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EDITORIAL.

THE DELINQUENT CHILD.

The Meeting of the British Association recently held at Liverpool has been a very remarkable gathering, prolific of new ideas, and the presentation and discussion of scientific evolution. At a conjoint session of Education and Psychology, the problem of the delinquent child was introduced by Dr. Cyril Burt.

As reported in the *Times*, he referred to an analysis of two hundred cases of juvenile delinquency in the County of London, and said that the contributory factors might be grouped into four broad classes. There was the hereditary factor. Family histories showed considerable differences between the delinquent and non-delinquent groups. Such offences as moral irregularities, stealing, wandering, alcoholism, violent temper, extreme idleness, and sexual misbehaviour were undoubtedly commoner in the delinquent families than in the non-delinquent. It did not follow, however, that the inheritance of these weaknesses was the direct factor in the crime. With a bad-tempered father or an immoral mother it was easy to drift into bad-tempered or immoral habits, quite apart from any direct biological inheritance. Poverty, he concluded, was only a contributory factor, and not a necessary factor, in crime.

A serious effect of the poor and overcrowded home was traceable to the utter absence of facilities for innocent and childish amusement within the home itself. Within the home the most serious factor was defective discipline or an alternation between weakness and strictness. Physical factors played a part. Anything that weakened health tended also to weaken self-control; anything that heightened irritability tended also to increase liability to anti-social outbreaks.

Dealing with psychological factors, he contended that childish crime was very often only an over-abundance of energy misdirected; where there were parks and open spaces, there the delinquent child was rarest. By removing the obstacles which hindered higher development they could convert a probable thief into a wholesome, energetic, and useful citizen of the State.

Dr. R. G. Gordon spoke of the necessity of children's courts being presided over by magistrates with an appreciation of the child mind. Discipline and punishment were still absolutely necessary. He advised that specially trained women should investigate the home life and surroundings of each child.

Speaking of children who had nothing to occupy them getting into trouble, Dr. W. A. Potts, Birmingham, said it was found in Scotland that three times as many offences were committed by children on Sundays as on other days.

Miss Ethel Crosland (Probation Officer at Bow Street Children's Court) said that magistrates were increasingly reluctant to send a child to an industrial school or reformatory without having first given a chance on probation. Only once during three years had she had what might be called the high school type of girl under her care. Most of her children came from homes consisting of two rooms. The great difficulty which faced all who worked among the children of the poor was the housing question.

We come back to the necessity for healthy and comfortable homes, and open spaces, where parents and children can enjoy a sufficiency of what makes life tolerable. Room to breathe, room to grow, room to play, privacy and decency. Thus only can health and happiness, and a low criminal record, be secured. The healthy and happy home should be the birthright of every child. It is the highest duty of every politician to help to secure this birthright. No country can claim to be civilised which neglects to secure it. A jolly, knockabout, rough-and-tumble childhood produces exuberant adolescence and virile manhood, and the happy home is its mainspring.

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