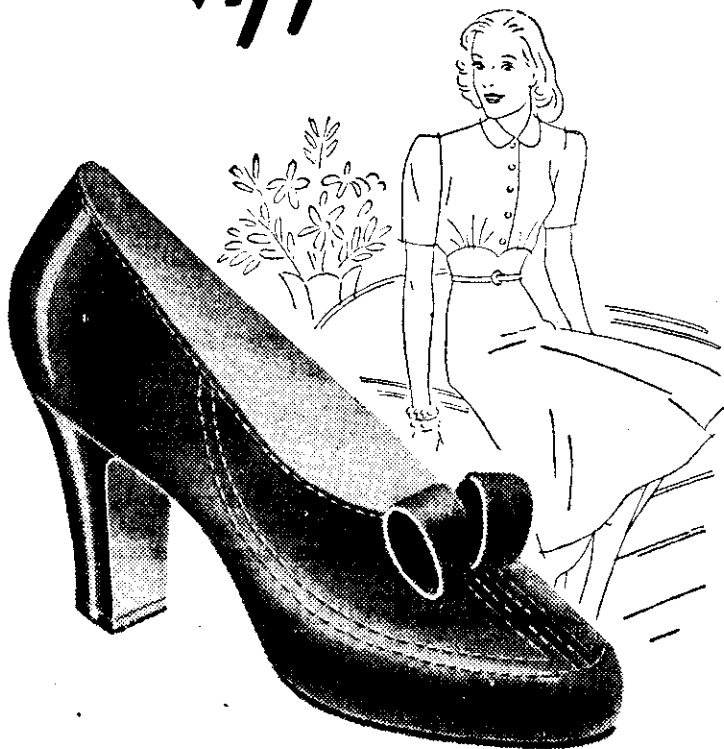


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THE DELINQUENT CHILD

(Written for "The Listener" by DR. H. B. TURBOTT, Director of the Division of School Hygiene, Health Department)



IN the daily press there have recently been references to child delinquency. Where does the delinquent child come from? From any home, rich or poor, where the relations between parent and child are wrong, and where proper parental guidance and discipline have been lacking from baby days onward. A child is not bad because he is born with a bad streak in him. There may be bad heredity, but it all depends on his training whether he will grow up good. Model citizens, as parents, are bitterly disappointed when their children fail to live as they want them to live. They don't realise that they have failed as parents in their training. It has been their wrong attitudes, or their lack of understanding, that shaped their children's characters. They laid down rules, talked about living correctly, and expected model replicas of themselves—and they ended up with a child delinquent.

Each boy and girl has personal characteristics, and individual problems. Each wants to be loved, to be appreciated, to be admired. Every child wants to feel secure and safe in its home, but also to be wanted. Haven't you remarked how the baby or small child plays up to an audience? It is delighted to be noticed. Well, every child, no matter what the age may be, wants to be noticed. Food and shelter of the home are not enough; children must have love and appreciation, too. If they don't get it, some will withstand unhappy supervision, but some will seek notoriety by annoying neighbours, destroying property in public places, stealing, and obtaining satisfaction in delinquency.

Whence comes the satisfaction in delinquency? It is true the immediate wrongful act gets punishment, from a spanking or scolding to an appearance in a Children's Court. But this is borne because it doesn't hurt so much as the deep-seated reason that drives the child to do the wrongful acts. Children need to rely on adults, to feel confidence in people. When punished or scolded for things they don't understand, they are frightened and feel insecure, and grow up afraid of life, of grown-ups and situations. The first instinct is to run away, when you are frightened, or to face and hit out blindly at the danger. And this is what the delinquent child does. He seems cruel and hardened, or sulky or secretive, but he is really frightened. Truancy is a running away from the feared teacher. Lying is a cover to avoid consequences the child feels unable to face. Sometimes he turns and attacks. For example, a child displaced in a parent's affection by a younger addition to a family, may be cruel to the baby, and although punished for it, will go on hurting the baby and standing more punishment. He knows something is hurting him, making him feel unwanted and inferior. He doesn't understand why he has this feeling. So he hits out at the other child.

(To be continued)