

## CRIMINAL ON THE ROAD

By T. C. Willett. (*Tavistock*, 42s.)

American research findings suggest that accident-prone drivers as a group differ from accident-free drivers in being significantly more often aggressive, extroverted, sexually promiscuous, having a police record, and being reared in a conflict-ridden home. These characteristics are so like those alleged to be associated with delinquents that Dr. Willett was led to question the common assumption that persons convicted of traffic violations differ from other kinds of offender in being generally respectable and law-abiding, apart from their driving.

His research was based on an analysis of 653 convictions for six "serious" offences of which driving dangerously or recklessly (285 cases), failing to stop after an accident (117 cases) and driving "under the influence" (104 cases) were the most frequent. In order not to swamp the sample, only one in ten of the actual number of offences of failing to insure were counted, and these amounted to 73 cases.

As with other types of offenders, males outnumbered females by 12 to 1, and the majority were manual workers. Motor cyclists were over-represented among offenders. A considerable proportion, over a fifth, had been previously convicted of an equally serious motoring offence. Most striking of all, 21% had a record of previous criminal convictions for offences unconnected with motoring (77% in the case of the offenders convicted of driving while disqualified). About 11% were categorised as ruthless, shameless, or violent offenders, who had little apparent concern for the safety of others and seemed indifferent to social or legal sanctions.

While this result does something to modify the stereotype of the respectable, middle-aged traffic violator it must not be taken to mean that such persons do not exist. Among drunken drivers, and persons failing to stop, they occur quite frequently. Furthermore, it is not clear to the present reviewer that these particular categories of motoring offenders really do have a significantly raised incidence of criminal records, compared with the population at large.

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## THE FAMILY AND THE SOCIAL SERVICES

By Somerville Hastings and Peggy Jay (*Fabian Society*, 1s. 6d.)

This pamphlet packs a volume of practical ideas into its twelve pages. They will be particularly useful for local authorities, who have the major responsibility—taken together with the National Assistance Board—for helping families in difficulty.

Most poignant of these problems is that of children in care; indeed, between 1961 and 1963, nearly 9,000 more applications were made to local authorities to take children into care. "The steady and alarming rise in (such) requests," says the pamphlet, "is a reflection of failure and the root causes of child deprivation—family disintegration—remain untouched." The real danger-signal was the fact that applications had risen at a rate nearly four times that of the growth-rate of the child population, the great majority of these requests coming from parents who were temporarily ill; 24,837 young children were placed in care in 1962/3 for this reason alone.

The pamphlet questions whether this was really the best form of help to offer and constantly invokes the adage prevention is better than cure. The practical effect of this reasoning has been translated into powers given to local children's authorities under the 1963 Children's Act "to make available such advice, guidance and assistance as may promote the welfare of children", by reducing the need to take them into care or to bring them before a juvenile court. In one area of London alone, 42 families involving 168 children, have been considered for help since October 1963; 8 families with 27 children, have not had to come into care, 20 families with 95 children now have a diminished need for reception, and 36 children previously in care have been reunited with their families as a result of the new powers to help in cash and kind. The pamphlet points out, "Had say 150 of these children been taken into care" the