

How Do Criminals Get That Way?

CRIME AND THE HUMAN MIND.

By David Abrahamsen. New York: Columbia University Press. 1944. 244 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by SHELDON GLUECK

ONE cannot say often enough that a great deal of criminal behavior is symptomatic of more complex and deep-lying personality distortions than are usually suggested by the crimes themselves. These live influences have their roots in traumatic experiences of early childhood and are reinforced by later emotional reactions to the stresses and strains of life in family and society. This major truth, still too largely ignored by legislators, police officials, prosecutors, judges, penologists, and even academic criminologists, is perhaps the chief reason for the (belatedly acknowledged) high incidence of recidivism. Symptomatic treatment can at best achieve but palliative results; causal treatment operating on a superficial plane can do little better. Deep therapy, based on deep diagnosis, is often indispensable; for in criminal misbehavior, as in non-criminal behavior, things on the surface are not what they seem.

Some such point of view is effectively reflected in Dr. Abrahamsen's thoughtful and useful book. The author, born in Norway and a graduate of the Royal Frederick University of Oslo, studied with such distinguished investigators and observers of individual and societal life as Professors Monrad-Krohn and Malinowski. He has worked as psychiatrist with the Department of Justice in Oslo, at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, at the Menninger Clinic, at Bellevue Hospital, in the Illinois State Penitentiary, and in the Psychiatric Clinic of the New York Court of General Sessions. His ample and varied experience and an uncommonly rich familiarity with the extensive literature of criminology, psychiatry, and anthropology in many languages qualify him to speak with authority.

Mr. Abrahamsen's work is psychoanalytically orientated; but he does not make the mistake of ignoring other approaches to the intricate problem of crime causation or of assuming that all criminalism is explainable by the same causes any more than all disease is. The originality of his presentation derives not so much from the novelty of his ideas as from their synthesis and clarification and in his ability to demonstrate the interpenetration of individual and societal dynamics. Thus, while he draws heavily on the Freudian-Alexanderian subcon-

scious "sense of guilt" in explaining certain forms of criminalism, he is also concerned with the role of external pressures, particularly "patterns of criminalism," in the community. This is particularly brought out in Chapter IV, "Functional View of the Offender," and in his insistence that "since crime is acted out in a society where economic, political, and religious forces exist, it is necessary that the psychiatrist be familiar with these forces which may influence the conduct of humans. He must therefore study sociology, anthropology, law, and philosophy if he is to be able to understand the propensities of crime."

The following brief extracts from the excellent Chapter II, "The Mind in Relation to Crime," may indicate, as well as any, Dr. Abrahamsen's approach to the problem of crime-causation:

Because a man acts simultaneously as an individual and as a member of society, our concept of what constitutes criminalistic behavior has two roots. . . .

Because criminalistic tendencies are present in all humans, a criterion of the criminal cannot be given. Even with the anthropological and sociological knowledge we have gained of the culprit, of his body, skull, height, face, the broken home situation, economic circumstances, and a thousand other things, the whole problem boils down to one question: *How does the mind function which reacts with anti-social behavior?*

Dr. Abrahamsen devotes himself largely to answering this crucial question with the aid of psychoanalytic psychiatry and cultural anthropology; and his treatment contributes much insight. The process of weaving environmental elements into the fabric



of personality and character—the why and wherefore of the conscious and unconscious acceptance or rejection by different persons of various bits of the environment—is the crucial issue not only in the study of crime but in the understanding of the educational problem generally. Long ago Samuel Butler wisely observed that "a life will be successful or not, according as the power of accommodation is equal or unequal to the strain of fusing and adjusting internal and external changes."

Dr. Abrahamsen presents valuable hints for the penology of the future. It is surprising how few court and prison psychiatrists attempt any therapy. It is not enough for a mental doctor attached to a court or prison clinic merely to diagnose offenders, even if he does more than so many prison doctors do who divide them, brilliantly, into "sane" and "not insane." The whole point about exploration and demonstration of the deep-lying causes of delinquency and criminalism as forms of maladaptation of the individual to society is that the agencies of law enforcement should thereafter do something more penetrating and effective than deal out various terms of imprisonment or probation. Society should actively sponsor and check up on plans of therapy suitable to different types of violators of the criminal law. Dr. Abrahamsen calls attention, as some American criminologists have done before him, to the urgent need of emphasizing, among several of society's approaches to the crime problem, a therapeutic-reëducative approach. It may well be that for certain types of crime and criminals society still prefers a retributive-punitive attack; but public officials ought to be reminded that a curative program is today feasible and promising in coping with the general run of delinquents and criminals.

Dr. Abrahamsen's book could have been improved in organization of topics, through omission of repetitive matter, and by greater clarity in the psychoanalytic passages, in which he ordinarily assumes a greater technical knowledge on the part of the general reader than he has a right to expect. Nevertheless, his work is a far better than average exposition of an intricate problem by one who is close to mastery of a highly intricate subject.

The author is to be commended upon two elements of his presentation which greatly enhance its value: the inclusion, at various strategic points, of relevant and *pointed* case-history summaries; and the preparation of a scholarly bibliography.

Dr. Nolan D. C. Lewis contributes to the orientation of the reader by means of a Foreword.

Strictly Personal

HIT-AND-RUN JOURNALISM

I HAPPENED to be with Sumner Welles in his office when a story by Arthur Krock on the front page of *The Times* started the final drive to get Welles out of government service. I detest the cheap use of news stories to level charges which, if they belong anywhere at all, should be found in editorial columns. Here was a devoted public servant needlessly lost to the nation, at least temporarily. I leave aside entirely any alleged differences in personal relationship or in international attitudes existing at that time between Welles and Mr. Hull. My ire is directed at the use of so-called news reports to drive men out of office. I had lived through a similar episode with Leon Henderson, when he headed the O.P.A.

In talking to Swing, Thompson, Gunther, Shirer and many other friends, I came to realize that the Krocks of the press were then intent on doing a job of no dissimilar proportions on Stettinius of Lend-Lease and Elmer Davis of O.W.I. Incidentally, I have never met Krock as far as I can remember, but I abhor his type of attack. I even prefer nasty, hard-hitting Pegler with whom, of course, I disagree on practically all his tactics as well as on matters of taste. I just don't like one-sided snipers. I like my opponents tough and direct.

With the Welles episode in mind I gave a party in his honor and invited about forty people, owners of radio, press—leaders of public opinion. All those present admired Welles. We deplored his departure from present political usefulness. And I knew it was our own fault. I was ashamed. We just hadn't been in there pitching against the anti-Welles forces. Had we stood up and made ourselves heard we would not have had to do special honor to Welles on that evening. And I said with complete sincerity that I gave the dinner in the hope that I would save the expense of giving further valedictory parties for Stettinius, Davis, and others.

We can't develop a trained group of devoted, selfless public servants with a shabby element riding so much of the press. If the snipers would state alleged facts, then debates could reach the truth. If they dared state sources and name names, the man to be "done in" would have a chance to make a defense. It's easy to say: "Why pay attention to the Krocks? Why not

treat them with disdain?" But life doesn't work that way. That front-page gossip story—emanating from a still unnamed source, resting on anonymity, the tool of cowards, was to be used as tinder for all the non-heterogeneous opponents of Welles. Anti-Russians, isolationists, and others took up the fire. The Washington office of *The Times* would not have given the same amount of front-page space to answer the attack, even if an anonymous rumor could ever be answered.

I'm told by some that Krock disclaims the discredit for the job and I'm confident his great paper regrets the episode. But Krock is head of the Washington Bureau from which the piece emanated and on his own theory of resting responsibility on the men at the top, he might well have resigned if he applied to himself the sanctimonious standards he applies so glibly to his political opponents.

I pick on Krock particularly because he writes for our most significant and greatest daily newspaper, and his attacks on nearly all the followers of the President are usually of the same snide quality. Years ago at a dinner in Washington, called to discuss the impropriety of Krock's use of power, one of the leading officials of the nation ended the evening by saying: "I'm truly embarrassed because every week or so Krock commends me and my conferees."

Some say that the answer to this kind of journalism should be for those under attack to write answering letters to the papers. But that is less than feasible. A letter tucked away in a

letter column is no answer. Moreover, for Krock's prey to rise up and hit back at innuendo would be playing into Krock's hands. In the old days of the press, papers debated with each other and editors felt strongly enough on issues to horsewhip each other at times. Today that corrective is considered impolite. I know that conscientious, informed Anne O'Hare McCormick does not see eye to eye with Krock. I see the brave *New York Post* taking up, through Grafton and in editorials, answers to Krock and others by name. But in general a class loyalty pervades our press where few papers permit criticism of so-called competitors. In fact, the press is in the "after you, Gaston" doldrums. The better papers should remember the effect on the decent utility companies when they were staying in bed with H. C. Hopson of the Associated Gas and other really evil light and power influences. Unless that portion of the press which has integrity slaps down the antisocial news publishers, the entire press will be tainted as a single unit by a disgusted public. Maybe the revitalization of the press will be delayed until all columnists and editors who disagree with a Krock (including his own editors perchance) will answer back, point by point. Maybe such criticism of the Krocks of the press would persuade them to rely on facts, creditable and from disclosed public sources.

I'm not a softie in the field of criticism of public servants. I think it wholesome that they be kept on their toes by a vigilant press. I'm in favor of the pushing around of our officials. But must we keep on tripping them up with concealed strings? Must we continue to have sneaky nudges from hidden corners?

MORRIS ERNST.

This article is drawn from Mr. Ernst's forthcoming book, "The Best Is Yet," to be published soon by Harper & Brothers.

Garden Note

Ben Ray Redman

B RITTLE as old begonia stalks,
Frail as cosmos perilously swaying:
So were the days that broke in our hands,
So was the balance we held
Through the wind of the years.

Was it too much sun or too little
That yellowed the leaf?
Excess or dearth that rotted the root?
Had the buds been pinched
Would the blossoms have flourished?

Silent and rich, deep-spaded, manured,
Endless and always, the seasonless bed
Stirs to the infinite planting.