LAW BREAKERS

NOT long since we called attention to the fact that the "Springfield Riots" were reported to have been instigated and maintained chiefly by boys of 16 to 20 years. Much the same report came from the scenes of the Russian riots. Now note the below from France. Is this not remarkable? May it not be one of the results of modern infidelity so freely introduced into the schools and schoolbooks? The French writer referred to says: –

"According to the official reports of the minister of justice for a number of years preceding 1904 there was an annual increase of about 5,000 crimes, which was not counterbalanced by any corresponding increase in population. The chairman of the committee of judiciary reform of the Chamber of Deputies recently reported to that body an increase of 80 per cent. since 1901 in the total number of crimes in the country. If the last five years alone are considered, the criminal statistics are even more appalling. 'Criminality,' says the eminent scientist and sociologist, Dr. Gustave Lebon, 'has augmented in proportions that are veritably terrifying; 30 per cent. for the murders, while the sum for the criminality [R4415 : page 183] has doubled in five years.' This statement almost passes belief, but Dr. Lebon is an authority whose word goes.

"In this connection, another dreary and dreadful fact (which no one thinks of disputing) is to be noted.

"The average age of criminals is getting to be younger and younger. More than 60 per cent. of the inmates of the 'maisons centrales' (as the houses of correction are called) are under 29 years of age. Many of the bands of 'Apaches' consist of boys of from 14 to 17, and their chiefs are often not more than 19 or twenty.

"How does it happen that crime, especially crime on the part of the young, is increasing at such a terrible rate?

"It would not be fair, of course, to assign this abominable state of things to any one cause; but it is certain that the lack of religious instruction in the public schools and the truancy and juvenile vagrancy due to the inadequate school accommodations since the passage of the law against the congregations must be held responsible for a great deal of the trouble. An adult often commits a crime because he is a discouraged, a desperate man. He is often pushed into crime by the hardships he encounters in earning his bread. But when a mere boy takes to crime, the chances are that he has deliberately chosen crime as a career, because he has been brought up with false ideals, because he has been given wrong standards of living. The criminal of fifteen to twenty, as a rule, has not even so much as tried to live honestly. He has grown up to consider work dishonorable, to believe that the world owes him a living, and that it is his business to collect the debt by hook or by crook. He becomes a thief or a swindler because he thinks it a finer thing to be a thief or a swindler than to be a cabinet-maker or a plumber."

