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BRIEFER CONTRIBUTIONS

CRIME IS OUR CROWN OF THORNS

COURTLAND NIXON

The press of our country devotes more space to crime than to any other subject—with the possible exception of the topic of Prohibition, which likewise includes crime in part. It does not seem that we are doing anything earnestly about the burden we carry. The subject is not played up because of abnormal curiosity of our citizens.

We think crime is overdone as news and yet the conclusion of the Wickersham Commission shows that the four or five hundred thousand inmates of our prisons today represent approximately 10 per cent of those engaged in crime. We should remember that jails only hold the failures in criminal life, the successful are not apprehended.

Thinking this through it means that with the remaining ninety per cent added we have four million people involved in crime. Again they support families, maintain perhaps one or two domiciles, representing conservatively four dependents to each law violator.

Crime is aiding, then, a population of 16 million people in the United States, or 12.8 per cent.

During 1931, Herman W. Duker, youth of 23, son of a family not wrecked by poverty, was found guilty and sentenced to death. He was convicted of killing a man in a hold-up in Baltimore. As a fugitive he landed in southern California. Again he was mixed up in a robbery shooting scrape and this time

a policeman shot the boy in the stomach. For weeks he was in a hospital, at death's door. The eastern police swore out a warrant for him. Meanwhile his mother went speedily to her son's bedside, after waiting to learn that he would recover she journeyed home.

Police were sent from Baltimore to bring the youth back when he became able to travel. The trial was held resulting in conviction. The judge in effect said he found it necessary in passing sentence to fix capital punishment rather than life imprisonment because human life was not safe before this convict. As a sequel the father and another man are under bond charged with attempting to obstruct justice, because they are alleged to have aided in the escape of the son by placing him aboard an oil tanker bound for the west coast. There may follow other trials and imprisonment of these men.

The case is cited to bring forth the various situations that crime involves. The expense of tracing and detecting, of the long hospital treatment, the cost of deputies to California and return with the prisoner, the trial cost, appeals and execution, and now the probable further trial of two more men. What does America profit? Only the example of law enforced.

Right here the readers will separate and align themselves. Positive opinions, on what should be

done about criminals, are more rabid, adamant and self-satisfied than on any other subject confronting our citizens. If a man serves on a jury case involving narcotics, he is sure dope causes our criminals, a welfare worker confronted with low intelligence, is convinced that mental deficiency is the basis of crime; and violators resulting from automobiles, joy-riding, bootlegging, gambling, poverty and robbery each have a coterie of citizens who, with expert opinion and profound wisdom, will vouch for their unerring judgment about crime. So long as such a condition exists we will not make progress in curtailing crime. Furthermore we will go on paying exorbitant financial costs together with loss of life and property.

It is not a case of justifying or condemning capital punishment. We should be concerned with preventing crime in general. It has been said that "Patience is what some of us think we have when we are just loafing."

How much better it would have been if all the money spent in the case mentioned had been appropriated in advance to train, assist and direct that youth before he became a criminal. There should be, for instance, at least ten times the present number of boys clubs for the underprivileged in our cities, to teach clean living and good Americanism. If mental deficiency exists in a derelict youth let the medical profession look after him, before the jails take him, avoiding waste of life, property and expense.

We have been approaching the subject of the cost of crime. We do not conceive its magnitude, until we seek data. One reason European nations have less crime expense is because they would not countenance

it. France with her frugal life today, using firewood that our puritan ancestors called fagots, would not for one instant stand our criminal waste.

The investigation of crime costs is not simple. Adding together State and Federal prison appropriations, budgets of states, cities and towns of the United States hardly touches the subject. We must consider the vast army of private officers, such as railroad, express, steamship, park, amusement places, estate and other police paid from pockets of individuals or corporations; also private detective agencies, and the watchmen and plain guards everywhere in buildings, shops and plants.

The earliest research in modern crime costs that I have found is a paper by Eugene Smith of New York for the National Prison Association in 1901. It was considered so valuable by the then Secretary of State, John Hay, that he transmitted it to Congress and it was printed (House Document No. 491 of 56th Congress). "County costs are meager and largely unknown," said the author. He took the earning capacity of a criminal at \$1600 per year and as that is wasted an estimated loss of 400 millions is there involved. The proportion of urban to suburban population has materially changed in the intervening thirty years. This was all before the days of the omnipresent automobile, Prohibition Enforcement, or gangsters.

Approaching our present conditions, The New York Times of September 20, 1925, said, "Crime costs the Nation Ten Billions a year." In this survey an item, not available in 1901, is considered, namely, it is estimated there are over 400,000 men serving as County

sheriffs, constables, deputies and marshals. Without going into details the article shows:

Direct property losses, three and a half billion.

Indirect losses, preventing, detecting, trying, punishing, three and a half billion.

Indirect economic losses, two and a half billion.

Undetermined, cost covering bribery, alarms, and racketeering.

Crime total annual cost, ten billion dollars.

This is equivalent to a charge for crime in 1925, of \$81.30 annually per capita, in the United States. Crime cost increased ten times in 24 years, according to this estimate.

As national defense has many features similar to armed defense against crime, the cost of military-naval activities are stated hereafter as a comparison. It shows that as a nation we had not become alarmists. In fact we have held our national defense to a minimum, but crime has forced us to meet its challenge from day to day. National defense cost \$6.15 per capita in 1925, as fixed by Federal appropriations for the Army and Navy combined.

We find the Manufacturers' Record, February 24, 1927, published a survey by Mark Prentiss, which estimates crime charge in the United States at almost 13 billion dollars. Graft and gambling being undeterminable are again omitted. The classifications are not just the same as those of 1925 above, but the group of steps of law enforcement are similar and we find an increase of 500 million dollars.

Based on the estimated population of 1927, this total means an expense of crime of \$111.46 annually per capita, an individual in-

crease cost of \$30.00 in two years. Our land and sea military appropriations showed a decrease that year. National defense being \$5.91 per capita in the United States.

In the summer of 1931, at the dedication of a municipal coliseum at Sterling, Illinois, Governor Louis L. Emmerson of that State made an address in which he is quoted as saying:

"Organized crime in the United States causes a total direct loss estimated as \$15,000,000,000 annually and must be stamped out if democratic government is to continue its existence."

On these latest figures each man, woman and child in this country feels the burden of crime financially to the extent of \$121.10 a year, and the entire Federal National Defense costs them individually only \$6.73 annually.

As comparison we might say, in terms of liquid measure the dairy farmer contributes each year a barrel of milk to crime expense, for every ten quarts of milk he subscribes to National Defense; or that Wall Street pays yearly 6 silver dollars as National Defense insurance, and allows crime to take its toll of 6 gold pieces of \$20 each. In weight each year, every wheelbarrow of coal that navy ships burn is met by wastage of two tons of coal by crime expense.

The Preamble of the Constitution of the United States prescribes,

"We, the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, . . . do ordain and establish this Constitution."

The Justice and Tranquility costs us yearly 18 times as much as common defense, or in other words it