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## Editorials

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## EDITORIALS

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### EDUCATION FOR PARENTS OF DELINQUENTS

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The following communication from a member of the staff of the New Eastern Penitentiary at Graterford, Pa., is a recognition of the need for a sense of unity between a delinquent and his family. A profound sense of isolation between them is inevitable unless sensible means for preventing it are adopted before it is too late. And isolation breeds no good. The procedure that is suggested here is so simple and wholesome that it is worthy of a prominent place.—[Ed.]

It has been well known to students of social pathology that no adequate answer has appeared to the challenging question of how a released prisoner can be helped to adjust to the situations of his new freedom. Still more puzzling is the problem, if the parolee is a minor and must go back to the environment that has been responsible for his delinquency.

The problem stated more definitely is this: a child is reared in a "bad" or broken home. The home generally is in the slum area. Chiefly because of delinquent associates and lack of parental guidance, this under-privileged boy repeatedly gets into "trouble." Eventually he is sent to a penal or correctional institution. After serving a sentence, he returns to parents, who alternately regard him as a martyr and as a blot on the family escutcheon, and to friends, who consider him a hero. Thus the vicious cycle is ready to start again.

Until recently, little was done to remedy this condition, except that social workers in isolated places made sporadic attempts to help home conditions. Commander John D. Pennington, while serving as Pennsylvania's Secretary of Welfare, personally took charge of the State reformatory (wisely called Pennsylvania Industrial School) in order that desirable changes should be effected. Among other innovations, a home or parent education service was introduced as a two front attack on the problem.

The first part of the plan consisted of attempting to change the parents' attitude toward the institution which is nearly always hostile. Toward this end, he sent social workers to the homes, explaining in detail what was being done for their sons at Huntingdon.

These visits were followed up with personal letters. The parents were asked to aid, by writing encouraging letters to their sons and to prepare properly for his home-coming.

Field workers were not only able to recognize better rapport in their contacts, but also noted greater facility in the re-entrance of the prodigal into the family circle.

Commander Pennington felt that this was only a partial solution and needed something to clinch the new gain. He reasoned that if Mohammed had to go to the mountain, the mountain should return the visit. And for the first time (to our knowledge) in penal history, a Parents' Day was staged. Parents came and sat with their sons, picnic style and had lunch on the grassy playfield. They ate and talked without a guard standing over them. They discussed their mutual problem—getting closer to one another than ever before in an effort to find wherein each had failed. The seeds that had been sown in the letters and visits to the parents were coming to fruition. These embryo gangsters at the end of the day went to their cells feeling like ordinary boys, who were not making a one man fight against the world, but boys who had parents who were friends—the kind of friends who wanted to help them to find a better way to live—and the "School" was also lending a hand.

Because this first meeting was productive of so much good in developing morale in the inmates; and changing the attitude of the parents toward, not only their sons, but also those who were trying to help him make a better adjustment to life, the Pennsylvania Industrial School is going to continue to observe Parents' Day several times a year. And the home contacts will also be continued. It is expected that other similar institutions will adopt these two tools to add to the none too abundant techniques now employed in the effort to prevent youthful offenders from going on to a larger career of crime.

JOHN D. MCGANN,  
New Eastern Penitentiary,  
Graterford, Pa.

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## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE CRIME PROBLEM

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There is a wide divergence at present between informed conviction and unthinking public sentiment as to what should be done about the crime problem. Because it is a human problem, it has been found difficult to deal with it rationally, without sentimentality.

on the one hand, or revenge and retaliation on the other. As a matter of fact, it is quite possible to make intelligent progress in this field, and at the same time to approach it in a humanitarian manner.

Our experience thus far, however, has been disappointing in both of these directions. There are the few who recognize all the factors involved, and plan accordingly, but they have failed to move the multitude from its primitive vindictive impulse or to awaken it to a consciousness of social responsibility for delinquency. Just as inventive genius has solved the problem of production, but stands helpless before the question of distribution, and as the demonstrations of democracy have failed to stem the clamor for dictatorships, so the notable advance in social legislation has failed to make its impress upon the conscience of mankind. In other words, as one has said: "Our knowledge and control of nature has outstripped our knowledge of human nature."

This is particularly pertinent to our clumsy processes of dealing with the crime problem. For some hundreds of years the state has persisted in sending men to prison on the theory that this procedure would necessarily cure crime. It ought to be obvious by now that it has not done so. On the contrary, it is widely published that crime is on the increase. Would it not be well to inquire as to whether or not the theory of punishment is, after all, a valid one? Why should we continue the weary process of sending offenders to institutions on the assumption that punishment will cure crime, when the centuries have proven the futility of this outdated process?

"But if men will violate the law, and if, as you imply, institutions are subversive and destructive of human character, what else can society do to protect itself? What, in short, is your substitute for imprisonment and punishment?" The answer, it seems to me, is less mass treatment and more intensive attention to the individual according to need, and largely increased personal service. Larger appropriations for qualified personnel service to supervise and guide delinquents, and less for prison cells. Thoughtful people are convinced of this better way to cope with the question, provided it is generally and properly applied.

It is precisely this individual aspect of the problem that the public habitually disregards when it thinks of the crime problem. Hence society's neglect of the human side. No sooner do we mention such constructive measures as Probation and Parole (devices by which offenders may be kept under measurable control), than we are accused of leniency and sentimentality. Nevertheless, I venture

to submit these techniques as a better way to conserve the best in the worst of human kind.

It is safe to say that fifty per cent of all convicted offenders might safely be placed under Probationary supervision (and overcrowding and idleness in the prisons avoided), providing they be suitably selected and properly supervised. This has been fully proved in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and in the Federal Courts. There, out of 38,869 placed on Probation, only two and two-tenths per cent were declared violators. "Should we send one hundred men to prison," asks former Director Sanford Bates, "when probational custody is suitable in over 97 per cent of the cases tried?"

What I have said as to the efficacy of personal service for probationers, applies equally to men released on parole. In either case the objectives are the same; namely, the security and protection of society, and the restoration of the offenders to normal living.

Here again there is wide variance in the public reaction on the subject. The Parole Law and the League of Nations are strikingly alike in that practically all approve of them "in principle" but differ widely in opinion as to their effective application. So, in most cases, this is a law in name only, as less than seven states have an organized parole system, with anything approaching adequate supervision. Until the original design of the law is carried out it can hardly hope to escape criticism.

The readers of this Journal will doubtless agree, in substance, with these observations. The question is what can we do to carry our convictions and our knowledge of the facts to a wider public? How shall we convince Mr. Average Citizen that here is a human problem, and not merely one of cases and conduct, or prisons and police? Who has the imagination to realize that for nearly every person behind prison bars, there is somewhere a human heart-throb of interest and of agony for their welfare?

Let the cynic and the doubting Thomas's ask the mothers, wives, fathers and sisters of our delinquents whether the crime problem is a human problem to be dealt with by measures of recovery or in the spirit of condemnation.

F. EMORY LYON.

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#### ANNOUNCEMENT

With this number Professor William F. Byron of Northwestern University joins our editorial staff. He will regularly conduct the Book Review Section that has for many years been very efficiently managed by Professor Thorsten Sellin.—[Ed.]