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Public Blame for Crime

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PUBLIC BLAME FOR CRIME

In the past few years the crime situation has become a major topic of discussion in this country, and not without reason. At first the temptation felt by the average citizen was to place the brunt of the blame on the legal profession and many of them dismissed the affair by doing just that thing. Then the public press fell into step and the hue and cry was raised. But though the bar was aroused and the judges warned nothing was accomplished.

Now it seems that the more serious minded are coming to the understanding that such a complex state of affairs cannot have such a simple answer. The newspapers have had their share of the burden brought home to them and many of the leading journals have met with the American Bar Association and agreed upon methods which will tend to make their actions less objectionable than in the past. It is very gratifying to note that these newspapers have been giving good example to their fellows.

Recently Judge Marcus Kavanaugh of Chicago has brought home another truth. In fact he made a very accurate diagnosis of the conditions when he asserted that responsibility for the unusual prevalence of crime may be traced to public indifference. The Bar Associations, the boards, investigators and law enforcement agencies have been delving into the problem, discussing relief measures, and advocating changes for some years. They

have been unable to accomplish much. The reason has been that they have all lacked the supreme moving force of public opinion.

In the December number of the *American Bar Association Journal*, Justice Renwick Riddell of the Ontario (Canada) bar had this to say "It is said that every country has the government it deserves; it is quite certain that every free country has the law it desires—I mean really does desire, not simply says it desires." That statement contains a truth that is both permanent and persistent. If it can be brought to the attention of the citizenry, they should be moved to action. And the sentiment is true. Public opinion is the moving force that will ultimately remove the cause of the crime wave that has taken on such proportions that it seems to be a rise in tide rather than a mere wave.

It has been said that the impersonal relationship which the average citizen bears to criminal activities lessens the vehemence of the demand for greater efficiency upon the part of our law enforcement machinery. Judge Kavanaugh insists that "a country pays for the crime it allows" and this, we believe, is thoroughly understood, bring about a facing of the issues and genuine action on the part of the citizens.

After all, it must be remembered that the criminal code itself cannot be blamed for the entire situation. A good set of laws by no means insures a law abiding citizenry. Perhaps one of the greatest codes ever devised was the code of Justinian—certainly it marked the high tide of the Roman law. But at the time that it was operating the Empire was at its most lawless state. Law can aid in bringing about the right conditions but unless backed by a vigilant citizenry their enforcement will be neglected.

Concrete suggestions to eliminate the unfortunate conditions have been offered. Reform measures have been drafted. But the public must realize that it has its part to play. Its part is a personal interest, an insistence that each case be tried justly, a lending of aid to worthy reform, and an unflinching memory to punish public officials for failure of duty. Until it has been brought to a realization of its responsibility with regard to crime conditions, just that long will the present peril impend.

—J. P. McN.