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DISEASE AND CRIME

L. L. STANLEY¹

Disease is defined as a disturbed or abnormal physiological action in the living organism. Crime may be defined as any act which subjects the doer to legal punishment.

In this paper an endeavor will be made to show that disease plays a considerable part in the cause of crime. And to this end disease will be divided into three classifications: moral disease, which has to do with character; mental disease, which pertains to the brain, and physical disease, which applies to the abnormalities and disturbances in one or another remaining portions of the body.

Moral disease is largely a matter of early training and environment. If the individual is brought up with the proper precepts and has them well instilled into him, he will probably not suffer a disordered character.

The home, school, and the church are the best guardians of the moral state, and if they do not function properly, a moral disease will result.

Mental disease may be hereditary or environmental, and at the same time may be brought on by a disregard of the physical laws of health. The maintenance of mental health is the aim of the mental hygienist and the psychiatrists.

Physical disease is much a matter of surroundings and environment, but may be influenced to a considerable extent by the moral and mental capacities of the individual.

After a very close association of ten years with those whom the law has branded as criminals, and whom society has thought best to put away for its protection, one cannot but see that disease does play a large part in the causation of crime.

During the past decade it has been the custom of the medical department at San Quentin thoroughly to examine every prisoner shortly after his arrival at the institution. This includes his personal history, his habits, his family tendencies and an account of the illness through which he has gone. In addition to this the inmate is given a complete clinical examination, including laboratory tests of whatever nature may be indicated. A few years ago, one thousand of these

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examinations were tabulated and the results analyzed. From this analysis some interesting data were obtained.

It was found that most of the crimes were committed by young men. The figures taken in 1916 show that five per cent were under twenty years of age when they entered prison, and that fifty per cent were between twenty and thirty years of age. Data compiled in the last year show that even a greater percentage than this are young men.

The greater number of prisoners, or sixty-four per cent, have never married. Eight per cent are divorced and five per cent are widowers. Only twenty-five per cent are married. One-fifth of one per cent have been married more than once. From these figures it might be suggested that marriage is one of the greatest deterrents of crime. It is seen that three-fourths of the crime is committed by those who are unmarried. It is possible that the duties and responsibilities of a family tend to steady the individual and make him consider the welfare of his dependents when temptation confronts him. These observations are brought in at this time because it is possible that various diseases have in certain ways prevented marriage and because they have prevented it have been directly responsible for crime. There are numerous instances of prisoners who know nothing of their parentage. Some have never known a home. It well can be presumed that they are of illegitimate parentage. Had marriage taken place different environments might have been provided for the child and he might have been kept out of crime.

One-sixth of all the prisoners examined asserted that one or more of their kin were alcoholics, that is addicted to the use of spiritous liquors in excess. This is recognized as a disease and it is known that this vicious tendency is handed down from one generation to the other. Many a crime has been committed under the influence of liquor. This point cannot be denied.

Approximately one-fourth of this series of a thousand cases give a history of having had some one in their family or close relationship who was afflicted with that dreadful disease, tuberculosis. When the white plague steals into a family and attacks the bread winner, verily a calamity has taken place. The mother is forced to take up anything she can do to provide for the family, and to administer to the helpless sufferer. The children, if there be any, are forced to shift for themselves the best they may, to roam the streets and to encounter pitfalls which they might have been piloted clear of, had not disease come into the household. Almost every community knows of such disasters and can count the indirect results in our prisons and reform schools.

Eight per cent claim that some of their kin had died of cancer. As this disease comes on usually in later life, it is probable that it has very little to do with framing circumstances which would lead to crime. This disease might have appeared after the family was sufficiently grown so that childhood was not deprived of the attention due it in contrast to the family attacked by consumption.

Insanity is one of the mental diseases, and that it may be inherited and passed down through generations is well known. Four per cent of the prisoners have stated that there was a history of insanity in their family. It is possible that this is an underestimation, for most people are reluctant to admit this most unfortunate taint in their heritage. Many crimes are committed by the mentally unbalanced. That the law recognizes the irresponsibility of the insane is evidenced by the fact that the mentally deranged are not amenable to the extreme penalty, even though found guilty of the taking of human life.

Every year a number of insane prisoners is sent to the state asylums for treatment for mental conditions. A few of these develop psychopathic tendencies in prison, while a greater number are recognized as being unbalanced upon examination after their arrival. Their mental diseases are not found out by the authorities at the time of the trial. In this connection it might be said that the establishment of psychopathic hospitals where mental disease may be recognized and provided for before a shocking crime is committed, would have much to do with keeping down the ever increasing population of the prisons and penitentiaries. Mental disease certainly does contribute to crime.

According to the data collected, most of the prisoners have suffered from various diseases in childhood and before they entered the penitentiary. Forty per cent of them had mumps, eleven per cent of them had measles and twelve per cent had scarlet fever. Fifteen per cent of them claim that they had typhoid fever. This is probably a higher percentage than it should be, for it is possible that some of the prisoners gave a positive statement to this question in order that they might be excused from typhoid vaccination, which is administered on the entrance of the inmate. But because of this vaccination there have been put two cases of typhoid fever in San Quentin during the past ten years.

Thirteen per cent assert that they have had pneumonia at some time during their lives, and four per cent claim that they had on entrance or had in the past tuberculosis in some of its forms.

Venereal disease heads the list, in that sixty-six per cent admit one, both, or all three of the infections. Forty-four out of every

hundred have had gonorrhoea. Many other morbid conditions arise from this disease, unless it is quickly and permanently cured. And there are grave doubts whether the individual once affected is ever permanently cured. Stricture, rheumatism, and various other inflammations follow in its train, while to the innocent recipient of the disease may come blindness, sterility, and numerous surgical procedures to relieve the distress and suffering caused by it.

Twelve out of every hundred state that they have had the initial lesion, which causes syphilis. This statement is borne out fairly well from the fact that the Wassermann reaction, which is a blood test for this disease, shows that ten per cent react positively. With syphilis comes locomotor-ataxia, that disease which renders a patient unable to properly co-ordinate the movement of his lower limbs, and causes him to be dependent on others for support. It likewise attacks the brain, causing a disease known as paresis. There have been numerous prisoners afflicted with this disease sent to the penitentiary. Their brain tissue has been badly injured and they have fallen into crime because it was the course of least resistance. Their brains were so impaired that they were unable to recognize the difference between right and wrong.

In the light of personal habits in that they might cause disease and through disease cause crime, it may be said that thirty-one per cent confess to the excessive use of alcoholics. One-half of this number may have come by this trait through inheritance, for such a number gave a family history of alcoholism. No doubt the other half of this thirty-one per cent acquired the craving. Four hundred and ninety out of the thousand stated that they used alcoholics moderately, while two hundred denied that they used spiritous liquors at all. It is known that alcoholism produces forms of insanity and that those afflicted with these mental derangements are potentially criminal. Here the point is proven and shows that disease does in a definite measure contribute to crime.

By some it is claimed that narcotic drug addiction is a disease, while other authorities consider it as a habit. But whatever it may be considered, its victims are the most highly potentialized criminals known. They will steal without the least compunction, and usually their pilfering is to procure means whereby they may obtain more of their narcotic. They surely do live and survive through a life of crime. At the beginning of 1913, about three per cent of all the prisoners sent to San Quentin were drug addicts, but in the past few years this per-

centage has more than doubled. No one can doubt for a moment that this disease does not cause much crime.

The symptoms and diseases which the prisoners claim to have when their histories are being taken are almost as numerous as the words of the medical dictionary. Among them are acne, adenoids, alcoholism, asthma, boils, bronchitis, chancre, constipation, cough, dislocated shoulder, deafness, general debility, gun-shot wounds, goiter, hernia, hydrocele, heart trouble, headaches, indigestion, insomnia, itch, locomotor-ataxia, lumbago, neurasthenia, paralysis, pains in various localities, pellagra, rheumatism, stomach troubles, syphilis, tape worm, eczema, epilepsy, gonorrhoea, malaria, morphinism, neuralgia, nervousness, tonsillitis, tuberculosis, varicose veins and many others.

And physical examinations bear out many of these claims and statements. On certain days the new prisoners are brought to the hospital, where they are stripped of all their clothing and carefully examined from head to foot. Almost all of them have some scars on the head. Many of these are due to falls or bumps in childhood, while others are due to violence in later life. Every year there is a considerable number of prisoners who blame their delinquency to some head injury received in youth. For the most part these claims can be discounted, for it is rare that any mental derangement is caused in this way, unless some of the brain tissue itself is damaged.

Almost ten per cent have impaired hearing. In some this impairment is slight, while in others it amounts to complete deafness. Such defects are surely handicaps to normal living.

Eight in every hundred have noses which have been broken and deformed through injury. In a few these deformities amount to unsightly features, and are a source of embarrassment to their possessors. By some it is claimed that through their unsightly appearance they have been unable to hold positions and as a result have been compelled to resort to crime for a living. These claims may be somewhat overdrawn, but they are well in the realm of possibilities. But what may be a detriment to their welfare is their inability to properly breathe, because the middle partition of their noses have been deflected in such a manner that the nostrils are occluded. Examination shows that fourteen per cent are so afflicted. Numerous operations are done at the San Quentin hospital for the relief of such conditions.

Three and one-half per cent claim defective vision, and a few of the prisoners are totally blind. The eyes are tested by a licensed optician and suitable glasses are provided for all of those who need them at the expense of the state. Numerous eye operations are per-

formed for the relief of squint, pterygium, and other abnormalities. The man with poor eyesight surely is less qualified to lead a straightforward life and to properly compete with his fellow beings than the man who is normal in this respect.

The resident dentist reports that ninety-nine per cent of the men are in need of dental attention, and the examinations of the mouth bear out this statement. Two per cent have no teeth at all, and over fifty-three per cent are afflicted with pyorrhoea. A corps of dentists is kept busy all the time with these conditions. They are aided by special workers from the University of California, who are doing research work toward the alleviation of dental diseases. Bad teeth lead to such diseases as indigestion, rheumatism and other illnesses, which in turn lower the physical and mental resistance of the individual and possibly make him more susceptible to crime.

Examination of the neck and chest showed that about five per cent were poorly nourished and poorly developed. Twelve per cent had definite pathological lung conditions, which included bronchitis, asthma and tuberculosis.

Almost eight per cent had heart murmurs, denoting impaired action of this important organ.

Abdominal diseases were found in many cases and to present an index to these conditions it may be said that from ten to thirty appendectomies are performed each year. About eight gastroenterostomies are performed annually for the relief of ulcer of the stomach. In addition to this there are found a number of cases of gall-bladder disease, as well as cancer of the abdominal organs.

Hernia, or rupture, was noted in six per cent of the cases, while scars denoting that this operation had previously been performed were found in four per cent. A hernia is a condition which causes the patient no end of annoyance. It is a constant source of irritation and may lead on to other systemic conditions. More hernia operations are performed on the prisoners in San Quentin than any other major procedure.

The extremities show interesting data in that in the lower limbs seventy-two out of the thousand were cripples, the legs having been amputated or otherwise deformed. The upper extremities gave almost five per cent of abnormalities. From this it is seen that twelve per cent of the prisoners may be classified as cripples. Surely men so afflicted are handicapped in the struggle for existence, and may fall easy victims to crime.

From the foregoing data an idea may be obtained of the physical condition of the men who are sent to prison for various crimes. As can be seen, many of them are or have been physically diseased. A recent survey by a trained psychologist reveals the fact that about twenty per cent of them are so diseased mentally that they are considered feeble-minded. With these handicaps which may constantly irritate them, which may be with them causing pain and distress and interfering with their normal efficiency, it can readily be seen that the threshold of their resistance is lowered and they may be more susceptible to deviating from the straight and narrow path of righteousness. If all moral, mental and physical disease could be eliminated, there would be no more crime.