

THE JUVENILE COURT OF MONTREAL

By JUDGE CHOQUET

There are few people who will deny the assertion that the introduction of Juvenile Courts into our Dominion marked a step in advance towards establishing newer ideas, more just and humane methods of dealing with youthful offenders. This, time has clearly demonstrated.

The Juvenile Court is not only a place where children and their parents are humanely treated, and their steps turn-

MONTREAL'S SOCIAL WELFARE PROBLEMS. Continued.

The fact that the C. O. S. has affiliated with and is one of the most energetic supporters of the council, is sufficient proof of the need of the council.

Council in Operation.

"All beginnings are hard." The Montreal Council of Social Agencies has made a beginning and has been in active operation for about ten months; but it has taken time to select its permanent director, who is only to take up duties towards the close of this year, so that in the meantime the work has been carried on entirely by voluntary effort, without staff or offices, and in face of that annual hindrance to social effort—the summer vacation. Yet already something has been accomplished in the way of co-operative social work that has never been seen before in Montreal, and this in regard to special summer vacation work.

At the first meeting of the executive held at the end of the summer, reports from three of the four groups into which the council is divided, were presented, which indicated promise of good work for the future. The report of the Recreation Division, for example, showed that all the work which is being done with the children of the city who have to stay at home in the hot summer months had been co-ordinated and centered under one direction. The Playground Association, the Parks and Playgrounds Committee, and the Daily Vacation Bible Schools, had arranged joint action for the summer season. The result of this co-operation was that ten Vacation Bible Schools, fourteen public baths, seventeen play centres, were provided, and all these were staffed with responsible instructors or supervisors. The same group carried out a similar experiment in regard to summer camps for the underprivileged boy, and a plan was adopted of sending all boys to one camp in the Laurentians.

The Child Welfare Division was able to show that with the co-operation of several agencies, the problem of the disposition of a boys' home had been successfully disposed of; also that important steps had been taken in conjunction with the National Committee on Mental Hygiene in the matter of a survey of feeble-minded cases in a number of institutions in order to demonstrate the need of a special training school for such cases. This group brought a New York expert to lecture on foster homes for orphans, and by invoking the assistance of affiliated agencies, it succeeded in drawing a crowded audience for the lecture.

The Dependents and Delinquents Division was able to show that it was working on a project for a Legal Aid Bureau and a Public Defender; that it had been negotiating with the Provincial Government for help in getting after deserting husbands and fathers, and that was also supporting the board of an institution for delinquent girls in efforts to obtain Government support.

When the Council of Social Agencies gets down to regular work, it will be in a position to standardize social welfare operations by its advice and influence on such points as the issue of balance sheets, names of subscribers, and the appointment of properly-equipped and reasonable workers.

ed in the right direction, but it is also a great national asset, saving as it does thousands of children from becoming habitual criminals. Each year in Montreal over 2,000 children pass before me for various offences, out of which number only about seven are sent to the reformatory, all the others being let out on probation. It is safe to say that if it were not for our system of handling and advising both parents and children, many of these would be leading lives which would end in the reformatory or penitentiary.

The money saved to the State is enormous, but the saving in the lives and morals of these future citizens cannot be estimated in terms of gold.

There is no Department in the State of more importance than the administration of the Juvenile Courts. No pains or money should be spared in bringing these courts to the highest state of efficiency. They pay for themselves a thousand times over in the saving of our children from institutions, gaols and penitentiaries.

In a city like Montreal, which to-day is absolutely cosmopolitan, a Judge of the Juvenile Court has a very difficult position to fill. Many of the children who are brought in front of him are of foreign extraction, and of different religion, whose parents have but lately arrived in the country, and who know nothing of the laws and language of the new land. Consequently, a Judge has to exercise an enormous amount of tact and patience in considering cases of the most complex character. He cannot often understand the parents, and they cannot understand him. The training should be towards assimilation, and not as it is now, distinctive and separate. The laws and customs have to be impressed upon these parents and children, and the Judge must make them realize the necessity of observing the laws and customs of the country, and often must explain these laws and customs to the parents and children. These people are obsessed with the idea of making money; consequently, the duties of citizenship are almost ignored, with the result that the home training is lacking and sometimes bad. They often do not know why their children are brought in front of the court, and instead of trying to help the Judge and officers to understand the case, will lie in order to screen themselves and their children. Here the Judge must have great understanding of human nature; patience and wisdom is even more necessary than a thorough understanding of criminal law, dealing, as he is, with the most primitive instincts, which are so subtle and so strong between parents and their children, laws and forces which are the very basis of the social fabric.

Some people are much concerned at what they think is the increase of child delinquency. But child delinquency is really not increasing. The population has been increasing at a very rapid rate. Thousands of people are pouring in every year, unaccustomed to our laws and regulations. We are only now beginning to touch the sources that have so long contributed to child delinquency. If there are more cases it is due to the better protection that is afforded the child, and the enforcement of the laws under the Juvenile Act. This only goes to prove again what a force is the Juvenile Court in protecting the morals not only of children, but of the community.

After all the children should be the nation's first consideration. They are our citizens of to-morrow, and any expenditure of time or money, of thought and effort, will come back to the nation two-fold, in the quality of its citizenship. This is building from the foundation up. Let us see that our foundation is as solid as it rests in our power to make it.