

The Juvenile Court

By MRS. ROSE HENDERSON.

"Juvenile courts are a farce," said a well-fed, red-faced man of middle age to me the other day. "Half those allowed on probation should be behind the bars, and the other half should be so severely punished that they'd remember it for the rest of their lives. It's the fear of God and man in their hearts these young rascals need."

"That's interesting," quote I, "have you ever been in a Juvenile Court?" "No," he answered, "but I've heard lots about 'em." I then proceeded to tell him that oft-repeated story of the man, a member of the Y. M. C. A., who while on earth heard terrible things about Hell. Being a good man, always doing and believing whatever he was told, he was admitted without question to heaven when he died. These stories, however, made a lasting impression on him, and after a short sojourn in heaven and failing to find his old friends there, he asked St. Peter permission to visit Hell, this was granted. He procured a return ticket, and set out for the fiery furnace; but, La; and behold, when he arrived there he got the surprise of his life. There were the Prophets, Heretics, Scientists, and Higher Critics, who had been condemned on earth, working at the most up-to-date appliances, and inventions, turning the place into a veritable paradise, and instead of burning and sizzling as of old, they were singing and laughing with joy, working out their salvation instead of burning in it. Mr. Y. M. C. A. man joined the people so interesting. Kind and brotherly, he wanted to dispose of his return ticket, but couldn't find a purchaser.

"Hu," Mr. Man said, "that's mighty clever, and certainly a reflection on me, henceforth I'll go and see things for myself."

This man's point of view represents an altogether too numerous element in society. In spite of the hundreds of experiments and the volumes explaining the latest achievements of social, mental, and moral science, in crime and disease, its causes and cures, there are people who still cling to the old idea of the inherent wickedness of mankind, and corporal punishment as the only cure. This idea belongs to the dark ages, a time when men held in the hollow of their hands the lives of their wives, children and dependents. Fortunately for the race, especially the children, men and women are arising everywhere and proclaiming a new doctrine, culled from the great university of life. With the dawn of a new century, and a new world, we are looking more humanly on both the adult and juvenile delinquents.

Though many people's eyes are closed, and the courts still remain barred for the most part, the light of science is penetrating through the clouded windows of our tribunals of justice. We are beginning to realize that crime has its origin chiefly in something outside rather than inside human beings, that our social conditions are manufacturing crime just as it creates disease. In no place is this fact brought out more plainly than in the Juvenile Court. Here we see children the victims in nine out of ten cases of either present or transmitted environment, suffering from a social disease, a moral sickness which has its roots sunken deep into the body politic. These victims of our social ignorance and greed, in most cases, need a moral or physical doctor to minister to them, and not a policeman, lawyer, judge or jailor.

We know that social conditions such as fear, worry, hunger, protracted illness and unemployment are potent factors in creating disease and insanity, but we are not so candid in stating that these very same conditions drive people, young and old, to drink, immorality, crime, and vice of all kinds.

Nowhere is this so clearly demonstrated as in the child life of any great city, or industrial centre, and the Juvenile Court is the mirror reflecting these social sins. Men and women connected with this children's tribune cannot long disregard these truths. They are glaringly patent to all, save the most stupid, and from this great social school the progressive are going forth enunciating these facts which are changing the darkness and suffering of the penitentiary, into the brighter, more hopeful, and more constructive work of the reformatory, industrial school, or probation system, giving even the worst of people a chance to prove their worth. Upon these principles the Juvenile Court is founded. Upon these ideals rests its excuse for being, to protect the child, educate the community as to causes of crime, and degeneracy, and render justice—not more tyrannical, but more merciful, a more intelligent instrument for the defence and protection of

the unfortunate victim, rather than a tool of retribution, and destruction. We have heard much about the protecting arm of the law, but alas! so far as human life is concerned, it is often not a protective but a destructive arm.

With the establishment of the Juvenile Court, however, this is changed, the law becomes a protector rather than a destroyer of the young life, the human element has entered in, and for the first time in jurisprudence the judge can take the little frightened lad by the hand and say, "little brother, never mind, we are all part of this world muddle, promise me you won't come here again," and in nine times out of ten the promise is kept; and instead of an embittered, resentful, embryo criminal, there goes forth a young citizen inspired with new ideals of self-respect, and responsibility towards himself, the community, his home and parents; a citizen saved to the state.

With the establishment of Juvenile Courts thousands of dollars are saved annually to the state, but the saving in the lives and morals of these future citizens cannot be estimated in cold cash.

The Juvenile Court is a place where we do something for the child instead of doing something to the child.

A great human laboratory, into which the ills, sorrows and misdeeds of the community are poured, it is a mirror of the social life of the city's children. Here every day is enacted comedy and tragedy, laughter and tears, and the actors in this drama are every day folks living life for the most part like the rest of us, as well as they know how. The Juvenile Court is a child saving station, a place where over ninety per cent of those who pass through are helped to a better understanding of themselves and life; a place where the inscription: "There is hope for all who enter here," has a real and a definite meaning and is being made manifest daily.

A place where the letter of the law is in abeyance, and must take second place to the greater law of conscience, love, science and justice.

A place where the inherent goodness of mankind is emphasized instead of the inherent badness.

A place where the state generously to the child a "square deal" and to the contributors of child delinquency their just reward.

The Juvenile Court is not a place to punish children, but help and protect them from themselves and others. A place where the physician, moral and social doctors aided by the common sense of the law, help to solve intricate human and social problems. It is the extension of maternal rule into the larger life of the community.

This is one of the most important departments of the state, and the judge presiding over such a tribunal needs to have the patience of Job, the wisdom of Solomon, and the great tender heart of a world parent. In the hands of an unsympathetic, unqualified person, the Juvenile Court can become a chamber of horrors, a place of sorrow and discord to parents and children, and a source of great and necessary expense to the state.

The judge has in his hands the power of doing more harm or more good than any other judge on the bench, or in fact any other citizen, dealing as he is with the most primitive and basic emotions and instincts of the human race. The cold letter of the law has but little place in solving the problems of mothers and children, and only a man of great practical experience and one who understands human nature as does Judge Choquet could ever in a great complex cosmopolitan city like Montreal make the success which he has done of the Juvenile Court. There is no denying the fact the spirit of a Juvenile Court is whatever the judge makes it. It matters but little how efficient the staff may be, an unsympathetic judge, thinking more of legal enactments than prescribing for human weaknesses, can change the entire principle and purpose for which the Juvenile Court was established to express.

Fortunate, indeed, are the points of Montreal to have one of such mature wisdom, patience and judgment to arbitrate the painful problems arising between the public the parents and the most cherished possessions, their children.

The Juvenile Court of this city, in spite of many handicaps, stands as high as any on this continent; we are not vainglorious or satisfied. We have studied and know our problems, and our weaknesses; with money and time we hope to reach a higher state of efficiency recognizing that time alone, with the great university of life as our teacher can inspire and lead us on to higher and greater achievements for the common good.