The Psycopathic Constitution.

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Ziehen in a recently published pamphlet* sketches in firm outline the psychopathic constitution—its recognition in the child—and calls attention to the fate of these individuals and their future incumbrance on and danger to society, the possibility of their becoming normal if adequately taken care of (by combined efforts of physician and pedagogue) in special institutions, and the absolute lack of such foundations at present. Stelzner covers the same ground and gives the data gathered in the study of over 400 cases.

The children in question are such as show neither specific psychosis nor in fact any mental weakness whatsoever (idiocy, imbecility, debility), who do however evidence many abnormal psychological phenomena, especially in the emotional sphere. Their weak-willed dispositions, intense lability of mood and strong uncontrollable affectivity suffer anti-social tendencies to develop which if not timely inhibited invariably drive them into the arms of crime, vagrancy or prostitution—or indeed devolve into insanity.

Examination of the inmates of penitentiaries, prisons and reformatories have shown an alarming percentage of such psychopathic constitutions and likewise left little doubt but that the majority of these graceless mortals might have been spared their own sad lot and society their misdeeds had they been properly cared for in their youth. In the well-to-do such cases are looked after in private institutions—and for the most part become normal.

These constitutions flourish in large measure on inherited impairment (insanity, alcoholism, neuroses, lues, etc., in the ascendants).* Casualties of parturition (prematurity, abnormal duration, asphyxia) are also of etiological moment, beside brain traumatia (thru fall or blow) alcoholic indulgence in childhood, insufficient nourishment and severe infections. Excessive masturbation is more often a symptom than a cause of such condition.

The psychopathic picture shows wide variations. Children of this nature have abnormally heightened fantasies: they lie much, romance and day dream. Even momentary hallucinations may occur, especially toward dusk. So they may hear someone calling them, or see “a man” or “shadow” or be aware of “someone” in the next room, or “someone following.” Fear in these instances is usually an accompaniment. Or again, the visionary tendency may be more marked and they see angels or faces on closing their eyes or have fancies materialize in broad daylight. Many manifest a very early sexual awakening with strong erotic bent. Characteristic is also a sudden “running away,” disappearing from school or home. It may be out of pique or after quarrel; or it may be just a deluge of an uncontrollable desire to wander aimlessly into nowhere—that nomadic instinct inherent in us all, the “Wanderlust” of youth, here breaking check—for a night or more, or for all time. Avenues of mishap and dangers

* “Die Erkennung der psychopathischen Konstitutionen (Krankheiten seelischen Veranlagungen) und die öffentliche Fürsorge für psychopathisch veranlagte Kinder,” Prof. Dr. Th. Ziehen; verlag von S. Karger, Berlin, 1912.

* Hence the term “hereditary psychopathic constitution” for these.

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are thus soon opened up, the falling in with evil companions, early familiarity with night life or even crime and consequent callousness to wrong (of 140 boys seen by Z., in one year over 40 had committed theft). Left to develop one realizes where this must end. Or again the vagrant grows into the vagabond, shifting from place to place, incapable of adhering to any work, haunted by ill-luck, misused by fate and man, gradually wanting into that sorry shadow of a creature found the whole world over, whose life has been futile and for whom the almshouse is the end.—In the case of girls such nightly escapades easily lend themselves to seduction and anon lead the way to prostitution. Not seldom do sexual transgressions begin in very childhood.

Pathological absent-mindedness is often a most prominent factor. In spite of good mentality these children do not progress in school. Rambling ideas persist in incurring upon their train of thoughts and thus disturb attention. They bring nothing to completion. Not only can they not concentrate, they cannot persevere. Complaints come up; discontent and depression follow. The former may be the clew to flight, the latter a motive for suicide. Attempts at such may follow the slightest provocation, a scolding or only the fear of reprimand. And only too often are they fatal.

Many show a diseased mental reactionability. They have outbursts of temper which prove violent and uncontrollable. Out of trifles the storm may rise. It may end in a crescendo of excitement or swell to blind fury. In such an attack the child may tear its clothes, strike about wildly, injure itself or do violence on someone present.

Some show marked ethical deficiency. These are among those formerly termed "morally insane." There is a weakness of inhibition. The breaks do not work on the temptation to wrong.*

The milder forms may indeed manifest no more than just nuances of the above. Such individuals are scarcely likely to travel the aberrant course, yet spend their days fettered with instability, out of tune with the finite and infinite. These the French aptly term the "déséquilibrés"—their irritabilities, fears, aversions, lack of perseverance, unrest and constant recalcitrance ever disturbing their equipoise and filling their days with discontent.

The mental abnormalities are often accompanied by somatic signs. Skull, ears, fingers, etc., may be deformed. The list of stigmata is large. Enuresis is frequent, may even continue into puberty. Headaches are common. Convulsions may occasionally occur. Some evidenceptic movements, others merely marked erethism. They cannot suppress fidgeting, cannot sit or stand still. Somnambulism is also frequent or speaking or screaming during sleep.

It will be seen that Ziehen has gathered into this rubric of the Psychopathic Constitution many conditions separately described and otherwise designated by various writers (so for instance, Koch’s "psychopathic inferiority" Kahlbaum’s "Heboidophrenie," Demoor’s "morally degenerate," Heller’s "Psychasthenic Children," Weygandt’s "slightly abnormal children." Here too one may add the "Dégénérés supérieurs" of the French and many of the cases described as hysterical, "Affectmenschs," etc.). This is a step forward in simplification for certainly all who have followed up the literature on the abnormal child must have felt the growing difficulty of classifying the pathologies. Out of this

*It is evident that if not corrected such individuals may in time lose all moral sense.
larger grouping Ziehen differentiates several types* distinguished by the prominence of certain characteristics: so for instance the "affective" type with its exaggerated impulsivity and outbreaks, or again the "depressive" with its moods, dejected states and apprehension, trend to melancholy if not checked or final suicide; or closely related to this the "obsessive" with its impulsions and varied fears. In a large proportion, "hyperphantasy" is the dominant feature, so often (but not always) associated with the hysterical symptomatology of childhood. Here one comes upon phantastic ideas, romancing and fabulation—even illusions and hallucinations.

And as to prognosis and eventualities—as already intimated the pronounced cares if not timely curbed lead downward to crime, prostitution or some form of psychosis. On the way they prove the source of seduction to every susceptible individual they pass. Wherever they turn up they like as not set into activity the beginnings of a hundred disastrous ends. Ultimately they must be cared for by society at an immense expense.—What can be done for them? Can such children be rescued?—The Asylum is no place for them, not really being psychotic, and tends only the more rapidly to invalidate them into mental disintegration. Nor do they belong in homes for feeble-minded where they would but corrupt the inmates and could scarcely profit by instruction and training meant for such defectives. On the other hand, in the case of the well-to-do, provision by medicopedagogic care has amply shown the possibility of saving these children and evening out their psychopathies into normal trends. Similar institutions therefore must be provided to meet this urgent need in the less fortunate, which institutions would then not only deliver these psychopathic individuals from their unpropitious fates but spare society much future crime and the final maintenance of a large number of its derelicts in the various terminals that gather them in.

This partly psychiatric partly pedagogic training must be in an ethical and moral direction, instilling altruistic sentiments, strengthening the inhibitions, lessening nervous tension and mental irritability both by avoiding all that might provoke discord or excitement and at the same time teaching suppression, leading these children thus gradually to tide their own peccant and morbid instincts and master the feelings which their over-reactionable minds constantly whip up into storm. Out-door work, as in a garden, and the calm of rustic districts may help to effect this change.

In this final connection of prophylaxis and management the chapter "Wünsche und Forderungen" in Stelzner's book is especially interesting and instructive.

I have dwelt on these publications at length because their content is significant and the sad lack of institutional provision, for such psychopaths and adolescents, as pointed out by Ziehen, as pertinent with us as abroad. Here is a field of work that will harvest good returns. Above all, here is a duty for us to assume, urgent and imperative.

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* See also Ziehen's "Die Geisteskrankheiten des Kindesalters," Drittes Heft, Berlin, 1906, p. 23 et seq. Z. here describes the generally degenerative psychopath constitution, the hysterical psychop. constitution, "the epileptic," "neurasthenic," "choreatic," "depressive," "obsessive" and "paranoid." The simple psychopath. constitution may also occur in combination with feeblemindedness (Dabilität) or outspoken psychosis. See also "Zur lehre von den psychopathischen constitutionen," Charité Annalen xxx 7, also his "Psychiatrie" in which he describes still other forms the "toxic," "traumatic," "alcoholic," etc. This nomenclature will more readily be understood if one keeps in mind that the psychopathic constitutions may be classified either according to etiology or symptomatology.