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Editorial

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EDITORIAL

ON "PREVENTION-MINDEDNESS"

In Illinois is a striking instance of a widely differing rate of increase in the population of mental hospitals and penal institutions on one hand and of the commonwealth at large on the other. Since 1917 the number of persons on the rolls of prisons, reformatories, correctional schools and mental hospitals has increased by approximately 100 percent—a little more than that. During the same period the general population of the State has grown at about one-fifth of that rate—approximately 21 percent. The doubling in institutional population is not likely to go on during each succeeding period of 23 years but any enlargement above that of the general population of the State is too much.

Of course the swelling rolls in the institutions are not an indication of the doubling of the frequency of the mentally ill and of criminals per 100,000 of the population as a whole. Several factors work together to produce the result. In the case of hospitals, at least, an awakened public recognition of the need and advantage of treatment for the mentally sick is probably of primary importance.

It is not the intention here to enter into an analysis of population changes. For the present we are content to recognize the disproportionate increases that have been mentioned and to accept the situation as indicating the urgency of every practical measure

that can be devised for preventing delinquency, crime and mental disease. There is no single formula. Every organization, public or private, that aims at putting the brakes upon the occurrence of unhealthy minds and behavior is doing a larger or smaller bit in that direction.

But in relation to delinquency and crime, while we gaze afar, we are likely to overlook what lies directly beneath our noses. Take a leaf out of a familiar book. How have we—millions of us in America—come by our "political-party-mindedness" and our "national-mindedness"? Dramatic biographies, received by ear or by eye, short stories of the Founding Fathers and of those others who have kept the nation or party on its feet: stories that lost nothing by the telling. "I regret that I have but one life to give to my country!" Who doesn't admire Nathan Hale who, on the scaffold, could say those words—and having warmed thus toward him, who is not inclined to place what young Hale stood for upon a high pedestal? How many are the instances of devotion to a great cause, even when it must have hurt? History is filled with them. They burn into the souls of young men and young women and then they have this national or party spirit or mindedness. Youth will have heroes in spite of the debunkers—and then they acquire a feeling for the cause the heroes represented.

Therein is the leaf out of a familiar book. And "prevention-mindedness" can grow much as national-mindedness does. The Dorothea Dix-es and the Wines-es—father and son—their lives were filled with drama. Give him a chance and youth will make heroes of them and take their cause close to his heart. Why shouldn't High School teachers expose their pupils to characters of this sort? They have their place in the history of State Government. Were the Dix-es and Wines-es not working in and out of season to extend the function of Government to the treatment of those types of folk who are today overcrowding our State institutions? There is one of the great and absorbing functions of Government in our day.

Even nearer to many of us are those "case-histories" that abound in the dusty archives of numerous institutions for research and in the records of other organizations that undertake the direction and correction of wayward youths and adults. These are "success stories" and "failure stories": dramatic vignettes of human life; some of them are descriptions of individuals of intelligence and courage, endurance and self-sacrifice by reason of which they finally were able to "come through" to success in a responsible place. Every one who has had much experience with cases will be reminded of his "Phil" or "Mary" or "Jim."

The teacher who has the "feel of it" and who knows what it's all about can

use such material toward a "welfare-mindedness" which is, on the reverse, a "prevention-mindedness."

Moreover, cases of the sort illustrate some of the processes of democratic Government which looks out for the meanest individual regardless of the fact that he cannot build a railroad or manage a city. They thus enrich the student's concept of democratic Government and, wisely selected, are appropriate illustrative material for courses in Civics and the like. In the light of these cases government is not just a great, complicated machine out there to be greased and oiled by you and me. It is for each of us; it comes very close to us not just when it is in the act of collecting our tax money to build capitols. It comes even to the man who doesn't know enough to come out of the rain.

It's time for teachers and all of us to apply some effort to dramatizing the boy and the girl who, in great danger, and by such aid as is at hand in a civilized community, have come successfully through the road that has been for many the way to a penal institution and for others the path to mental and nervous wreck. As educators and others do so they are contributing a share toward developing a "prevention-mindedness" in those who will have the helm but a few years hence. And in its peculiar area it has as much virtue as political-party-mindedness has in its sphere.

ROBERT H. GAULT.