Reviews

Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency, by Sheldon & Eleanor Glueck.
Commonwealth Fund. (London : Geoffrey Cumberledge) 40/-

This is the sort of American book which makes British social scientists writhe with envy. It is the record of a sustained and elaborate criminological research project, lasting ten years and costing three-quarters of a million dollars. As might be expected, this is therefore as good a book of its type as is likely to be written. However, it adheres to the orthodox methodology for the study of crime, and there is every reason for feeling that this is no longer adequate.

Five hundred boys in state correctional schools in Massachusetts were matched with five hundred non-delinquents in Boston public schools. All one thousand cases were then intensively studied from various points of view. Their family and social backgrounds were explored by trained caseworkers. They were subjected to intelligence and attainment tests, and to the Rorschach personality test. They were given careful medical examinations, and classified into physical types according to the categories developed by W. A. Sheldon in his book "Varieties of Human Physique." Finally there was a psychiatric interview. The Gluecks claimed that the results of these separate enquiries were mutually confirmatory, the delinquent emerging as a distinct and recognisable entity, identifiable by certain characteristic traits. He was found to be physically muscular and energetic, temperamentally restless and extraverted, assertive and hostile in attitude, and addicted to the concrete rather than the symbolic approach to problems. "In the exciting, stimulating, but little-controlled and culturally inconsistent environment of the underprivileged area, such boys readily give expression to their untamed impulses and their self-centred desires by means of various forms of delinquent behaviour. These tendencies towards uninhibited energy expression are deeply anchored in soma and psyche and in the malformations of character during the first few years of life."

The basic principle of method was that factors which were found to a greater degree in the delinquents than in the controls were the significant ones, and it is becoming clear that this is an over-simplification. It is not a trait as such which makes a delinquent, but the place that trait occupies in relation to other elements of the personality, and even in relation to the social setting of the child in question. We are concerned with a person, and not with a bag of discrete characteristics. And even a particular type of person may not become delinquent unless his social setting is of the specific sort to evoke delinquency in a person such as he is.

Thus a characteristic, e.g. "adventurousness," may be of equal strength in two boys, and yet be significant for the causation of delinquency in the one case and not in the other. The Gluecks are too experienced, and too intellectually honest to burk entirely at this difficulty, but they do not seem to realise how much it invalidates their whole argument, and the traditional methodology upon which this rests.

These criticisms do not detract from the value of the book as a treasure-house of experience and statistical information on the subject of juvenile delinquents in the United States. And no doubt, to most students of the subject they will not detract either from its value as a major contribution to the understanding of the causation of crime.

H.J.

Eighty-Thousand Adolescents. A Study of Young People in Birmingham. Directed by Brian H. R. Reed, D.D. George Allen & Unwin. 12/6.

This book is a comprehensive survey of the interests and activities of the youth of Birmingham. It sets out to discover how they spend their time, what is their work, how they liked school, where they spend their leisure hours and what are their hopes and ambitions.

The survey was undertaken by the staff and students of West-hill Training College. Many visits were paid to Clubs and Youth Organisations in the City and questionnaires put to a sample of over 1,000 young people inside and outside Youth Organisations.

Let it be said frankly that the picture which emerges is a highly depressing one—so depressing that one turns the pages again, incredulously seeking for some redeeming feature, some flash of the fire and idealism of youth that may have been missed. Can it be that the atmosphere of aimless futility and intellectual poverty that breathes from these pages is indeed so prevalent? Has the adventure and sparkle of youth been so thoroughly stamped out by our educational processes and our industrial civilisation? At what stage in these youngsters' lives did apathy finally overcome the natural exuberance and optimism of youth? What ammunition for the A. S. Neill's of our times!

From the questionnaires many little sidelights are glimpsed. School, it seems, rouses little enthusiasm in the adolescent breast. 62% of boys and 68% of girls near school leaving age are glad finally to escape its portals. No enthusiasm for education here! Employment seems more popular though the problem of finding the right job comes up for mention. A 19-year-old girl packer replies sadly to the question "What job in life would you like to do?" with "I wish I knew." Pocket-money, with wide variations,