

1941

Editorials

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Recommended Citation

Editorials, 32 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 1 (1941-1942)

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EDITORIALS

VOCATIONAL TRAINING RE CORRECTION AND PREVENTION

"What you would have the State be, that put into the schools." A paragraph in the Annual Report (1939-1940) of James V. Bennett, Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, to Robert H. Jackson, Attorney-General of the United States, has reminded us of these words. They were spoken by the great Bismarck.

Twenty-six industries in twelve Federal penal and correctional institutions have given steady employment during the year to 3,500 persons in the institutions who have been engaged in making articles for government use only. Each of these has thus by his labor more than made good for his per capita cost. Altogether the inmates earned \$280,000. Seventy-five percent of the earnings of each one was sent to his dependents, if he had any. The burden of relief "back home" was thus lightened and the inmate was given the sense of living up to his domestic responsibilities. The total value of products sold during the year to government agencies was in excess of \$5,200,000.

But all of this is less important than the fact that the inmates were doing constructive work. Some of them were probably finding out for the first time in their lives that they are able to do something that is valued in our normal social order.

The task of rehabilitation is so heavy that institutional schools need the best of equipment in material and person-

nel. This requirement is probably far from being met. At any rate the article by Maurice C. McCann in our last number seems to indicate that the schools for delinquents in Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, are not, in respect to such equipment, up to the level of the regular schools.

However successful industrial and occupational training may be as correctives in the Federal and State institutions it is likely to be more so as a preventive in the usual course of instruction in the schools.

Literature is crowded with biographies of men and women who owe their mental health and happiness and a wholesome pattern of behavior to the discovery and knowledge that they can "do" constructive things for themselves and their fellow men. And one is tempted to believe that there may be many unwritten biographies of young folk of the "must-do-it" sort who have been saved from a course that would have led to delinquency, crime or mental disease had they not had appropriate vocational training to satisfy their urge "to be doing things."

A good many years ago the writer received a letter from the late Superintendent of Public Schools in Chicago, William F. Bogan, that is as good now as when it was written. The letter relates to an unpublished educational experiment for which Mr. Bogan had been responsible. Here it is:

“ . . . Chicago discovered that in its public school system were hundreds of large, over-age boys who were retarded in their grades and unhappy in their associations with the brighter, younger, and smaller children in the schools. In the belief that special treatment might aid these boys to find themselves, a pre-vocational department was organized in connection with the Lane Technical High School. The chief requirements for admission were: excess weight, excess height, and excess age for the grade. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that the most important instruments for testing eligibility were the weighing scales and the yard-stick. No boy was admitted who could not show a clear record of at least one year behind his grade. The curriculum that was offered the boys emphasized handwork and drawing and minimized book work.

“The results were what any intelligent person might have prophesied. The boys developed independence, skill-of-hand, and a liking for simple academic work provided it had a clear goal. These boys who at first were nicknamed ‘prevokes’, for short, then ‘provokes’ because of their irritating ways, soon developed qualities of leadership which won the respect of

the High School boys. In shop and drawing classes they mingled with these other boys and could not be distinguished from them. They soon developed an *esprit de corps* which made them very proud of their school and of their department. This pride in the school became the basis of a group morale that has been noted by nearly every visitor. Plainly, these large boys during their associations with brighter and smaller boys and girls in the elementary schools had suffered from soul-hunger and hand-hunger. The pre-vocational school satisfied this peculiar type of ‘hunger’.”

The Bogan experiment justified itself. In many cities in the United States pre-vocational schools have been established whose doors and shops are wide open to pupils on practically no condition except that they be behind grade, fairly intelligent by nature and a source of exasperation to their teachers in the conventional, more or less inelastic school.

Relieve a troubled boy or girl of irritation and distress—that’s all good. But infinitely better than that—lead him to a discovery of what they can do. That’s the road toward enthusiasm and the acquisition of wholesome patterns of behavior.

Robert H. Gault.

“Eighty per cent of the persons placed on PROBATION make good; no other profession can boast of such a high percentage of success.”—Paul V. McNutt.

“Almost all students of social condi-

tions believe in PROBATION . . . not only has the probation system shown remarkably good results in turning young and first offenders from evil ways, but it results in great economy to the state.”—George W. Wickersham.