

Frén K, L. K.
memoranda
10/10/24

ADOLESCENT CRIMINALS AND DELINQUENTS

The prevention of criminality and delinquency in adolescents has been the subject of very earnest concern on the part of a number of different groups. The efforts and studies made in this direction fall into two general classes, those made by the laity and those made by certain professional groups such as the doctors, psychiatrists and psychologists.

Of the lay efforts it is sufficient to refer to the development^{of} probation officers, of juvenile courts, of volunteer probation schemes such as the Big Brothers and Big Sisters, the reform movements such as the Marshall Stillman movement and similar organizations and activities addressed to the task of reforming the youthful delinquent and criminal. In this connection it should be pointed out that many organizations such as the Y.M.C.A. and the Boy Scouts and the like lay claim to the role of preventive agencies in keeping the youth from going wrong.

Of the professional studies and efforts there have been a series of efforts which may be characterized perhaps too harshly as successive fashions in reform and treatment. Going back some ten years or so to the beginning of intelligence testing there was a great deal of time and attention given to the supposed correlation between feeble-mindedness and delinquency. It was thought that a simple answer to the

whole question of juvenile misbehavior was to be found in mental testing and the imputation of criminal tendencies to the mentally defective.

Unfortunately, while a considerable number of those who found their way into reformatories and correctional institutions were undoubtedly of low par mentally, it was not long before it was discovered that the problem was not so simple as it was at first believed. The mentally defective delinquents were easier to catch, they did not comprehend the total number of delinquents among whom were increasingly found youths with fairly high intelligence quotients. The next movement in this field came from the psychiatrists who, notably at Chicago in the person of Dr. William Healy, began the demonstration of the relation between warped and distorted personality and delinquency. This movement was a considerable time in incubation and did not fully develop until in 1921 the Commonwealth Fund inaugurated its program for the prevention of delinquency through the establishment of child guidance clinics. This program also embraced the visiting teacher movement which had begun some five or six years earlier in a small way in New York City and operated through the agency of a tactful woman who visited the homes of children having difficulties with lessons or school discipline.

Running along with this development was a movement for the further extension of the juvenile court procedure assisted by a psychiatrist who would advise the judge on the type of therapeutic treatment which was required for the specific juvenile offender. In this connection particular note should be made of the establishment of the Judge Baker Foundation in Boston to which Dr. Healy and Dr. Bronner came from Chicago. This organiza-

tion was formed specifically to deal with the young people brought before the juvenile court in Boston where it still continues to operate.

Within the last few years there has been a further development along the lines of gland therapy based upon the notion that aberrant and unlawful behavior proceeded from some imbalance of the ductless glands, the correction of which would with a certain amount of reform efforts lead to a restoration of the offender to the paths of rectitude. One rather enthusiastic advocate of this method of approach is inclined to view most delinquencies and conduct disorders as due in large part to endocrine disturbances of the mother during pregnancy whereby the developing organism is permanently injured.

A calm and dispassionate survey of the various and sundry efforts now being made to deal with this problem of juvenile delinquency must lead anyone to the conclusion that there is no single royal remedy and that probably all of these efforts may be available and useful and necessary pending upon the individual case. One who reads the voluminous case records put out by Dr. Realy, the case book issued by the Joint Committee on the Prevention of Delinquency and the numerous case records accumulated by their child guidance clinics, must be impressed by the fact that there appears to be no single causative or etiological factor: that the individual delinquent can be above or below or at the average of intelligence, of physical development, of school achievement and so on, but that his particular form of delinquency will be conditioned by the degree of intelligence, energy and information he possesses. Moreover it appears from many of these case histories that the specific overt acts which bring

the youth into conflict with the law or other adult authority seem to be very largely fortuitous, in the sense that these specific acts have very little rhyme or reason or what we call motive behind them. As one psychologist has put it, they are ways in which the youthful energy seems to spill over and the direction of the spill or form it takes is more or less inconsequential, contrasted with the effect of the "spill over", that is to say, the important thing about the juvenile delinquent is not so much what he does, whether stealing, setting fire to buildings or pursuing illicit pleasures of one kind or another, but rather how he came to develop that particular habit of behavior. Pursuing this line of inquiry, which is more or less what the psychiatrists are doing brings one up against the hard fact that the only method of reform which can be used is a highly individualistic study of each separate case. This is precisely what is being done by the child guidance clinics, juvenile courts, psychiatric clinics, Judge Baker Foundation and others. No one yet is able to say that there is any single factor or factors at work in all the cases.

From the point of view of prevention of delinquency two methods present themselves: one of the early diagnoses of conduct disorders to catch the youthful offender before he has gone very far wrong, the other is the method of parent education which looks to the teaching of methods of child raising which will avoid these incipient behavior difficulties. The first method is that being pursued by the Commonwealth program and is meeting with considerable success in readjusting those children of preschool age who have gone wrong sufficiently to bring themselves to the attention of the school authorities, juvenile courts and the social welfare agencies.

The same method is being followed in the habit clinics which have been organized most successfully in Massachusetts and which aim to catch the preschool child who is giving concern to his parents. The second method of parent education is that which the Memorial has been considering and assisting in the grants to Iowa University, Columbia University, Monmouth County, Federation for Child Study etc. It is expected that at one or more of these institutions an attempt will be made to study the clinical records of preschool child parents with the hope of discovering what general classes of parental mismanagement appear most frequently in the histories of these cases. This study ought to give some general notion of the incipient stages and causes of behavior in small children which presumably give rise to the juvenile and adolescent delinquent in later years.

The cause celebre at Chicago recently has been responsible for starting a considerable amount of discussion and thinking about the question of responsibility for criminal behavior. In the main the issue has been joined between the legal conception of volition and individual responsibility and the current appreciation of the fact that the individual's behavior is the product of his prior experience. It is not unwarranted to say that on the whole punishment for crime is very rarely a deterrent except in so far as it may serve to emphasize parental responsibility in the sense that every criminal caught, convicted and punished serves as a reminder to parents that they must inculcate those habits of right behavior and of avoidance of crime which will save their children from a similar fate. Unfortunately, however while the incentive to bring up their children in the righteous way may be present the knowledge of how to do so is extremely limited and many a parent

who earnestly strives to bring up his children as law abiding citizens is himself responsible through misdirected and unwise notions of discipline and obedience for later delinquency.

One cannot escape the feeling that a great deal more must be found out about how children grow and develop before we can say very much but it is clear enough that no single remedy will get us very far.

One cannot be dogmatic about any phase of this subject but it does seem that the careful and intensive study of child development in the early years ^{should} throw considerable light on the genesis of those forms of behavior in which we are now concerned.

LXP:ENH

10/10/24