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CREED OF A SCIENCE TEACHER IN PENAL EDUCATION

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JACK SCHUYLER¹
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The causes of crime have been a matter of dispute since the beginning of the first human societal group, the family. Various theories have been formulated and are bitterly argued even today. However, we may say that the existence of crime and criminals cannot be traced to any single causative factor nor have we been able to isolate the predominant factor, if any, which may be involved. Most authorities will agree to placement of the hierarchy of causes within the three categories of:

1. The individual's make-up: physical, mental, and emotional.
2. The social environment: such as poverty, lack of education, crowded depressing homes, overcrowded schools, lack of proper medical and dental care.
3. The physical environment; such as lack of proper recreation facilities (dance halls, poolrooms, and street corners instead), bad housing.

Not all crime may be traced to the equal effects of the three categories. Individuals differ and the etiology of their criminal careers differ as widely. Yet some or all of these categories enfold the totality of causative factors in individual cases.

It may be said that the factors of personality and environment contribute to the making of criminal careers. Both groups of factors must be studied in interrelation and the individual must be considered as an integrated personality in order to understand the springs of human conduct.

The criminal who is placed in prison for the protection of society is eventually released unless he dies, either in the electric chair or the hospital. Attempts in the past to discourage crime by long incarceration tended to produce repeaters rather than repenters. Society is obliged to use the period of retention in prison to try to produce certain changes in the criminal which will enable him to participate in social and economic affairs without injury to

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other citizens rather than to add to the criminal's moral, mental and physical deterioration during his confinement.

Being a product of social situations to a large extent, the criminal may be helped by the deliberate creation of situations beneficial to his personality and of value in bringing about changes in attitudes. A criminal sentence is not primarily a punishment but an opportunity to readapt the criminal to society in a way beneficial both to the criminal and society. Physical, mental and moral handicaps should be removed in prison. Disease should be eliminated, undesirable attitudes changed and vocational adjustments achieved. To some extent, criminality may be regarded as the failure of our social institutions to meet the needs of life; failure to mutually adjust individuals and institutions. The criminal has acquired a certain set of habits and attitudes; he has developed a certain personality in his daily experiences. The prison should substitute other habits and other attitudes which will satisfy the criminal's needs. Provision must be made for satisfactory human relationships and personal achievement in a manner which will not seriously interfere with the personal needs of all other individuals in society.

Education is one of the major weapons in the process of rehabilitation. Not education for its own sake, for such a concept is fundamentally false. Education is a means, an instrument rather than an end. Prisoners seek education, knowingly or not, with the view toward expanding their vista, their knowledge of the world; of their fellows and of themselves, with the view toward equipping themselves for social, political and vocational activity, and to a smaller extent toward acquiring satisfying means for the use of leisure time. The educator must bring order and reason to the ferment already stirring in the mind and he must attempt to help people think and reason for themselves.

Education may be used to encourage desirable social attitudes toward self and society and to readjust personal patterns of behavior. Psychologically, criminals are characterized by feelings of insecurity, anxiety and boredom. Improper houses and companions, lack of family affection, financial insecurity have all contributed to a feeling of rejection, of fear and of isolation. Antisocial behavior represents a satisfactory adjustment by the individual however inadequate socially, and education tries to meet the basic needs of security, recognition and acceptance in socially desirable ways. In fact, the success of education in rehabilitation may be measured by

the extent to which socially satisfactory substitutes for these basic needs are developed.

Education is aimed toward the maximum development of the individual's potentialities, but at the same time these potentialities are to be developed in the individual as one member of a group moving toward acceptable social goals. Poise, self-assurance, courage and comradeship are built up by participation in desirable group activity. The development of the individual's potentialities begins with creating opportunities for worthwhile experiences based upon the interests and capacities of the individual and stemming from his past experiences. Knowledge in itself is of little value unless it is used by the individual in attempting to solve his problems.

What part may the teaching of science play in the effort of educators to prepare the criminal for adequate living in his community? Perhaps the fundamental contribution of science teaching lies in the area of thought and action. A great many people are born into and strive for conformity in the undesirable social groups present in the slum areas of urban centers. Our social milieu as a whole, mass production and mass consumption as well, impose it. The need for acceptance and approval by a group leads to submission to the mores of the group. Furthermore, thinking requires considerable effort and energy. Most people need a great deal of stimulation before they expend the necessary energy. It is much easier to believe than to doubt and doubt is usually discouraged since it may connote disruption of the status quo.

The purpose of education may be summed up in the dictum. "A sound mind in a sound body" but a sound mind is of little value unless it be also a questioning mind.

Since our society is continually changing, constantly presenting new situations, changing adjustments are necessitated. Constant readjustment is not efficient nor effective without the presence of the ability to think effectually. It is intelligence that enabled man to break away from the other animals and obtain increasing control over his environment. The greater the use of intelligence and reason the higher the civilization, for intelligence and reason destroy the superstitions which build a hampering net of traditions and customs about human society. A passion for questioning encourages tolerance and rejects absolute truths. Unanalytical thinking or snap judgments are loaded with prejudices, biases, misinformation, misconceptions and propaganda. Social readjustment must deal in large part with training inmates in scientific thinking and the acqui-

sition of scientific attitudes in connection with vital problems bearing on the personal perplexing situations of the inmates and larger social and economic questions. The teaching of science helps to build up intellectual honesty, an openness to new ideas, a willingness to change present judgments and the power to view problems from more than one angle. Science teaching aids to drive home the principle of judging things and people on their own merits rather than on prejudices, emotions and preconceptions. Beliefs that are the offspring of our emotions or the fulfillment of our desires are suspect. All beliefs should be subjected to the test of experience and reason.

Presenting science in the form of problems revitalizes the spirit of adventure, of inquiry and experimentation, the spirit underlying all creative effort and worthwhile achievement. Fostering a keen understanding of the workings of nature including the knowledge of our bodily operations, science contributes to the satisfaction of curiosity about ourselves and the world around us. The understanding of natural laws and a consequent freedom from superstition and fear are the foundation for the construction of a sense of security and freedom. The inmate learns to see himself and the things about him in the right proportions. This larger perspective brings an intelligent understanding and appreciation of human achievement together with a realization of the needs of the social organism of which he is a small but important cog. Opening the mind to a whole new world, a world of vast importance because it is the world in which he lives; learning by doing and experimenting because he needs to make, to see, to use and to handle the thing studied; all this helps to bring about feeling of adequacy, self-expression and satisfaction in facing and courageously meeting reality and leading to wholesome attitudes toward himself and toward society.