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SOME PRINCIPLES OF PAROLE LAWS FOR GIRLS¹

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Unless parole is considered in its relation to a state program for the correction of delinquency no true estimate of its value can be made.

Penology should deal with correctional systems and should recognize the various phases of treatment as parts of one whole, preserving the relations of one part to another and the interdependence of the parts.

The following paper attempts to indicate the place of parole in the care of the delinquent girl and some of its principles.

We are considering girls, who have been committed to the institution by the court, because of having broken certain laws or statutes. We are not talking about dependent or neglected children, who in certain states are being put into industrial schools. We are also assuming that the institution has been established as a training school on the cottage plan, which means a certain free life as contrasted with the stricter discipline which goes with the high walls of reformatory institutions.

It is because the girl could not adjust herself, was a misfit in the community that she was sent to the institution. Parole is the process of re-education—the specific kind of community service, through which the girl is re-absorbed into free community life.

The difference between parole and probation is that parole is dealing with a girl who has been removed entirely from the community and subject to all the influences of institution life, while probation undertakes readjustment without this experience. No girl of average mentality could pass unchanged through a period of enforced retirement in an institution, because so many new forces have been brought to bear upon her.

It is the purpose of this paper, then, to discuss by what methods parole can best accomplish its end, establishment of the girl in free community life as a helpful force.

Its conclusions are based on experience with girls only and may differ materially from the principles applicable to the parole of boys and of adults. Re-absorption into the community is governed in each instance by widely differing considerations.

¹Read at the National Conference of Social Work, Kansas City, May, 1918.

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The normal boy, for instance, has an economic value and an interest in his own economic efficiency. Such interest is secondary in importance with the girl—at least in her own mind. Earning her living presents itself to her in a form which offers none of the inducements of a career and is but a necessary tiding over of the time until she shall marry and have a home of her own—a frankly avowed ambition with a majority of these girls. This difference in mental attitude must have a great bearing in determining methods of parole and methods should be applied principles.

The fact that parole should be a part of any correctional system will undoubtedly be accepted.

It is conceded by some of the most progressive institution superintendents that parole is of importance equal to that of the institution. Their reason for this rather radical stand is that the institution, because of its restricted and practically homogeneous group cannot hope to complete the girl's training, since it can offer no practical application of the knowledge gained in her industrial training, nor test the sincerity of her change of heart and the strength of her good resolutions when the girl is called upon to face the temptations of normal community life.

The institution, then, is only the first step along the road to the complete rehabilitation of the girl.

As the unrestricted return of the girl to the community is manifestly too dangerous, both for society and for the girl, a second step must be provided for in the state program which shall include continued training and supervision. The return of the girl to the community under these conditions is made possible by a system of parole.

There are several theories as to the best system.

Most institutions have a parole officer, perhaps several officers, belonging to the staff, where possible living in the institution, and usually having some duties in the institution itself. These parole officers are under the direction of the superintendent of the institution. This system has been upheld on the ground that the girl was best known to and therefore best handled by a person living with her in the institution.

A theory more recently advocated is that parole and probation should be co-ordinated and that when the girl is paroled from the institution she should be returned to the jurisdiction of the court which committed her, as otherwise the knowledge of her gained through the investigation for the court would not be available.

The real test for any theory of parole is how effectively it can accomplish its object—the complete restoration of the girl.

A parole system established as an independent outside department, under the same board of trustees, would seem to be the most effective means of solving the problem.

While under certain conditions parole might be well done under the direction of the superintendent of the institution, separation from it insures a more complete identification of the girl with the community from the start. It marks for her the second step in her progress towards freedom.

The possibilities of parole are so great that the work needs most careful organization and the undivided attention of its officers. They should not be hampered or distracted by the problems of the institution, since their work demands a constant study of the resources in the community which can be utilized for the development of the girl on parole. This study can be made best by people who are themselves a part of the community.

Parole should offer the girl a chance to put behind her all the signs of her delinquency—court, probation, institution—the strongest argument against the co-ordination of probation and parole. This need imply no disloyalty to the institution which has done so much for her, but hitches up the girl more completely to the community from the beginning of her parole. She must not fly back to the institution as a refuge from the difficulties or the temptations she meets. She must learn how to fight them in the open with the resources which are available to her there.

This encouragement of independence of the institution does not preclude the return of girls to it when necessary for the protection of the girl and of the community. In certain instances the girls need the discipline of the institution, sometimes they need medical treatment, or further training, to make them capable of earning their living.

It is fundamentally bad for the girl to make the reformatory institution a home center. It should be a background for future attainment instead. With every desire to give the girl a sense that she has a home, tying her to the institution unwittingly helps to prevent her from making new and more normal ties in the community. I believe this would hold true also of any plan which held the girls together in a group anywhere outside the institution, such as a home from which the girls went out to work in factories or stores. Any such group, even though in a lesser degree, continues the abnormal segregation of

the institution and lessens the chances of the complete readjustment of the girl in society.

The continuance of associations formed in the institution with girls of lower standards than those acceptable to the community tends to lessen in the girl's eyes the seriousness of the offense she had committed. It is only after she comes out on parole that she can make her first application of the principles of right living taught her in the school. It is then she realizes that if she does things, other people condemn she cannot hope to win their respect or to maintain her own self-respect.

The stimulating mental effect upon the girl of marking her forward progress by this separation of institution and parole is evident because it offers her a new allegiance, a new loyalty, new influences, a chance to begin all over again with new people and under entirely new conditions, where old failures need not be recalled.

As in most instances her own home does not offer the best opportunities for her development, it is usually necessary to secure for the girl a home in a family very carefully selected to fit her special needs, a home which will give her in an unusual degree oversight, protection and opportunities for further training. In every instance the girl's temperament and capacities must be considered. It would be disastrous to place a slow-moving, slow-thinking girl with a quick, red-haired woman, the discouragements of both would be too great; or again, to give a chronic runaway a place with unrestricted chance to slip away from the woman's notice.

This leads us to the conclusion that certain working principles, certain methods are essential to successful parole. These working principles interlock, but can be differentiated.

The first of these is individual treatment based on knowledge of the individual.

Each girl is an individual problem and her mental attitude as well as her capacities must be considered.

The school has been teaching her the fundamentals of good conduct, truthfulness, honesty, clean thinking, as well as giving her industrial training, supplementing her school education and laying the foundation of habits of self-control, cleanliness, order and industry.

The girl's attitude towards her parole depends upon how much hold—how much formative power—the institution has acquired over her. She may be determined to begin over again, her success depending only on her strength of will; or she may look upon parole as an opportunity to have her own way, to be free; or she may dread it as

she has grown dependent on the institution. A more or less childish attitude seems to be a frequent result of group treatment.

It is the responsibility of any parole system to comprehend and meet any of these attitudes.

No treatment of the individual can be intelligent which is not based on a thorough knowledge of that individual; her heredity, her environment, her companions, her reactions to school, her recreation, her health, her characteristics and disposition, and her delinquencies prior to her commitment. A thorough investigation of the girl's background should be made as soon as possible after commitment, in order that the institution can do its work intelligently and prepare the girl for parole. The information thus gained is also of great value when the girl comes out on parole.

A person is her potentialities (not what she is, but what she may be) plus her experiences. The girl who has had institution treatment is different from a girl who has never had it and different from what she would have been if she had never had it, because it is an added layer of experience. So it is necessary to add to what has been learned about the girl prior to her commitment, her reactions to the institution. These may be learned from reports from the various people who have come in contact with her in the school. They should cover as many sides as possible.

While it may be easier for the girl to know her visitor before she comes out on parole, there are real advantages in making a fresh start. It adds to the adventure. Such appeals to the imagination of the girl are real helps in arresting her attention and catching her interest at the beginning.

This individual treatment can only be secured by *oversight* over every girl—the second working principle.

It is through constant oversight that the girl's development is noted and her best interests insured. This oversight is secured by means of visitors, each visitor responsible for a certain number of girls who look to her for sympathy and guidance. This oversight means also the *protection* of the girl—the third working principle.

Protection includes both the girl and the community—protection of the girl from temptation by placing her in an environment which will stimulate her good impulses at the same time that it attracts and interests her. Oversight over the girl may protect her from exploitation through overwork, or neglect of her health or happiness. The protection of the girl from her bad impulses protects both the girl and the community.

The fourth working principle, *education* or *re-education* is one of the most important.

To make oversight and protection possible, the girls, when they first come from the institution need to be placed at housework. There are several reasons for this—the chief reasons are because it is only at housework that they can be constantly supervised and protected and because, having come from bad or weak homes, they need to learn the essentials of a good, happy, well-ordered home, as most of them will become home-makers themselves. There is a third reason for this placing of girls in families; a good employer, who is willing to interest herself in the further training and welfare of the girl is a powerful means of regeneration. If the girl learns to love and respect the woman she lives with and works with, she learns lessons in right living, the value of which cannot be overestimated. It may take several trials before a girl is fitted into the home best suited to influence her, but the final result is worth the most patient searching.

Return to her own home may be educative if it is made under the right circumstances. Either the home should offer special constructive influences or the girl should have developed sufficient character to grow through the responsibility of raising the standards of her home.

Ideally, constructive study of the family of the girl should be made while the girl is in the care of the state. How can new forces be set to work to build up a new family life and thus bring about a safe reuniting of girl and family?

The girl's church connections may be a great influence in her rehabilitation. While many of the girls have not developed any real religious feeling they get in the habit of forming their social contacts through the church. Some girls are honestly and deeply religious. A true spiritual awakening is always possible and is always most hopeful.

Recreation means to most of the girls before they come to the school the commercialized recreation of the "movies" and the dance halls. They know nothing of the wholesome pleasures of purely social intercourse. The good-will aroused in the give-and-take of happy family-sharing of good times, the generous impulses awakened and the quickened intellectual response resulting from social contacts of the right sort contribute largely to the growth of the girl's character.

It is usually possible to gratify a girl's ambition for lessons in music, in school branches or in various other things in which she is interested, either through private lessons or through the public schools, where under wise oversight, a girl who has failed utterly before com-

mitment because of bad influences, may be reabsorbed into the school population and become a normal happy unit of it.

The establishment of the habit of thrift is another source of education and is most important for the welfare of the girl and of the state. It is only through thrifty habits that the girl can be self-supporting when she has to stand upon her own feet after she passes out of the care of the state. The girl must be taught frugality which is the basis of prosperity—respect both for the uses and the values of things. If you can show the girl that frugality has associated with it the joy of achievement she will find real pleasure and pride in making over her dresses and retrimming her hats. The attractiveness of planning is a wedge between the girl and the temptation of pretty clothes which can otherwise be hers only through illicit means. As far as possible the girl should be self-supporting from the start. Self-support and self-respect are closely allied. A girl who feels that whatever the state does for her is no more than her due, that having been committed to the school against her will the state should support her, must be taught to realize that this is not the attitude of self-respecting people. Her growing independence may well give her a new vision of her relations to others.

The fifth working principle is closely linked to all the others and is the care of the girl's *health*. A parole system has no greater responsibility than this.

Many of these girls are physically in poor condition, if they are not diseased at the time of their commitment. They make surprising gains because of the regular life and the medical care of the institution, but the neglect some of them have previously experienced, the natural delicacy of others as well as the normal possibilities of illness make the solution of medical problems a very important part of the work of parole. The most difficult of these is that of the girls suffering from venereal disease. In spite of apparent cure after long treatment in the institution the possibility of later developments in such cases make extra care in placing and constant watchfulness a necessity. The precaution of putting these girls immediately under skilled medical supervision as soon as they are paroled protects the community and insures the continued good health of the girl.

Among the working principles of parole never to be lost sight of is the long look ahead. Good parole work implies much more than watchful care on the part of the officer. What is the girl going to be and to do after she passes out of the care of the state? From the beginning this should be borne in mind. Nothing should be done with

the girl which does not look to her future. What does she need most to hold her steadily to her purpose of being a good citizen after she has formed that purpose? She must have the constant and sympathetic encouragement of her visitor. She must be given hope and the incentive of a gratified ambition if she has one within the bounds of good sense and earning her living. The plan for her future must be her plan or she will abandon it when she is free. Even if you make a much wiser plan for her, unless you can win her honest acceptance of your plan, it must be given up for hers. The best you can do, then, is to give her a chance to test her own out before she passes out of your care. One of the lessons parole officers have to remember is that the girl has to learn from her own experience, sometimes from her own mistakes, to make her choice wisely. The learning of this lesson is worth the risk of many failures.

This long look ahead is much complicated by the variety and difficulty of the problems presented by the girls. No thoughtful prognosis of the girl's future can be made without careful observation of her mental development. Not so long ago most girls who behaved badly, who yielded to every impulse, or who were swayed this way or that by their emotions, were called feeble-minded—that happy dumping ground of the social worker. The psychiatrists and psychologists in their increasing comprehension of these problems, though they have not yet determined upon treatment, have taught us the value of careful diagnosis, and in some instances are able to advise methods of care. We at least have learned that sometimes apparently wilful conduct the girl herself is unable to control; that intellect is not always the factor which gives most trouble in the mental makeup of the individual. A girl with average intellectual capacity may have no emotional control or may be the victim of her own impulses. The most hopeful feature is that this greater comprehension, this combination of the experience of medical and social specialists may eventually be able to prove to legislative bodies, that there are certain individuals who are not feeble-minded nor insane, but who are equally dangerous to the public welfare and who must be placed in custodial care. In the present overcrowded conditions of the institutions for the feeble-minded and the lack of institutions for the care of these even more difficult girls, which include the "defective delinquent" and the more dangerous of the "psychopathic personalities," the future of these girls can be easily predicted, but not prevented.

Then there are the girls who present problems of character and disposition: the high-strung girls with bad tempers, many of whom can

learn self-control; the suggestible girls, swung either way by the people last with them; the girls with babies; the girls who steal; the girl who is unchaste; the girl with a grouch, who believes the world will only give her what she demands. And we must never forget that any one of them may be all of them.

What is the test of successful parole? The girl herself. We cannot measure success in exact terms, nor can we analyze the relative importance of the elements which compose it—the unexpected responses, the sudden awakening of unsuspected powers, the new loyalties, the development of the child into the woman. Nobody can standardize the parts of a human character, nor assemble them, but “by the grace of God” they grow, while we stand by, opportunists in character-building, ready to encourage, or to restrain, to sympathize with the joys and the sorrows, and most earnestly endeavoring to understand.

If the community would recognize its own handiwork and its own job, parole would not only be a larger part of its plan for the correction of delinquency, but would be an accepted field of study for preventive measures—measures which could be taken with little children before they become delinquents.

“For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope.”