

Criminal Is a Defective, but Not a Type

Conclusions from Biometrical Study of 3,000 British Convicts Discredit Lombroso's Theory and Minimize the Influence of Environment

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CONCLUSIONS which will appear in revolutionary light to the criminologists of the Lombroso school—those who believe in a "criminal type"—and may tend to jar cherished preconceptions of philanthropists who believe that the criminal is merely a creature of environment, are embodied in a work which has just been issued by the British Government. It is called "The English Convict: A Statistical Study by the Late Dr. Charles Goring, Deputy Medical Officer of His Majesty's Prison Service."

Presenting what seems to be the most complete first hand scientific study of the criminal that exists in any language, it goes a long way toward proving that there is no "criminal type," and casts grave doubt upon the previously held theory that the criminal is a product chiefly of environment.

It is an axiom among criminologists that knowledge of the criminal should underlie all measures for prevention of crime, but hitherto influences bearing on prevention, detection, and punishment have oscillated between notions of "sin" tempered by a benevolent philanthropy and the romantic, graphic school of Lombroso.

In 1902, Dr. Charles Goring, then Deputy Medical Officer of Parkhurst Prison, formed the idea of making accurate measurements of prisoners classified according to their crimes with the object of seeing whether the criminals thus classified corresponded, in their deviations from the normal type, with the criminal types which form the basis from which the Lombroso hypothesis is developed.

At the time of his death Dr. Goring had examined 3,000 convicts. He performed his gigantic task at the Biometrical Laboratory of University College, London, under the direction of Professor Karl Pearson, who has written the introduction to "The English Convict."

In this introduction it is declared that once for all people must banish the conception that the criminal is a specific type of humanity, possibly an atavistic reappearance of the old brutal instincts, marked off by physical and mental "stigmata." On the contrary, he is shown to be subject to variations like other people, but in the nature and range of his individual peculiarities he is indistinguishable from the average sample of the law-abiding citizen.

Other theories, according to Professor Pearson, must also be thrown into the discard: the distrust of heads too large or too small, protruding jowls, near-set eyes, projecting ears, &c. Excluding

criminals convicted of fraud and violence, the remainder, constituting nearly 90 per cent. of the total, and consisting chiefly of thieves, burglars, and incendiaries, differ from the general population merely by lower physique and lower intelligence.

The overwhelming bulk of crime, it is said, is an expression of defectiveness, and is associated with alcoholism, epilepsy, bad economic conditions, but not in a casual way. These, like crime, are other manifestations of defectiveness, concurrent but not dependent phenomena.

Dr. Goring comes to the conclusion that physical and mental defectiveness, like many other human qualities, is inherited, and he infers that crime is, to a large extent, a product of nature rather than of nurture and environment.

His statistics deal with convicted criminals, the only trustworthy material, but he admits that the consequences of physical and mental defectiveness must appear in other human occupations as well as in crime. Such defectiveness, therefore, presupposes failure in all occupations and failure in crime means detection. Thus was the material furnished for Dr. Goring to work upon.

The Prison Commission's summary of the work of Dr. Goring and those who completed and co-ordinated his observations reads as follows:

Dr. Goring's work is in the first place

seem to be obvious that frontal development was associated with intelligence. But two years later the same 300 criminals were included in a group of 800 criminals whose head contours were being traced, and a series of precise measurements of the forehead heights were thus obtained. The verdict by the exact method was different. There was very little, if any, appreciable relationship between height of forehead and intelligence.

In determining the existence or non-existence of criminal characteristics, the whole series of measurements obtained from a random sample of criminals must be compared with a similar whole series obtained from a random sample of the noncriminal population. If the differences between the results compared are not greater than the probable error, they may be regarded as insignificant. If any difference is found greater than three times the probable error it is reasonable to assume that it is due to some definite influence over and above those causes which are inherent in the sampling process.

Further, the statistics have to be corrected for heterogeneity of material. This requires an elaborate search for correlations that exist. For example, before it can be concluded that any significant difference discovered between the mean head length of a sample of criminals and that of the general population represents a veritable criminal characteristic, we must be certain that, apart from criminality, the contrasted series of head lengths have been obtained from homogeneous human material. We must see

are reduced to a common standard of age, stature, intelligence, and class, these differences tend to disappear. The results challenge the allegations of criminal anthropologists at almost every point. Both with regard to measurements and to the presence of physical anomalies in criminals the statistics present a startling conformity with similar statistics of the law-abiding classes.

All English criminals, except those technically convicted of fraud, are markedly below the general population in stature and body-weight. Offenders convicted of violence to the person are characterized by an average degree of strength and of constitutional soundness considerably above the average of other criminals and of the law-abiding class. Thieves, burglars, and incendiaries, who constitute 90 per cent. of all criminals, are inferior in stature and weight, and are puny in their general bodily habit in comparison with other criminals and with the law-abiding population. These are the sole facts on which the theories of criminal anthropology rest.

First convictions show a predilection for the age period 15 to 25, which Dr. Goring concludes to be significant. Comparing this fact with the age incidences of liability to various diseases, he is inclined to interpret the facts as evidence that a "mental constitutional proclivity is the primal source of the habitual criminal's career."

Alcoholism, epilepsy, sexual profligacy, and insanity in their relation to crime are accidental associations depending on a high degree of relationship between defective intelligence and crime. It cannot



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statistical, and he has followed the methods which have been developed in recent years by biometricians, depending on accurate measurements. As an example of the futility of drawing accurate conclusions from rough observations, he states that 300 criminals, classified by three grades of intelligence, were observed, to discover if there were any appreciable association between height of forehead and intellectual capacity. The forehead of each of the 300 was judged as being low, medium, or high. The result was that of the intelligent group 20.5 per cent. had low foreheads and 20.5 per cent. had high foreheads; of the unintelligent group 35.7 had low and 8.3 had high foreheads; of the weak-minded group the corresponding figures were 46 per cent. and 8 per cent. The conclusion would

that the distributions of age, stature, intelligence, and all the characters associated with head length are the same for both section of the population that are being compared. The necessary allowances have to be calculated and made.

After these corrections have been made, comparisons between the measurements of criminals as a class and of the noncriminal public—including Oxford and Cambridge undergraduates, the staff of University College, inmates of a general hospital, soldiers, &c.—lead to a definite result. No evidence emerged confirming the existence of a physical criminal type, such as Lombroso and his disciples have described. Physical differences exist between different kinds of criminals precisely as they exist between different kinds of the law-abiding population. But when allowance is made for a certain range of probable variation, when they

be assumed from the evidence that defective intelligence is correlated with the defective physique. English criminals appear to be selected from the noncriminal population by two independent factors—a mental constitution and a physical constitution, each, however, differing from that of the general population in degree and not in kind. Moreover, elaborate examination of the data shows that crime, at least in this country, is due only in a trifling extent (if in any) to social inequality, adverse environment, or other manifestations of what may be comprehensively termed the "forces of circumstances."

The ratio of the absolute rate of fertility of criminals to that of the general population is as 5 to 8. Further scrutiny of the results shows that there is a striking difference between "star class" criminals—that is, those who are at once first offenders and are guilty of serious crime and habitual criminals. The former are precisely equal in fertility to the general population. The falling off in the number of offspring produced by habitual criminals does not occur before the age of 40. Criminals as a class come from the most fertile stratum of the population, and the decrease in their fertility is not due to physiological sterility nor to any direct effect of their confinement in prison. It is the result of a definite psychological human reaction, which, after a certain period of continually interrupted married life, induces the desertion of habitual criminals by their wives. In fact, it is a process of sexual selection.



How Criminals Really Look