

## PSYCHOLOGY AND JUVENILE CRIME

BY

MARTIN L. REYMERT, PH. D.

*Director, The Mooseheart Laboratory for Child Research*

The psychological approach to criminal problems, first advocated by Franz von Liszt, has now taken hold in most countries. In Denmark, the State Attorney General asks the psychiatrist to determine amount and kind of punishment the criminal should have, type of institutional confinement, and other questions.

In juvenile and other crime, the psychologist and psychiatrist are interested in *why* the crime is committed. Thus, we are led to a study of the entire personality pattern of the individual. In every conduct situation there are three variables:

- a) the individual with his native and acquired equipment,
- b) the social milieu in which he finds himself,
- c) a/b-(momentary relationship between the individual and the milieu at the time of executing the act).

The full relationship and bearing of these compound factors can hardly be written at the present time into any definite equation. It all involves greater knowledge than we now possess of human nature. The field of human mentality and motivation is as yet rather obscure. The age-old question of heredity and environment is still perfectly open as regards such large entities as "criminal tendencies". I am unwilling to say that we know much about the nature of intelligence and neither have we reached any ideal means of measurement. Experience has proved to me how little we know in the field of feelings and emotions. Along biological and medical lines, endocrinology seems to give promise for the future but its claims have been over-estimated. I think we can sum up our experience by now in the line of prognosis for the growing individual by saying that the early period of childhood is of great importance. Other periods of importance are around the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades in school, and the adolescent period. Adolescence is the plastic stage of secondary childhood in which new habit, new thought and emotional patterns might be successfully implanted.

When applying their science to juvenile crime, the main thing which the psychologist and the psychiatrist should contribute in the future is the genetic study of the growing individual with special references to factors and patterns of factors which might lead to anti-social conduct.

The specific task of the psychologist should be to explore the relation a/b in the light of what he knows also of *a* and *b* as entities. All psychology is to some degree social psychology.

Instead of using psychological clinics for the study of the juvenile criminal after he is caught, the sensible thing for prevention of crime should be to have clinics in all schools studying the individual from the first grade throughout the system.

I think we shall have to go the whole way and acknowledge the multitude of conditions which might determine the conduct of the bio-social structure of man inside the milieu in which he finds himself. The following are a few of such conditions which we *know* would be helpful:

- 1) A psychological clinic in each community.
- 2) Reforms in our schools with the main emphasis on more individualization of instruction and training. The teacher must remember that the child is a *living, growing structure*.

- 3) Further extension of adult education; reorganization of the training of lawyers and judges to include definite and good courses in branches of psychology and psychiatry which will suit their needs. Similar training for social leaders such as ministers and priests.
- 4) Continued public and private efforts for betterment of physical and mental health.
- 5) Non-political State Departments of Public Welfare, where experts can give good service.
- 6) Government should make available to the individual those things which his very nature rightfully demands (food, housing, education and so forth).