

## THE DELINQUENT GIRL

Mrs. Julius Andrews, Boston

The problem of the girl in court has never seemed sufficiently serious to attract public attention. Statistics show that only about 10 per cent. of the Boston juvenile cases from 1906 to 1911 were girl offenders. In Massachusetts we have but one girls' penal or industrial school, while for delinquent boys we have two State and two city reformatory schools.

Larceny, truancy, waywardness and stubbornness are the common charges against the girl delinquent. Where larceny and truancy are not complicated with other misdemeanors, the court is often successful in correcting the fault. But the wayward and stubborn girls are more difficult problems—only too often indicating immorality. The probation officer finds one case of this type more difficult to supervise than several of the usual boy cases. Frequently public complaints are made of "hoodlumism," implying violation of property rights. These offenses are indignantly resented by all communities; even when girls are guilty of property offenses the public does not hesitate to report and accuse. But the complaints against the wayward or immoral girls rarely come from the public, it is the discouraged parent or private agency who seeks protection for the offender.

Girls congregate on the streets, in low dance halls and other commercialized amusement places—free from public interference. It is in such surroundings that many of our young people, seeking diversion from miserable home conditions, begin their downward careers.

In an investigation of recreational opportunities in Greater Boston, a pretty young girl naively informed us that she went to the public dances twice a week and wished she could go every night. When asked by the manager of the store whether she was escorted, she said, "No, we dance with any fellow who asks us." It was amusing to see the manager's surprised look and to hear his remark, "I didn't know nice girls danced with strangers without an introduction." We do not seem to realize the danger to the adolescent, of improper recreation, but the results of our lack of foresight are serious. When the inevitable

harm has been done we ostracize the girl, making reformation almost impossible, while the boy or man, if charged with his share of responsibility, easily escapes by paying a small penalty. Today, as a result, we are facing the problem of 15,000 feeble-minded, in Massachusetts, besides the many innocent victims of inherited diseases.

One of the most pathetic instances of our social standards was illustrated at a trial of a high school boy, who was held responsible for the condition of a girl of 16 years. In order to escape the penalty of his wrongdoing, he brought to the court, as witnesses, several boy friends, who willingly testified in his behalf. They displayed no personal shame nor any sympathy for the young girl, but boldly acknowledged their participation in her downfall. The light penalty imposed by the court can but encourage repetitions of like offenses. The general statutory penalties, for all sex offenses, are too trivial to act as a deterrent. A degenerate, who had for many years demoralized scores of little school children, was recently held on a \$300 bail. On the same day a lad of 20 years was held for \$2,000 for the larceny of \$430.

Until the law holds man and woman equally guilty and all sex offenses are consistently punished, we shall not be able to control immorality.

In speaking to the superintendent of a well-known maternity home for unmarried mothers in regard to the causes which were responsible for girl immorality, she said: "The freedom and privileges allowed girls during the past fifty years were now bearing fruit. They had influenced for good and for evil. The mentally strong girl had benefited and is today our best standard of American womanhood, but the weaker girl and many of foreign parentage, not understanding the ethics of such freedom, fall easy preys to what is presented to them as American privilege and liberty."

The social service departments of our hospitals, the charitable and philanthropic societies dealing with girls, the capacity of all the maternity and refuge homes are today overtaxed with cases of girl sex of-

fenders who rarely reach the court. A visit to the institutions for unmarried mothers would awaken our deepest sympathy and distress. Here we find the young girls of 13 to 14 years burdened with infants, whom they must often support.

It is evident that more supervision is necessary, not only in the overcrowded homes of the poor, but in many of the homes of the more prosperous families.

Public neglect and indifference are accountable for a large per cent. of girl delinquency, but as many of the direct causes are now recognized we may, in the future, do much to lessen the evil.

1. By holding the parents (when justifiable) responsible for the girl's delinquency.

2. By emphasizing the need for better housing.

3. By advocating more municipal evening recreation in school buildings, such as gymnasias, basket-ball, swimming pool and dances (under proper supervision). Teaching of music combined with choral and orchestral clubs.

4. By appointing special women police to protect the boy and girl on the street.

5. By synagogue and church realizing their responsibility to provide recreation as well as spiritual guidance for the young wage-earner and the youth of the congested districts.

6. By providing and enforcing, throughout the State, better regulations, not only in the city commercialized amusements, but particularly in beach and other summer resorts.

7. By amending our statutory laws so as to increase the penalties for sex offenders.

Speaking under Jewish auspices, it seems fitting to say a word in regard to the Jewish girl in the court. As is the case with all other denominations, the records show but few girl offenders, but I fear the inherited morality, which has been the proverbial glory of Jewish womanhood, is leading us to forget the dangerous influences of bad environment, extreme poverty, overcrowded tenements and particularly the misunderstood American liberty, which fosters disregard of parental authority.

We, too, then, have a still greater obligation placed upon us, in order that we may, in correcting the neglect and oversight of

recent years, pass on to our descendants the age-honored heritage of Jewish morality.

Since this meeting has been arranged, particularly in regard to volunteer social service, we should consider the opportunities for volunteer co-operation.

A most effective activity in preventing girl misdemeanors is the "Girls' Home Club." One of these clubs of twelve young girls, organized several years ago by a young volunteer, obtained results that more than repaid her for the time and conscientious effort put into the work. The girls with their leader met once a week at one another's homes. Reading, dressmaking, millinery, fancy work and home economics were introduced. Several of these girls are holding responsible positions today, others are mothers of self-respecting and prosperous families. The friendship between the club members and the volunteer has continued up to the present time.

The school visitor affords another opportunity for guiding girls into desirable vocations and for helping deserving students to higher education. By keeping in touch with all the elementary school graduates much beneficial preventive work could be accomplished. In many of the evening school centers the volunteers also could find a splendid field for social service.

I would pay a deserved tribute to the hundreds of young people from all classes and denominations, who though surrounded by temptations or discouraged through poverty, remain pure and self-respecting, splendid examples of inherent moral strength; but while recognizing their worth and numbers, do not let us neglect the weak and unfortunate, who, unable to battle alone with existing conditions, need our consideration and our help.

## Get Together

All New York workers who expect to attend the Conference in Memphis are kindly requested to notify Mr. Morris D. Waldman, 356 Second Avenue, New York City, who will arrange for special rates and accommodations, if ten or more will travel on one train.

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