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THE FUTURE OF PAROLE¹

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The idea that parole is more than something due as a "reward for good conduct" has developed very slowly. One reason for this is that the bulk of the institution has obstructed our vision of parole. Theoretically we have become sufficiently radical to agree that this "reward for good conduct" idea belongs in the same category as that of "punishment for crime." Practically, however, parole is still granted largely on the ground of good behavior.

From the standpoint of behavior, there are two types who do well in an institution for delinquents: those who have a real desire to make the most of their opportunities for training, and those who reach their highest level where they are under constant guidance and protection. The good conduct of these two types is not comparable, because of the difference in the causes of it. One is behaving well because he has an object for which he is striving, the other because he is contented in his present situation, which calls for no initiative on his part.

Knowledge of the causes of behavior would, therefore, seem to be essential. Conduct is a symptom. Intelligent diagnosis of the individual must be based on a careful examination, physical and mental, and an equally careful study of his background and his experiences plus his behavior. I am not attempting to indicate at what point this diagnosis should be made. In some cases diagnoses are simply starting points. They are tentative estimates of character and capabilities needing frequent revision in the light of the actual development of the individual. Diagnoses in these doubtful cases should not be taken as final, but should stimulate closer observation in order to eliminate as far as possible any danger of mistake.

The basis of comparison of the behavior of the inmates of such an institution, because it is such a highly selected group (selected primarily because of its bad behavior) is not sufficiently broad to be decisive. The final level of comparison must be sought with their fellow-citizens outside.

¹Read before the Congress of the American Prison Association, New York City, October 24, 1919.

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Readiness for parole, then, depends on something much more fundamental than good conduct in the institution. The inmate should be paroled when, because of his progress in the institution, he is considered ripe for trial in the community, or when the point of saturation has been reached. It is like filling a jar with jam. The jam will shrink a little and you may add a little, but there comes a time when any addition to its contents trickles down on the outside—a good thing wasted! Such cases should be tried on parole, not because they have done well, but because they apparently cannot benefit further by remaining in the institution. These seeming failures often make good on parole. Their nervous make-up is such that they do not thrive under institution conditions. I am not speaking of the manifestly custodial cases, who do not belong in a reformatory institution, though most training schools are at present clogged with them.

Parole offers the opportunity of a continuing study of the needs and possibilities of the individual under conditions approximating more nearly than the institution the complete freedom to govern his life compatible with being a good citizen, exercised by the ordinary members of society. Further training in the institution is indicated if the individual fails on his first experiment in the great adventure of living.

Consideration of the best system of parole may be properly left until we have examined more specifically the material we have to deal with. Hereafter I shall use girls on parole as my subject matter, certainly as difficult and probably as hopeful as any.

MATERIAL FOR PAROLE

What is the material with which we have to work? Everybody's failures—failures of parents, of home, of school, of private agencies, of probation. This statement is not quite correct; it should be everybody's failures plus the training of the institution.

There is time to touch but briefly on the causes for these failures: Ignorance, sickness, poverty, lack of any strength of character, if not actual depravity on the part of parents; homes crowded and in wretched neighborhoods; failure to detect wayward tendencies or ignorance of means of coping with them on the part of the public school. (I should like to see courses on the understanding and treatment of delinquents established in all normal schools, as well as mental examination of all school children.) Private agencies sometimes have cases referred to them too late to handle them successfully in the community; probation cannot always supply the type of discipline needed.

Neither private agencies nor probation have yet developed all their resources in the community, nor within their own ranks.

Life has treated these children so harshly it is pitifully marred material they present to work with—a discouraging outlook but for what the institution has been able to do with it.

THE WORK OF THE INSTITUTION

What does the institution try to do with this conglomeration of failures? It gives them medical care; it not only builds them up physically and cures them of their curable diseases, but establishes decent personal habits. It gives them ideals of conduct, training in industrial occupations, and their first lessons in the meaning of citizenship. It takes this warped and marred material and smooths it, cleans it and makes it ready for building.

Parole cannot take it as institution product alone, however. In planning for the future of any human being, all his layers of experience must be tapped. It is just as essential to know Sally's past history, her inherited tendencies, the good and bad influences in her past environment, her big and little delinquencies before commitment, as it is to know the history of her progress in the institution, if the problems of parole are to be met successfully.

On parole, each girl's disposition, inclinations, capacities, and tendencies can be reckoned with. A delinquent girl is apt to feel disconnected since she has failed to acknowledge her responsibilities to any one. Being taken out of the community and being put in an institution tend to intensify this feeling of set-apartness, a dangerous frame of mind, since it apparently releases the individual from obligations to his neighbor. One of the first lessons a girl needs to get on parole is the sense of having a place in society where she belongs and of responsibility for doing her share of the world's work. To bring this about, parole must marshal its forces in the community and bring them to bear upon the girl.

FORCES IN THE COMMUNITY TO BUILD WITH

Among the forces which offer themselves for our consideration *work* stands out as one of the strongest. Practically every girl who comes out of the institution on parole has to earn her own living. This is true even of those who go back into the public schools. This idea of *earning* her living, her privileges, her own and other people's respect, is worth emphasizing as one of the ways in which work can be

used to develop character. Work should be adapted as nearly as possible to the capabilities and interests of the girl. If this cannot be found at first under conditions which give sufficient protection to the girl, such work should be a promised goal of the future. Nothing plays a bigger part in the development of a girl's character than her *mental attitude towards her work*. For instance, if she shirks her work and tries to "get by," she is developing a type of dishonesty which is insidious. If she tries to do her best, even against her inclinations, she is gaining markedly in self-control and honesty of purpose. *Special types of work* are often very valuable in counteracting bad tendencies or weaknesses. An emotional girl may find a safe outlet for her too easily aroused affections if employed in the care of children who are blind or crippled, their demands upon her sympathies and their response satisfying her craving for love and dramatic expression. With a bright girl, work which gratifies her ambition and which gives her a chance to assume responsibility and give free rein to whatever creative faculty she may possess, will absorb her to the exclusion of her former undesirable interests.

The *employer* of the girl cannot be overestimated as a vital force in her training. This is especially true if the girl is placed at housework, an employment often best suited to the needs and abilities of the girl. The employer probably gives to the girl her first real insight into what a mother and homemaker may be. There should be no element of an employment agency in parole. Girls should never be placed at housework to accommodate the public, or as an easy means of disposing of the girl. Only such homes should be used as will teach the girl some of the lessons of wholesome living and will provide her with safe contacts with the community while she is learning to make wise choices for herself.

Work must be balanced by wholesome *recreation*. A girl who never has had a decent home finds a real joy in discovering how many pleasures are associated with happy family life. She needs to be taught to discriminate between the kind of pleasure which leaves contentment behind it and the harmful excitements which lead to restlessness and discontent.

The girl's former environment undoubtedly played a large part in her failure. Close knowledge of her *family* and what the family can offer in upbuilding influences through its need and the girl's natural affections may reveal unsuspected power in the home.

Through *church connections* she may get the right spirit in place of suspicion and dislike, and an idea of social intercourse founded on

something higher than self-interest. She may learn to give for the sake of giving. Through joining the Red Cross and sewing on a shirt for a distant, unknown hero, she may begin to see her relation to the world, to understand that it takes each little unit to make a great whole. Making a cake for a social may mean an expression of community service not to be despised. All the interests of the neighborhood may become instruments of community enlightenment. No one thing ever made these girls feel more an integral part of their communities than buying Liberty Bonds with their savings. We must find new ways of visualizing great ideas.

The greatest single force in the life of one of these girls is the *parole officer* who has charge of her. In Massachusetts we call these officers visitors, which title conceals the firm hand of authority within the velvet glove of friendly interest. A girl's visitor naturally looms large in the life of a girl since she is so much the arbiter of the girl's fate. The visitor is far enough removed from the girl's daily life to be a source of interest and to arrest her imagination. This is a real factor in her influence.

She must be able to hold up an idea of the girl which can be constantly renewed to meet the onslaughts of the girl herself upon it. She must have personal magnetism to win the girl's confidence, and mental power (more than force of will, since it calls into use judgment and sympathy and patience) to make a girl see a thing as the visitor sees it. She must have faith in the innate goodness of the human being or her spirit will flag with the difficulties of helping these girls to become "grown up" in their mental attitude. She must have insight and sympathy as well as a genuine love for each girl.

Prejudices in the visitor's makeup of race, color or creed should be watched out for and guarded against. If she cannot overcome her prejudices she must at least learn to recognize them and fight against them, and thus minimize their effect. On the other hand, the racial prejudices of the girl must be taken into account if the visitor is to understand her and help her. A Polish girl, for instance, instinctively distrusts officialdom. Lying in the case of such a girl is an inherited weapon of defense against unjust punishment. Unlimited proof of the good faith of the visitor may eventually overcome her distrust.

The visitor, in short, needs to have the patience of Job and the wisdom of Solomon, plus an unbounded sense of humor, to be a sufficiently well-balanced personality for her job.

To summarize:

We have considered very briefly the basis of parole, either, first, that the progress of the individual in the institution warrants belief that he is ripe for trial in the community, or, second, that he has received from the institution all that he is capable of assimilating.

We have considered the material for parole—the failures of society—and what the institution is able to do through medical care, industrial training and the teaching of sound principles to prepare it for trial in the community again on parole.

We have also considered the forces in the community which may be brought to bear effectively upon this material—work and play, the family, the church, the school, community interests—the adjustment to this new environment being made with the help of the visitor, who acts in the various capacities of sympathetic friend, intelligent observer and careful supervisor, an interpreter to the girl of the intricacies of living, and to the community of the needs of the girl. We have touched but briefly on the importance of the study of the causes of their delinquencies and of recurrent diagnoses of these girls, both more effectively accomplished in the light of their progress on parole.

Consideration of the future of parole brings us face to face with such questions as these:

A. What is the function of parole in relation to the rehabilitation of the girl's family?

A girl cannot be considered entirely apart from her family, no matter how bad her family may be. Family ties are so strong that after her release from supervision she will almost inevitably drift back to her family. Should not the state save the future of the girl by doing all it can to build up the family? Up to this time such work has been beyond the powers of the limited numbers of parole officers.

B. What is the function of parole in relation to the medical care of the girl?

Should there not be a stronger appeal to the best brains of the medical profession to help solve the problems of diseased bodies and brains?

More careful studies of special mental abilities would be a stride in advance, surely, from the point of view of vocational guidance.

C. Would not the development of specialists within the ranks of visitors be helpful?

The placing of delinquent girls requires great skill in fitting together home and girl, calling for discrimination and judgment of a high order. Would not a person possessing these qualities, after acquiring a wide acquaintance with possible places, grow into a master of the art?

Is not the handling of girls who are put back into the public schools, involving relations with the schools and the finding and developing of suitable homes, another problem requiring special qualifications in the worker and the growth of a real technique?

Does not the question of illegitimacy demand special attention? Would not this be a field for a visitor with a nurse's training?

D. Should not all parole departments develop the habit of making analyses of their case records?

Real knowledge of proper treatment on parole might result, as well as suggestions for preventive work.

E. Is not parole incidentally a sifting process which is needed to bring to light which part of this marred material can be remolded successfully; which part, because of slow development, needs indeterminate parole before the outcome can be determined fairly?

Can these questions be answered by the parole officer who lives in the institution and who has 80 girls in her charge?

Can the superintendent of a big institution, a world in itself, consider successfully, with her institution problems, questions which imply the closest contact with the community?

The future of parole lies in the answers to such questions as these. I leave them with you.

At least we may conclude that to obtain successful results, parole must cease to be a mechanical operation of law and rules, and must become a vital, creative force to preserve human material for itself and for society, which otherwise might become wreckage and waste.

Parole must be imbued with a deep-seated optimism to take this material, to study it and tend it, to push it and prod it and love it into shape. The intrinsic worth of human life is the real inspiration.