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HEADING OFF JUVENILE CRIME

Necessity of Social as Well as Mechanical Inventions—The Juvenile Court, a Curative Measure—The Need for a Preventive Measure—Community Effort.

(J. W. MacMillan in Journal of Commerce.)

One of the great social inventions of the present day is the juvenile court. The world has as much need of social inventions as of mechanical inventions. Indeed, mechanical invention has outrun social invention, both because of the huge financial profits which accrue to the successful discovery of new mechanical contrivances and because the mood of the world welcomes novelties in machinery, whereas the man who launches a new organization or founds a new type of institution not only fails to put anything in his pocket thereby but finds himself faced by a general disposition to suspect and deny his efforts. It is, therefore, something of a victory for progress when a new, efficient and beneficent organization like the juvenile court wins its way into popular favor.

Yet the juvenile court deals with only half of the problem of juvenile delinquency. It is entirely curative. It does nothing for the offender until he has broken the law. Back of his offense lies a period of time, sometimes years long, in which he was gradually moulding to the level where he cast his challenge down to the law. Obviously it would be wise to attack the problem by way of prevention. It would be better for the young delinquent and better for society if he never came to require the kindly services of the juvenile court.

Of course a great deal of preventive work is being done, and always has been done, by many agencies. Every good home, every school, church, club, or employment which reaches into the mind of a child and sets pure and honorable affections there is preventing that child from falling into crime. But this effort is not organized, not fully conscious of its problem. Thirty years ago many judges dealt with the youngsters who came before them on lines similar to those employed by the juvenile courts. But when the court came all the judges acted so, and it became easier for even the most sagacious and understanding judge to fulfill his reformatory purposes for the unhappy boy and girl culprits who were brought before him. Society needs a preventive invention to co-operate with the curative invention, the juvenile court.

The Prison Association of New York has essayed such an invention. It is set forth in a publication entitled *A New Plan for the Reduction of Juvenile Delinquency by Community Effort*.

No patent has been applied for. Rather, anyone is invited, yes, besought, to make the fullest use of the Association's plan. Maybe, if it were patented, more people would want it!

The plan, whose general purport is suggested by its title, may be described under four headings:

1. A community survey. Any town, village, or city or country neighborhood which finds itself troubled with disorderly conduct by boys or girls is asked to first of all examine itself. One hundred questions are supplied, which may be taken up by any local group as the basis of a study of their local conditions. The questionnaire runs the gamut from a few introductory inquiries as to population, distribution of radical groups and problems arising therefrom, through questions as to public administration, courts, probation, curative agencies, housing, child labor, commercial amusements, into rather extended inquiries as to public and private recreational facilities and needs. There follow questions as to self-improvement facilities, mental and social hygiene, ending with a few questions as to possible community plans for combating juvenile delinquency.
2. One community will differ from another. The evil will show itself in one place through the depredations of gangs of boys. In another a vicious or incompetent municipal administration may foment the trouble. In another it may be found that the patronage of the local games is in the hands of "sports," men of loose lives and low standards. In another place it is commercialized recreation which is the sore spot. It may be that insufficient poor relief or the lack of mothers' pensions is to blame. Or a district given over to degeneracy and vice may be cursing the vicinity.
3. In every case, however, the problem is complex. No single factor is the key to the entire problem. Well-intentioned people constantly make the mistake of selecting some one item out of a gross and insisting that it and it alone should be attended to. The value of the survey lies in bringing all possible factors into the field of attention. The one idea man seldom goes as far as to look at the second idea. If he did he might cease to be one-ideaed.
4. Self-help by the community. Juvenile delinquency is properly a community problem. It is not a family problem, nor the problem of a narrow neighborhood. The modern home is too restricted in its interests to absorb the life of the child which it shelters. Besides, many modern families are housed so unhappily as to be unable to care for more than the physical needs of the child. Further, many modern families are so small that the one or two youngsters in them are orphaned in the very presence of their parents. Youth needs youth. So, because the community controls the streets, and the school and play activities of children are community matters, there is no wisdom in up-bidding the home, or trying to save the children by zany efforts whose range is narrower than the community.

In each community it is to be found a number of organizations whose function is to train the children. The school board, the junior department of the Y. M. C. A., the Sunday schools, the Boy



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Scouts, the Camp Fire Girls, and others of like sort are at work in friendly sympathy with each other. But they are not linked and jointed together. None of them envisages the whole realm of child interests. A community movement is necessary, starting naturally from the union of these several forms of efforts to undertake the problem as a whole.

3. The programme adopted must appeal to children and adolescents. The temptations which entrap them are attractive. The antidote must be more attractive. The path of honorable and useful behavior must be a way of sunshine and flowers. It must beckon at its gates, and lure the traveller from stage to stage.

So obvious a matter as this might be passed by, it would seem, as accepted by all. But it is not at all so. Rather, we do find innumerable would-be guides and mentors of youth whose attempts are diametrically opposed to this conception. They try to give youth not what it wants but what they think it needs. And they usually think it needs what it does not want. Indeed, there are many people who think that unpleasantness is a recommendation in the discipline of children. That very word "discipline" suggests the erroneous idea. It goes with the old belief that the efficacy of a medi-

cine is in proportion to its bitterness. One of the secrets of the success of the playground movement is that the instructors do not so much make the children play with them, as that they make themselves play with the children. The impulses and preferences of the child are the guide to the games. So must it be in the substitution of lures to goodness for lures to evil. The nature of the tempted child must determine the treatment to be prescribed.

So recreation will have a foremost place in the community's endeavor. I remember well the first organized playground in Winnipeg. It was conducted during the summer holidays in the grounds of one of the public schools. It was financed and managed by a group of ladies and gentlemen who believed in it. The rest of the city looked on. The next year the city council took the movement over, and has ever since, with steadily widening activities, carried it on. One thing that impressed the city of Winnipeg that summer was that if any child was lost he was pretty certain to be found at the organized playground, sliding down a board or swinging on a trapeze or playing baseball. Still more convincing was the testimony of the chief of police that in that portion of the city there had not been during those two months a single case of juvenile crime.

To recreation should be added opportunities for self-improvement, and the correction of the lacks and lapses in general social organization.

4. One thing more, which is the counsel of outside experts. I have pointed out that the community is to save itself. In it will be found people willing and competent to lead in such a movement. But they will be stronger for co-ordination with other communities engaged in similar tasks. And they will be wiser by means of the advice of men and women who have made a life-profession of solving the problems of juvenile delinquency. Here is where the Prison Association will help. With the experience of many years behind it and with the whole country constantly under view, it will be able to bring to bear on any community an accumulation of knowledge which no one in that community has had the opportunity to acquire. I suppose the intention is, if the thing takes hold, to form a national organization, with a secretary or two devoting all their time to its work. These secretaries would be the experts to

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whom the local leaders might look for help.

Grando F. Lewis, secretary of the Prison Association, confesses that this plan is born of the success of similar organizations of community efforts of the men in the camps preparing for the war. The W. C. C. S. (War Camp Community Service) promoted "the substantial and interesting entertainment and service for soldiers and sailors" by communities adjacent to the training camps. It worked well. It combined the energies of many local organizations to make provision for the leisure time of the men, to combat the enticements of booze and vice. Outdoor games, indoor sports, welcome canteen service, and club facilities so filled the lives of the men that they did not become the easy prey of degenerate and intoxicating vices. But now the war is over. The camps are empty. The W. C. C. S. has lost its occupation. Yet here is another field where young boys and girls, young men and women, are being drawn into watersheds and sewerage schemes, initiated in 1918, in which there is a total capital investment of \$136,305, is probably the greatest contributing cause to this condition.

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