

Juvenile Delinquency in War Time

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By J. W. MACMILLAN.

It is well known among students of social conditions that crime is certain to accompany or follow war. The offences of adults are apt to be less in number during the war, because so many adult males are in the armies, and because there is more employment and earnings for those who are not wearing military uniforms. It is our well-founded hope, considering the scale and thoroughness of the work now being done in Canada for the rehabilitation of returned soldiers, that the impending wave of crime, which normally would follow the return of peace, will be prevented. With children, however, the wave of delinquency (it is wrong to speak of children's crimes) among those too young to fight is apt to come while the war is on. It is, therefore, with deep interest that we read a report on child delinquency in Europe as published by the Bureau of Labor of the United States.

The information is scant, of course, from the enemy countries. Yet enough comes through to show that the same unfortunate conditions have arisen in all the warring nations. The number of arrests and convictions of juveniles has everywhere increased. If one can judge where so few statistics have been available Russia seems to have suffered the most in this respect. The general upheaval of the revolution, the large number of men in the armies, and a custom which prevailed of allowing juvenile volunteers, sometimes of only eleven years of age, to engage in the fighting, helps to explain the sad pre-eminence of Russia.

The completest account is given of the conditions in England. Early in the war the gravity of the situation was recognized. It does not appear that things have gotten notably worse, but they certainly have continued bad. Leaders in social movements having to do with child welfare have written articles and books upon the subject, and are of one mind in the suggestions they make for the rolling back of the wave of delinquency. We shall see how widely, in several particulars, the situation differs in England from that in Germany.

The causes of the increase in children's offences in England are numerous. Some of them are impossible to avoid. Others may and can be remedied. The chief causes appear to be the absence of fathers of families in the war, and of mothers in the factories, the taking over of school buildings for emergency purposes, the enlistment for military service of many teachers, probation officers, and leaders in child welfare movements, and the closing of parks and playgrounds. Add to these the increase in the number of children earning wages, and so entering on a wider and less supervised manner of life. Add again the increase of energy in these youthful wage-earners, for they are now better fed and clad than ever before. Add once more the ill-devised efforts of some judges to restrain juvenile offenders, as by frequent floggings, and you have the whole story as the most competent authorities on the life of the young in England set it forth.

These authorities emphasize two means for the checking of anti-social behavior among the children. One is the maintenance, as far as possible, of the pre-war control of children. It is not wise to take too many of the teachers, scout-leaders, and big brothers away. To an impulsive mind it might seem that such persons could more easily be spared than the machinists and shipbuilders. But the country must not only be saved, it must be preserved. One must make sure, in saving the country, that the country is saved. It may be lost, to a considerable extent, where the invader never comes. It will be unfortunate if, when the troops come home in triumph, it be found that the moral tone of the boys and girls is lower than when they marched away.

The other means for repelling delinquency among the young which is emphasized in England is the establishment of playgrounds. There is unanimity and deep earnestness regarding this. As J. J. Findlay, Professor of Education at Manchester University, writes:

"There is now a large consensus of opinion among teachers of the young that open-air activity, work with some immediate purpose in it, is the best prophylactic for the tendencies which bring school children into the juvenile courts. They need discipline certainly, but they need occupation away from the

confinement of seats and desks."

Professor Findlay makes a bold proposal for the children of Manchester. He would transport them in a body, the whole school population, to the outskirts of the city every morning. He would keep them on the vacant land from eight to six each day, setting the older ones to build and garden, and cook and clean for the smaller ones. He would create a juvenile society which should have a work to do and a life to lead. He points out that the land and the things on the land—garden, farm, workshop, including kitchen and washhouse—constitute the primitive circle of activities in which the children of men have always found release for mind and body, and he hopes thus to restore to health the soul of the erring children of his city. This proposal has been endorsed by the secretary of the Howard Society, but we are not informed whether or not it has been carried into effect.

Now, turning to Germany, we find, as we should expect, much less information. Yet several books, written by leaders of movements among children, have been received by the world at large, and serve to show how sharply the war has hurt the child life of that country. It seems that immediately after the war began there was a noticeable decrease in the amount of juvenile delinquency. Not for long, however, as within a few months the number of young girls and boys committing offences against the law had become so numerous as to attract attention. It is the children of the poor, we are told, that are thus running wild. Much the same causes are ascribed, such as the absence of parents and teachers, and the fuller responsibility which has attended the sudden advancement of the child into the wage-earning class. There is no mention of any increase of energy from more and better food and clothes. More significant is the repeated statement that juvenile prostitution has increased alarmingly. Doubtless something of this kind has happened in England, but the fact that none of the reporters mention it would indicate that it has not grown disproportionately to other offences. On the other hand, in Germany, it apparently is the most obvious as it is the most vicious form which youthful transgression has taken. Anyone who has read Dr. Abraham Flexner's book on Prostitution in Europe, published shortly before the war, with its sweeping condemnation of sexual conditions in Germany, will not be surprised that in the tense and unstable social situation caused by the war the younger girls are being drawn into the life of shame.

Another notable difference between England and Germany is to be found in the remedies suggested. No one in Germany suggests playgrounds. Not that the writers there wish to be strict. They are rather disposed to deprecate the habitual severity of judges. It is quite easy to believe that the average German magistrate has only one policy in the suppression of disorder, to punish severely. That is the true method of Kultur. But there are some friends of children left in Germany who think that to be a mistake and who are even bold enough to charge a certain quantity of the prevailing disorder among children to such practices as the teaching of hatred and the militarization of the youth of the nation. It would appear that in Bavaria a resolution was adopted in both houses of the parliament urging that war measures and military command be continued in time of peace. A certain defense society petitioned the Reichstag to the same effect. Some at least of the children's friends in Germany are pleading for the opposite view. One Berlin judge delivers himself of this dictum, which must sound strange there:

"The problem of the increase of delinquency among our young people is not to be solved by the creation of new categories of crime, nor by police power, but by intensive educational work, and judges and the police cannot serve as educators. New laws attempting to suppress unwholesome tendencies can easily bring about evils greater than those which they are designed to overcome."

This is as far as we can expect any German judge to go. But will the people of Germany ever be fit for the comity of nations till their children learn to play. In play one learns what fairplay is. Most of those who love and practise fairplay, which is just another name for justice, learned it in the playing of games.

"A Little Nonsense Now and Then"

"In old days doctors used to bleed patients for most diseases." "They still do, my boy; they still do."

"What's going on here, anything unusual?" asked a visitor in the Birmingham Age-Herald. "Nope, just an army officer marrying the prettiest girl in town."

We recently saw an old-fashioned girl, says one of the editors of the Louisville Courier-Journal. She wore one of these thin shirtwaists, but she had been vaccinated on the arm.

The maid—Jamsey, old top, the boss is thinking seriously of letting you men guys out, so you can do your bit for Uncle Sam.

The Butler—Eavens! What could Hi do in the service?

The maid—Just think of the swell listening-post you'd make!—Judge.

On the night of the first big minstrel show in Richmond, a private entered one of the boxes with a magnificently bejeweled and befurred young woman on either arm. Lord Chesterfield had nothing on him for chivalrous bearing and grandiloquent concern for the comfort of the ladies. They were conspicuously long in getting settled. Not being able to stand it any longer, or perhaps prompted by jealousy, a soldier in the balcony yelled down: "That's all right, old top, you'll be washing dishes to-morrow!"—Judge.

In the course of a Liberty bond speech, Mary Pickford told of her brother Jack, who has enlisted in the navy. "He's going to wear the blue and white for his country just like these boys here," she said turning to the jackies who had been acting as her bodyguard and now formed a semi-circle behind her on the platform. "He's going in the navy, and when I think of him 'over there,' lying in the mud of the trenches—" whereat, comments the camp periodical, Pass in Review, the jackies cleared their throats and shifted their guns, and a strange rustle passed over the audience.

A cotton exchange house, anxious for late and exact news of the growing crop, received a telegram from one of its correspondents in the South which was unadorned by any punctuation. It read: "Complaints coming in of red ants and lice sleeping under blankets every night weather dry fair too cool for cotton. Smith."

To this the manager of the brokerage house immediately dispatched a reply as follows:

"Please be more explicit. Which is it, the red ants or the lice that sleep under blankets these cool nights?"

A Y. M. C. A. secretary with the expeditionary force in Paris tells this one. Some Yanks attended a theatrical performance the other evening. I speak French pretty well myself, and I went along with one of the boys as an interpreter. After the curtain had gone down on the first act, the principal comedian came out and addressed the audience. When he had finished, my companion broke out in vociferous applause. "Why did you applaud that curtain speech?" I whispered. "I wanted to make some o' those other doughboys think I understood French," he answered. "What did the guy say?" "He announced to the audience," I answered sadly, "that his part must be taken by an understudy for the rest of the performance, as he had just received word that his mother was dying."

When father came home to dinner he observed a vacant chair at the table. "Where's the boy?" he asked, nodding to the chair.

"Harry is upstairs," came in a tone of painful precision from the mother.

"I hope he is not sick."

There was an anxious pause. "No, he is not sick," continued the mother. "It grieves me to say, Richard, that our son, your son, has been swearing on the street. I heard him myself."

"Swearing!" exclaimed the father. "I'll teach him to swear!" And with that the angry parent started upstairs in the dark. Half-way up he stumbled and came down with his chin on the top step.

When the confusion had subsided Harry's mother was heard saying from the hallway: "That will do, Richard, dear. You have given him enough for one lesson."—Harper's Magazine.