Psychology and Crime

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Thomas Holmes

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PSYCHOLOGY AND CRIME

By

THOMAS HOLMES

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PREFACE

Sincerely do I hope that the issue of this little book may prove useful in drawing the attention of the public to the mental and physical condition of the unfortunates who form such a large proportion of our prison population.

To our authorities the sad plight of this mass of smitten humanity is well known. Year after year our Prison Commissioners, in presenting their reports, have not failed to impress upon the State the great part physical and mental afflictions play in the production of crime.

So far, the information given by the Prison Commissioners has produced little or no effect; neither have their representations led to any alteration in the treatment of unfortunate individuals whose infirmities are in reality the root cause of their delinquency.

To the official information I add the result of my own prolonged experience. This experience has imbued me with the conviction that the present methods of dealing with suffering humanity are neither wise, just, nor efficacious. I have seen the helplessness of so many that are called criminals that, in writing these pages, I am animated with a keen desire to hasten the day of sensible reform. Surely the day cannot be far distant when the

State will take mental and physical infirmities into consideration when it has to deal with its erring children.

Thomas Holmes.

Howard Association,

Devonshire Chambers, Bishopsgate.

CHAPTER I:

PSYCHOLOGY AND CRIME

I hope that no one will be prevented from reading this chapter by its title, for let me say at once that I am not the least bit scientific. Whatever I have to say will be expressed in very simple language, and further, that in the writing of it I am animated with the desire of conveying to thoughtful and non-scientific readers some of the personal causes that lead individuals to commit actions that are deemed criminal.

Of the social and industrial causes of crime I shall be silent, for whole volumes have been and can still be written on those subjects, and though to me they are very inviting topics, I must within the compass of this little book ignore them.

I shall of course speak "right on" and tell of what I have seen and known during my many years' experience of London's criminals.

Indeed, I have no other qualification than this: that for twenty-five years I have spent my days in London

police courts, and my evenings with discharged prisoners.

I may also add to these opportunities for study, frequent visits to prisons, and confidential talks with prisoners.

It will, I think, be admitted that I have had privileged opportunities for learning something, but by no means everything, of the characteristics, mentality and personality of law-breakers.

Of a certainty, considering the extent of my opportunities, I must have been dull if I had not learned much, or what is perhaps of more importance, unlearned a great deal more about the personal causes of crime.

I will therefore draw upon my own experience, feeling quite sure that a non-scientific book, though small in size and free from pretensions, will be a welcome addition to the long list of books that have been written upon this interesting subject.

To me it is a most inviting subject, yet it is a singularly dangerous one; for when any one undertakes to explain the working of another man's mind, and to give reasons for the other man's actions, he assumes a knowledge that he cannot possess, though he may honestly believe that he possesses it. In reality he makes statements that cannot be proved, but they are statements that cannot be disproved.

The list of scientific books on this subject is a long one, indeed it is almost interminable. Many of these