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## BOOKS

### CHILD DELINQUENCY

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY IN NEW ZEALAND. A Preliminary Study. By Eileen Philipp. N.Z. Council for Educational Research.

(Reviewed by the Rev. K. D. Andrews-Baxter)

MRS. PHILIPP'S book is a valuable piece of research into the problem of child delinquency in this country. I think its recommendations reach the heights of Utopia so far as New Zealand is concerned; but Utopian though they are, these are heights which should be aimed at, and could be attained.

In her introduction the author frankly states that her report gives relatively little data on some matters of obvious importance; evidently because she had so little to go on. The annual reports of the Child Welfare Branch of the Education Department are inadequate, for various reasons. It seems to me that New Zealand has fallen far short of dealing successfully with the problem of juvenile delinquency, the importance of which deserves more expert treatment than it has so far received.

It would appear from Mrs. Philipp's book that no comprehensive statistical survey of the general nature and trends of delinquency could be based on the materials existing in the personal files of delinquents and in the reports to the Children's Courts. This has made Mrs. Philipp's task a difficult one. The incidence of delinquency, dealt with in Chapter 1, seems to reveal some departmental muddle; this is not only a serious obstacle to research, but, as the writer points out, an obstacle also to progress in the practical business of diagnosing and treating the problem.

"Foster-homes" are mentioned. In my view this system is a very doubtful one, for children may be taken in for what can be got out of them in the way of money and work. "Foster-homes" would need expert and concentrated supervision.

The introduction to the book is most enlightening. It suggests that something worthwhile has been attempted by the Child Welfare Department, but that there has been lack of staff and training in this obviously expert and vocational work. The treatment and position of Maori delinquents is interestingly brought out to reveal that their codes of behaviour and their social conditions are different from those of the Pakeha, and that special understanding is necessary in dealing with their delinquency problems.

It is good to see the writer pointing out the need for special magistrates in Children's Courts—men who are interested in and understand children and, one might add, men who have been specially trained for this work. The magistrate should be able, as the author leads one to infer, to concentrate on the welfare of the individual delinquent and to ensure a right method of re-education. The primary aim of the Courts must be to have concern for the best interests of the child and to seek to help him to adjust his difficulties successfully. Mrs. Philipp gives good news of Christchurch,

where a new approach to the hearing of children's cases has been initiated by an understanding magistrate.

It is apparent from the book that children needing care and protection, and those guilty of breaking by-laws (e.g., riding a bicycle without a light) are brought before a magistrate along with those guilty of more serious offences. One would think that a board set up for the purpose would be a fairer way of dealing with such minor cases, which should not, indeed, come within the general classification of "delinquency."

An interesting statistical survey shows the rise and fall in the numbers of delinquency. We learn from it that delinquency in New Zealand is almost entirely a problem affecting boys. It is discouraging to learn that the number of repeated offences is increasing, which (as Mrs. Philipp points out) is a very clear indication of the need for directing attention to the methods of treating offenders. The inference is that there has been imperfect treatment in the past.

We are indebted to the book for showing us that only by a wise insight into the attitude and reactions of an offender can a Court presume to calculate the re-educative or deterrent effect of the treatment given. This is very important. Another good point concerns the functions of the report on the child presented to the Children's Court. These reports should provide information on which to base statistics about the incidence of delinquency; they should also give the Court the significant facts in a case, and help the Child Welfare Officer to understand the true meaning of the delinquent's behaviour and so enable him to plan wisely for its modification. These are pertinent and wise suggestions.

Undoubtedly we owe a debt to the author for showing so plainly the great need in New Zealand for more expert and understanding treatment of delinquents. Her suggestions and recommendations (particularly regarding the report form) are often excellent, but unfortunately she omits to mention the importance of religion in the home and in the school. To my mind this is a serious omission, for much of the delinquency among our young people can be traced to lack of religion.

The chapter on the social histories of some delinquents is especially valuable and should be read not only by welfare officers and social workers but also by a good many parents. The lack of proper parental care is one of the chief factors in delinquency; and had the writer suggested a term of imprisonment for certain parents she would have added to the value of her book. She makes a good point in emphasising that the actual occurrence of delinquency remains the responsibility of the community itself. The community sets the general standards and, where those standards are poor, child delinquency must inevitably increase.

This book is well timed. It provides a good background for an examination—which is, in effect, a self-examination—of the community's responsibility for juvenile delinquency. I hope it will be widely read. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Yes.