

***THOMAS
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***PSYCHOLOGY
AND CRIME***

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Psychology and Crime

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PREFACE

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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.

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CHAPTER I

PSYCHOLOGY AND CRIME

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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 books are voluminous in size and terrifying in title. Some of these, written by men of eminence, have their uses, and may be considered standard works. Neither can there be the slightest doubt that the accumulated experience, research or opinions of thinking men have, and have very rightly, a title to serious consideration.

But when any book professes to be a kind of mental "ready reckoner" for judges, magistrates and others who are called upon to adjudicate upon the guilt or innocence of individuals, and to apportion punishment, I for one feel suspicious as to the value of that book for its specified purpose.

It is, no doubt, a comforting thought to many who have to sit in judgment upon others, that they can have access to

books written by learned scientists that will afford them light and leading on the mysteries of criminal psychology.

But is it possible to explore the innermost recesses of a criminal's mind, or to follow the workings of passion, instinct, mania or whim in any selected prisoner?

With all respect I venture to say it is not possible. The pretension to such knowledge is at once dangerous and misleading; and though many things in a book of this description may be true and instructive, the great bulk of it must be pure conjecture. So far as my experience goes, no two criminals are alike; but while they vary as ordinary people vary, they are far more careful than ordinary people to conceal their thoughts, and, believe me, they are far more successful in their endeavours.

As a matter of fact, the criminal, especially the habitual criminal, lives in a world of self-repression. In prison he is not only shut up, but he also shuts himself up. He gives nothing away to his would-be investigators.

He is cute enough to know what the investigator is after, and clever enough to give answers that will please his questioner and confirm him in judgments that he has already formed: though probably there is not more than a grain of truth in the whole of the answers he will give. I am led to these remarks by the fact that all round me as I write are books that deal with the crime of the world, hundreds of them, and a weird collection they form.

As I sit and look at them they fascinate me, almost cast a spell over me. But when I rise from my desk, take one into my hand and read but a single page, I am disillusioned.