

1921

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### Recommended Citation

John R. Harding, Segregable Delinquent, 12 J. Am. Inst. Crim. L. & Criminology 267 (May 1921 to February 1922)

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## THE SEGREGABLE DELINQUENT<sup>1</sup>

JOHN R. HARDING<sup>2</sup>

The writer has often been asked to give a description of some of the extreme types met with at the Elmira Reformatory. This outline will be concerned more particularly with the discussion of a distinct class of feeble-minded criminals, generally known in reform circles as "defective delinquents."

There are good defectives and bad defectives side by side in every correctional institution. The "good" defective is usually a facile and easy-going individual and he is mentioned here in passing only because of his gullibility and his readiness to follow the lead and do the bidding of the so-called "bad" defective.

The bad defective under consideration here is a troublemaker wherever he is. He either will not work at all, or applies himself in such a shiftless and half-hearted manner that his employer soon becomes disgusted and discharges him. At the institution he cannot adapt himself to the routine intended for ordinary offenders because of his inborn defects. In fact, this self-same delinquent, constituting something like 10 per cent of the present reformatory population, is not amenable to ordinary discipline or control. Even at the institutional hospital, where life is made easy for him, and where there is a premium upon obedience and a minimum of responsibility placed upon him, he must often be called to task for his foolish acts.

Who is this unregenerate criminal, whose presence creates havoc in the outside community, and who is able to destroy the morale of a whole group of ordinary inmates at the reformatory? And why have we never captured him or confined him to a place of permanent safety and thus put an end to his wild activities? Is it not because we have never really taken the time to study his motives or to master the details of his diseased personality?

Let us glance for a moment at the life history of these prisoners. As infants they have often been dull and distracted, or backward in their physical and mental development. Later they became restless, irritable and hard for their parents to manage. When sent to school they chafed under restraint, violated the rules and corrupted the man-

<sup>1</sup>Read at the Annual Convention of the American Prison Association, Columbus, Ohio, October 20, 1920.

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ners of their classmates. They could not remember or understand the lessons like normal children, and to them obedience and application have always been lost arts. They felt strange and out of place in the school room, and soon began to rebel and to look for a means of escape from what was, to them, an intolerable situation. Like caged eagles they were ruffled and untamed.

The average defective delinquent shows early signs of incorrigibility and eventually becomes a chronic truant from school. By running away he is able to evade the authority of both parents and teachers. He loiters about the street corners where he falls in with a vicious slum element. These new-found denizens of the lower world play upon his ignorance and cupidity, initiate him into the art of petty gambling, and teach him the mysteries of crime and dissipation.

In the ungraded class or at the truant school these delinquents are hopelessly incorrigible, and by the time they reach the reformatory stage of their careers they have become quarrelsome, rebellious, deceitful and psychopathic.

Physically these subjects may be dwarfed and deformed or handicapped by the presence of chronic disease. A certain percentage of them suffer from defective sight or hearing; some belong to the so-called "dizzy type"—experience dizziness if they try to fix their gaze or attention too closely—become "fussed" and confused when they meet with any new situation that calls for initiative or immediate action on their part.

Intellectually the most of them are feeble-minded. They have never developed judgment or foresight and are still in the "play" stage of life, where amusement and self-gratification occupy first place.

As a rule they have enough education to enable them to read simple English, and the so-called Wild West literature is usually their choice.

Their emotional faculties are stunted, perverted and poverty-stricken. Mental and physical application tires and annoys them—their dominating idea is to avoid work and to escape responsibility of every description. Although naturally obstinate and irritable when antagonized, they become strangely weak and pliable in the hands of their associates—cannot resist suggestion—are afraid of being called "yellow."

Their conversation is vulgar and profane, their motives low and sensual, and their minds are stys where swinish passions revel. These individuals live in a world of their own, where the virtues of honor, truth and integrity are unknown.

Their home environment has generally been one of ignorance, poverty and neglect, and often our subjects have been orphans or the youngest of a large family of siblings. Where the parents were un-Americanized foreigners home authority was ignored. The easily accessible moving picture house, of which they have invariably been ardent and interested patrons, has taught them many of the secrets of criminal practice and has fired their morbid fancies with a strong desire to emulate the heroes there portrayed. And finally, the low dance, the inevitable "crap" game and the obnoxious pool dive have each contributed their part by further developing criminal character. What else but crime and degradation could possibly have followed?

The moral reason for all of this is simple enough. A vague and primitive understanding of what is really right and wrong, together with a hazy conception of the rights of property and person of others, have left these perverted individuals only partially responsible for their acts. Accordingly they spend their lives making rounds in a vicious circle of crime and custody, repeating the process over and over, terrorizing society when at large and periodically congesting the courts and prisons until chronic disease or the electric chair finally claims them.

The following cases are now serving sentence at the Elmira Reformatory. They represent a distinct type of present-day criminals as found in every correctional institution. As previously intimated, they are degenerates who cannot adapt themselves to any environment and who have demonstrated their criminality beyond the shadow of a doubt. It is a well-known fact that no special provision has ever been made for this extreme type of criminal, and consequently that he will be regularly released from custody within a few months.

Case 1.—Age 15; Binet age, 11½ years.

*Diagnosis*—Segregable Delinquent—*Rebellious* Type.

*History*—Is an Italian-American. Parents are ignorant, illiterate and low grade individuals; father has drunk wine freely, and neither parent can read or write. From early life this boy has fought against every form of discipline and restraint, whether at home or in school. His foreign-born parents found themselves wholly unequal to the task of managing him. Inmate could not and would not learn in school—shouted his defiance in the classroom or ran into the street when interfered with—later was transferred to an ungraded class where he continued equally incorrigible. Industrially he has been limited to short driving jobs, which he changed frequently on account of instability

and incompetence. Much of his time has been spent in low pool dives where he associated with a criminal element.

The boy was very backward in his early development—did not walk until he was five or six years old, and still stutters slightly when nervous or off his guard—naturally his ignorant and benighted parents have always favored him—recently sent him to live with a married sister in a neighboring city in order to avoid his reporting to the probation officer and prevent his being “caught.” He seems to have succeeded fairly as a “crap shooter” and claims to have supplied his parents from time to time with money obtained in this way. When eleven years of age he was sent to a juvenile reform school for “jostling,” but escaped soon after and was kept under cover by his relatives so as to avoid re-arrest. Of late the boy has made a practice of “going robbing” every Sunday. Has been arrested several times.

*Physical*—Dwarfed—several primitive Darwinian tubercles—thick, licentious lips with depressed corners and a cynical curl of mouth—nervous heart—constipation—dizziness and flushing of face when angry.

*Mental*—Inmate is feeble-minded—Binet age, 11½ years—Ungraded Class. He is an ignorant, shiftless, defiant youngster who has virtually lived in a poolroom. He has no notion of becoming an honest citizen—is arrested in intelligence and deficient in all of the higher mental attributes—has only a limited conception of what is right or wrong—lives for pleasure and self-gratification—holds himself in readiness to “pull off a job” whenever he has the opportunity—looks upon burglary as a ready means of making “easy money,” and considers his sentence here as only one of the misfortunes that occasionally follow those who take chances. Personally the boy is brazen, aggressive, egotistic, selfish and cruel, also secretly proud of his criminal escapades. He occupies a position outside the pale of society. Every man’s money is to him an object of envy and an excuse for plunder. He flies into a violent temper, and in his dizzy rage reviles or threatens to murder those who have antagonized him. When subdued he makes light of the conflict and gloats over the fact that he has “disgraced” his antagonist and thus gotten even.

Meanwhile institutional confinement chafes on his sensitive and rebellious nature. He longs for the “open,” and in the absence of the exciting adventure incident to crime and dissipation he periodically abandons himself to insurrection, after which he has to be rescued from the guard house by the superintendent or disciplinarian. Inmate

is incapable of self-analysis and is an entire stranger to the art of self-control.

The outstanding characteristics in this case are to be found in the individual's irritable and touchy temperament, which finds expression in violent episodes that take place when he is crossed in any way. His utter lack of emotional control leaves him unfortified when the responsibilities of life crowd in upon him. An arrested intelligence makes him industrially incompetent, and, inasmuch as he is further handicapped by dizziness and by an absence of moral sensibility, the boy stands out as a helpless and a hopeless proposition for reformation.

Case 2.—Age 20; Binet age, 14 years.

*Diagnosis*—Segregable Delinquent—*Psychopathic* Type.

*History*—The third son of a French father and an Irish mother. Inmate is looked upon at home as the odd member of the family, which fact his parents attribute to an attack of scarlet fever during his childhood. The father is a proud and exacting man who has tried to reform his son by means of arbitrary repression rather than proper training. The boy was constantly shamed and belittled at home when he failed to measure up to the family standards. His earnings were confiscated so that he would have no money to spend upon idle amusement. He has never been resourceful—could not adjust himself to his environment and so early fell back upon larceny to supply his wants. The present is his sixth recorded arrest, and his first conviction occurred when he was only 11 years old. The boy learned quickly, but was finally expelled from high school for misconduct, greatly to the chagrin of his parents. Soon after this event he ran away from home and enlisted in the U. S. Navy under a fraudulent age. He had trouble there with his superior officers, received several minor courts-martial, and finally went A. W. O. L. eight months after enlisting. Subsequently he worked at odd jobs, secured largely because of the fact that he continued to wear a sailor's uniform. Meanwhile inmate lived in furnished rooms, spent his paltry earnings freely, and associated with a gambling and a prostitute element. He was sentenced to the Elmira Reformatory for driving a stolen automobile toward Chicago from New York City in company with several accomplices whom he claims actually stole the car. They wrecked the machine while crossing Ohio, and this inmate finally confessed to the authorities in detail.

*Delinquencies*—

1. 1911—Burglary—Probation.
2. 1915—Larceny—Suspended Sentence.

3. 1915—Larceny—Discharged.
4. 1917—Vagrancy—State Reformatory (Minn.)—1 year.
5. 1919—Burglary—Suspended Sentence.
6. 1919—Attempted Grand Larceny—Elmira Reformatory.

*Physical*—Undersized—suspicious lungs—venereal history—facial acne—generally nervous and restless—cigarette cough.

*Mental*—This boy is a public school graduate. He plays cornet in the institutional band—might earn his living if he could learn to correlate his faculties. He converses rather intelligently upon familiar topics and makes a good first impression. But he is defective and unbalanced in judgment and unable to foresee the consequences of his acts.

The boy has never been able to turn his scattering faculties to good account. Although possessed of a fair theoretical knowledge of what is right and wrong, he is shiftless and unstable, and lacking in the moral sense necessary to keep him from committing crime. Personally this inmate is pleasant, pliable, and, if anything, over-obliging—is always ready to plunge into foolhardy crime in order to “help out” his friends—claims that he does not want to hurt their feelings by refusing them, but at the same time admits that he cannot resist their criminal suggestions. When arrested he takes the blame for crimes in which he was only a minor accomplice in order to shield his friends. Inmate is emotionally facile and uncontrollable—shows childish elation over any circumstance that promises him even a temporary change of perspective, but becomes pessimistic under the strain of responsibility—confesses his own lack of confidence—is ill at ease when among normal people—declares that nobody likes him and says that he is disgusted with life.

This case is of interest because of the prominent part that his parents may have played in his downfall. Meanwhile the boy belongs to the type of delinquent known as constitutionally psychopathic inferior. He is irritable, peevish and neurotic—is essentially “mal-adjusted” and destined to continue a life of vagabondage unless isolated from society or permanently taken over by some supervising authority.

Case 3.—Age 19; Binet age, 14 years—(Colored).

*Diagnosis*—Segregable Delinquent—*Sex Pervert*.

*History*—Inmate was born out of wedlock, the illegitimate son of a sixteen-year-old colored girl; father's identity is obscure. He was adopted by colored people who cared for him until he ran away from home during 1919. The foster parents were both of them theatrical

people who were frequently absent from home, leaving this boy with strangers much of the time during his childhood. He quit school when fourteen years of age and idled away his time or played some minor theatrical parts ever since, mostly in poses or chorus acts. One year ago he was turned out of his home, since which time he has kept up his stealing and vagrancy—has lived in furnished rooms, part of the time with prostitutes. Admits having roomed with male prostitutes, and confesses to having engaged in numerous perverted sex activities, including buccal coitus, also both active and passive sodomies. Inmate is syphilitic. The present is his fifth recorded arrest, beginning with a juvenile delinquency for which he spent from his fifteenth to his seventeenth year at the New York Juvenile Asylum. He has never tried to make his paroles, stating that he "could not be bothered reporting." An obvious male prostitute was his partner in the present crime. His fourth arrest was for returning at night and stealing his foster father's clothing after he had been driven from home; and the fifth for ransacking the apartments of a prospective employer in company with the aforementioned accomplice. Soon after this burglary he was identified on the street with part of the stolen clothing on his person.

*Physical*—Suspicious lungs—4 plus Wassermann reaction—slight dizziness—nocturnal restlessness—nightmares—headaches following fatigue or excitement.

*Mental*—This subject is a degenerate. He passes a 14-year Binet test and had finished the sixth grade when he left school. Inmate has a fair memory, which enables him to converse and to make a good first impression. But he is too lazy to work and has been a natural born thief since early life, stealing especially from his parents and benefactors. He has a primitive judgment and is unable to profit by his repeated arrests. He is dull and undeveloped along emotional lines, manifests no real affection for his parents, and fails to recognize any obligations as a member of society. Personally he is a pliable and spineless weakling who follows the lead of his impulses or yields to the suggestions of his associates without apparent power or effort to resist. He is simple, semi-responsible, admittedly licentious and obviously defective along both mental and moral lines.

This boy should be permanently separated from his paramour and also isolated from society on account of his dangerous and nauseating habits. While his delinquencies are undoubtedly the outcome of inherent mental and emotional defects, the prevailing instinct here is a perverted and predominating sex lust which has overshadowed the



individual's whole life. Deprived of his parents and left to the care of inferiors during the crucial years of his character building, he has naturally abandoned himself to indulgence in the lowest licentious practices, adopting petty thievery as a source of financial supply. His only hope for possible improvement is to be found in a prolonged course of isolation and training where he can receive medical treatment and be taught to control his abnormal sex instincts.

In fact, there is no longer any doubt in the minds of more enlightened reformers that the confirmed criminal defective should be committed to a special institution set apart for that purpose rather than sending him to prison. It is not only bad business practice, but also a miscarriage of justice to the delinquent himself to do otherwise. From the very nature of things all morons are potential criminals unless some kind friend lends them a helping hand. It is the neglected defective that generally turns out to be a criminal later. And the writer of this paper is more than ever impressed with the prominent part played by the home and the parents in the making of every criminal. So, while we are trying to patch up the mangled wrecks of character that come to our penal institutions, let us not forget that modern society itself is the original offender, and that, in order to be effective, reformation must begin with a proper education and control of the grandparents.