

MODERN METHODS OF REFORMING DELINQUENT YOUTHS.

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One of the most momentous questions to be considered by the thoughtful serious minds of to-day must surely be: how can we best train the rising generation of delinquent children?

This question is a vital one because its solution involves not only the welfare and stability of the family, but of the state and nation. The rapid increase in the dependent and delinquent class represents a most formidable problem. Certainly it is a problem of some moment when we know that statistics show the increase of dependency and delinquency to have doubled in the United States during the past century. For every three hundred persons in our land we find one delinquent or a total of more than three hundred thousand of these unfortunate children within the borders of our nation to-day.

Could we wipe out at once the many causes of this condition we need not consider the solution of so grave a question, but just as vividly as we can see this to be impossible so vividly should be impressed upon our minds the necessity of good reform for these "innocents" who because of some fault, not their own, have been led away from the path of virtue.

I say, "by a fault not their own", for I believe it is time reformers more completely appreciated the fact that individuals are only partly, in perhaps all instances, and only slightly in many instances, to blame for their infractions of the law. Born into a social environment they have no power in selecting and still less in moulding and those so constituted that they readily yield, certainly deserve consideration and society should well assume the duty of eliminating the conditions it has been so helpful in producing.

While there are many causes of delinquency, yet they may all be safely classified under two heads—heredity and environment.

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ible barriers to the child's development; that because of improvident birth the child is handicapped for life; then we might as well give up the problem of reform as one that cannot be solved for it is said that only about one-fourth of the children of to-day are as well born as they should be were the laws of heredity and prenatal culture better understood.

Edgar J. Swift, who made a careful study of the relative influence of heredity and environment says: "The question of interest to society should not be, Can children become criminals because of inherited tendencies? but rather, Must these constitutional peculiarities reveal themselves in the life of the individual, however unfavorable to their development their the surroundings may be?"

From his investigations he concluded that inheritance need not determine what a child's character will be, but that evil hereditary tendencies may be overcome by an environment that subdues their growth.

One interesting experiment from which he drew his conclusion was made at the Minnesota State School for neglected and dependent children. The record of one hundred six children from this school was examined with the purpose of getting information on this point. The parents of all of these children were distinctly bad. The least of which any of them had been guilty was habitual drunkenness and desertion of their family while most of them were decidedly intemperate insane or criminal. Could we find a better ancestry for the production of criminals if the effect of heredity were beyond control?

Of these children when last investigated by the State agent fifty-two were classed as excellent, thirty-six as good and eighteen as bad. Those designated as excellent were so strong in character and ability as to attract unusual attention, while by good was meant

above reproach in character. Eighty-three and two-hundredths per cent of all those of known bad parentage developed into young men and young women of good character when placed in better surroundings.

Thus Swift concludes that moral obtuseness is not necessarily the result of native incapacity. He says: "It is doubtful whether in three-fourths of the cases, criminal tendencies are anything other than a convenient name with which to cover our social failure in education, and if a suitable training long enough continued can to a certainty derange the hereditary tendencies which we call instinctive, and create new ones, heredity loses the charm of necessity, and society with its power to control environment becomes responsible.

Julia B. Perry, Superintendent of the Kansas Industrial School for Girls, in speaking upon the same subject, says: Much may be said regarding the influence of heredity and yet to my mind, character is acquired by example and not by blood; by the activities and amusements in the shop, and street and not alone by the restraint of home and church. I am of the belief", she says, "that nearly all vicious tendencies or abnormal appetites may be overcome".

Believing then that heredity may be subdued by environment we must also believe that reformation of delinquent children is possible and that it is our privilege as well as our duty to save these unfortunate boys and girls and reclaim them for social usefulness.

Knowing then the great field of work open to reform schools it is of interest to study the methods used and the results obtained.

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The Industrial Schools must do what these forces have failed to do.

A very pronounced change in motive and method has taken place in these schools within the last generation or two. The earliest institutions for juvenile delinquents were organized under the dominance of the prison idea. The first efforts were primarily to save these young offenders from the demoralizing effects of associating with older criminals in jails and prisons, and in the earlier provisions for the detention and care of these children, there were present most of the characteristics of prison treatment of adults and few characteristics properly belonging to the regimen of education and development.

The establishments were distinctly prison enclosures. There was no thought of making them homelike and inviting. The earning capacity of those confined was exploited to its highest possible figure. Education was only provided for during such hours as could not be profitably employed in work; and the greatest ambition and strongest claims for popular approval was a low per capita cost of maintenance.

But thanks to the change in social conditions, incident to increased wealth, culture and general uplifting of ideals in the people which has given the reform schools of to-day a loftier purpose, a higher sphere, a nobler ideal.

To-day the object of the Industrial School is to train these bad boys and girls into honesty, purity and helpful service, to furnish such surroundings and influence as will lead them to a better life. They supply the child with a ladder by which he may climb rung by rung back to a proper social adjustment. The point of vision of these schools is forward, not backward, is more concerned with the future conduct of the individual than the act he has com-

mitted and interested in what he will do when he leaves, not what he has done. Their object is the reclamation and reform if possible of their erring subject, not an exhibition of revenge.

The delinquent is treated, not as a criminal but as one needing aid and encouragement and the kind of interest that strengthens character. His duty as a little citizen is impressed upon him and he is shown that he has the love, trust and confidence of those in charge. The child is given a chance to prove his worth-perhaps the first opportunity he has had.

While the trend of the child's thoughts and aspirations are thus unconsciously being guided from bad to good channels, the body is built up physically. The physical condition is carefully considered, as it must be the basis for all future work of child development. It is found that the neglect which most of these children have suffered, has resulted in weak bodies-not necessarily famished or emaciated bodies- but lack of strength, sluggish circulation, and bad mental and physical correlation.

The physical occupation therefore takes a prominent place in the curriculum of these institutions. It is necessary that the brain be in the best physical condition as a part of a buoyant body fed by rich blood circulating evenly through every organ. The old policy that work, if hard enough, is good exercise, was first attacked, but the newer notion that in order to give full exercise, systematic and carefully studied work is necessary, was soon given consideration. Since no productive work could be found which fulfilled the requirements, some form or other of physical training, which is body building in its nature was added. Regular gymnastics drills

under competent instruction and oversight have been turned to as the best fulfillment of the end desired.

These means and the stimulation of a morning shower bath are relied upon to give a physical buoyancy and health to every part of the body. It is said that the results thus obtained, where this system is fully carried out, have so impressed some observers that the question has been raised as to whether it would not be profitable to devote a few weeks to this physical drill before attempting anything in the line of mental training.

Thus far we have considered only the development of the physical to make the mental accomplishments possible. The next question is: how and what does this mental training consist of? The school of letters is as unique as the school of physical and manual training. The first step taken is to put into separate classes pupils in the same grade differing widely in age and physical development. Those who have reached considerable size and maturity of mind cannot be advantageously taught in the same classes with small and immature children even when they are equally advanced in their studies. The older student, because of greater maturity, can acquire knowledge much faster than they young, of course, there is the same approach to the normal in their mental capacity. Separation is made because it is an embarrassment for a child to find himself associated in work with those very much younger and smaller than ~~himself~~. The individual is advanced and promoted just as rapidly as his ability will permit regardless of any set period for each particular grade as is common in our public schools. In addition to the common branches the child is given instruction in music, nature study and some work in literature. The boys are also instructed in elementary agriculture while the girls are trained in domestic science!

One might think that when the ground already covered has been traversed the end has been reached so far as education is concerned. But education is the development of the child, as we now proclaim, we are still far from the end of the route; for the every day life and atmosphere and spirit that envelops and controls it, are more potent in bringing out what is best and developing proper standards of conduct than any set tasks.

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Groups of pupils of the same approximate age and physical development and in some cases those of about the same moral standard are associated in life in "little homes" or "cottages" as they are called. This makes the teaching of absolute social equality possible.

In an article printed in the Annals of the American Academy, Vol 23, Page 491, F.H. Nibecker, Superintendent of House of Reformation, Glen Mills, Pa., says: Individual rights as well as individual limitations, and community rights and duties are the daily food of out of doors and indoor experience. In each of these families an inexorable reign of law exists protecting one child as much as the other. This not only instills in the child a proper reverence for law but also teaches him the limitations of his social sphere. He is taught to do the right thing in the right way. Play must be fair play, work must be honestly done; results must prove the correctness of the processes and processes must be commensurate with the results sought. These are moral lessons and it is character building to impress them upon the young mind.

Moral truths are taught not only every day—but every hour. The moral training relied upon to bring about the change in character does not differ from the training that develops character and ability in the case of the normal individual. The school endeavors to supply those things that the child has failed to receive in his earlier t

training. One of the principal deficiencies in the character of the delinquent is disrespect to those of authority. Most of these children have never known what it is to be obedient. This they are taught through the systematic way in which everything is done and must be done. If the child fails to do his duty he is corrected but in kindness and in love. He is shown his mistake and given a just reason why he should correct it. Authorities say it is remarkable to note how alaciously these little children respond to a kind word ; or to the loving hand which for the first time many of these children find resting upon their shoulders. And why should it not be thus? It is the natural tendency of the child's nature under proper conditions of healthful work and kind treatment to throw off viciousness, just as natural as doctors say it is for the body to throw off disease. In the Reformatory Report of George Junior Republic, page 29, Thomas M. Osbourne of New York says: In these schools may be found on every hand a moral and mental expansion, which is as surprising as it is delightful to behold. But why need these results be surprising for they are produced in a perfectly natural and logical way. They are such because the effort is made along lines of a child's nature - the lines of least resistance.

Proper devotional observance at meals and at the beginning and close of each day as well as appropriate service for moral instruction on Sunday, keep alive the appreciation of the higher obligation of life.

When the child has been at the Reform School for several months or two or three years, according to his behavior, he is paroled; that is, he is released upon conditions imposed by the school. If these conditions are complied with, and the child conducts himself properly

properly ,he is given his entire freedom.

Parole officers look after these paroled boys and girls, and they are also required to report regularly.

So far much has been said of the methods used in these schools but the question now is, are they accomplishing their purpose This can best be answered by the record made by the children after leaving the institutions.

In the Ninth Biennial Report of the State Industrial School for Girls, Page 9, Mrs. J. B. Perry in her report of what the school is accomplishing, writes: Many of our girls are filling positions worthily and satisfactorily. Others are continuing their education in the schools of the place in which they live. Only five have been returned to the institution the past biennium, and none of these was returned on account of misbehavior, but because the home was broken up on account of sickness or some unavoidable cause. Our girls are rapidly becoming homemakers of our own and other states and we can confidently say that they are becoming vital factors in making good citizens.

Again statistics show that of the four hundred boys in the Kansas Industrial School paroled during the past four years, seventy-five per cent are living useful and upright lives in the homes to which they had been sent, or in other homes provided for them, - Thirteenth Biennial Report of the State Industrial School for Boys, Topeka, Kansas, 1906, page 13.

The Boys' Industrial School of the state of Ohio, - Fiftieth Annual Report, 1905, page 7, - paroled four-hundred-thirty boys in one year, of which seventy-one were returned for violation of parole, leaving three-hundred-fifty-nine boys leading good, honest lives.

The George Junior Republic, situated in New York state has sent one hundred seven boys out into society again, of which sixty rank as good, thirty-three as fair, and fourteen as bad. This statement is made in the Report of the Reformatory Section, National Conference of Charities and Corrections, Washington, D.C., 1901, page 31.

The Indian Boys' Industrial School released three hundred thirty on parole of which one-hundred forty-nine became good citizens. - For thirtieth Annual Report, 1906, page 33.

The House of Refuge at Glen Mills, Pa., discharged during the year 1905, three hundred sixty-five boys of which only twenty-four were recommitted by courts, or sent to prisons, leaving ninety-four percent of the boys as doing well, - 78th Annual Report, 1906, page 38.

Thus we see what marvelous results these schools are obtaining, and what priceless contributions they are making to society.

The results are indeed gratifying. Every child saved from crime is a direct gain to the nation, and in every child is the possibility of a good citizen.

Remembering then that it is our privilege as well as our duty to care for these delinquent youths, to prevent crime and misery to bring happiness to these fellow-beings, let us all extend our sincere, tactful, wise, and intelligent co-operation to further this great noble work of reform.