

The Delinquent Woman

An Experimental Study of Psychopathic Delinquent Women, by Edith R. Spaulding, M. D. Introduction by Katharine Bement Davis. New York: Published for the Bureau of Social Hygiene by Rand McNally and Company. \$2.50.

PROBABLY a group of delinquent persons has never received the same degree of organized attention as that given the women in the New York State Reformatory at Bedford Hills during the period from 1913 to 1918, when Dr. Davis was in charge of the institution. This may be said because a private benefaction made it possible to add to the facilities of the state both a Laboratory of Social Hygiene and a Psychopathic Hospital engaging the services of a large research staff composed of psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, investigators and statisticians. Nothing could have been better conceived, and three reports of first-rate importance have now appeared, one by Dr. Davis on prostitution, one by Dr. Mabel Fernald, Dr. Hayes and Miss Dawley on the delinquent women at Bedford Hills and in the whole state, unequalled in its way but largely concerned with mental testing and statistics, and the present admirably executed report on the treatment of the most desperate cases, where the subject was both delinquent and psychopathic.

The practical value of Dr. Spaulding's study lies, of course, in the description of the method and the account of the successes and failures. But passing that over, an examination of the forty-four case-histories given in some detail raises certain questions concerning behavior and behavior difficulties. These girls were the worst in the institution, truly incalculable and terrifying personalities—sullen, dishonest, over-active, self-pitying, suicidal, tale-bearing, irritable, opinionated, insolent, fault-finding, loquacious, spitting, dirty, obscene, homosexual, assaultive, homicidal. They served their sentences, gave unspeakable trouble, showed in general no improvement, and when discharged the prognosis was usually recorded as "bad." But four years later, in connection with the preparation of this volume, these cases were wisely reinvestigated, in order to determine the present status of the girls, and this revealed an interesting situation. Two were insane, four were dead, five had disappeared from view, eleven were unchanged, that is, remained bad, and twenty-two, or half of the number, had "straightened up," "settled down," or were living inoffensively. The record shows also that many of the girls had had an uneventful childhood and that their initial delinquency was related to some incident, chagrin, mischance, uncertainty or desperation connected with the critical period of puberty, and we may surmise with some temporary condition of glandular imbalance. Did these girls settle down because of their hospital experience or in spite of it? Is it a fact that, with all its imperfections, a reformatory conducted as wisely as this one has a beneficial habit-forming effect which we have been slow in recognizing? Are behavior difficulties mainly due to unfortunate social experiences, and not to bad heredity? Does "mentality" play an important rôle, or is mental testing an unfortunate diversion of attention from the main problem?

The materials of this experiment thus far presented raise these questions without greatly illuminating them, and the experiment was terminated after five years. But what can you expect of science in five years? We do not limit

chemical and physical and biological and medical research to five years. Science requires time and many shiftings of standpoint and the accumulation of a great variety of data some of which reveal truth and find practical applications. Perhaps, on the other hand, we need not lament the termination of this particular experiment. Presumably its authors found that they had for the present reached the limit of their technique and were forced to go behind the behavior difficulties as they *exist* and study them as they *develop*—in the present Bureau of Social Hygiene. But even so, those who are specially interested in these questions are aware that the records of this experiment—certainly hardly less than a thousand cases—are among the most significant documents in this field. And documents are badly needed for purposes of comparison, in as much detail as possible. Nothing would be more welcome to students of behavior than five or more volumes containing selected cases from these archives representing behavior situations and types of personality.

W. I. THOMAS.

The Log of a Forty-Niner, edited by Carolyn Hale Russ. Boston: B. J. Brimmer Company. Private Edition, limited.

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H. E. B.

A Correction

In our issue of March 19 "Poems" by Grace Hazard Conkling was incorrectly attributed in the table of contents to Hazel Conkling.

Contributors

JOHN DEWEY, philosopher, educator and writer, is the author of *Studies in Logical Theory*, *School and Society*, and *Democracy and Politics*. His most recent book is *Human Nature and Conduct*, An Introduction to Social Psychology.

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W. I. THOMAS is the author of *A Source Book for Social Origins*, *The Polish Peasant*, *Sex and Society*, *The Unadjusted Girl*, etc.

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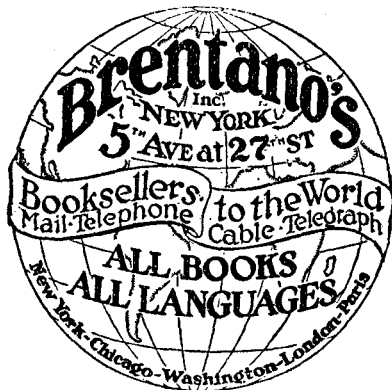
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