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CHARLES GORING'S "THE ENGLISH CONVICT":
A SYMPOSIUM.

I. METHOD AND MOTIVE FROM THE PSYCHIATRIC VIEWPOINT.

[PURSUING THE PLAN ANNOUNCED IN OUR LAST ISSUE WE PRESENT IN THIS SYMPOSIUM CRITICISMS OF "THE ENGLISH CONVICT" BY SEVERAL AMERICAN STUDENTS OF CRIMINOLOGY. WE ARE UNDER OBLIGATION TO THOSE WHO HAVE SUPPLIED THESE ARTICLES AND ALSO TO THE AUTHORS OF THE PAPERS THAT APPEARED IN JULY UNDER THE ABOVE TITLE.—EDS.]

WILLIAM A. WHITE.¹

In this exhaustive treatise we have one of the most comprehensive of recent efforts to deal with the problem of crime by a study of the criminal. This is a study of the convicted English prisoner, and has been carried out with the utmost pains and in the greatest detail. The program, as condensed in the table of contents, is indeed an extensive one. Part I deals with an inquiry into the alleged existence of a physical criminal type. Part II is divided into seven chapters, dealing with the physique, age, vital statistics, mental differentiation, influence of the force of circumstances, fertility of criminals and the influence of heredity on the genesis of crime.

To begin with, the characteristic feature of the book is set forth in the sub-title "A Statistical Study." The work is essentially statistical, and upon almost every page we meet tables, curves, diagrams and complicated mathematical formulæ. Why it is so can be easily understood when we read in the preface that Professor Karl Pearson's advice was sought and that the author visited the Biometrical Laboratory for the purpose of studying their methods. The whole work, then, is a statistical study carried out under the inspiration of the biometricians.

Nothing in the sciences that deal with human beings may be more delusive than the application of the statistical method. Certain groups of human beings, as in this instance "criminals," are studied by being measured in all sorts of possible ways, and the figures thus obtained are then treated as finalities and the process of mathematical juggling is begun, which brings out all sorts of results. Manifestly the results, as the outcome of this process, must depend upon what originally went into the formation of these figures. It is, therefore, of prime importance that the concepts upon which the author bases his study should have some examination.

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METHOD AND MOTIVE

In the first place, it makes very little difference to start with what the author may conceive to be the meaning of the concept "criminal" so long as we know that the material is the material found in the English prison. If we understand the preface aright, these statistics were gathered by systematic statistical study of the convicted criminal without selection. Now while I, personally, am always suspicious of statistical studies, I am more than critical of a study based upon such material. I cannot possibly see how the convicted criminal can be dealt with as a unit—as if he consisted of homogeneous material. "Criminal," like "insane" and many other such terms, are broad concepts, in these two instances, solely legal concepts, and include a tremendous medley of all sorts and conditions of men. Take the more limited concept of "thief," for example. One man may steal under the influence of the prodromal stage of paresis who has been previously of high moral character; another man may steal under the excitement of a hypomanic attack; another may steal as a result of moral delinquency; another as a result of high-grade mental defect; another under the influence of alcoholic intoxication, and so forth and so on, and how by any possibility a grouping of these men together can give us any light upon the general concept "thief" is beyond my power to comprehend. The difficulty with all such methods of approach to scientific problems is that the approaches are not sufficiently controlled by dynamic concepts. Some group of individuals is given a name, and forthwith the name becomes a thing, and the thing has clear-cut, rigid limitations, and is so dealt with. I am aware that the author disclaims a concept of such rigidity and emphasizes the fact that the criminal, as he has worked him out, merges into the normal man. This, of course, is all right so far as it goes, but his actual treatment of the situation by statistical methods in the way in which he has done is a treatment which is based upon such rigidity of concepts.

A fundamentally dynamic viewpoint of human beings should enable one to see them as biological units in the last analysis, but not any too clearly differentiated even from their environment. It should enable one to see also an interplay of action and reaction between what at their focal points we term the individual and the environment. The failure to get this viewpoint is seen well on page 22 of the introduction, where the author undertakes to differentiate the words abnormal and unusual. He states here that the two words are not interchangeable as they might appear to be, but that there is a real and important difference which it is necessary to recognize; unusual mean-

ing rarity, whereas with the term abnormal the idea of unnaturalness and morbidity is connoted. Let me quote: "The unusual is always quite natural, and is the outcome of natural laws. Unusually tall people are quite rare, but their stature is part of natural growth, and is the outcome of the natural laws of growth. The abnormal on the other hand, is essentially morbid, and implies a condition of things against nature." I wonder if it is possible to find a more absolute distortion of viewpoint than this. This sentence absolutely smacks of medievalism, as if morbidity were something that invaded the human being from without, as if a difference in height up to a certain number of centimeters and fractions thereof were conditioned by natural laws, and as if a person exceeded by a millimeter that average height the laws which controlled that excess of growth were laws outside of nature! This is a concept which, I must confess, is absolutely unacceptable to me, unless I project myself a thousand years in the past and think of the world and everything on it as natural, provided it be usual, and things that offend my eye or produce results which I do not approve as caused by some demon from outside the world who projects his power like the proverbial curse upon the afflicted mortal. It is as if a watch by the mere fact of having a broken main-spring becomes no longer a watch; as if a man who is sick becomes by that same token a monster no longer amenable to the laws of nature; as if the chemistry of the pancreatic secretions of a diseased pancreas must be a different chemistry from that of normal secretions; as if for the study of a disordered mind one must needs have a different psychology.

As to the author's conclusions as a result of the inquiry into the alleged existence of a physical criminal type, conducted at great length, and occupying practically one-half the book, his general conclusion is that there is no evidence which confirms the existence of such a type as Lombroso and his disciples described.

His conclusions as to the mental differentiation of the criminal is as follows: "Our final conclusion is that English criminals are selected by a physical condition, and a mental constitution which are independent of each other—and that the one significant physical association with criminality is a generally defective physique; and that the one vital mental constitutional factor in the etiology of crime is defective intelligence." Here we have a conclusion which is diametrically opposed to the whole trend of modern thought in the realm of psychiatry. The work of Adler on the explanation of the neurotic character and his work on organic defects indicates quite clearly that mental disorders, as exhibited in the neuroses particularly, and

probably also in the psychoses, are correlated, and perhaps, in his opinion, dependent upon defect in functioning of certain organs.

Dr. Goring, in his consideration of the mentality of the criminal, has practically nothing to say about the emotional side of mental life. He stresses the intellectual side. This, again, is a movement diametrically opposed to modern trends in psychiatry and psychopathology. I think I may say, without fear of serious contradiction, that we have learned that the affective side of mental life is of far greater importance as supplying motives for conduct than the intellectual side. With the recent development in the knowledge of the endocrinous glands and the sympathetic nervous system we have arrived at a position where we appreciate the existence of a physical basis for emotional expression which has to be taken into account in studying defective types of conduct based upon defective emotional reactions. The study of the material which Dr. Goring had at his disposal would undoubtedly have been illuminating from this organic viewpoint, and even with his statistical method he has indicated that his material was, on the whole, physically defective, a conclusion which is, perhaps, one of the most valuable in his book.

I have been emphasizing for a long time the necessity of a psychopathological approach to the problem of the criminal quite on all fours with the same approach to the problem of the so-called insane. Dr. Goring's approach to the problem is essentially anthropological, and although his book is filled with all kinds of valuable suggestions and interspersed with detailed information which comes from an immense storehouse of knowledge, based upon extensive experience, still I cannot but feel that the amount of effort that he has put upon the preparation of this work has been very largely taken up in "lost motion." We have learned in psychiatry long since that the outward act of an individual can never be taken at its face value, or at least can never be understood by considering it alone. A careful psychological dissection, so to speak, has to be carried out in order to determine the roots from which such conduct has sprung, and it is only by such dissection and such determination that conduct becomes understandable. To attempt to classify conduct upon the basis of the opinion of twelve jurymen, whose business it is to say whether the conduct of an individual is or is not capable of being squeezed into the limits defined by a specific statute is to confine one's observations to the most superficial aspects of the individual. Society has been doing this for hundreds of years. For scientific purposes such superficial glimpses are of little value. The identically same act, from a legal point of view, as I have already

indicated, may be committed by widely different individuals from widely different motives, and, therefore, have absolutely different explanations. The problem of the criminal must become more individualistic. We never learned anything about the so-called insane person as long as he was considered *en masse*, and we never learned very much about him until we studied him as an individual, and this will be the same way with the criminal. His make-up, physical and mental; his heritage, his individual history, his motives, and all the rest of it, must be carefully worked out in individual studies. We must look upon him with the calm discernment of the scientific eye for the purpose of endeavoring to determine the meaning of the phenomena in his particular case. Nothing can so effectively distort our ability to see clearly as does a moral critique that considers the criminal's act as sinful, and while, as a general thing, Dr. Goring's work is free from such manifest limitations, still, when he comes to discuss general principles, we find that they are all the time in the back of his head; for example, on page 21 of the introduction: "Now we do not deny that the law-breaker, by his anti-social acts, is sinful."

When the statistical method is brought in operation for the purpose of reaching scientific conclusions, it is necessary primarily to call in question the accuracy of the concepts with which the figures deal, for nothing can be taken out from one end of an equation which was not put in at the other. The trend of modern psychopathology is individualistic and essentially dynamic. From these standpoints the concepts dealt with by the author are distinctly defective.

As to the whole work, he has succeeded in demolishing the old idea of the born criminal, as set forth by Lombroso, but such a concept did not need demolishing. It has ceased to have much life for some time past. It is, however, gratifying that it has been demolished by a refinement of the same methods that called it into being. As for the rest—well, I cannot but express regret that such a stupendous amount of work and energy has been side-tracked into working over discarded ideas rather than utilized in dealing with the actual, pulsating, living problems of which there are so many. So much work might well have gone a considerable way toward illuminating these problems. In any event, one must bow acknowledgment to the author who has pursued the light as he saw it so diligently and for so long.