

## UNDERSTANDING JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

By LEE R. STEINER

In his fascinating and instructive book, *Good Behaviour*, Sir Harold Nicholson, famous English biographer and authority on diplomacy, makes some pertinent observations which are occasionally curious if not humorous. Says he, speaking of American manners:

"It seems strange to me . . . that whereas American adults sometimes seem to be inhibited by conventions which have long been discarded in the Old World, American children and adolescents are accorded a license without bond or bound. The adulation accorded to children and young boys and girls is to our minds bewildering. The pert, pampered and loud-voiced infants of the Great Republic are for us almost incomprehensible as the bunching, petting, dare-seeking boys and girls of the universities and colleges."

This revealing passage from an admittedly keen and judicious observer flashed before us as we ploughed through the well-documented book, *Understanding Juvenile Delinquency*, published in the United States of America, by Lee R. Steiner whose picture adorns the back cover. The author, we gather, is not only a certified psychologist, but is also a recognized psychoanalyst and consultant in personal problems. She thus had already access to those intimate problems with which American teen-agers are faced today to the bafflement and disappointment of their parents, who, in their dotting fondness, have spared the rod and spoiled the child.

An American reviewer describes Mrs. Steiner's recent publication as a "brutally frank" and "hard-hitting" treatise or diagnosis. It is more than that. It is sometimes diagnostically as shocking in its factuality as it is in its clinical frankness. It calls a spade a spade for want of a worse name. In her passion for truth and accuracy, she quotes a word which, banned by Webster as well as Oxford Dictionary, we saw printed for the first time.

Some modern novelists in their attempt to appear realistic and photographic might have used the word. Still we have always wondered, possibly in our conservatism or provincialism, what constructive purpose its use could serve or accomplish. Determined no doubt to be always factual and accurate as becomes a scientist, the author copiously quotes from reports that could easily fall under the category of pornographic, however noble or lofty might have been her motive or intention.

Over a decade ago, juvenile delinquency was at best a legal terminology with hardly any clear meaning or evil connotation to the reading public. That was particularly true in the Philippines where the influence of the home, salutary and unquestioned, as well as of the school and the church, was then strong. If the man in the street happened to read the expression or

hear about it, it left him no impression; he merely shrugged his shoulders as if it were none of his or his family's concern. Today, it conveys an increasingly serious and alarming social and domestic problem in the United States and to a limited extent in the Philippines, especially in the chartered cities where vice and crime are becoming rampant.

What seems to have inspired Mrs. Steiner to publish the result of her study and research is that juvenile delinquency has broken and continues to break many a peaceful and happy home. At the same time, it has left a long trail of blood and tears from victims and relatives. What causes juvenile delinquency? Why has it spread terror across the land from Maine to California as well in the Philippines through the baneful influence of cheap magazines? Is it symptomatic of the breakdown of the home, the school and the church? Has the bad example of well-meaning but seemingly irresponsible parents anything to do with it?

The last seems to be the opinion of Dr. H. H. Remmers of Purdue University. According to Mrs. Steiner, he has "drawn the conclusion after years of research that the difficulty is not so much with the young as with the pattern their elders are setting — a pattern of meaningless activity and boredom." The same authority holds that young people have "a more accurate appraisal of the adult world than vice-versa." This reverses the stand taken by a famed English writer who said to a young man, "You think we (old men) are fools; but we know that you are."

What is the solution? The author views the whole matter quite pessimistically. She quotes Dr. Jacques M. May, Vice-President of the National Organization for Mentally Ill Children, as saying that the problem of juvenile delinquency "will not be solved by more policemen, only by more unbiased scientist exploring the depths of the cells." And far from improving the situation, many of the judges presiding over juvenile courts in the States are blamed for making it worse.

"Instead of using psychiatric knowledge to make the young person's life easier," complains Mrs. Steiner, "some of these mal-adjusted judges use it as one more weapon of sadism. Actually, many of these judges who bandy around the psychiatric lingo don't want anything to do with psychiatrists. In private, they will tell you that they think psychiatrists are dopes. And many psychiatrists return the compliment by belittling judges."

Understanding evidently holds the key to the whole problem, but how can one attain understanding when the authorities themselves, scientific and otherwise, do not or cannot understand one another, much less the unfortunate patients who are brought before them for treatment?