

ROBERTO E. MORÁN
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO

ANTHONY PARKER, *The Courage of His Convictions: A Criminal Mind*, London: Hutchinson, 1962, pp. 212.

For years students of human behavior have endeavored to discover the factors which lead men to become criminals. This search has led to various and perhaps conflicting theories, and to a wealth of publications, either by criminologists or by criminals themselves. One could rightfully expect to find in books written by the latter—the criminals—a deeper insight into, and a more authentic picture of, the workings of the criminal mind, than those in which material is too often based on second-hand information, conjecture or the imagination of the social scientists. This, unfortunately, is not the case. For, criminals in explaining their anti-social behavior are often so psychopathic, on the defensive, or megalomaniacal, that they perhaps unwittingly distort, exaggerate, or omit material, obscuring rather than enlightening: we are usually left with little further understanding of the criminal mentality. This is particularly true of the intelligent criminal who has the capacity to communicate his feelings and analyze his actions, but who may be more interested in attracting public

support than in aiding the cause of science. Unintelligent criminals are usually inarticulate, and books supposedly written by them are often «ghosted». The book «The Courage of His Convictions: A Criminal Mind» is a welcome exception.

Here we have a book, essentially based on tape recordings of many long hours of intimate conversation between a criminal—who remains completely anonymous—and the author. The latter is not a professional social scientist, neither is he a judge, warden or directly attached to any prison. He is, in fact, a business man who has devoted a large part of his time to the rehabilitation of ex-convicts. In spite of his lack of formal training, judging from his book, the author has been able to accomplish what magistrates, prison officials and social scientists have been largely unable to do—listen, and for hours on end, to an unusual criminal relate in clear unemotional manner all the factors which he feels have contributed to his becoming a criminal. Thus, the reader can follow closely the development of a criminal personality and can delve into the complex factors that result in criminal behavior.

The subject of this book is not outstanding in his field of crime, far from sensational, daring or even clever, and may be considered a run-of-the-mill offender: a common thief, housebreaker, robber and assaulter. By the age of 33 he had had nine convictions, total sentences of 18 years of which he had actually done 12 1/2 years time in various prisons. Yet, he shows no signs of being capable of rehabilitation, and in his own words, expects to die in prison. Though his criminal record is prosaic, he is certainly not. We have here a shy retiring individual, who though not finishing school, has read and can appreciate the literary works of such writers as Sassoon, Wilde, Dylan Thomas, Robert Graves, Scott Fitzgerald and Lawrence Durrell, to name but a few, although he regretfully admits not being able to understand James Joyce's «Ulysses». (How many intellectuals do?) Indeed, «...about the only places (he) never stole from were the second hand book shops». This is especially interesting in view of the fact that the first person from whom he stole (at the age of four) was his mother.

Many environmentalists firmly believe that the primary causative factor of criminal behavior can be traced to inter-family relationships, broken homes, criminal parents, a harsh

father or indifferent mother. None of these seem to have influenced this criminal, «...my father was the only straight man I knew. He was good and kind and honest... And I wasn't a conventionally deprived child either. I had a mother and father who loved each other and got on well, and loved and were loved by their children». Such statements may give weight to the argument of the hereditarians or those who believe in the born criminal. For in the subject's own words, «My grandfather was a pickpocket, my six uncles were all villains and tearaways, my brothers... were thieves».

His experiences seem to support the belief of many present —day social scientists as to the negative value of corporal punishment as a deterrent— at least in his case. «Punishments made no difference, whatever sort they were, beatings or anything else. I should think the product I am today ought to prove thrashings are no good and only produce responses of vengeance and violence». Neither does the imposing of stiff prison sentences seem to have a preventive effect. In fact, according to this criminal, in prison much time is spent planning future crimes in such a way as not to get caught. Prisoners, therefore, are not repentant for past crimes, but rather for having been caught. Crime is viewed as an occupation which involves hard work, and prison as an occupational risk which the professional criminal is prepared to face. Indeed he feels it is preferable to «...vegetating the rest of my life away in a steady job». He feels that, «...the only thing that gets anywhere at all is kindness». Yet throughout his criminal life he showed a certain amount of distain for and even abused those who did treat him kindly: and, kindness certainly did not alter his criminal behavior. However, it seems to offer more hope than punishment at least in certain types of criminal. «As a criminal myself, it's a matter of indifference to me whether I'm treated kindly or cruelly, and neither will change me. For others... with kindness there is always the faint hope they might respond».

Poverty is generally accepted as either a causative factor, or at least a concomitant factor of crime. Such a statement, however true scientifically, does not offer us any clue as to how people who live in an impoverished environment feel or react to this condition. Here is the unique contribution of this

book. For this criminal poignantly describes his feelings, those of thousands of his kind, and those of potential criminals. «As a child, to me poverty was a crime: the nastiest crime in the world. Imagine the foulest, most repugnant deed you can think of, and then change the image to poverty. That was what it meant to me: that was how I felt about it —as something soul— destroying and foul, something dirtying and full of shame, something that cut into me and seared through me and filled me full of hate». From this description, however, the social scientist should not deduce that poverty, *per se*, causes crime. The subject is deeply aware of this fact, «...it wouldn't be true to say that an environment of poverty makes everyone a criminal, because it doesn't. There were plenty of people —or there were some people— who came from just the same surroundings that I did, who grew up straight. But poverty, I suppose, does different things to different people». This last statement, it seems, contains the part explanation of the causes of crime; that the same stimuli will invariably cause different reactions in different people, the ultimate reaction or behavior, it seems, will depend in great part on the innate quality of man's personality —his temperament—. As man's personality is singular and unique, we shall expect to find as many causes for crimes as there are persons who commit them.