

## Why Children Are Murderers—Continued

stories they hear. Most children are anxious to secure the attention of adults and their associates in school.

Prof. Robert T. Rock, of Catholic University, who gives psychological and psychiatric examinations to juvenile delinquents and other problem children in the District of Columbia, reports that many of the children with whom he comes in contact are quite normal healthy youngsters. Their trouble is just that they have never been taught, by either precept or example, true ethical values. One boy says, "Why should I work to earn money? My brother never worked, and see what a fine car he has!"

Those who have studied the child in the light of the new psychology tell us that the young boy or girl receives only the smallest part of his education in school. He is learning from us during all his waking hours, whether we are on guard or not—perhaps principally when we are not. Probably very few parents would deliberately tell a child that it was right to evade and disobey the law, and afterwards to lie and cheat to avoid punishment. Yet in too many cases a very young boy riding on the front seat of an automobile can watch the speedometer and see his father driving above the legal limit, he sees him ride past signals in an effort to outdistance the pursuing policeman, and finally hears him lie glibly to the officer when he is overtaken. The child is like a sponge in absorbing such experiences, to be influenced by them throughout his whole later life.

Educators now believe that children begin to learn at a much earlier age than we have supposed possible in the past. Long before they can talk, they are watching the parents and receiving impressions that will later influence their behavior. A father who comes home drunk and frightens his wife by a loud voice, domineering manner, and the display of small cruelties, may give his infant son the impression that this type of behavior is ideal. In later years, although he retains no conscious memory of such incidents he may exhibit the same behavior in his relations with a younger sister or young playmates.

This sort of unconscious imitation of others is called by the psychologists, "identification." We can *consciously* imitate only one person at a time, but we can identify ourselves with any number of people. Their

habits, mannerisms, ideals, and ways of thought may be adopted and made a part of us. In this way we may become a composite of all the characters who throughout our lives impress us and rouse our interest, whether the characters exist in real life or whether they are found in fiction or in the motion pictures.

Sometimes the teaching is more direct. How often we hear the expression "I'll kill you if you do that!" used carelessly before young children!

Then there is another method by which even the most well-intentioned parents may give children the wrong start. Psychologists have found that one of the first traits displayed by the young infant is the desire for attention. Probably nature has given this longing to human infants as a substitute for the ability to shift for himself which is the gift of the young of the lower animals. Certainly the lusty howl of the infant is a powerful weapon for forcing elders to produce the necessities of life. At first he uses it just for this purpose, but at a surprisingly early age he finds out that when he wakes up feeling bored or lonesome, a good strong cry will bring someone running. If this is kept up, before long he realizes that when he is good his elders go on about their own affairs and leave him alone. When he is bad, he immediately secures the coveted attention—the taking up out of his damp, wrinkled crib, the rocking, petting, and all the other known devices for soothing. The wise parent will give the child attention at certain regular intervals, preferably when he is not crying, rather than when he cries for it, thus breaking up this association of bad behavior and pleasurable results. The unwise parent will continue the same "education" throughout the childhood and boyhood of the son.

The school may in some cases contribute its share toward placing the "bad boy" in the limelight that he so strongly desires. When the boy does his school work as he should and turns in the right answers and behaves in an orderly fashion, he is unnoticed because he is like so many of his fellows. As Dr. Wilfrid Lay, a child psychologist of the new school, says, "It is an unfortunate fact that the early tasks of the school are generally those in which he (the child) is almost unable to express any individuality different from other children's. When, for instance, the

same ten examples in arithmetic are given to a class of forty children, and the forty sets of answers have to be exactly the same for each child, there is little scope for individuality. If the child wishes to be individual and make his work his own and different from other children's, he must have different answers to the examples—answers which are called *wrong!*" From the wrong answers, the child may progress to wrong behavior, and in the end he may devote his whole energies toward excelling his fellows in wickedness. He then becomes the central figure in his little world. He is called to the principal's office. He becomes the subject of repeated conferences and meetings of teachers, parents, neighbors, and friends. He is taken to court and allowed to tell his story to a new audience. Perhaps he even gets his story and his photograph into the newspaper. Finally he is sent to a reform school where he learns that after all he is only an apprentice in crime, and then he sets out with new zeal to improve his technique in wrong-doing.

Crime in children is not a disease in itself. Rather it is like a fever; it may be symptomatic of any of a score of diseases that affect the mind and body and soul of the child. Those who are called upon to deal with the child offender should look behind the particular misdeed, as the physician looks beyond the eruption on a child's chest. We may then be in a position to cure or remedy juvenile delinquency as well as we now can cure the measles.

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### Plant "Camels"

*Botany*

When it comes to living without water, there are "camels" of the plant kingdom as well as of the animal kingdom, declares Dr. F. L. Pickett, head of the botany department of the State College at Pullman, Washington.

This botanist has discovered ferns and mosses in the semi-arid regions of the northwest that will live indefinitely without moisture, he says. While the ordinary plant will not grow without at least a four or five per cent. moisture content, these ferns and mosses may have their water content reduced to one-tenth of one per cent. and live in this condition indefinitely, he has found.

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