House of Refuge

Pickett, Robert

Published by Syracuse University Press

Pickett, Robert.
Indeed, they are guilty; but who, among all the sons and daughters of Adam, if subjected to the same ordeal that tries their morals, would come forth unscathed?


VI. "Most Prolific Sources of Juvenile Crime" (1826–56)

As time went on, and their institution grew older and more established, the managers of the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in New York City spent less time railing against the ravages of immigration. After they secured immigrant head-tax money to support their institution, the sustained diatribe diminished in frequency and force. After 1840, even though the number of Irish children almost corresponded to and eventually exceeded the number of Irish immigrating to the United States, the managers did not feel as compelled to mention immigration as a contributing factor to juvenile delinquency. Perhaps, as in the case of poverty, they simply assumed that everyone was aware of the connection. Other "sources of juvenile crime," however, might not be as lucrative as immigration in terms of support. (See Table IV, p. 191.)

When Superintendent Hart assumed control of the New York House of Refuge, the managers found an administrator who subscribed to their own views of the world and what was wrong with it. His views of deviant behavior and appropriate treatment coincided with theirs. In his reports to the managers, Hart was always able to inject the right amount of moral indignation concerning the vices of the children's parents. Whenever he got the opportunity to rail against liquor, he did so. The managers, many of whom believed in temperance reform and some of whom were strict teetotalers, listened avidly to Hart's words. Each case that he cited gave them further evidence to support their firmly held convictions concerning the devastating inroads of John Barleycorn.

Hart never missed an opportunity to cater to the managers' preju-
Hart and the managers felt that they had a rather strong case against Demon Rum. Rum shops and corner grocery stores, where hard liquor flowed freely and cheaply, crowded the alleys and byways of New York City. In 1837, the managers noted a total of 2,850 dram shops in the city. These places, which had been licensed by the mayor and aldermen, held forth at all hours in any kind of a house. Some operated out of cellars. Much to the dismay of the managers, the dram shops even stayed open during the Sabbath. The managers took a very clear stand on the use of "ardent spirits." In 1835, they had indentured a boy to a "cordial distiller" and had felt it necessary to call to the public's attention that they were firm believers in temperance and had indentured the boy to one who dealt with liquor because the boy was "weakly and deficient in eyesight." The distiller happened to be the boy's brother-in-law, but the managers wanted to assure others that they were not being soft on the liquor issue.

Several years before, the state legislature had repealed the clause of
"Most Prolific Sources of Crime"

the Sabbath Temperance act which penalized the sale of liquor on the Sabbath, and the managers felt that the result had been an increase of inebriated youths. The managers scolded the legislature for having done away with the teeth of the bill and rendering it a "dead letter." They felt that the repeal had encouraged "the profanation of the Sabbath," heightened disorder and immorality, and directly contributed to the "increase of intemperance of the young," thereby "multiplying the number of juvenile offenders against the laws." 3

Although the managers were not averse to running their institution on the excess proceeds of liquor sales, the members of the Society, possibly bewitched by the feverish temperance crusade in progress, spent a good deal of time fulminating over the sale of liquor. Most of them would have agreed with Edward C. Delavan, the militant temperance reformer in upstate New York, who castigated parents and "drunkeries" alike for depraving youth. Delavan was fond of inserting in his newspaper little anecdotes about the bad effects of alcohol. He obtained the following quote from the Zion's Herald:

While passing through one of our streets on one of the earliest days of last week, we noticed a little boy about ten years old, DRUNK! He lay in the gutter, making sundry stiffened gestures, silly and sleepy looks, vociferations, in exact imitation of confirmed low drunkards. After being taken up and falling down a few times, he succeeded in reeling into a grocery, which had been licensed by the proper authorities, to sell him as much rum as he wanted! 4

The managers, like Delavan, assumed that alcohol, in the manner of certain other manufactured deviltry, robbed the mind of its ability to think and made the body a living prison.

Tobacco was another substance about which Superintendent Hart could always evoke a heated response. Even though some of the managers used it, Hart could be assured of a hearing if he attacked tobacco as sinful. Later in the career of the Refuge, the case of "Tobacco" Thompson became the standard example for the evil effects of the weed. 5 Only the most callous soul could look at Thompson without suffering a pang of pity. Thompson's mother had died some time before and his father was a drunken carpenter. He had left his home in western New York and had wandered down the Erie Canal as far as
House of Refuge

Albany. From there, he had hitched a steamboat ride to New York City. While wandering about the city, Thompson fell into the hands of the police. They classified him as a youthful vagrant and packed him off to the Refuge.

The Superintendent, as he observed Thompson, saw only a poor, "Shattered" wretch, subject to "Falling Sickness or Fits and St. Vitus' dance." Shaking like an aspen, Thompson spent his free time scouring the Refuge yard in search of "every old Quid" he could find. He begged so hard for tobacco that the Superintendent let him have a "chew" to calm him down. Assistant Superintendent Elijah P. DeVoe described Thompson as more tobacco than boy.

A nervous, swaggering juicy compound of flesh and tobacco. He was the embodiment, not of the "best Virginia," nor "pure Cavendish," but of "old sogers" Tobacco was the very gist of his existence—"twas meat, drink, and clothing—it was music and dancing. Had he been requested, like the man in the fairy tale, to make three wishes, with the assurance that they should be granted, he would have repeated them all in asking for "a little more tobacco." 6

A month after the managers received Thompson, they decided that he was "an improper Subject to retain in the House or to indenture as an apprentice" and sent him, under DeVoe's charge, back to his home county. Parting with Thompson, the Superintendent gave him "a plug of Tobacco, to prevent him from gnawing the buttons off his clothes." 7

Thus fortified, "Tobacco" Thompson went home.

Not all of the notions of criminal causation and treatment originated from the mind of N. C. Hart. Although they were emotionally concerned over liquor and tobacco, the managers themselves had ideas as to why their charges had become ensnared in lives of crime and how the situation could be corrected. Professor John Griscom was the most influential of the managers when it came to arriving at theories of juvenile crime. According to Griscom, bad example, ignorance, depraved parents, and wretchedness preyed upon the young. Given the opportunity, the reformed delinquent could aspire to a "life of honest industry," free from vicious habits. 8 If the delinquents were reformed, society might also be saved from needless expense and danger. He
"Most Prolific Sources of Crime"

proposed three great nostrums: knowledge, religion, and work. Convinced of the viability of this formula for ridding society of its deviants, the managers of the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents would never knowingly forsake it.

Griscom and his associates did not pay much attention to the predominant criminological theorists of the period. The European researches of Franz Joseph Gall, for example, had made substantial inroads into American scientific thought during the period in which the House of Refuge movement began. Gall, and his successor Spurzheim, had extended the proposition that the external shape of the human skull provided a clue as to the nature of the brain contained within. Further, if one knew the configuration of the skull, he could then analyze the type of mind which it contained. All of this was predicated on the notion that the mind could be easily differentiated into separate faculties or compartments which possessed specific functions. If a phrenologist knew the shape of a given skull, he felt that the behavior of the person could be predicted with considerable certainty. Spurzheim, positive that he had found the key to the inner workings of man, had gone out to convince the world. In the midst of an effort to convert listeners in the United States to his views, Spurzheim died. A small number of Americans, however, had seized onto the notion and were willing to keep it circulating. Spurzheim's disciples, some of whom had heard him in Paris, had already embarked on a vigorous campaign to propagate the new science. Although he met considerable opposition from both clergy and scientists, Charles Caldwell, an American convert, wrote and lectured at Transylvania University and eventually founded a new medical school in Louisville, Kentucky. Phrenology, of course, received a central place in the school's curricula.

Theoretical ignorance proved to be a saving grace of practical reformers such as the businessmen, clergymen, and politicians who founded the New York House of Refuge. With the possible exception of John Griscom, few of the founders of the Refuge paid any attention to phrenology. Even Griscom, however, would not impose the new science onto the Refuge plan. Griscom's commitment to the practical aspects of pedagogy and his deep religious concern did not allow him to become convinced of the underlying determinism of phrenological
thought. Although Griscom traveled in circles where phrenology had achieved considerable attention, he remained unconvinced of its practical merit.

To some extent, Griscom's views on the matter of delinquency prevention represented a partial adherence to English philosopher John Locke's theories on education. Locke had earlier propounded a notion that children were "as white paper, or wax, to be moulded and fashioned as one pleases." This view, spread abroad by many who had not even read his qualifications of it, became known as the *tabula rasa* theory. It gradually assumed a position of supremacy as other English intellectuals utilized it to support their own belief in the primacy of environment over innate characteristics. If one could find the perfect adult who possessed knowledge of the appropriate methods of instruction, environmentalist educators argued, the problems of troublesome youths could be eliminated. Although the notion of *tabula rasa* was only a portion of Locke's total theories concerning education, it received a disproportionate amount of attention. Locke's qualifications of the theory were often lost in the heat of the argument between those who favored nurture and those who championed nature. By the time of the American Revolution, the *tabula rasa* concept of child development, however distorted, had assumed the status of gospel among American as well as English educators.

The notion of nurture as more powerful than nature had a powerful appeal to pragmatists such as John Griscom. Griscom felt that he could do little about a child's innate characteristics, but he knew that he could alter the environment in which the child grew to maturity. By taking the child away from what Griscom assumed to be the corrupting influences of urban civilization and unsociable parents and placing him in the hands of moral and learned men, Griscom felt that a distinct improvement in the child's personality could be achieved. If, on the other hand, the child did not receive the nurture of virtuous, public-minded citizens, his mind and heart would be stamped in sin. Griscom took little stock in the notion of innate depravity; he reasoned that adults had become deviants through improper training. At some magical age, the clay hardened. Griscom and the other pioneers of the House of Refuge movement felt that no change could occur after this had happened. In the first thirty years of their operation, Griscom and his associates in
the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents never came close to publicly acknowledging that there could be any such thing as a "bad seed." Neither did Griscom and his friends feel that there was any basic drive within all human beings which contributed to aggressiveness and moral laxity. They had either forgotten or ignored Thomas Hobbes's earlier notion that mankind was by nature, "nasty, brutish and short." The work of Freud, which developed over a half-century later, was to bring into being a new force which the Refuge managers would never know and which would eventually shake the foundations of the very edifice they were in the process of building.

The insistence of the American reformers on the moral and intellectual pliability of youth placed them in the mainstream of reform ideology. When De Beaumont and De Tocqueville visited the Refuge in the early 1830's, they summed up the managers' sentiments as well as the most widely held notion concerning juvenile correction.

If it be possible to obtain moral reformation for any human being, it seems that we ought to expect it for these youths, whose misfortune was caused less by crime, than by inexperience, and in whom all the generous passions of youth may be excited. With a criminal, whose corruption is inveterate, and deeply rooted, the feeling of honesty is not awakened, because the sentiment is extinct; with a youth, this feeling exists, though it has not yet been called into action. It seems to us, therefore, that a system which corrects evil dispositions, and inculcates correct principles, which gives a protector and a profession to him who has none, habits of order and labor to the vagrant and beggar whom idleness had corrupted; elementary instruction and religious principles to the child whose education has been neglected; it seems to us, we say, that a similar system must be fertile of beneficial results.

The managers felt that certain general elements were the most prolific breeders of youthful crime. In an age of growing faith in common school education as a panacea to all social evils, the managers clung to the belief that ignorance provided the most welcome resting place for depravity. Hart argued that along with "parental depravity and neglect," ignorance could be considered central to the rash of youth crime prevalent in New York City. For some time, John Griscom and those
House of Refuge

affiliated with the Society of Friends had concerned themselves with the high degree of illiteracy of the children of the poor. Originally, some of them had participated in setting up the Free School Society and when, as members of the Society for the Prevention of Pauperism, they had noted that the number of Free Schools was totally inadequate to meet the needs of the multitude of urchins roaming the streets, they had urged the expansion of free education.

The estimates of Griscom and his associates were essentially correct, but resulted in very little improvement. Although many schools were erected by the Free School Society and the Refuge itself trained many children, the city of New York still fell short of its goal of a well-informed electorate. In 1838, when they were visiting the Refuge, the grand jury members estimated that a full 4,000 children in New York City did not attend any school. This figure, while considerably less than earlier totals, represented a hard core of almost inaccessible youths. The grand jury members felt that a goodly share of the children operated as petty thieves and peddlers along the waterfront. Even though they considered that “this class of hawkers” furnished the eventual population of the penitentiary and the houses of prostitution, the most that the jury could recommend was that aldermen in the various wards should grant only “temporary vendors’ licenses” to minors. Beyond this regulatory measure, the grand jury seemed to have no idea as to what might be done concerning the children’s education.

The total number of unschooled youngsters actually far exceeded the number cited by the grand jury, and the problem of unschooled children grew more threatening as time went on. According to the calculations of the Board of Aldermen, the number of children who did not attend school in 1839 came closer to 12,000. This figure amounted to roughly 40 per cent of the school-age population of New York City. In the Eleventh Ward, where most of the immigrants resided, the numbers of unschooled rapidly outpaced those of other wards. By 1852, 7,000 out of a total of 12,000 children between the ages of five and fifteen did not attend school. In the period from 1850 to 1856, the proportion of the city’s children attending schools actually dropped 10 per cent.

According to Refuge Head Teacher P. A. Spencer, the Refuge inmates represented the worst of the unschooled. They were either
truants from other schools or newly arrived immigrants. In either case, they were generally illiterate. Of a total of 239 boys received into Spencer's school in 1840, only one "could read well"; 205 were generally "unacquainted with Arithmetic." A number could read sufficiently well to peruse the "Penny Papers," and Spencer lamented that they did so in order to read the lurid accounts available in the "Police Reports." 13

In the face of the city's inability to cope with the rising number of unlettered children, the effort of Refuge leaders to educate their inmates began to stand out. Some observers felt that the best way to insure academic as well as manual training was to commit a delinquent act and be sent to the Refuge.

The managers of the Refuge stressed education as the chief means of entry into the mainstream of American life. In a democratic society, "where all by exertion may rise in eminence," education seemed absolutely essential to success. Without it, the managers sensed that the individual would feel degraded. The unschooled youngster, in their eyes, would be like one who "looks around him and finds himself alone in his ignorance, and . . . feels that he is engaged in an unequal contest with his peers—that difficulties lie in his path that others do not experience." 14 According to the managers, these factors operated to prevent him from progressing any further. Without adequate education, the youth would be relegated to the periphery of society. From this vantage point, he could never hope to compete with those who were more highly favored in early life.

Despite their advocacy of education for their wards, the managers wanted it made abundantly clear that they were in no way advocating a universal common school education for every youngster. Writing in 1836, they decried the idea that all of the youngsters in a community might be educated alike and that a common secular school education might be funded by public taxation. This, they considered as a "wild and visionary" notion. 15 The managers maintained that a totally public education for all children would be deficient because of the absence of moral training. "Mere improvement of the intellect, without correspondent inculcation of moral principles" they considered as a dangerous experiment. The ideal place for education, according to the managers, took place within the family circle. There, under the tutelage of loving parents, the moral as well as the mental abilities
House of Refuge

could be nurtured. For that “class of children abandoned by their natural protectors, or led by their example into an evil course of life,” the situation was defined differently. The state was to be regarded “emphatically, and in self-defense,” as the parent of these youngsters. If society took no responsibility for such children, society could expect fearful retribution in due time.

The managers of the Refuge left little doubt as to their intentions concerning a proper moral and intellectual training for their charges. The managers, as well as most of the superintendents of the Refuge, did not hesitate to pinpoint a lack of religion as a major factor in the emergence of juvenile crime. Beneath their fears of crime and vice, the managers seemed to harbor a deeper dread concerning the possibility of being overrun by heathens and “Romish” offspring. Some of the more pious appeared to entertain the hope that if they could just manage to force the rising generation to memorize enough verses of scripture, not only could the children be saved, but Protestant democracy as well.

If the managers hoped to maintain the bygone balance of Protestants and other religious groups, they were waging a losing battle. The tides of population had risen against them in each generation. By the middle of the 1850’s, less than 2,000 Quakers could be discerned attending church in New York County. The rest of the total churchgoing population of New York County only amounted to a little over 220,000; of this number, over 100,000 were Catholics. This left over 400,000 people unaccounted for; churchgoers had become outnumbered by two to one and the figure of heathen and “Romish” was rapidly rising.

The managers found other evidences than the lack of churchgoing to indicate the growing moral laxity in their midst. Some of these factors manifested themselves in institutional forms such as the dram shops and houses of prostitution; others presented themselves in more abstract behavior patterns such as idleness. “Our nature abhors inaction,” the managers wrote. “Both the body and the mind . . . desire action and will have it, right or wrong.” The managers contended that if no useful employment presented itself, moral lassitude captivated the soul. The managers urged that sturdy habits such as diligence, promptness, and punctuality become the goals of Refuge discipline.
"Most Prolific Sources of Crime"

Although their mention might not yield financial support, certain other factors occasionally occurred to the managers as possible contributors to juvenile delinquency. Parental depravity and neglect were frequently mentioned as factors in youth crime. In 1835, a manager wrote that the “immoral and profligate” constituted the largest portion of Refuge parents. They abandoned their youngsters to “run at large, strolling along the wharves, and thronging the ship-yards and other places of like resort.”

In an attempt to estimate the “character” of the children’s parents, Refuge officials surveyed their charges’ records in 1829. They found that thirty-three of the parents had been in a penal institution of some kind and that nine of the mothers had frequented “Houses of Ill Fame.” As to stealing, a number of parents were willing to receive stolen goods from their youngsters, and the Refuge report writers described 401 of the parents as “intemperate.” By citing the number of times in which the families had gotten into trouble and through listing the results of their own interrogation relative to the use of liquor, the managers hoped to establish the fact of parental depravity.

In most of their reports, both the superintendents and the managers of the New York House of Refuge contented themselves with pejorative statements about the parents of their inmates. The managers’ comments ranged from remarks about lack of “care and vigilance” to outright condemnations of the parents as depraved and dissolute. Refuge parents, according to the managers, preferred their own comfort or degradation to the interests of their children. The parents either abandoned their children or failed to restrain them. In reference to the training the children had received, the managers stated unequivocally that the parents had done a poor job. As in the case of the immigrant, however, neither the superintendents nor the managers attempted an examination of the factors which resided behind the inadequacies of the Refuge parents.

Neglect loomed large in the Refuge leaders’ analysis of juvenile crime. Many offspring of disrupted immigrant families, such as a girl named Mary Jane, illustrated the pattern of parental inadequacy and neglect. Mary Jane received no guidance from her parents, so the streets became her sanctuary and school. Writing in his book of case histories, Superintendent Hart did not hold out much hope for the girl.
House of Refuge

Her father is a Cripple and works at the tailor's trade and fiddles for a living, but business growing dull in the City and having a son in Boston who fiddles, he went on a few weeks since to help him, thinking he might do better than in New York leaving the mother in the Alms House, and this girl fiddling about the streets she has followed this business ever since . . . she would play in the park, in front of Public Houses in Houses of Ill Fame etc., . . . and would take a glass sometimes. For the last three weeks has slept in sand boxes and carts. Says she never stole anything, has been seduced and staid a few times with boys of 16 & 17 years of age, has never had the disease.20

Occasionally, a youngster would get lost in the city and his parents would lose all contact with him. One day, a wandering Rachel appeared at the Refuge looking for her lost son, who had been gone for over a year. She said that she had advertised for the boy and had spent nearly all of her “living” in search of him. Accidentally, she had heard that her son was in the Refuge. Witnessing the meeting of mother and child had warmed the Superintendent's heart.21 He did not, however, regard the occasion as unusual.

Certain families, by their continual practice of neglect or criminality, almost singlehandedly helped keep the Refuge dormitories filled. When Superintendent Terry took in a youngster named Laura, he matter-of-factly observed that she was the fourth child received into the Refuge from the same mother. The superintendent quickly recognized another child, from a family of nine, and categorized him immediately.

They are all bad—we now have two of them here—one a little girl of 12 years of age, who made a practice of exposing her nakedness to boys at 3 cts. per time—An older brother has been in the State Prison—and two of the girls are said to be on the Town—This little fellow has been in the practice of going up & down the river for a year past, selling papers—We met him a year ago, swearing and smoking cigars and told him he would get into the House of Refuge.22

On rare occasions, the Refuge leaders hinted at the possibility of several large-scale social and economic changes afoot in the cities of America. In the year 1835, the year of the tenth anniversary of the
opening of the Refuge and a year in which the medical report listed
ten deaths from Asiatic cholera, the author of the report morosely ob­served that the city had become a spawning ground for vice because of the increasing density of its population. Youths grew up jammed to­gether in fetid and vice-ridden slums where opportunities for crime far exceeded possibilities for detection and punishment. Under these cir­cumstances, it was difficult for the managers to illustrate the contrast between “the inevitable ruin and disgrace which awaits the wicked, and the great and lasting blessings enjoyed by those who lived the life of virtue.”

The managers forced themselves, somewhat infrequently, to recog­nize the pressures which originated from the social and economic situa­tion in which many of the less economically secure families found themselves. The managers railed against “petty” pawnbrokers and the manner in which they loaned money to the poor. Stephen Allen and his colleagues suggested the creation of savings and loan associations as an alternative. Under the auspices of such associations, the meager eco­nomic transactions of the poor could be conducted with greater equity.

Although the managers seldom mentioned the matter in their re­ports, occasionally they returned to relating crime and poverty. Even though they no longer retained a consuming concern over it, they still felt that the two factors were inextricably linked. Within this assump­tion, one which they had made as far back as their first meetings, the kernel of another notion dwelt. Although they did not refer to them as such, the managers seemed to believe that criminals really arose from the lower classes, the “dangerous” or “vicious” classes, as they were sometimes called. To them, it probably would have seemed an ac­centuation of the obvious to have made a great deal out of this fact.

The managers themselves could hardly be considered to have come from the lower echelons of society. They came from the ranks of com­merce and the professions. Only a few of them, such as Stephen Allen, their wealthy president, had any acquaintance with poverty and want. Most came from well-established Anglo-Saxon families. A self­perpetuating group, the managers chose their replacements from others with like backgrounds. “Shanty” Irishmen, newly arrived and with empty pockets, need not apply. Basking in the grace of their munificent Maker, the managers served as stewards of the earthly
vineyard. One of their chief works was to minister to the less fortunate than themselves. The Refuge constituted such a ministry.

How different were the delinquents? If a young criminal's father did not come from the ranks of business and the professions, what did the father do for a living? One might have expected, from the managers' reports, that he had originally dug the ditches of the Erie Canal, but now did nothing but drink and sponge off his betters.

Although they tended to labor with their hands in what might have been classified as service occupations, instead of with their minds, the fathers and mothers of Refuge inmates came from a variety of respectable trades and skills. Of the three hundred or so occupations practiced in the United States during the period from 1830 to 1855, the parents of Refuge inmates labored in at least a hundred.

True, about eight of every hundred fathers possessed no description other than common laborer, and four of every hundred mothers scrubbed and washed clothes for a livelihood. Nevertheless, many of the fathers and mothers came from trades which required at least a minimal amount of skill. The men laid bricks, built houses, made shoes, drove carts, built, rigged, and sailed ships, tailored suits, kept saloons, cooked, gardened, sawed wood, cut stone, sold groceries, drove coaches, cut meat, blacksmithed, and barbered. Some were even policemen and city officials. The farmer, in spite of all the Jeffersonian pronouncements of the virtues of the simple life, contributed an occasional offspring. Many of the women sewed dresses, worked as domestics, and kept boarding houses. Although the managers probably viewed them as unusual, a small number of inmates trickled into the Refuge from the families of business and the professions. Even a policeman and a judge contributed their sons to the Refuge roster. Also, a leading member and official of the Home Missionary Society had brought in an ungovernable son. Such cases, however, were clearly aberrations; the common laborer remained the chief type of occupational affiliation for Refuge parents.

* In the Census figures of 1855, about three of every one hundred New York County residents were listed as common laborers. One problem in dealing with a comparison, however, is the lack of certainty as to the number of children in each family, e.g., a laborer's family vs. a doctor's. Presumably, the lower classes had more children, but only a study of individual census schedules would have revealed this.
"Most Prolific Sources of Crime"

The managers raised few questions about the economic system per se. Whatever criticisms they made were likely to be leveled more at the inadequacies of people functioning within the system. If the traditional tenets of capitalism, as it was practiced during the period, were carried out correctly, the managers did not see how anyone could fail. Time-honored institutions like the apprenticeship system, for example, did not come under scrutiny; the various parties to the apprenticeship bargain were criticized for not carrying out their share in agreements. Stephen Allen noted that many youngsters under indenture received no "guardianship"; he warned that they were likely to become delinquents, but he did not question the system which allowed the situation to exist. Allen regarded theaters and volunteer fire departments as greater sources of juvenile misbehavior than the canal and newspaper enterprises which employed boys without educating and caring for them.

Although they very seldom mentioned it, the managers were aware that the negligence of adults other than the natural parents often brought youths into delinquent career patterns. Largely because of a bragging hired hand, one strapping country lad named Elon, from the western part of the state, had entered the gates of the Refuge under these circumstances. He typified the youth who had been led astray by the twin sirens of easy money and lack of guidance. Prior to getting into trouble, Elon had been hired to help thresh wheat on an upstate farm. One day, the farmer hired another man to come in and help with the threshing.

This man had in his pocket $59 in a pocket book and talked a good deal about it—The temptation was too great for the boy. He rose early one morning, took the money & started for the north, got about 17 miles by 3 o.c. that day when he was overtaken by the owner of the cash & the Shereffe, was put in Genesse [sic] jail where he laid 6 weeks, & for which he was sent here, says that he never stole anything before. 25

Occasionally, the Society even found itself confronted with the backwash of what they unsympathetically believed to be the havoc engineered by fellow reformers. The abolitionists had indirectly propelled one young Negro named James, a "run-a-way-Slave—on the Gerrit Smith plan," into the managers' hands. Reflecting on his furtive
House of Refuge

odyssey, James thought he had been "better off with his Master." Originally, he had escaped from Virginia to Pittsburgh. From there, "a line of forwarders" had sent him to Cleveland, where he "worked his passage to Buffalo [sic] etc., on to Rochester." In Rochester, James fell upon hard times. He had set fire to a barn and had been sent to Auburn State Prison. Through the good graces of Governor Seward, James finally reached the Refuge. The rigors of the journey had taken their toll, however. In the middle of a May night in 1844, James died of "pulmonary consumption."

As if in response to an increasing awareness current in New York City in the thinking of reformers such as Robert M. Hartley, who at the time was busily engaged in constructing the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, the operators of the Refuge recognized the need for more systematic charity dispensation. They remarked on the "unreflecting kindness" of "trifling charity" and urged, along with a growing number of missionary workers in slum areas, that the time had come for charity coordination.

The managers and Refuge officials interspersed criticisms about the misguided approach to charity with comments about "licentiousness" and squalor. One report writer noted that want of cleanliness had a greater relationship to moral purity than many supposed. He felt that a direct correlation existed between the contamination of the body and of the soul—between tattered and foul clothing and looseness of morals.

According to the managers, the condition of one's apparel had a great impact on self-awareness and social conduct. The managers felt that when the working girl and boy donned Sunday clothes the mirror looked back in approval. It was as if the mirror told them that they were accepted. Through good clean clothes, the working class youngster heightened his own sense of self-esteem. The author of the Refuge report assured his readers that vermin-ridden rags conferred no such feelings.

We cannot hope to see the youth unwashed and uncombed for months—half-clothed with rags, actuated by high purposes and noble resolves, scorning to conceive a mean action, or hesitating to perpetrate it. Such a condition has power, of itself, to stifle and crush, in the bud, the very germ of a generous ambition.
The managers expressed more concern about the moral effect of rags than the economic impact of unemployment. Six years after the onset of the severe economic depression of the late 1830's the managers finally mentioned "absence of employment" as a factor in the creation of juvenile crime. Since the managers strongly believed in the efficacy of work as an antidote to vice, the omission stood out as inconsistent with their treatment philosophy. Perhaps, the managers assumed that anyone would have understood the relationship, or, even more likely, they felt that nothing could be done about it. Unlike a tavern or a circus, the business which had closed its doors could produce little revenue for the Refuge, so why mention it?

Economic prosperity provoked a considerably different response from the Refuge personnel. In their eyes, prosperity led the way to temptation and peril. In 1850, T. C. M'Kenne, assistant superintendent of the Refuge, wrote that the "growth of population, wealth and commerce" brought with it "a more precocious disposition to perceive and yield to the temptation of vice, an earlier and more ready adaptation to crime." The metropolis, with all its examples of vice, its displays of "male and female lewdness," to which "indiscriminate publicity" was often rendered, tended to corrode the moral standards of youth. The Refuge managers and officials had little doubt that the low standard of public morals was associated with juvenile delinquency.

As guardians of the morality of their charges, the managers and Refuge officials lamented the low state of morals which permeated their society and tended to relate the public standard to even the most unregenerate of the Refuge inmates. One girl, whom the Superintendent described as "a real low kind of baud," given to sleeping anywhere with anyone, was still given the benefit of a social explanation for her behavior. Even though he irately described her "as smoothe as a glass bottle while her heart is as black as dirt," the Superintendent could not help but acknowledge that her behavior was a result of "running the Streets without a quid or cultivator." There were too many people, complained the managers, who were willing to regard all of the desperate little vagrants and young thieves as responsible for their transgressions. Society must bear its share of the burden of blame. In commenting on the degree to which the youngsters should be blamed for their own misconduct, the managers remarked that the youngsters
were, in fact, guilty; "but who, among all the sons and daughters of Adam, if subjected to the same ordeal that tries their morals, would come forth unscathed?" 32 The Refuge leaders felt that the criminal act alone should not determine the assessment of blame. There were a multitude of circumstances which should be considered when arriving at a truly just treatment.

Labeling recognizable and taxable elements that contributed to juvenile delinquency would prove to be a shrewd maneuver. Over the years, the Society eventually managed to tap education funds, excise taxes, circus and theater taxes, immigration fees, and poor relief funds. All, at one time or another, would help to defray the cost of caring for delinquent children. According to the managers, the devil must pay a fee for corrupting society, and they were willing to collect it.

At certain points, the managers felt it necessary to defend their needs as relevant to several of their sources of support. They maintained that the utilization of money from the Marine Hospital Fund was appropriate because the House of Refuge only received support from the levy on passengers. Most of the passengers, argued the managers, were "foreigners" and a goodly portion of the Refuge inmates would eventually come from this population. Each year, the managers underscored the relationship by carefully tabulating and printing the national origins of the Refuge inmates. In the case of immigration as well as intemperance and idleness, the managers held the position that if evil obstacles to the perfectability of man could not be eliminated, the managers could at least maintain the pragmatic policy that the causes of crime must pay for its cost.

With the exception of receiving a portion of the immigrant head-tax money customarily routed to the Marine Hospital, the managers obtained few other moneys to support their enterprise. To enable them to sustain their institution, they had adopted the remunerative policy of tapping the sources of delinquency. In so doing, the managers could continue to entertain a theory of moral development focused upon external elements such as liquor and plays and receive substantial revenues from them as well. The degree of support which the Society received from such sources was revealed in the Annual Report of 1838 when the Treasurer of the Society noted the following sources of revenue: 33
"Most Prolific Sources of Crime"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labor of children in different workshops</td>
<td>$ 768.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash from Marine Hospital Fund, “a part of the surplus funds arising from tax upon foreign passengers, one quarterly payment”</td>
<td>2,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash from Comptroller of State, “3 quarterly payments”</td>
<td>6,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash from Theater and Circus Licenses for 1838</td>
<td>1,850.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash from Corporation of City of New York, from Excise Fund</td>
<td>4,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale of hogs, etc.</td>
<td>142.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash from Finance Committee</td>
<td>202.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasury balance</td>
<td>437.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$15,401.23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When it came to the matter of treatment, the managers of the Refuge, like their counterparts in utopian and social reform elsewhere, extended the promise of a better life for all. They viewed the Refuge primarily as a saver of young souls otherwise doomed to eternal ruin and destitution. Under the paternal guidance of the staff, youngsters might yet be washed of past sins and reborn to a life of virtue.

John Griscom and his associates stressed the need for the inculcation of certain qualities to produce the ideal character. Above all else, "habits of industry" must be drummed into the unwilling delinquent. Instill a healthy respect for labor in the individuals, the managers maintained, teach him his social and moral obligations as the citizen of a free republic, improve his mind, and he could become a useful citizen. At the same time, the managers believed that a healthy dread of evil must be implanted in the soul of the youth. This would prevent any future return to the paths of evil. After all, next to the preservation of the individual lay the protection of society. Therefore, the differential rewards of good and evil must be hammered into the delinquent’s consciousness. Only by doing this could “the peace of the city” be maintained and the prison hordes diminished. They felt that the taxpayer would appreciate such a service.

What manner of magic could the managers prescribe to cure the youthful deviant? Once again, true to their faith in universal education, they espoused instruction as a major antidote to social illness. Enrich the mind, create skill in the hands, furbish the moral fiber—these three elements appeared as the combination to eliminate delinquency. Fol-
lowing Griscom's formula from start to finish, the managers urged the principle of nurture. After education, training, and religion came a steady routine of discipline, tempered with kindness and mercy.

Occasionally, the managers spelled out the particular facets of their program. "Indulgences and distinctions" should go to the worthy, punishments to the unworthy. They supported a combination of paternal government, capable of exercising restraint while in the Refuge, and a soundly administered indenture program once the youngsters left the institution. Only once in the first thirty years would the managers think to mention recreation as a possibility. Constant surveillance and rigorous training served as their sustaining force. Work was their chief form of exercise.

The managers constantly devoted themselves to singing the praises of work. Managers and superintendents alike were convinced of the positive effects of labor on youngsters. The real advantage of the work program was that it helped to develop "habits of Industry" within the youngsters. (See Table V, p. 192.) This, they thought, was "one of the secrets of Reformation." Work should serve as the real antidote to idleness, and idleness, as Superintendent Hart would remark, "has most generally been the cause of their delinquencies, the root of which we most generally find the love of Rum in their parents or care-takers." 34

In keeping with their own pious ways and their prescription for reformatory nurture, the managers felt that religion should be a daily part of Refuge discipline. Rigid discipline, fourth in the hierarchy of prescribed treatment, was to be chiefly the prerogative of the reigning superintendent. With a thorough period of discipline undergone at the Refuge, the managers felt assured that the youngsters could not fail to lead well-ordered and eventually prosperous lives. They felt that they owed much of their own success to a life of careful regimentation.

Beyond the standard features of education, work, and religion, plus firm discipline, the managers anticipated that an indenture system would complete the process of reformation. In a way, the process of indenture was supposed to resemble a composite of their total program. Indentured to a virtuous tradesman or farmer, the youth's education would continue, he would learn further skills, be encouraged by the example of morality, and live under quasi-parental surveillance.

The managers hoped to bring a sense of fairness into handling the
"Most Prolific Sources of Crime"

juvenile crime problem. They sincerely desired to reverse the moral and social trends which they deplored so mightily. By working with youngsters who, if left to their own devices and their parents' errors, would end up criminals and human derelicts, the managers hoped to set the future straight. “If a youngster can be rendered virtuous,” commented John Griscom in one of the Society's early reports, “there will be comparatively but few crimes, for how seldom does it happen that a person in advanced life is criminal, who was not vicious when he was young?” Through their program of religious and moral instruction, elementary education, useful employment, careful discipline, and constant surveillance, the managers hoped to redeem the rising generation and save society.