

OUTBREAK OF THE "GANG" TERROR IN NEW YORK CITY

Who Is Responsible for the Revival of Bands of Young Outlaws in This Town?

THE newspapers of last Monday contained three items of more or less interest when read separately, but together opening a considerable field for speculation. The three items were captioned: "Vandals in the Parks," "Police Run Out Rowdy Gang," and "West Twenty-third Street Terrorized by Gang."

The spectacle of "gangs" of some toughness is not a new one, and the bad boy we have always with us, but here were three accounts of their doings on the same day, and two of them were really serious. In one instance a man's leg was broken in the course of a fight, which was further marked by the hurling of sundry missiles of glass seized from drug store counters and pushcarts.

Street. The complainant refused, on re-examination, to press the charge, and Magistrate Co. well discharged him on the promise that he would enlist in the navy.

Arrested at 3:40 P. M., Nov. 13, 1909, by Patrolman James J. Phelan for being intoxicated and causing a disturbance at Seventeenth Street and Tenth Avenue, where he was in a taxicab, shouting and disturbing the neighborhood. Fined \$5 by Magistrate Barlow.

Arrested at 11 P. M., on January 9, 1910, by Detective Peter Reid of the Detective Bureau on complaint of John Gerrity of 194 Tenth Avenue for feloniously assaulting him, to which he made affidavit the first day the prisoner was arraigned in court, but he refused the next day to identify the prisoner. Discharged by Magistrate Kernochan.

"I have seen more terrified specimens of hunted humanity than those poor men, running under a rain of missiles worse than stones."

"At the sight of me the gang scattered. I went after them, and found in the shadow of a coal barn, within hearing of the noise, a policeman. I did not mind words with him."

"What are you doing here, you coward?" said I. "Are you so afraid of your skin that you let boys persecute and injure under your very eyes, you poltroon—for I was very angry."

"Softly, Father," he said. "Sure, if I did arrest them they'd be back here on the block before myself and me fined, maybe, for interfering with lads at play. For, Father, all boys are angels, these days, and all policemen brutes."

ga gang of boys or young men do they are only high-spirited, and if they are clubbed it is never because they resisted arrest or assaulted the officer, but because the officer is brutal and likes to club.

"I know one policeman who was stabbed by this same gang of boys when he was taking one to the station house, and he was followed all the way, too, by a crowd of women crying shame on him for arresting a boy. There he was, dragging the boy and standing abuse from the crowd for laying hands on an innocent lad, and all the time so badly cut he could hardly get the boy to the station house before he collapsed."

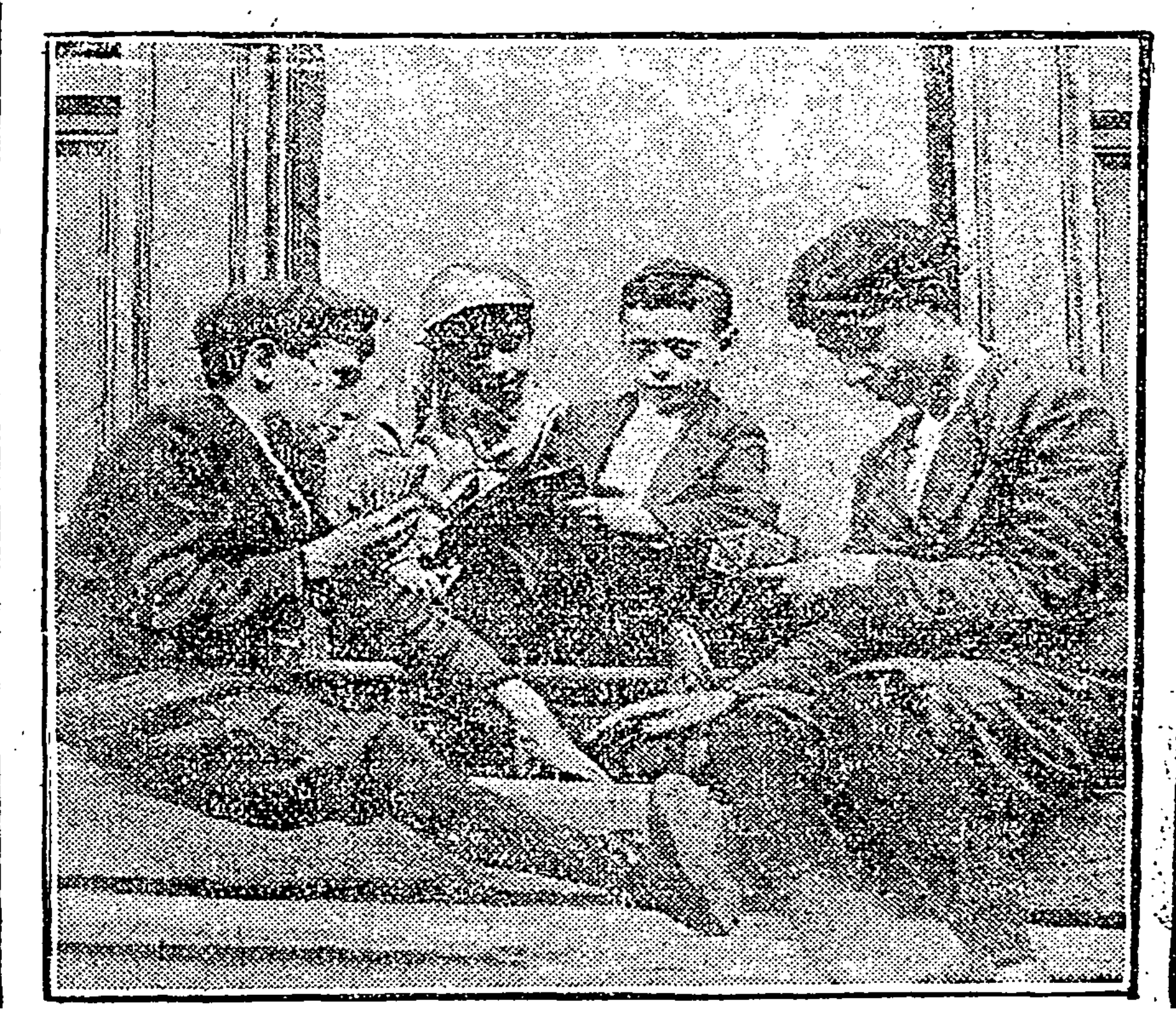
"I think I have as much sympathy with boyish pranks as anybody," said Father Raywood, and, indeed, though it is a long day since he was young, his face carried conviction, "but what I do protest against with all my might is the habit of confusing the work of such gangs as these, led by, if not made up of, degenerates, with the mischief of lads who mean no harm."

"Here we have young criminals handled like babies and encouraged to terrorize the neighborhood till people are beginning to suffer in silence rather than complain. The attitude of the administration toward clubbing is all right when it stops wanton brutality, such as exists sometimes, but it is distinctly wrong when it encourages young toughs to do as they

running against some city ordinance, the fact remains that a certain number of really vicious boys exist, boys at least whose environment—to put it mildly—has made them unfit to roam the streets without some sort of restraint. Maybe, taken years ago, all would have been well, but the milk is split now and all that remains is to do the best we can for the boy and his neighbors. Certainly the best is not turning them loose to learn more viciousness.

Some three or four years ago a number of gangs, such as that which followed Monk Eastman, were stamped out after hard work on the part of the police. It was natural enough that for a short while the youngsters who were the natural successors of Eastman and his crew should keep quiet.

Rowdysm was not, just at that time, the proper thing. But it would also be natural to suppose that after a time the tougher boys would again begin to get together and there would be another wave of the old sort of things.



"They Congregate on Street Corners."



"The Natural Social Tendency of the Boys Draws Them Together."



"You Violate Section 20 Almost Every Time You Do Anything,"

Several persons were injured. The gang had been playing craps and amusing themselves by tormenting an old man by reason of a distaste for his long beard, and they appeared from all accounts to deserve the epithet "tough" applied with emphasis. These young citizens were from 17 to 18 years old, and they are known as the Carpenter gang.

On the west side the situation was worse. There was the same toughness, but considerably more of it. The spokesman was not the police but a priest, who says that a gang known as the "Tanner Smith Terror" have for years been guilty of outrages of all sorts, and have intimidated the neighborhood to such an extent that immediate and drastic action is needed. The priest backs up his statement with a long list of charges that go to show a career of persistent viciousness that has been lightly passed over as boyish mischief.

The accounts of gang outrages have, in fact, grown so numerous of late that one is faced with the inquiry, have the gangs really grown worse within the last year or so or is it simply coincidence that has brought these wild doings together and made them conspicuous? Ask the people who are in a fair way to know and you get varying replies, but a majority incline to believe that toughness of the gang variety is on the increase. Go further and ask why this should be so and several theories will be advanced, with an occasional suggestion that there is no reason—just "happened."

Father Raywood, the priest of the Church of the Guardian Angel on West Twenty-third Street, says that the police are not allowed a free hand. The feeling is that to use stern measures, especially with boys, is so unpopular that a man risks his pay and promotion if he takes a young tough by the back of the neck and leads him to the station house.

Fine Commissioner Stover, who has had a little experience in this direction, thinks that the police are energetic enough, but that a growing lack of a sense of parental responsibility is largely at the bottom of the trouble. Among social workers there is the feeling that New York's notorious future is provided for the supervision of the young offender is chiefly to blame. Most likely, says another, all three of these theories are true and each contributes to make a situation that nobody can fall to call bad.

The most interesting account of a gang and its doings comes from Father Raywood and might be given first, as an illustration of what a gang can grow to when it roams the city unchecked and acquitted, whenever caught, by a sentimentality that thinks a boy should "have a chance"—the said chance consisting usually of an opportunity to return free to the street and amuse himself as his lively imagination may direct.

Over near Tenth Avenue, where Father Raywood lives and speaks his mind, an energetic youth by the name of Smith stands at the head of a gang. He is a little over 20 years old now, and here is his police court record for the past three years, with the disposition of the case made by the Magistrate:

Arrested in April, 1907, by Patrolman John J. Gilder, under the name of John Farrell. Fined \$10 by Magistrate Barlow.

Arrested in 1908, charged with shouting and singing and disturbing the neighborhood in West Seventeenth Street, by Patrolman Thomas J. Tiffany. Fined \$1 by Magistrate Wahl.

Arrested on June 21, 1908, on complaint of Schurtzer of 274 West Seventy-ninth Street, he having entered and caused a disturbance in the Lowell restaurant at 4:30 A. M. on the same date. Arrest made by Patrolman Henry A. Stewart. Sentenced to thirty days or \$300 to keep the peace for six months.

Arrested at 4:30 P. M. on May 9, 1909, by Patrolman William J. Loeb, for using profane and abusive language and attempting to assault the officer at Twenty-sixth Street and Eighth Avenue. Fined \$10 by Magistrate Steiner.

Arrested at 10:15 P. M., June 11, 1909, by Patrolman Peter J. Finnegan, assisted by Lieut. Peter J. Tighe, for being intoxicated, using vile and indecent language, and causing a crowd to collect at Eighteenth Street and Tenth Avenue. Discharged by Magistrate Cornell.

Arrested on July 29, 1909, by Detective John J. Gilder, of the Detective Bureau for assault and robbery, on complaint of Charles Black of 457 West Nineteenth



Animal Life in Thompson Street.

Arrested at 1:35 A. M. on July 2, 1910, by Patrolman Daniel J. Phelan at Twenty-seventh Street and Tenth Avenue, where he and a number of others were discharging revolvers in the air and where he deliberately fired two shots at the officer. Held in \$1,500 bail for trial by Magistrate Barlow.

These are the official records of the young man. It will be noted that on two occasions the complainants refused to press the charge. The report along Tenth Avenue is that the gang have the neighborhood so terrorized that silence is considered the safest course.

In the case of the man Black, assaulted on July 29, 1909, the gang is said to have abducted him and held him a prisoner for twenty-four hours until he learned the wisdom of not interfering with their pastimes. Black was a laborer of the poorer sort and it was not difficult to convince him that he had better stay in the background.

Other tales are many about this gang. Arrest has not followed all their escapades, for many men in that neighborhood were quick to decide that silence was golden. For instance, when the gang stole an automobile that they did not know how to run and ended the ride against the plate-glass window of a shop—nothing was said. And as for taking drinks in a saloon and not paying for them, that is a mere incidental.

It will be seen that no real effort was made to stop the work of this particular specimen. The Magistrate in whose court the frightened Black repented of his desire to bring the young roush to justice, evidently put Smith down as a high-spirited boy who might, in an adventurous career, do well.

At the second collapse of identification, in the case of Gerrity, nothing at all was done. Now we have got to the \$1,500 bail point.

It would really seem as if it might have been less trouble if the case of this boy had been looked into and properly dealt with in the first instance. This is not an accusation of carelessness against the Magistrates, but rather an indictment of the system, of which more later.

To finish the case of this west side gang, Father Raywood tells a story of what happened last January. He turned into Tenth Avenue one bitter morning and saw running as fast as their feet, very efficient feet could carry them, two peddlers, apparently Russian Jews, who were pursued by a hooting mob of young men throwing balls of ice and snow that were as hard as bullets.

"Never," says Father Raywood,

"Well, I still was angry and we talked a while, but I found the man was quite earnest about it. He said he had tried, and I believe him, for I know of similar cases, and nothing had come of it but reprimands to the police for brutality."

"The idea has got abroad that whatever

like because they know the police are muzzled."

A number of social workers feel, too, that a good deal of misplaced sentiment is given to tough boys. Granted that many of the children of the poor do not have a fair chance to be children without

Of course, had preventive measures been applied, quiet might have been maintained, but so far New York had not thought very well of prevention. When a hard, life-sized evil presents itself the community is interested; but small ounces of prevention have hitherto seemed rather

below the dignity of the metropolis.

How much time do you suppose the Judge spends at the Children's Court for each case? Remember, the Children's Court includes a great many boys who are well on the way to manhood and have had no little experience of vice as it stalks up and down in crowded streets.

Well, for each case there are less than five minutes. Less than five minutes to settle what shall be done with a growing boy who may or may not be really vicious, but who certainly needs attention from somebody.

In that space of time the Judge must grasp the psychology of the situation, must determine whether the boy is really ingenuous or merely "putting it on," as many of them know well how to do, must be made to understand the home conditions and receive any information that may be at hand in regard to the boy's past career.

The Judges are admirable gentlemen, but they are only human. They can't do the impossible any more than the rest of us, and when they are crowded and rushed like this they make mistakes. They know this as well as anybody.

Again, if there was a court where all the records were kept of every child arrested in Manhattan it would be an easy matter to turn to a card and see if Pat or Sammy, arrested for throwing stones, has done so for the first time merely in a casual manner by way of emphasizing for the moment a strong personal objection to some one, or if he has been making a habit of throwing things about whenever he felt like it. In the one case a lecture and a warning is sufficient; in the other there is a habit of mind that must be carefully watched.

There is no way of this keeping track of young offenders in New York. The boy or the young man who stands before the Magistrate is usually judged by what he has done on that particular occasion without reference to his past record. This hardly sounds like a good way to deal with boys, and apparently, looking at results, it is not.

Smith of the west side is not the first young man who has been able to profit by this state of affairs. When the Magistrate dismissed his case a year ago on his promise to join the navy, it is not to be supposed that the gentleman knew the boy's record. When, not very long ago, another Magistrate in another court sent a boy away with a fatherly lecture after he had been arrested for throwing stones, that official had no idea whatever that the boy had been arrested several times before, that his two brothers had a criminal record, and that the whole family had been in the courts on one count or another.

The little chap, who looked wistful, whose fault lay in what the Magistrate not unnaturally regarded as a childish prank, was in reality headed straight for destruction, without one influence to hold him back. He had got into court, where something might have been done with him, and he slipped through the hands that might have saved him.

And all because the city has never thought it worth while to have a definite system of child saving in the courts.

This particular case was investigated by an agent for the Child Welfare Committee, which, realizing the gravity of the situation, has a committee on the Children's Court composed of various Judges who have sat on that bench. Everybody admits the failure of New York to attack the problem of the street boy in a vigorous fashion. Lately, an appropriation of \$150,000 has been made to build a proper court—nothing could be worse than the cramped building where cases are tried now—and the noble number of four probation officers have been appointed to help the court.

Considering that 11,000 children appeared before the court last year, this is no great number, but it is a beginning. So far the Judges have had to be probation officers and what not themselves, and as has been before remarked they are not human. And this number does not include children arraigned in other courts.

The statement that there were more than 11,000 children brought before the Children's Court last year should not pass without some explanation. Of this

number 2,000 were neglected children, guilty of nothing save the mistake of having chosen their parents unwisely. Of the remaining 9,000 two-thirds were arrested for violation of "Section 20."

Now, as you violate Section 20 almost every time you do what every healthy boy is bound to do, these 6,000 form no very great problem, morally. They have played ball and obstructed the sidewalk and been saucy to policemen, but most of them, it is to be hoped, will be drawn off into Commissioner Stover's playgrounds.

Deducting the unfortunate and the mischievous there are left 3,000 and more boys who had shown some vicious tendency, who had stolen, mostly. For the study of these boys the city has relied on private philanthropy and on the reports given the Judge from time to time.

Now, in a fit of generosity four probation officers are appointed. Did you ever have 750 boys to manage—tolerably good boys at that? The brain reels a bit at the thought of such a task.

When you make it a case of boys who are bad or weak or in some way as a moral disadvantage, the matter becomes pretty serious. Of course, private organizations will help, but still—

Considering how little study it was possible to give to the cases of "tough" boys it is not to be wondered at that there is perpetual alternation between sentences too severe and sentences too light. In many cases the Judges make as good a disposition of the case as could have been made had they spent weeks of study, but in others they must go wrong.

And when they go wrong you have a boy started for the bad—a boy whose record may not be as varied as that of young Smith's, but who can be depended on to injure the community in some way and eventually to cost the State more, possibly, than the salary of many probation officers. It is a case of scorning the ounce of prevention.

Some folk maintain that there are no "gangs." But there are.

The natural social tendency of the boys draws them together. If they are ordinary boys, just reasonably bad, they come to no great harm.

They may meet in the back room of a saloon, which is not a desirable place to meet in, but is frequently the best available. They take a name and have outings. The outings give social standing and make a loose organization a sure-enough club.

Perhaps they go in for athletics. Sometimes a settlement captures them, and then they are headed along the right road.

But it is easy to see that sometimes in a club that might have been innocuous and evil and commanding spirit arises.

The better balanced members protest and leave. Then you have the gang.

The toughest gangs do not even meet in saloons, but congregate on street corners, waiting for some suggestion along the line of amusement. The organization is in any case a loose one, but it is effective enough.

That this is true will be acknowledged almost universally by social workers. The point is to check the gang when it is young, and this can be done, in the case of boys really inclined to be vicious, only through the courts when they are first arrested. It is all very well to talk about leniency, and certainly in the case of a boy or young man mercy may well temper justice, but the point is whether there is not danger from a false sentimentality, danger to the boy and to the community.

Parental influence can be largely discounted. When a boy has appeared several times in court it is pretty good proof that his parents cannot manage him, and records of the Child Welfare Committee go to show, too, that in a majority of the cases the young delinquent has only one parent living and is to a great extent his own master.

The courts have to step in with help and sympathy, and when, as in New York, there is no place where the record of every boy who has been arrested can be studied, it becomes largely a matter of guesswork on the part of the court. Time and system are required, and that is just what New York has not had.

Commissioner Stover says that in his opinion parents do less for their children now than in other days when the municipality did not do so much. He says that there seems to be a tendency to shove on to the city duties that belong in the home.

Mr. Stover has lived among the poor for twenty years, and speaks of what he has studied. If this is so, let us educate the parents as well as the boys—but let us do something. It looks rather as if between the parental and the municipal stool the boy who isn't as good as he might be was falling to the ground.

And the worst of it is that when a boy gets on the ground he is extremely likely to stay there.

No doubt before long, what with the committees that are considering his welfare and the beginnings of municipal appropriations, the boy who is not yet well started downward will be helped. But meanwhile the lawless is considered, by people who know, to be on the increase. The clubs are in a fair way to become gangs, the moderately bad boy to acquire a really criminal record.

How much truth is there in the accusation that we have been handling the matter in an oversentimental fashion? It looks as if there were some, anyhow.