

issues which require, not a paper, but whole books to themselves. I cannot here do more than indicate some of the urgent questions which our problem of the religious and moral aspect of psychotherapy raises in my own mind, and some of the tasks with which it seems to me to confront us. For, I must repeat, I can see no complete and ready-made solution to our problem; only a challenge to an immense amount of work yet to be done.

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AN EXPERIMENT WITH YOUNG DELINQUENTS

The inner history of a social experiment, if told by a chief actor in it, is nearly always interesting to the reader, as well as being valuable to those working in the same field. And the whole subject of delinquency among children and adolescents has become an urgent one for many who, in this time of war, are looking ahead to the generation which will inherit our land afterwards.

An account⁽¹⁾ has been published of a venture made in treating "in a free environment on sympathetic and individual lines" boys and young men who had, in various ways and degrees, shown themselves "misfits", or as anti-social. Not all were law-breakers, and only exceptionally had a member of Hawkspur Camp been in prison; but many were rapidly qualifying for Borstal sentences, and all provided material for Mr. Will's intensive study, and the working out of his purpose when he accepted the post of Camp Chief.

He was backed by a little group of Quakers who were concerned with the problem of training maladjusted youth, and his staff was formed of a few men prepared, like himself, to tackle it by wholly unconventional methods. They started in May, 1936, with a very inadequate capital, of which £500 was spent in buying a site, and a group of tents until they could put up rough buildings, as bunk-houses, dayroom, etc., by their own labour. The first member to present himself had read about the new "Q Camps" in a paper and, thinking it was the sort of place he needed, had written to ask for admission. He was a typical waif, having been deserted by his parents in babyhood; and, at the age of twenty-three, he had never known security or understanding in his life. By 1940, when the war brought the experiment to an untimely end, about fifty members had been welcomed for varying periods; twenty being the

(1) *The Hawkspur Experiment*. By W. David Wills. (Allen & Unwin; 1941).

Camp's complement at a time. Of these, some came of their own accord, and others were sent to the Camp by probation officers, courts, social workers, doctors or parents.

Mr. Wills explains in his preface that his book is not intended to be an official record of the "Q Camps" undertaking. It is a frank and outspoken statement of his own motives, illustrated by examples drawn from daily life at Hawkspur. He had arrived at his standpoint by way of previous experiences, first as a "Brother" at the Wallingford Farm Training Colony, and later as a house master at a Borstal Institution. Work among difficult lads—and his own failures—convinced him that discipline, as the word is commonly used, is not the remedy that "any magistrate" believes it to be for every kind of delinquent.

He also disclaims the labels of psychologist and scientist for himself, declaring that if he must put himself into a category it was as a Christian that he carried out his task, believing that the principles underlying the work at Hawkspur were those taught in the Gospels. At the same time, he made full use of all the help he could obtain from specialists in psychology and therapeutics, sending his "cases" up to London for treatment by them, and being in frequent consultation with them for diagnosis. Some of his readers will regret that Mr. Wills, who calls himself "that most noxious of creatures, a layman dabbling in psychology", has not altogether avoided its highly infectious jargon. But his views and practice are set forth with such boyish gusto that, apart from his own avowal, he would not pass as a Quaker himself.

One of Mr. Wills's fundamental ideas is given in the words of a Cockney mother who pleaded for her son in the police court, "He's a good boy, yer honour, bar what he does." He accepted that as true of all his wayward charges, counting on a deeply-rooted desire in each to realise the better self; to be approved by his own people and group. He held that when the boy forfeited these by his outward conduct, an inner discord occurred, and presently he was driven to satisfy his craving outside the home, in bad company, or perhaps by joining a gang. Mr. Wills's way of dealing with this contradictory state of mind was to show persistent approval of the boy himself, however perverse his deeds, until the other self could develop in an atmosphere of affection not dependent on his behaviour.

The particular boy, "Yus," whose mother had unconsciously described a large human group, began with the single aim of appearing a "tough", but after a few months of friendliness at Hawkspur, there were signs of another nature, "gentle, consider-

ate, sensitive—and most important, he was happy.” Unfortunately, before the change could be complete, and during the Chief’s absence, a new, untested member of the Camp persuaded “Yus”, and another lad, to join him in burgling the village inn. At the Quarter Sessions he was sentenced to Borstal, and Mr. Wills doubted if that emerging self would ever be discovered there.

The second boy involved in this affair was a much more complicated subject. He had been kept under at home by his father’s heavy hand, but was now big and strong enough to defend himself against that form of discipline. At sixteen he seemed a thoroughly unpromising youth, dishonest, given to fits of violent temper or depression, quite illiterate, and incapable of any sort of steady work. Every means of training him was tried for nearly two years, without much improvement in his character. Then it was suggested by a woman doctor, who specialised in teaching retarded adults, that Jim should have an interview with the head of a painting school in London, where he used the art as a way of healing various neuroses.

That proved to be the turning point for Jim. It was arranged that he should attend the school three days a week; and the teacher reported that, if his general education could be improved, he might even become a painter. After four months, Jim was visibly altered and had found a purpose in life. He announced, “Painting is the only thing that matters, really”; but he had become able and willing to concentrate on duller work, and his bad moods lessened. It was the loss of his absorbing interest through the school’s closure for the summer holidays that led him to take part in the burglary; and his new passion survived a year under Borstal sentence which followed. Directly he was free, he returned to the one important thing—to take up his painting again.

From such instances as these, drawn from the diverse adolescents gathered at Hawkspur, Mr. Wills found evidence to support his argument against “ordinary” discipline, i.e., a rule imposed on its subjects. He holds that this kind of control makes the tamer characters dependent on authority, and helpless when removed from its sway. And, if applied to natural rebels, like Jim, it leads to resentment, resistance, penalties, and the final emergence of “a hardened, embittered criminal”. But his main quarrel with those who prescribe “a bit of discipline” for all and sundry young offenders is that they do not acknowledge the real motive of the system.

He analyses the true cause as fear and a natural desire for protection; adding a candid confession of his own self-deception, in his

earlier days, and of his resort to physical violence in order to gain a slavish obedience, and overcome his secret dread of losing control. He believes that the safety and convenience of "the administrative official" are the objects aimed at in drawing up the codes of reformatory institutions, and that discipline becomes in these an end in itself, and not a means of reconstruction. The conception of discipline at Hawkspur Camp was the more positive one of making a way for the individual failure to shape a system of his own not in conflict with society. "A system of which, since he has discovered it himself, he can see the value and by which he wants to live."

Because Mr. Wills wished to know the members as they really were, to observe every symptom so that he might discover the hidden malady, he gave the members an extraordinary degree of liberty. He lived and worked with them as a comrade, not exacting deference or submission, though it is evident that his own strong personality gained for him the influence of a leader; and they confided in him because he was never surprised or shocked by anything they told him.

The Camp Council was designed to frame such laws and regulations as were found to be necessary in a community of this kind. It consisted of the whole number of the members and staff, who met weekly to hear complaints and to discuss the affairs of the camp. Judging by the verbatim report of one of these meetings, it was a very informal assembly; the members not refraining from colloquial abuse of each other, and using distinctly unparliamentary terms of debate. But the real crux was to turn the Council into an effective governing body; for the members evaded responsibility whenever they could, and preferred the chance of a public "grouse" about any real or imaginary grievance to putting matters right for themselves. Therefore, if some measure essential to the welfare of the Camp was to be carried through, instead of making a "law", general agreement to the suggestion had to be won by tact and good humour.

In this connexion, Mr. Wills recalls the elaborate system of self-government which he had found at the American Institution for young offenders, called "The Junior Republic". There all the administrative offices of American Democracy were reproduced among the boys, with their imposing titles. But, though he admits that it would help them to understand their functions as citizens when they went back to normal life, Mr. Wills thought it too imitative of the adult organization which he does not regard as "necessarily an ideal system of Government".

In his own experimental work, an occasional phase of anarchy caused him no dismay. He took it as a sign of vitality; and, if he ever felt hopeless about any of his members, it was of the amenable type which he knew might end as a "model prisoner", keeping every rule, and only contented when deprived of liberty and independence.

Though disarmingly ready to own that he sometimes made errors of judgment, or blundered in handling one of his delinquents, he was sure that his basic principle of self-determined reform was the right one. And, like most men who have been converted from one way of thinking to another, his faith in the later conviction is particularly tenacious and ardent.

Perhaps that mental and moral reaction in his own experience made it difficult for him to allow that only a small-scale experiment, like his at Hawkspur, could be run on equally individual and specialised lines. For economic reasons alone, and because of the increasing demand for Borstal accommodation, it seems that the more orthodox social reformers—who are also intent on improving their methods—must needs direct the big institutions needed as an alternative to prison sentences for youth. But even those who cannot go all the way with Mr. Wills, and find his conclusions too sweeping, will recognise his devotion to the cause of young delinquents, and the generous courage of his experiment—which he hopes will be made again, and extended, after the war.

Certainly his view of the training system in force at our Borstal Institutions is not endorsed by such an expert observer as Mrs. Le Mesurier, whose book, "Boys in Trouble," is the fruit of years spent in sympathetic dealing with young offenders on remand at Wormwood Scrubs. She and her fellow workers make friends with them, gather all available information about their previous histories, and if possible visit their homes. On their reports, drawn up from this material, the authorities are able to decide where a lad can most advantageously be sent for his training. Though, at the outbreak of war, Wormwood Scrubs had to be cleared of its inmates, the women visitors carry on their "case work" at the remand centre now established at Feltham.

The penal reformers reckon that they have suffered a setback of twenty years in their efforts, as the consequence of war conditions, but they count the Borstal system—particularly as it has been tried out by the later experiments of comparative freedom at Lowdham Grange and North Sea Camp—among the assets that still remain to them, when so many other of their objectives are—at least temporarily—lost.

New Zealand, where a persistent spirit of reform has marked its Government for some years past, now has three institutions of the Borstal type; and is developing its work for the prevention of delinquency among young people.

Mr. Alexander Paterson, most humane of Prison Commissioners, addressing the Howard League in 1940,⁽²⁾ gave some details of Borstal in war-time which are a remarkable testimony to its value. Owing to orders for the evacuation of certain prisons and Borstal Institutions, it was necessary to discharge 1,700 lads from the latter at 48 hours' notice. Of these many were not fully trained, and some had not half completed their training; so there was naturally some uneasiness as to what might result from "that mass discharge" in September, 1939. The Borstal Association's records showed that out of the restless crowd, thus suddenly released, only 13 per cent. were reconvicted in the following six months—though, at that time, neither the fighting forces nor the armament firms had reached a stage of organization which could absorb them.

After outlining Mr. Wills's work at Hawkspur Camp, it seems only fair to quote these authoritative witnesses to the great measure of success achieved by a system which has now stood the test of time—and abundant criticism—since its beginning forty years ago.

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Author's Note—

Since writing this article, I have learned that the Committee of Friends which sponsored Hawkspur Camp maintains another urgent social work at Barns House, Manor, Peebles. In conjunction with the Scottish Department of Health, the Peebles-shire County Council, and the Edinburgh Education Authority, they opened in July, 1940, a School and Hostel for boys who had proved too troublesome in billets, to be re-educated and humanised, with Mr. Wills as their Warden. The results of the first year's training make an encouraging record of improved health, manners and morals.

(2). Reported in *The Howard Journal*, Autumn, 1941.