

1944

## Current Notes

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### Recommended Citation

Current Notes, 35 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 174 (1944-1945)

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## CURRENT NOTES

V. A. Leonard (*Editor*)

**Democratic Ideals and Delinquency**—The terms, “adjustment” and “re-adjustment”, used so extensively in the literature of recent years as to lose considerable meaning, receive added interpretation in an article, *Juvenile Delinquency in a Democracy*, prepared for publication by Dr. Martin L. Reymert of the Mooseheart Laboratory for Child Research, Mooseheart, Illinois. Dr. Reymert lends additional emphasis to the concept that in the approach to crime and delinquency control, proper values must be assigned to the influence of national ideals, cultural patterns and traditions. He reacts to the current formula, “adjusting the child to his environment and to society”, with the question, “adjusting the child to what kind of society?”, and leaves the implication that perhaps the average delinquent is well adjusted to the society in which he finds himself.

“The crux of the problem”, he states, “is what kind of society is it to which we are helping the child to adjust? Do we mean adjusting the child to the inequalities of the slum and the gold coast; adjusting to a society in which spiritual, intellectual and moral values have been pushed into the background by material goals; adjusting to a society where labor and management have yet to cooperate toward the goal of greater production; where lying and minor dishonesties are commonplace in the life of adults and where corrupt political controls strangle decent government in some communities? Do we have in mind a society in which the emphasis is upon ‘smartness’ in getting to the top of the ladder at all costs; where there is not enough of the tempering moral and sincere religious influence to insure that getting ahead will not ignore the basic human values on which our society must be based if it is to succeed and endure. My point is that when we confidently and even smugly assume that in ‘adjusting the child to society’ we have solved our difficulties, we are just doing some ‘mental shadow-boxing’.”

Stressing the importance of the home and the school as major elements in that society to which the youngster will become adjusted, Dr. Reymert includes the following items among his recommendations:

1. Since the behavior pattern begins to form in a decisive way during the early years of childhood, provide for a widening understanding on the part of parents of the importance of physical and mental well-being, and the complex nature of environmental influences. It should be understood, for example, that the mere order of birth in a family, the other children in the home and the different personalities of the parents themselves, play an important role in the shaping of the future of the individual.

2. Parents and school systems of the nation should be made aware of the extreme importance of the preschool period; Federal and local governments should regard it as obligatory to establish nursery and kindergarten schools with *well-trained* and *well-paid* teachers.

3. No school system in the United States should be without proper facilities for the thorough investigation of each individual child in the first school years, regarding physical characteristics, hearing, vision, speech, degree of native mental ability, special aptitudes and abilities, special disabilities, etc.

4. Our general school programs should be thoroughly scrutinized from the point of view of delivering back to the nation youth who have learned good habits of work and who have been disciplined in meeting even the unpleasant though necessary tasks of life.

5. Important agencies operating in the environment of the growing youngster, such as the press, radio and movies should more fully appreciate the significance of their influence in shaping lives between childhood and maturity.

6. Personality, not being an inborn, static thing, imposes upon research and practice the heavy burden of finding out what stimuli in the environment will promote wholesome personality development and of identifying and eliminating stimuli which might definitely contribute to juvenile delinquency.

7. We have not as yet caught the measure of the great responsibility confronting adult society, once the young boy or young girl for the first time comes in conflict with the law. The point of departure here must be—not *what* did the offender do, but rather *why* did he do this, and what can be done to modify factors in the individual and in the environment that led to the end result.

8. Professionalization of those agencies in the public service concerned with youth welfare; elevation of personnel standards, fortified with protection against stray political winds that too frequently cross the path of these workers.

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Parents and Other Complainants in the Juvenile Court—"A study of 1,500 cases of juvenile delinquents whose accusers could be reached, shows that a large part of the conflict with youth grows out of the peevishness, rejection, impatience, irresponsibility or criminal attitudes of those who complain. We ought to pay more attention to the people who make the complaints about juvenile delinquents," said Dr. Austin L. Porterfield, Professor of Sociology, Texas Christian University, in speaking before the recent 38th Annual Conference of the National Probation Association.

Complaints by parents have risen from 8 per cent in the years 1931, 1933 and 1935 to 66 per cent now, in an area where the number of divorces on some days runs to 250 per cent of the marriages performed on the same days. "The popular theory about a mother's love has been overdone," Dr. Porterfield added, for "More often than not it is the mother who complains to the court about the child." Often when parents complain of a child's disobedience, the behavior of the parents cannot create respect, while some who ought to know better, refer their children to the court.

According to Dr. Porterfield's study, boys were brought into juvenile court for such minor offenses as "riding horses without permission, getting peaches and pecans off other people's trees, shining mirrors in people's eyes, teasing a pop-corn peddler, hollering at Mr. Rafferty, or calling a park attendant 'Pistol Pete'."

He adds that stores and community institutions also have children sent to court. An eight year old boy stole some marbles and both his mother and the store cooperated in getting him sent to the training school. The study showed that 500 of the 746 children referred to the court by the police, were for offenses of this type. "For shooting craps with less than a dollar in the game," he said, "boys of tender age are put in jail, while gamblers of political and social importance carry on without the slightest danger."

In connection with parents who complain to the court about their children, Dr. Porterfield added that parents themselves have problems. "When they are parents, fathers and mothers accept their children and love them. They do not dominate them, overprotect them, submit to them or reject them. But problem parents do one or more of these four things. A large percent of juvenile delinquents are "rejected children," according to Dr.

Porterfield. "Parents who reject the child show little or no interest in him, have no time for him, compare the child unfavorably with his brothers and sisters, nag him, blame him, and fail to support him. They give him cruel physical punishment, neglect his health, his clothes, and his training. They frequently threaten to turn him out or to place him in an institution. They did not want him at birth; they may require hard work of him, slander him, and finally report him to the authorities. As a result the child steals, lies, runs away, acts disobediently, quarrels, is unhappy, destructive, lonesome, does poor school work, and suffers from night terrors. In general he is the aggressive type. The overprotected child becomes a "mama's boy," dependent, shy, sissy, restless, and in protest against this he may become a "two gun man." The child of parents who dominate him, or who always give into him, is also apt to get into trouble.

Since science shows that a child needs his parents to give him that "feeling of belonging", courts and community agencies must help parents learn how to be better parents. "Where parents really care for their children, there is a good chance of success," concludes Dr. Porterfield.

**Epilepsy, Murder and the Death Penalty (England)**—In a recent murder case one of the defenses raised was that the crime was due to insanity caused by an attack of minor epilepsy. That the accused was subject to epileptic fits was supported from their own observation by the evidence of two non-medical witnesses but, according to the testimony of the prison doctor, prolonged clinical observation in the prison hospital revealed no evidence of epilepsy. This is, of course, the well-known difficulty in cases of epilepsy; there are usually no objective symptoms of the disease and unless the accused person actually has a fit while under observation in the hospital or the Court, his claim to be an epileptic is likely to be disbelieved. The scepticism of the average Court with regard to these cases is understandable in view of the frequency with which epilepsy is suggested as a defense in serious crimes, often obviously, on slight grounds.

In the case under consideration, the evidence of the prison doctor would probably have been decisive, as it has been previously in many similar cases in which the accused was condemned to death, except for the use by the defense of a new medical device called the electro-encephalograph. This apparatus amplifies and graphically records the minute electrical currents that occur in the brain. These currents give rise to a wave-form on the graph produced by the apparatus, and one particular wave-form is accepted by neuro-psychiatrists as positive proof of epilepsy. This particular wave-form was produced by the brain-currents of the man accused in the case under consideration and it is almost certain that the production of the encephalogram showing this was decisive in securing a verdict of "Guilty But Insane" instead of one of "Wilful Murder."

This incident was seized on by certain sections of the press and exaggerated claims were expressed which may have given rise to a great deal of public misunderstanding. A subsequent correspondence in *The Times*, which was contributed to by several experts on the subject, puts the facts very clearly. It is agreed that the apparatus, which has been in use since 1934 and of which only a small number exists, is soundly based and scientifically accurate in its recordings. But there are a number of difficulties in its use for the determination of legal insanity. As one of *The Times* correspondents says:—

"The electro-encephalograph would be of value only in a minority of cases . . . it is unanimously agreed by neuro-psychiatrists that a particular wave-form, that of minor epilepsy, is proof positive of epilepsy, although there are cases of epilepsy in which the electrical tracing is normal. While

about 70 per cent of adult epileptics have electro-encephalograms which differ from those of normal persons, only a small number, certainly less than 10 per cent, actually show this specific wave-form. For the majority of epileptics, therefore, the electro-encephalograph can only indicate a tendency to the condition and does not supply absolute proof that the individual is actually suffering from fits."

Allowing for all the difficulties and limitations, it is still true that in a substantial number of these cases an electro-encephalogram would reveal the condition of the accused beyond dispute by giving the specific wave-form of minor epilepsy. For the larger number whose electro-encephalograms, while not showing the specific form yet showed clear differences from those of normal persons, marked abnormality would be proved and there would be, at least, a reasonable presumption of liability to epileptic seizure. In this, although there might be nothing to satisfy the narrow legal definition of insanity, there would be material of great assistance to the Home Secretary in exercising his difficult final judgment.

It is obvious that the appeal to the electro-encephalograph requires the greatest care and thoroughness on the part of those responsible for the defense. Equally obviously, it is a device which ought to be available and capable of being regularly employed.

This raises a matter of the very highest importance. Those of us who have kept watch on murder trials over a long period of time have had, on numerous occasions, reason for grave disquiet because of the obvious disadvantage of the defense in the cases of poor defendants in securing expert evidence of equal weight to that of the prosecution with all the resources of the Crown behind it. In such circumstances, it would seem, therefore, that the solution of the difficulty, and this applies not only to medical but to all technical matters, would be to make expert opinion and all necessary apparatus, available for the Court independently of both prosecution and defense. This proposal is not new; it has been made often before, and it is already the practice in technical Courts like those dealing with Admiralty cases. *Wartime Bulletin No. 9*, National Council for the Abolition of the Death Penalty, 63 Valley Road, Welwyn Garden City, Herts.

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**The Police and the Social Worker**—The need for an intimate working relationship between police administration and the social work profession was emphasized in a conference of high ranking police officers from large cities throughout the country with the Children's Bureau of the U. S. Department of Labor in Washington, D. C., on May 9. The meeting was called by Miss Katherine Lenroot, chief of the Bureau, who presided at the sessions. Throughout the conference emphasis was placed on the preventive work being done by a socialized police service through the individual police officer working with youngsters on his beat. On the motion of Captain Donald S. Lenard, Michigan State Police, a past president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the Children's Bureau was given a three-fold mandate calling for (1) creation of a better community understanding of the juvenile delinquent and the resources available for his help; (2) improvement of techniques used in handling cases and in their referral from one group to another; and (3) coordination of effort by all groups in the community, including the police, who are working with juveniles. The conferees then constituted themselves a committee to work with the Children's Bureau in carrying out the program. Superintendent A. J. Kavanaugh of the Wilmington, Delaware, Department of Public Safety; Superintendent Lou Smyth of the Kansas City

Police Department; Police Inspector Lawrence Morrison of Houston, Texas; Inspector William A. Turk, commanding the New York Police Academy; and others, stressed the need for coordinating the work of the police and the social agencies in the community.

One immediate result of this conference has been the inauguration by the University of Southern California of an amplified training program for police officers and others working in the prevention field. The projected courses run for two quarters of two units each and include the following subjects: Social Service Aspects of Delinquency Control, Community Organization Aspects of Delinquency Control, Administrative Aspects of Delinquency Control, Police Aspects of Probation and Parole. It is to be expected that other institutions will recognize their social responsibilities in this respect and establish instructional programs which will assist in meeting the need for trained personnel in this important field. Tax-supported in the main and geared to training techniques as their principal function, the universities and colleges of this country are eminently prepared to discharge this responsibility to the public service. A survey of the plant and equipment at any major university or college will reveal the physical resources for a police training program comparable in scope and severity to the university curricula of other professions. In terms of preparing men and women for effective work in the field of delinquency prevention, the necessary basic sources dealing with abnormal behavior—including the biological, sociological, psychological, physiological, pathological, economic and legal aspects of crime and delinquency—are already a part of the regular offerings at these institutions, together with a trained teaching staff to command the attention of the student. It only remains to superimpose upon these subjects the necessary technical police courses to make available an integrated program of preparation. It is now patent that the superb training resources of higher education can be applied to the professional training requirements of police service with important results. Those familiar with the technical aspects of every phase of the police enterprise feel that police administration may with advantage be accorded the same academic recognition given to the other professions.

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