

OBITER

SISTER MARIE HILDA, the Director of the Notre Dame Child Guidance Clinic at Glasgow, writing with unequalled experience, adds to the general discussion in this issue of *BLACKFRIARS* an authoritative account of a Clinic's treatment of delinquent children. Sister Marie Hilda writes:

'A very small number of children attending the Notre Dame Child Guidance Clinic, Glasgow, during the last year, were referred for delinquency; out of the total number of 429, not more than forty-five could be classified thus and only six were actually under the care of Probation Officers. The remaining thirty-nine were brought by their parents who sought advice in the handling of such problems as truancy, housebreaking, falsehood, theft, open defiance and sex misdemeanours.

Misconduct may be regarded as an outward sign of inward conflict. The Clinic experts endeavour by their respective techniques to discover the source of the conflict and so get rid of the symptom. The *needs* of the offender are studied rather than the *nature* of the offence, and reformation, not punishment, is the aim.

Now children have three fundamental needs: affection, security and congenial occupation. They must feel that they are wanted and that there is a special place for them to fill, in home and school. Even more than affection they need security: they must know exactly what is expected of them in the situations of their daily lives. Finally, they must be kept interested and occupied at work or play.

If these needs are not met, the child, according to individual temperament, will find outlets for frustration in some form of aggression or self-assertion, or will retreat from the conflict. These are the roots from which delinquency springs, for delinquents are made, not born. Moral training cannot begin too early and it is the responsibility of the parents to give correct attitudes to authority, property, truth and sex. Obedience is not innate: it must be acquired. It is a means not an end; the goal is self-control. Mere submission is not obedience. The child should be taught to use his reason in carrying out commands. Of course the obedience exacted should be for the child's benefit and should suit his individual capacity and intelligence. Reverence must be inculcated in the early years, reverence for the property and character of one's neighbour, reverence for self in purity and truth.

No general rules can be laid down as to the reason why children play truant, tell lies, steal, offend sexually and defy authority. The general causes may be social, personal or educational. Broken homes, bad companions, dire poverty, may create criminal environments; pronounced physical variations may motivate delinquency; low intelligence, repeated failures, emotional immaturity, may account for the development of vicious tendencies. Meningitis and encephalitis lethargica create situations from which delinquency may emerge. Therefore, in every case, a close study of the individual is essential.

Truancy may be actuated by boredom, by excessively high spirits or by the 'wanderlust': a housebreaker may be one of a gang and out for adventure: a thief may be urged-on by greed or spite, or his case may be strictly pathological: lying may be due to fear, to boastfulness, or to a craving for notice: sex-offences may be prompted by active sensuality or by lively and innocent curiosity. For each individual delinquent the Clinic provides treatment, on constructive lines, by psychiatric or psychological interviews, and by group-play-therapy.

It will be remembered that the *parents* brought these children to the Clinic for advice as to the solving of their problems. The Psychiatric Social Worker in an initial interview builds up a full history of the child from earliest years; gauges the relationship between child and family and notes all relevant details. Then after consultation with the other members of the team she explains to the parent, the need of the child, the cause of the conflict and the remedy to be applied. If the parent has insight and is able and willing to co-operate, there is good hope that further delinquency may be averted.'

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CHILDREN IN THE CINEMA (R. H. Johns, Newport; 1s.) is a useful summary of the Departmental Committee's Report on Children and the Cinema, prepared by the Hon. Mrs Robert Bower and includes the reasons for her dissenting Memorandum as well as reproductions of *Picture Post* photographs of the reactions of children in the cinema. LA FRATERNITE DE NOTRE DAME DE LA MERCI (3 Rue de la Trinité, Paris 9) exists for prayer and work on behalf of political prisoners. Inspired by the example of the Trinitarian Order and of St Vincent de Paul, it seeks 'to break the terrible circle of hate' which, five years after the ending of war in Europe, still perpetuates division in France. THE CHURCH IN ACTION, a *Catholic Worker* 'special' (3d.) is an excellently illustrated commentary on the Works of Mercy and their essential place in Catholic life.