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## A CRIMINOLOGICAL LABORATORY IN THE MASSACHUSETTS CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM<sup>1</sup>

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Despite the recent economic disturbances no rational person will deny that the past century has brought phenomenal industrial progress. Accompanying this industrial progress, in smaller degree and with a decided lag to be sure, has come social progress. It has been somewhat distressing, however, that with the giant strides made in increasing the production of material goods such short and halting steps should have been taken in the amelioration of social ills.

But if we were to study the efforts made and the thought involved in bringing the world's industrial machine to its present relatively high plane of efficiency and contrast with this the methods developed to solve our social problems, we need go no further in explaining the discrepancy existing between these two progress rates. Industrial society has employed and encouraged inventive genius; it has secured the best in organizing ability; it has given its workers the best equipment that could be developed and has carefully scrutinized every operation to learn whether better goods could not be made with less effort and expense. At the basis of all industrial progress has been the laboratory, always creative yet critical of what it has created and intent on changing when change meant improvement.

But where is the counterpart of the industrial laboratory to be found in the field of human relations? With the development of medicine and with its accomplishments in the protection and preservation of human life through the channels of the laboratory there has recently developed the idea that research, with its analytical technique, may have something to offer in making more effective our efforts in the sphere of social relations. But whereas the waste due to criminal activity in the United States mounts to thousands of lives and into hundreds of millions of dollars yearly, the number of laboratories seriously engaged in the analysis of the problems presented by the criminal can be counted on one's

<sup>1</sup>Read by invitation before the Massachusetts Psychiatric Society, Boston, December 30, 1931.

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fingers. It is estimated by the National Industrial Conference Board that about \$200,000,000 is spent annually for industrial research but it is doubtful whether two per cent of that amount has in all time been spent on criminal research.

And so if we are to expect effective results in the operation of the machinery of criminal justice, it would seem worthy of consideration that we submit our raw materials, our methods and machinery of operation to the same critical analysis that has produced efficiency in the field of industry and which has made medicine a science.

There are certain handicaps placed on criminal research, however, not to be found in either industrial or medical research. The whole system of criminal treatment has its roots planted deeply in ancient tradition and even though scientific analysis were to show a certain operation in our treatment of criminal offenders to be utterly ineffectual and though a technique indicating much more promising possibilities might be suggested, there would be a powerful element of public opinion which would decry the proposal as a vicious attack on a respected social institution. Then too, it is not easy to convince the authorities in whose power it is to furnish research facilities that the state is justified in appropriating the taxpayers' money for what appears to be a pursuit of only academic interest and value. And there will be those who have given serious thought to the problem who will maintain that effective research cannot be done by persons employed by the state; that research properly belongs to the university and the foundation or organization privately endowed and consequently not restricted in the nature of its studies and in the presentation of its findings by political expediency. In answer to this argument may I state that I believe both private and state controlled research have their respective places just as private and public welfare work have their respective fields of endeavor. The very fact that the criminal is dealt with at all points by state agencies presents a situation which seems to require research under state auspices. No longer can criminal research be considered effective which allows the criminologist to sit back in his study and contemplate the vagaries and perversity of human nature. Only by an intensive study of the individuals who are criminals can we obtain the information upon which to intelligently base programs of prevention and treatment. This being true it would seem that for much criminological and penological research the state con-

trolled laboratory would be in an advantageous position for effective work. On the contrary, there is much that can undoubtedly be better accomplished by private enterprise. The Glueck study, for example, which is without doubt the most thorough and comprehensive research yet done in the field of criminal treatment could not have been warranted under a state program of research. This study showed the social status of 500 reformatory offenders five years after their discharge from parole. Although there can be few if any projects of more importance in penology than the analysis of the effects of treatment, I believe it is impracticable, at present at least, for the state to carry on projects requiring the investigation of individuals long after they have been released from the custody of the state.

Despite the several objections which might be made to the state's analysis of its own problems, the Massachusetts General Assembly in the Spring of 1931 created a Division of Research for the Prevention of Crime in the Department of Correction. It was obvious from the beginning that information upon which to base criminal research was lacking. Furthermore, to set about obtaining this information purely for the purpose of research would be an expensive procedure and could not be justified. But it was also evident that the information we needed for research was needed by the prison officials, the Department of Correction, and the Board of Parole for administrative purposes. And so the first project of the Division of Research has been to assist each of the state penal and correctional institutions in establishing a department or clinic for the purpose of making a complete and accurate social and psychiatric study of every person committed.

At the State Prison a complete unit has been developed, the staff comprising a director, who might be considered a clinical criminologist, a part time psychiatrist, a psychologist, two male and two female social workers and a clinical interne. Each inmate is interviewed soon after admission and with the report of this interview as a basis an extensive field investigation is conducted which includes contacts with the home, court, school, employers, physicians, social agencies, hospitals, and other persons and agencies which may possess relevant information. The data obtained is developed into a chronological life history and then given to the psychiatrist for his examination of the inmate. In the meantime the institution physician and the psychologist make their respective examinations. With all of the above data in hand, the

director of the division interviews the inmate, and then the case is presented in staff conference which is attended by members of the staff enumerated above, the warden, the director of the Division of Research, and frequently by the Commissioner of Correction. In conference the case is analyzed from all standpoints, and an attempt is made to arrive at a concise statement of the man's problems. Possibly the result should not be dignified by the term diagnosis. But the terminology used is of less importance than the fact that a serious effort is made to describe the problems presented by each offender, taking into account whatever the psychiatric, psychological and sociological techniques have to offer.

A tentative program of institutional treatment is then outlined. To what extent the program suggested can or will be put into operation in individual cases it is too early to judge. Nevertheless, the inclusion of administrative officials in the staff conference and the existence of a close and friendly relationship between the administrative officers and the members of the staff augurs well for more effective results than have been produced where a psychiatric or scientific unit has been superimposed upon the administrative organization.

To one familiar with the limited treatment facilities found in an old prison such as that at Charlestown it may seem that the program of investigation and analysis described above is not warranted by what can be accomplished in individualized treatment. Nevertheless, even at Charlestown there exist some facilities for classification into homogeneous groups. Vocational training is available in the various industries and with the knowledge of the inmate obtained through the case history, he can be placed at work fitted to his needs, interests, and capacities. Then there is the school, the hospital, the library, and other constructive influences toward which the inmate may be more intelligently directed if his history and problems are understood. Not least in importance to the administration is the case history's use in dealing with conduct problems, which are, needless to say, numerous in a state prison population.

An example of its use in this respect arose recently in the case of an inmate sentenced on the charge of forgery who requested that our investigator refrain from interviewing members of his family because they were highly respected and influential members of the community and did not know of his imprisonment. The request was made in such a sincere and straightforward man-

ner that the experienced worker who handled the interview was prone to give the inmate's statements credence. Among other things, the inmate stated that he was a college graduate, that he had worked steadily but did not care to give the names of his employers because he could easily be reemployed upon his release unless the opportunity was spoiled by investigators; that he had never been previously arrested except on a non-support charge and even then it was his wife who was the culpable party. In the course of our investigation it was learned that the family had no particular standing in the community but on the contrary had been known to relief and other social agencies over a period of years; that the inmate had not gone beyond the ninth grade in school; that he had been employed in numerous places but had always been discharged as undesirable because of his extreme egotism, his "glib" tongue, his untruthfulness, his continual petty frauds and trouble making among employees; that he had been previously arrested on fifteen different occasions on charges including non-support, larceny by check and larceny of an auto, and for these offenses had served five sentences totaling three and one-half years in houses of corrections in addition to several probation sentences and that even while at large in the community he had been continually involved in fraudulent schemes. It was also learned that he was seen by Drs. Healy and Bronner early in his career, and they had classed him as a pathological liar. In 1927 he was examined by the Division of Examination of Prisoners of the Department of Mental Diseases and was then diagnosed as a psychopathic personality. Soon after our investigation had been started and after the inmate had been informed that we could not comply with his request that no one who had previously known him be interviewed, we began to have considerable difficulty in enlisting the cooperation of newly admitted inmates. Then one day I was called to the warden's office and informed that rather serious accusations had been made against certain members of our staff by an inmate who appeared to be both fair and intelligent. The inmate referred to was our "pathological liar"—"psychopathic personality" friend, who it was learned, was also responsible for informing each new inmate on arrival that unless he wanted to be sent to the Hospital for the Criminally Insane, he had better have nothing to do with members of our staff. The complaints by him made to various officials were very serious. But as soon as these officials saw his life's record of lies and

continual trouble making, his ability to incite dissension was immediately nullified.

In addition to its use by the prison administration, the case history with its accompanying interpretation is being used by the Department of Correction wherever it contacts the offender. One of the most important powers of the Commissioner of Correction is that of transfer from one penal or correctional institution to another. Through this legal provision, the Commissioner has virtual authority to classify prisoners according to their respective needs, no matter to which institution they may have been sentenced. But in the past there has been lacking an adequate factual basis for intelligent classification. The development of the new prison colony at Norfolk, and the high rate of commitments to Charlestown accompanied by aggravated overcrowded conditions has placed upon the Commissioner the necessity of making numerous transfers. But it is to the credit of the organization being developed by Dr. Stearns that the transfers are being made on a basis of treatment needed by the individual as well as upon the needs of the institutions.

The case history is also used by the Board of Parole in determining when an inmate is fitted for release into the community. Over 95% of all persons sentenced are returned to the community. There is probably no more important decision made during the course of penal treatment than that relating to when release shall come. Not so many years ago the only information upon which to base this decision was the applicant's own unverified statements to the Board of Parole. Later an investigator was employed to secure a brief story of the offense from the police and the offender's criminal record from the Bureau of Identification and from the Board of Probation. Within the past few years an effort has been made to obtain a few social data, but the result could not be compared with the case history found in private social agencies and in hospitals for the mentally diseased. And so now for the first time a complete picture of the offender petitioning for release is in the hands of the Board of Parole. In considering the use of the case history by the Board of Parole it is interesting to note that in the present Massachusetts plan for studying the offender neither the sole nor the primary reason for the development of the case analysis is its use in determining parole. In some states, including New York, the study of offenders is made under the parole department with the result that the institutions must either set

up duplicating investigatory and diagnostic machinery or be satisfied to deal with the inmate with only a superficial knowledge of his past history and his personality make-up.

In the event the inmate is granted parole, the case history next comes into use by the parole agent in supervising and assisting the offender to make his adjustment in the community. Just as a program of institutional treatment is made at the time of the inmate's imprisonment, now the parole agent may outline a program of extra-mural treatment based upon a knowledge of the offender's problems.

Finally, it is hoped that these histories may be of value to the various agencies which may contact the offender after his release. If the subject of the study again appears in court, the history will be available to the judge and the probation department. As these case histories accumulate, they will form a nucleus of a much needed bureau of criminal histories which will be comparable to the bureau of identification in the field of criminal identification. The waste that now exists in the collection of social information on offenders is apparent to all who are familiar with the courts and the prison. I daresay that an average of eight or ten investigations have been made in cases admitted to State Prison, ranging from those made by the juvenile court to those of the Division of Examination of Prisoners. The reason given by these various governmental agencies for not making use of previously compiled records is that they are incomplete and inaccurate. It is and will continue to be our goal to compile histories against which this accusation cannot properly be made. The Division of Examination of Prisoners has already completed approximately eight thousand histories of superior quality on persons committed to the houses of correction and continues to compile about 1200 histories annually. With the studies being prepared on all persons committed to the state institutions, it will be only a relatively short time before Massachusetts will have a case history library on the majority of its more serious and persistent offenders.

I have taken some time in the discussion of the laboratory work of the prison, because there seems to me nothing more important to be done in penal science, both from the standpoint of making penal administration more effective and in the development of a factual basis for preventive work than the compilation and analysis of the life histories of adult offenders. Although individualization of treatment is recognized as the fundamental tenet

of modern penology, there is no state that has adequately recognized the fact that individualization in treatment must depend upon an accurate knowledge of the individual to be treated. With the facilities for study of the offender to be found at State Prison, the Norfolk Prison Colony, and the Reformatory for Women, and with the work being done by the Division of Examination of Prisoners, I believe it is not immodest to state that Massachusetts is in the forefront in this phase of penology. With the continued support of the legislature, the Reformatory for Men and the State Farm should soon be classed with the above institutions in the quality of its investigative and diagnostic work.

The research work now being conducted and that contemplated by the Division of Research may be roughly classified into historical, descriptive, causal, and research into the results of treatment. Historical research is of value in giving us a background for and a truer perspective toward our administrative work. For example, a study now being made of admissions to the Massachusetts State Prison covering the past 125 years shows no cause for alarm in the rising commitment rate since the World War. Similar so called "crime waves" have occurred several times during the past century only to subside in the course of a few years. After the Civil War the rate of increase was far more severe than that since the World War. This study also indicates clearly a difference in the type of crimes being committed, the varying ages and nativity of persons committed and a noticeable difference in the severity of sentences. With the results of this study correlated with sentences to other Massachusetts institutions and to the use of probation as a court disposition, we shall be able to see with some clarity the trend in treatment measures used by the courts in dealing with the criminal in Massachusetts. A second historical study being made is concerned with persons committed during the past 50 years to serve life sentences. Frequently we hear definite statements to the effect that a life sentence means either ten, fifteen or twenty years of imprisonment. I doubt very much whether the persons making such statements could quote satisfactory authority for their estimates. The current study should furnish a factual basis for legislation and practices relating to those offenses punishable by life imprisonment and death. One of the incidental findings is the fact that until recent years a surprisingly high proportion of life sentence inmates have had to be transferred

to the Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Whether or not they were insane at the time of sentence cannot be discussed here.

In the class of descriptive research may be included surveys or descriptions of the institution populations. Such studies are useful in determining the type of treatment facilities needed, both in present institutions and in those being planned and constructed. For example, two years ago one of the Massachusetts counties found it necessary to build a new house of correction. The Department of Correction was requested by the County Commissioners to suggest the type and size of the institution to be constructed. A survey was made involving both historical and descriptive research which indicated the approximate population to be housed, the rate of population movement, the security needs of the institution, the desirable number of separate classification units, the desirable amount of hospital space, etc. The information presented was used by the County Commissioners and their architects in planning their new institution. The state is now faced with a similar problem in constructing the new Prison Colony at Norfolk. A preliminary study describing the population of State Prison has already been made, and this is to be followed by a more intensive analysis of both the State Prison and the Reformatory population in order that the new institution may be constructed to meet actual penal needs. It is not contended that such studies can accurately prognosticate the needs of fifty years hence. Nevertheless, it is believed that by observing the past trend and analyzing carefully the present institutional population, a more intelligent plan can be arrived at than is otherwise possible.

The causal relationship is the most interesting but also the most difficult of all research. Although there has been much loose talk about the causes and cure of crime recently, criminologists and penologists have for the most part shown becoming and proper modesty by their reticence in entering the discussion. There is little factual basis for deduction in this field, Massachusetts perhaps having as much to boast as other states in the work of Drs. Healy and Bronner in juvenile delinquency and in the material being compiled by the Division of Examination of Prisoners of the Department of Mental Diseases. It is with a very real recognition of the entrapments that lie in wait for the student of crime causation that the Division of Research contemplates any study of causal relationships in this field. As life histories of offenders are made and analyzed by competent representatives of the vari-

ous social sciences and of medical science, however, and as these histories accumulate, there will be provided a wealth of material for criminal research not now existent. To present what may be shown by this material will be considered one of the duties of the Division of Research.

In the fourth type of research will be included studies the purpose of which will be to evaluate the correctional work being done. As has already been stated, the Glueck study is the outstanding piece of work in this field. Although it will not be practicable for us to cover such long time periods in our projects, there are many valuable studies which can be made covering the period in which the offender is in the custody of the state. An example of such a study already made is an analysis of parole revocations from the Massachusetts Reformatory. It has been known in a general way for several years that approximately 50% of the young men paroled from the Reformatory violated the conditions of their parole before being granted absolute freedom. Although it is impossible, of course, to determine just what proportion of failures should be expected under ideal parole administration, there is obviously inefficiency in a piece of machinery which turns out products 50% of which must be returned during the trial period. Although the study made of this situation did not show how the failure rate could be reduced from 50% to 10%, it did show significant factors which, if given consideration by the authorities concerned, showed promise of bringing a reduction in the proportion of parole revocations.

From the foregoing, it is quite obvious that the field for investigation contemplated by the Division of Research has not been restricted to narrow limits. On the other hand, it has not gone outside the Department of Correction for its raw material. Moreover, an attempt has been made to limit our projects to those of some immediate value to the Commonwealth and to those which the state can undertake more economically and more effectively than could a private organization.

Needless to say, it is not the intention of the Division of Research to monopolize scientific study within the Department of Correction. On the contrary, it has accepted as one of its primary functions the encouragement of and assistance to workers in the various institutions and divisions of the Department who are interested in this type of endeavor. And there are such persons in the Department. At the State Farm where one would hardly look

for criminological research two studies are now being made, one showing the incidence of mental disease among vagrants and the second an analysis of the first ten years commitments to the Department of Defective Delinquents. With the abundant material in the various correctional institutions and with the increasing number of scientifically trained persons entering the service, much should be expected from the Massachusetts institutions during the next few years.

Not least in importance among the functions of the Division of Research will be the training of students interested in entering the field of penology on a professional basis. It is paradoxical that in this field there is a dearth of trained personnel and at the same time there are numerous persons of excellent ability desirous of entering it. The explanation lies in the fact that there has been no bridge to span the gap between the inexperienced student and the administrator or penologist. In medicine the student becomes a physician through actual experience in the laboratory and as an interne in the hospital. Through the efforts of Dr. Stearns capable students who show a serious interest in penology are being allowed the opportunity of obtaining experience as internes in penology. The Bureau of Social Hygiene has granted fellowships for this purpose, and penal internships are provided by the state at the State Prison and the Norfolk Prison Colony. Other selected graduate students in the social sciences are being given first hand experience as volunteer workers both in the study of offenders and as assistants in various research projects mentioned.

Such is the program for the development of the criminological laboratory in the Massachusetts correctional system. It contemplates the collection of sound criminological data, research projects which will utilize this data towards the end that a better scientific basis may be furnished for the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders and thirdly, the training of a professional type of personnel for penal administration and research. The staff enters upon its work with the full realization that truth cannot be learned in a day and that years of painstaking work will be required before even a small contribution can be made to criminal science. But it begins with the belief that in work based upon scientific principle lies progress.