

importance. We hope to epitomize some of them. We heartily congratulate our South American colleagues upon their industry and energy. We gather that the conference will be held periodically, and trust that a British delegate will be present when it is next convened.

M. HAMBLIN SMITH.

Children at the Cross-roads. By AGNES E. BENEDICT. New York: The Commonwealth Fund Division of Publication, 1930. Demy 8vo. Pp. 238. Illustr. 7. Price \$1.50 post-paid.

This work consists of the life-histories of nine children with school or home difficulties, followed by illuminating comments on possible ætiological factors. The work is based on a study of the carefully kept records of visiting teachers in the rural communities of Monmouth county, New Jersey, Huron county, Ohio, and Boone county, Missouri, these being three out of thirty communities selected by the National Committee on Visiting Teachers, sponsored by the Commonwealth Fund, for a three-year demonstration of visiting teacher work.

It presents a point of view and an interpretation of method that should be particularly useful at the present time to all interested in children and their problems, having regard to the efforts now being made to educate the nation on a subject of the greatest importance not only to the individual child but to the adult community of the future.

J. R. LORD.

Report from the Select Committee on Capital Punishment. H.M. Stationery Office, 1930. Pp. 98. Price 1s. 6d. net.

In the autumn of 1929 the House of Commons appointed a Select Committee to examine the question of capital punishment and the possible substitutes for that penalty. The reference was confined to capital punishment in cases tried by civil courts in time of peace. For practical purposes, the Committee had to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the capital penalty for the crime of wilful murder.

The Committee held thirty-one meetings, and examined a large number of witnesses, who may be roughly divided into three classes: (1) Officials from the Home Office, from other public departments, and from the prisons. With a few exceptions these were in favour of retention of the capital penalty, although some suggested certain modifications in practice. (2) Some well-known advocates of the abolition of capital punishment. (3) Witnesses who gave evidence as to the experience of foreign countries, particularly those which have abolished, or suspended, the infliction of capital punishment.

We are informed that the complete evidence will shortly be published. Meanwhile, a report has been presented which, however, does not emanate from the Committee as a whole. This consisted of fifteen members, representing diverse views.

on the subject with which they had to deal and, no doubt, selected for that reason. But six members, who would appear to have been opposed to abolition, found themselves quite unable to agree with the conclusions of their colleagues, and withdrew from the proceedings prior to the presentation of the report. They have given no official expression of their views, and we are unaware whether the procedure of a Parliamentary Committee would have allowed them to do so. But the omission is unfortunate, as we do not know what were the special reasons which weighed with the dissentient members.

The report begins with a short survey of the history of capital punishment in this country, tracing it from the period when executions were very common, and followed upon what are now regarded as minor offences, and describing the various attempts which have been made to alter the present practice.

The various arguments for and against the capital penalty are then taken up, and this involved some consideration of the theories of punishment. From the point of view of "natural justice" and that of appropriate retribution it is urged that murder deserves the punishment of death, that it is an offence which stands in a class by itself, and so merits a special form of penalty. On the other side, it is maintained that the inviolability of human life is as binding upon the State as upon the individual; that while murder may be the worst crime from the individual point of view, there are other crimes which have more anti-social results; and that there are grave objections to legal retribution taking a form which is strongly disapproved of by a large section of the community.

The main issue, however, is the efficacy of capital punishment as deterring from murder. It is advanced, on the one side, that the fear of death is the greatest of all deterrents; and that, although the threat of capital punishment is not a universal preventative of murder, it is, at least, effective in many cases. The other side holds that the deterrent effect of capital punishment has been greatly exaggerated; that many murders are committed under the influence of sudden passion, where the deterrent effect of prospective punishment does not operate; that it is the certainty rather than the severity of punishment which deters, and that many of those who commit deliberate murder probably think that their crime will escape detection; and that the abolition of capital punishment for minor offences did not result in any increase of such offences, although the most gloomy prognostications were made at the time of that alteration in the law.

It is clear that the deterrent effect of any penalty for any crime is a matter upon which we can never have definite proof; it remains, in the words of the Report, a question of "psychological conjecture." All that can be done is to consider the experience of other countries. The Report admits that deduction from the statistics of other nations is a matter of great difficulty, since the crime rate in any country depends upon a number of complex considerations. Very interesting information has, however,

been collected from various parts of the world. Holland abolished capital punishment in 1870; Belgium still retains the capital penalty on its statute-book, but there has been, in peace-time, no execution since 1863: all capital sentences are automatically reprieved. The report considers that in neither country has any evil effect been produced by the absence of the capital penalty. On the other hand, nine States of the American Union have re-introduced capital punishment after it had been abrogated. There is a considerable degree of controversy as to the correct interpretation of the facts; the arguments on either side must be duly weighed.

Some point is made of the obvious irreparability of the death penalty when a miscarriage of justice is discovered, and of the possible reluctance of a jury to convict in a case in which the death sentence must follow. On the other side of the controversy, it is urged that abolition of the death penalty might lead to the adoption of "lynch law."

Some have suggested that murders should be "graded," *i.e.*, that there should be defined "degrees" of murder, only the highest of these carrying the death penalty. This is the law in some of the American States, and it was recommended for adoption in this country as long ago as 1866, by a Royal Commission. There are serious difficulties in this practice. The Committee does not think that these difficulties are insuperable, but considers them to be of sufficient moment to render any present attempt at "grading" inadvisable.

Finally, the Committee makes certain recommendations: (1) That the death penalty should be abolished for an experimental period of five years. (2) That meantime a resolution should be passed by the House of Commons declaring that the Secretary of State should recommend the commutation of the death sentence in every case. (3) That the penalty attached to reprieved murderers should be interpreted and administered as at present. (The death sentence is commuted to one of penal servitude for life. This sentence is reviewed after a period which, the Report informs us, is usually about fifteen years.)

The Committee recognizes that Parliament may decide to retain the death penalty, and it, therefore, makes certain other recommendations. (1) That the "McNaughten rules" should be revised, "so as to give fuller scope to general medical considerations, and to extend the area of criminal irresponsibility." It is recognized that the great majority of disputes as regards "irresponsibility" occur in capital cases. (2) That the death penalty should still, in law, apply to women on the same terms on which it applies to men. (3) That, as 21 is the age when full civil responsibility is assumed, it should also be the age below which no one should be sentenced to death. (The present minimum age for this purpose is 16 years; but during the last forty years no one has been executed under the age of 18 years.) (4) That there might be a still larger exercise of the Royal prerogative.

The whole subject is extremely controversial, for it is conducted, however much we may rationalize, on the emotional plane. It is probable that there is as acute a difference of opinion among our readers as among the members of the Committee, or among the general public. All, however, should study this report, even if it is regarded as no more than an exposition (albeit a very able exposition) of the case for the abolition of capital punishment.

Western Australia ; State Psychological Clinic : Annual Report to June 30, 1930. Perth.

The Report reaches us this year in type-script, Australian finances not warranting the expense of printing. We learn, with great regret, that this shortness of money will necessitate the closing of the Clinic.

The excellent work upon which we have commented in previous years has been continued. The number of private cases (not referred by a school or court) shows a large increase. A start has been made in the examination of prospective apprentices for various trades, and some interesting differences are shown in the results obtained by psychological tests. It is pointed out that it is highly desirable for a psychologist to deal with a fair number of "normal" individuals; if none but "problem" cases are seen, there is no proper standard of comparison. A useful warning is given against the use of "intelligence tests" by untrained workers; the dangers of this practice are often overlooked. The percentage of mental defectives is much higher in rural than in urban schools, which agrees with the findings in this country.

Group tests of intelligence were applied to 205 delinquents in the prison. The results are tabulated, and are of considerable interest; but it must be remembered that the number of cases dealt with is far too small to warrant any deductions as to the incidence of mental abnormality in delinquents. The Report, indeed, insists that mental defect, where it exists, is only one contributing factor in the production of delinquency. The Pressey "X-O" tests were also applied to the delinquents. More might be done in this country with these tests, suitably modified to suit British conditions.

There are some useful notes on the re-education of neurotic patients, Janet's view being adopted. In the case of a child patient the re-education of the parent is a necessary preliminary step.

A Mental Deficiency Bill was introduced into the Legislature but was dropped. The objections appear to have been the possible cost to the State, and the inclusion of a clause authorizing sterilization.

We congratulate Miss Ethel T. Stoneman upon a most interesting report; we sympathize with the disappointment which she must feel at the unfortunate suspension of her labours; and we trust that improved economic conditions will soon allow a resumption of her excellent work.

M. HAMBLIN SMITH.