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## CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND CRIMINOLOGY

Robert H. Gault

Editor in Chief of this Journal.

In the course of the last several years I have surveyed more than 1,000 titles relating to the development of sound character which, of course, implies good citizenship and freedom from delinquent and criminal behavior. The gist of what I have obtained from these sources will indicate some landmarks of my own thinking regarding crime and criminals.

In the recent report of this Association for the Psychiatric Treatment of Offenders I find lines that cannot too often be quoted in homes, schools and on the street corners for the purpose of putting criminals in their proper place within the mental horizon of children and youths—not to heroize but to deflate them. This is what Professor Fred Harvey Harrington has done very effectively in his treatment of the wild southwestern desperadoes in his book "The Hanging Judge."

The deflationary lines to which I refer are an appropriate introduction to a discussion of character as I define the term: "Crime is not a dramatic climax nor is it a coordinated conspiracy of an underworld organization. Actually, crime is a series of many activities, big and small, running the gamut of minor violations of the law to the most shocking and infamous deed . . . . The average criminal offender, comprising the vast majority of lawbreakers, is insignificant and unspectacular . . . . He is neither affluent nor arrogant. He has no organization nor long range plans. If you pass him in the street he cannot be distinguished from the ordinary person. By and large, though, he is poorer and infinitely unhappier . . . . Often he is hard put to pay his rent or to buy a meal. When he makes a strike he is apt to splurge his loot in a short lived imitation of the 'big shot' racketeers whom he admires. And when he is caught it is rare indeed that he can pay the fee for a lawyer . . . . For the vast majority of lawbreakers, crime is a bankrupt business. . . . As a rule [criminals] are confused, troubled personalities who break the law stupidly and ineptly, without regard for the consequences. The majority, by far, are mentally sick."

When such words infiltrate the minds of children, youth will be disposed to put desperadoes into the gutter, not upon a pedestal. The psychology of this follows, in reverse, what heroizes a George Washington, lifts him to a place among the gods, and so stimulates the young to try living up to him. This involves the psychology of the de-

velopment or destruction of affective attitudes toward people and toward the causes they stand for.

The question of treating criminals is centered upon the small offenders, not upon the "big shots." And I feel sure that the "real problem", in its largest proportions, may reach back to circumstances and times before the "small offender" became a "small offender". Over and over again this idea is expressed in a score of ways in the literature I have been surveying.

I am thinking of the foundations of sound and unsound character. So are psychiatrists when they talk about the warpings that the newborn, the nursery school child and other youngsters suffer or enjoy in the atmosphere of the home, school, church and community. Childhood is the period in which character is laid down, and the extent to which the sound variety is placed, reenforced and tamped during those years, the criminal psychopathologists will be short of jobs.

How shall we describe this kind of character? Whatever words we use, we shall mean that he whose character is sound is highly skilled in human relations. A man may succeed in selling phony stock to a widow. Human relations are involved in that business, but of a very poor grade. Selling stock like that is an exercise of the most unskilled human relations that you can imagine. In the long run it would mean the death of all that our civilization holds most dear, and that would be death, indeed, for us all.

The skill in human relations involved in sound character gets desirable things done and at the same time it protects and promotes the natural human rights—common possessions of all of us. It looks out equally for the finest values—values which we are accustomed to associate with homes, churches, schools and communities at their best. Such skill has survival value for the individual and for the nation. Students of the science of human behavior are showing us the psychophysical circumstances that promote or obstruct its development.

The course of events I have suggested as following upon the sale of phony stock can be made as dramatic as the story of the Battle of the Bulge. But we don't make it so, unfortunately. We leave it with a lack of the drive that it needs to put it over and make it stay over. It has been said that the recent Cicero rioters had probably read the Bill of Rights with understanding and approval. Nevertheless, they were rioters. It is alleged, therefore, that knowledge of the document has no virtue—else why riot? The trouble with the argument is that you can read or recite anything to a child or adult in such a dull, flat

manner that he will be relieved, rather than emotionally stirred, when you have finished. Or you can read the same matter so it will take hold of him.

Every aspect of human nature affects skill in human relations. Some are more potent than others. More than a hundred years ago, back in Massachusetts, Horace Mann, campaigning for a public school system, said repeatedly, "The more schools, the fewer jails." He would be disappointed on that score if he were here today. But he would find a tremendous interest in mental health, emotional maturity, freedom from psychic distortion, which imply a sense of security. Given these qualities in the full sense, there could be no phony stock salesmen, war mongers nor aggressor nations—not even offenders against propriety.

But Horace Mann is in the picture. We must be informed so we may orient ourselves; know which of several patterns of human relations will best protect and promote the best values of our civilization.

How do so many criminals and others get out of mental gear so they can't handle those patterns of human relations? What nourishment have they had or lacked? The literature on child development makes it stand out in red letters that the atmosphere of home is a potent food. It penetrates their skin under a sort of osmotic pressure. Take the case of Bob. His father loved to have the small fry at the fireside where he told them stories of national heroes, religious and political party leaders of earlier days. The father enjoyed telling stories. He had practiced the art upon the youngsters. His political party leaders, e.g., were made to live. And Bob was committed to his father's party before he could pronounce its name; ready to defend it against all comers. Now Bob is fully grown. Many things have happened that could have dulled or wiped out the party attitude. He cannot defend himself to the satisfaction of a Professor of Political Science but he has held on to the old party alignment; scratches the ticket now and then but it always requires a pull to bring him to the point. His affective political party attitude goes a long way toward determining his behavior on election day. Goes a long way toward selecting his reading matter at other times. Character, sound or unsound, is of much the same nature. It grows analogously. It is as reliable, or more reliable, than our political party or our religious attitudes.

One of the good things about this political party attitude is that it seems to sharpen a want to exhibit in one's own behavior the action patterns as they have been seen in admired leaders. Moreover, something spreads over to the causes which the leaders have stood for. It even

makes tolerance for the weakness of the leaders—their “five percentism,” e.g. “Guilt by association” is a very real thing.

The overprotective, over-indulgent parent creates a home atmosphere which promotes unsound character. Give him all he wants on a silver platter—never stimulate the self reliance that “gets it for himself”. The situation is then favorable—more favorable than it would otherwise be—for a break up later when the silver platter is no longer available. The case of the overprotected boy, grown into manhood, well situated in business, who couldn’t stand the strain consequent upon insistence caused by all those eager collectors coming around in the evenings. He “mentally played” for a long time with the idea of using his employer’s funds to help him out. He helped himself finally—and that was all. Others grown in enervating home atmospheres become the men and women to whom “the world owes everybody a living”.

A high school principal once said to me that his students hear so much about graft in high places that they have got the matter of course idea that in our system government and all are bound to be corrupt. “It’s difficult to disabuse them of that notion.” Of course, if corruption is tolerantly talked about incessantly at home and in the street what is to be expected? “What do you talk about at home?” is one of the most important enquiries you can make in your search for the springs of character. For whatever it is that makes up the habitual conversation at home creates good will or suspicion toward the state, toward industry, the schools, churches, etc. And these attitudes have a way of good or bad human relations—and skill in human relations, broadly interpreted, is sound character.