

THE YOUNG CRIMINAL.

BY REV. CHARLES F. THWING.

MOST criminals are young. It is seldom that a grave crime, provided it be the first, is committed after the age of thirty. A careful statistician* has proved that of the entire male population of England and Wales the largest proportion of criminals is found to be between the ages of twenty and twenty-five. Five times as many crimes are committed in the five years between these limits as in the ten years between the ages of fifty and sixty. Dividing the whole population into groups of those from ten years to fifteen, from fifteen to twenty, from twenty to twenty-five, from twenty-five to thirty, from thirty to forty, from forty to fifty, and from fifty to sixty, it is found that from the age of twenty the tendency to crime decreases at each successive term 33 per cent. in the case of women, and 25 per cent. in the case of men.

The crimes of which the youth are guilty are not, as one might suppose, merely crimes against property. An even larger proportion of the offences against the person than of the offences against property are committed by those under the age of twenty-five.

It is to a degree natural that a considerable proportion of the crimes of the community should be committed by its younger members. It is not till about the age of twenty-five that the will has attained such maturity of strength as to control the emotions. Many crimes, therefore, the result, not of premeditation, but of impulse and passion, may naturally be laid at the door of young men and of even boys. After the twenty-fifth year the temptations may be equally strong, or even stronger, but the man is better fitted to resist them. Manslaughter committed under sudden provocation, breaking into houses either unoccupied or easy of entering, and larceny, will doubtless, in the present constitution of human nature and society, remain offences to which the youth will be peculiarly addicted.

But there are, of course, special causes leading young men and young women into criminal courses.

Respecting the influence of heredity in alluring to temptation opinions differ, and it is not the part of the present paper

to discuss critically the question of the inheritance of moral qualities. But it is clear that if certain moral qualities or moral habits have been prominent in a family for a series of generations, the child of those ancestors will manifest those qualities or habits.

But whatever may be the precise influence of heredity in making boys and girls vicious, it is a universally conceded proposition that evil surroundings allure to vice and to crime.

If a lad live in certain wards of New York city, he is obliged to breathe a foul moral atmosphere. In these wards population is more crowded than it is in the most densely settled sections of East London. In some the density is of the rate of more than two hundred thousand to the square mile. In a population so compact evils numberless and nameless germinate and thrive. It is notorious that in it are included not only the destitute, but also those who form the most depraved of the destitute class, professional beggars, ruined gamblers, broken-down drunkards, nondescript thieves; it embraces, in fact, those whose poverty tempts them to prey upon society, and those whose crimes have brought them to poverty and wretchedness.

Yet of importance greater than either heredity or environment is the influence of the vicious home in determining a life of crime for those who are born and trained in it. It is undoubtedly the evil character of the home, or the lack of a home, which allures most boys and girls into vicious and criminal courses.

Turning from the causes of juvenile delinquency and crime, we are led to the yet more important and difficult question of the remedy. The regularly prescribed remedy at the present is the reform school. It is to be noted that this is not the remedy of a hundred or of even fifty years ago. From the days when criminals both old and young were confined within the same walls, throughout the period when all juvenile delinquents were congregated in a jail, down to the present time when the family system of reformation begins to be practised, the improvement in the method of punishing and correcting criminal youth has been constant. Writing no longer ago than 1852, in reference to

* F. G. P. Neilson, *Vital Statistics*, p. 404.

England, Mary Carpenter said: "The jail continues to be the only infirmary provided by the parental care of the state for the cure of her erring children's souls. To this all her young criminals, more or less guilty, infected with soul-contaminating guilt, or just showing their sin spot, are indiscriminately consigned, all sharing the same treatment for the time arbitrarily assigned, and coming back again and again, unreclaimed, while our police courts are infested with them, our prison cells swarm with them, our felons' docks are filled with them; and then they are withdrawn for a short time again from our sight, only to return more hardened."

But this lamentable condition is now quite wiped out, not only in England, but also in the United States, in which the evil never waxed so dangerous as in the mother country. The reform school is indeed far in advance of the method of juvenile reformation practised in England thirty years ago.

In the United States are about seventy institutions designed for the reformation of young offenders. Their inmates number more than nine thousand boys and girls. The causes of commitment embrace nearly every offence, from petty larceny to manslaughter. The means of amendment employed include not only the removal of the offender from the opportunity of indulging his criminal tastes, but also the teaching of some trade, instruction in the elementary branches of knowledge, and endeavor to form an upright character. Concerning the success of the reform school in the reformation of those intrusted to it, there is room for two contrary opinions. In an examination of the convicts of the prisons of New York, which was ordered by the Prison Association of the State in 1875, it was found that of the inmates of the Sing Sing Penitentiary, 22.31 per cent. had been "refuge" boys. As the usual number of inmates of the reformatories of New York exceeds three thousand, it is plain that the large proportion of them do not become inmates of prisons within the State.

As to the reforms accomplished, estimates vary from 60 per cent. to 75. But in these percentages are included many children who without being vicious, but exposed and homeless, are received into houses of refuge. The proportion, therefore, of those who have served in reform

schools who are afterward convicted of crimes is small, not exceeding 30 or 40 per cent. Yet statistics indicate that the influence of these schools in impressing evil habits upon a certain class of their boys is exceedingly strong. Of the 22.31 per cent. of the Sing Sing convicts examined who had been in these schools, 98 per cent.—fifty-one out of fifty-two—were *habitual* criminals. Some light is thrown upon the methods by which the reform school helps to fix the habit of criminality by the following conversation between a convict at Sing Sing and an examiner:

"Please, sir, may I ask you a question?" asks the convict.

"Certainly," is the examiner's reply.

"Why do they send boys to the house of refuge?"

"I suppose it is to teach them to be better boys."

"That's a great mistake, for they get worse."

"How should that be?"

"I wouldn't be here only I was sent to the refuge."

"What did you learn there that should have caused you to be sent here?"

"I didn't know how to pick pockets before I went, and I didn't know no fences: that's where you sell what you steal, you know."

"What else did you learn in the way of thieving?"

"I learned how to put up a job in burglary."

Another inmate—who at the age of seven stole fruit, and was sent to a reform school at Albany for nine months; at eight, was found guilty of petit larceny, and sent to the house of refuge; at twelve, was committed to a juvenile asylum, and escaped three times in four days; and three other times before reaching his majority was sentenced to reformatories, and who between the ages of twenty-one and forty-one had been committed to prison no less than ten times—remarked to the examiner:

"I never learned a thing in my life in prison to benefit me outside. The house of refuge is the worst place a boy could be sent to."

"Why so?"

"Boys are worse than men; I believe boys know more mischief than men. In the house of refuge I learned to sneak-thief, shop-lift, pick pockets, and open a lock."

"How did you get an opportunity to learn all this?"

"There's plenty of chance. They learn it from each other when at play."

In respect to the evil influence of the reform school upon certain boys, it is, moreover, worth while to refer to the experience of one of the most learned and humane judges of the Supreme Bench of Maine. Before his court was brought a boy who had, evidently in a fit of extreme rage, shot his father. He had, so far as known, borne a good reputation, and was a church member. He pleaded that he believed the gun was not loaded, and only intended to frighten his parent. The jury returned a verdict of guilty. Never before, confesses the judge, did he spend so many sleepless nights in determining upon a sentence. It lay in his power to commit the lad either to the reform school of the State during the remainder of his majority or to the State-prison for a term of years. He chose the latter alternative, and on the ground that in the reform school he would learn certain vicious and criminal habits, which would probably render his whole life criminal and vicious. In the prison, separated from other convicts, he would be in less peril of contamination. Having solely in view the interests of the boy, the judge decided that the disgrace of being a State-prison convict was less perilous than the danger of education in evil which the baser members of the reform school give their purer associates.

And this opinion of the Maine jurist brings us to the consideration of the good and of the bad features of the reformatory. The principal worthy element consists in the absolute separation of the inmates into families on the basis of moral character; and the chief evil element consists in just the opposite fact, in the mingling together of all the inmates. It is still, however, the latter method which is pursued in most institutions; and it is still the case that wherever the family system has been introduced it has not been applied with that exactness of subdivisions of the boys and girls that would prove of the greatest usefulness. In the reformatories of Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin the family system has been adopted; but in most other States the congregate system—by which the boys, to the number it may be of hundreds, lodge and

eat beneath one roof, work together in a few rooms or in the same field, and play together within the same walled enclosure—still prevails. And no system is better fitted than the congregate to make the good boy bad and the bad boy worse. The classification of the members of reform schools into several distinct bodies—five is a sufficiently small number of classifications, as is the case in the New Jersey school—is absolutely essential to their amendment. The more complete the subdivisions, the more minute the care that can be given to each inmate, and the more home-like and elevating the surroundings of each, and therefore also the greater the probability of reformation. Writing of the family system, a careful student of the criminal classes affirms* that "it enables the managers, by a skilful selection of temperaments and dispositions which shall healthfully react on each other, to segregate those who suffer from similar deficiencies so that the defects shall not become a demoralizing example to the rest, and to group such natures as present well-organized habits so as to become exemplars to those who lack those special habits; thus to consciously organize by artificial means an environment in which the convicts themselves will become instruments for each other's regeneration."

But the need of the application of the family system to the reform school is not so urgent as the need of personal and systematic effort for the regeneration of the children of great cities who are either homeless or are growing up in homes of squalor and vice. These children are now beggars and petty thieves. They will ten years hence be burglars and murderers. The State recognizes this pressing need, and passes laws authorizing that children may be removed from parents vicious or improvident.† Individuals also recognize this need, and form organizations, like the Children's Aid Society of New York, for amending the lives of those who are naturally gravitating toward vice and crime. The means which private effort, and in some degree public, employs in this regeneration, is the placing of children in comfortable and virtuous homes. The Children's Aid Society in a period of twenty-five years placed no less than

* R. L. Dugdale, chapter on Further Studies of Criminals, "The Fakes," p. 115.

† Laws of Massachusetts, 1880, chapters 66, 231.

fifty thousand children in good homes. On all principles of reasoning, had they remained in cities, it is clear that the large majority would have remained not only poor, but would have become vicious and criminal. Investigation indicates

that of the larger boys of this number not ten per cent. have committed criminal offences or become chargeable to the public, and that of the smaller boys only five per cent. have turned out badly.

Editor's Easy Chair.

SOME recent remarks in England upon the American press have elicited some angry American rejoinders. We are, indeed, peculiarly sensitive to English comment, and our instinctive disposition is to shout back, "Pshaw! pull that tremendous beam out of your own eye, and hush!" It is, of course, rather provoking when you know that there is a button off your coat to hear an old fellow out at both elbows vociferating, "Holla there, you! why don't you mend your clothes?" The first impulse perhaps upon such a salutation is to pull off another button. John Bull is not a courtly international critic, but even the jeer of a boor may be worth heeding. His arrogance is the fault of a virtue. It is the obverse of the self-reliance and persistence which have circled "the earth with one continuous and unbroken strain of the martial airs of England."

This American antipathy to the comments of the elder brother who lives at the Old Home upon the ancestral estate is so strong that the American politician finds no sneer at an opponent more effective than that of English tastes, models, and preferences. A very ludicrous illustration of this disposition is the fling at reform in the civil service as an English system and an English importation—a remark which is equally true of trial by jury, *habeas corpus*, and constitutional government, and also of the best qualities at the base of American character. In criticism, however, it is not the critic but the truthfulness of his comment, the accuracy of his observation, which are important. Every man who is in the way of public criticism, the author, the artist, the public man, knows very well when his critic has hit a weak spot, whether he winces or not. The anger of his denial or report is often merely the confession, "A hit, a palpable hit."

The energy with which we have repelled the British suggestion that our newspapers may have something yet to learn, and that they do not represent the high-water mark of an ideal press, is not in itself evidence that they have reached it. The first and elementary duty of a newspaper is to give the news. When it cooks the news it betrays its trust. But is there any partisan newspaper which gives the news fairly? That is to say, is the news told in such a way as to convey the actual truth, however injurious to the party in-

terests of the paper, or is it so presented as to belittle the opposition and aggrandize the paper's own side? Is the Republican meeting honestly depicted in the Democratic paper, or the Democratic in the Republican? Is the weight of the orator's argument on either side, which is the essentially important matter, justly represented, or are the strong points passed over, and the weak and doubtful points alone exposed? There are newspapers which undoubtedly hold the mirror up to nature and report the facts. But if John Bull says that it is not the practice of the American party newspaper, John Bull is correct.

And has John upon this subject a beam in his own eye? The *Times* is still the chief English journal, and it is bitterly opposed to Mr. Gladstone and the Liberals in the Irish controversy. But it prints all of Mr. Gladstone's speeches in full, without any insinuations or marginalia in the report, so that every reader of the *Times* knows exactly what Mr. Gladstone said and all that he said. In its editorial column, indeed, the *Times* does its best to overthrow his arguments. But it gives the orator a perfectly fair chance to convert every reader of the paper if he can do it, and if the editorial article misrepresents any argument or statement of the orator its own complete and faithful report of his speech refutes its own misstatements. This treatment is accorded to all the party leaders on all sides. Lord Salisbury, Mr. Morley, Mr. Göschén, Sir William Harcourt, Lord Hartington, Mr. Parnell, are all treated with the same fairness. The reader is not obliged to put up with the *Times's* editorial statement of what any one of the great leaders says. He has his own words.

That is the proper discharge of one of the most important functions of a newspaper in a popular government which is carried on by argument and appeal to the people. It is a course which assumes that the people wish to know the reasons on both sides, and it recognizes the fact that the common welfare demands that the government shall represent the general conviction upon a fair comparison of all views. This, indeed, is the object of all electoral and administrative reform, to make the election and the government the expression of the honest national will. Political corruption is the endeavor by whatever means to affect that expression illicitly. But what great party