

A Dynamic Era of Court Psychiatry

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A Dynamic Era of Court Psychiatry. 1914-1944. Edited by Agnes A. Sharp. Chicago: The Psychiatric Institute of the Municipal Court of Chicago, 1944. Pp. 149.

This volume consists of a collection of articles commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the Psychiatric Institute which is a part of the Municipal Court of Chicago. The contributions fall into three groups. One group is purely laudatory in nature and testifies to the value of the Institute as seen by judges and by executives of organizations that work and co-operate with the court.

The most interesting and instructive papers in the collection are those which interpret the function of the Institute in relation to the work of a court which deals with minor cases and has specialized branches for boys, women, and domestic relations. The important factor in the development of the past thirty years has been a reorientation of the attitude of the judges toward the persons brought before them, particularly offenders in minor matters. The pattern of seeing the offender as more important than the offense was originally set by the practices of the juvenile court. This court had existed in Chicago for some fifteen years prior to the foundation of the Psychiatric Institute, and for the last five of these years it had had its own psychiatric clinic. The change in attitude involves a realization of the futility of punishment as the solution to the problem of crime. It also involves a realization that some offenders are mentally abnormal and that there is more to their mental abnormality than is recognized by the legal rubrics dealing with mental illness (insanity) and mental defect (feeble-mindedness), for psychiatric knowledge has grown while the legal classifications have remained static. Whether or not a prisoner before the bar of justice can or cannot be reclaimed for society depends upon his mental and emotional make-up and his social background. While the psychiatric clinic possesses no magical means of foretelling the future, it can give the judge valuable aid towards the understanding of persons before the court. The reviewer cannot refrain from remarking that, while courts in other cities, such as New York and Detroit, have joined Chicago in adding such services to their courts, no adult court in Wisconsin makes use of clinical psychiatric aid for any purpose other than the legal determination of insanity or feeble-mindedness.

A third group of contributions is concerned with certain specific problems with which the Institute deals. There are interesting papers on phases of the work of the branches of the court dealing with domestic relations, traffic offenses, and neighborhood police matters. Several types of mental abnormalities found in the courts, including

psychopathic personality, amnesia and mental deficiency are also discussed in non-technical language.

The book has been written so as to appeal both to the medical and the legal professions. To the attorney who sees his work as something which involves people as well as the facts of law, it presents the development of a new and slowly growing point of view in criminal procedures.

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