

## BOOK REVIEWS—cont.

all going to be left by the social scientists with the profound reflection that the law-breakers are those caught breaking the law?

### Recommendation.

At least borrow this book for Lady Wootton has performed a great service for us all. Much of what she has written can be made the subject of contentious argument, but the essence of her work, the assessment of the work of scientists "for the interested layman", should be the subject of continuous study and report. The field concerned in individual reports need not be so wide as that covered by Lady Wootton, but being able to consult such reports, would put people like prison and borstal officers of all grades in the way of knowing what it is essential they should know. They often have neither the time nor skill to know it by the critical reading of the multitudinous out-pourings, some published, some not, of social scientists, not all of whose work it seems will withstand rigorous examination. In the meanwhile and probably for a long time to come, there is little doubt that "*Social Science and Social Pathology*" will be a standard reference book and guide.

A. GOULD.

## THE JURY IS STILL OUT

By Irwin D. Davidson and Richard Gehman  
Peter Davies. 1959. pp.303. 21s. 0d.

IN JULY 1957 a 15-year-old boy called Michael Farmer was beaten, kicked and stabbed to death by a gang of his contemporaries in New York. Most of the eighteen accused of attacking him were put up in the juvenile court; but seven of

them were over fifteen and were tried by Judge Davidson of the Court of General Sessions, New York County, on a charge of first degree murder. This book is an account of the trial. The blurb claims that "told with outrage and compassion it is a story with a sobering lesson for all of us." What is this lesson?

The crime itself was a shocking one not only because of the youth of its victim, but also because of the youth of its perpetrators. Farmer, whether he himself belonged to a gang or not, was a fatal casualty in the incessant warfare of gangs like the Egyptian Kings, the Dragons, the Jesters, the St. John's Killers, the Boy Chaplains and the Baby Mau Maus, into which a considerable part of the youth of New York seems to be organised. The victim was caught alone and one at least of his assailants used a knife. The surprising thing is that such deaths do not occur more often; just as it is surprising that when gangs of boys fight in Britain, broken bones are not too frequent. Our *murderous* hooligans are older. It is indeed astonishing that among children such as those described in this book, who live according to queer rules of their own and regard law and the police with hatred, killing is very much less frequent than among adult and even normally law-abiding citizens in peace time.

To those who want to know what juvenile delinquents—or rather the particular sort of juvenile delinquents brought up in the near-slums of New York—are like, this book throws some light, but not much in proportion to its size. From juvenile witnesses we learn that these gangs are well organised. They are run by a Presi-

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dent, goaded and led into battle by a War Lord, recruited or pressed ('drafted') by a Prime Minister ("with or without portfolio?" one of the more brilliant lawyers in the trial wittily flashed). They collect contributions from their members, try and punish them. Oddly, teachers are sometimes attached to them to help and guide; but the more essential aspects of the life of the gangs go on out of the teacher's sight and against his will: especially, one imagines, the corporal punishment—in which these boys seem to be strong believers—inflicted with common consent on errant members by gang leaders.

But the sobering lesson of this book is not to be found in these facts. What astonishes, horrifies, and possibly teaches is not the existence of such gangs and the violence, hatred and mendaciousness of their members: we probably knew about this already. It is rather the shock of encountering in detail the proceedings of a New York court. The trial took over three months. It reads not as an attempt to find out the truth about the defendants, but as an opportunity for a display of virtuosity, temperament, and even contempt for the legal process, on the part of the gaggle of twenty-odd lawyers involved. In the event two boys were found guilty of second degree murder, and two of manslaughter, while three were acquitted. This result provoked the victim's father to say: "These marauding savages have made a mockery of the law. I can just see the grins and ha-ha's in the neighbourhood where the Egyptian Dragons live". He was referring to the defendants, not the lawyers. If anything makes

the law a laughing stock in this it is the long-drawn out succession of stupid interchanges and unjustified motions by counsel. From the beginning, they never missed a trick. Even the Vice-Presidential gimmick of parading a dog before the jury to arouse sympathy for the accused was resorted to early in the trial. The interchange recorded on pages 215-217 must be one of the most astonishing which could ever have disgraced an English-speaking court outside Ireland. When what the blurb describes as eminent lawyers behave like this in a public court, it is hardly surprising that deprived, undisciplined boys of very low intelligence who carry knives, sticks and chains should hurt somebody once in a while.

"Not one of those lawyers has anything to gain from this trial but his own self-respect and possibly the sense of doing a job as well as he can. Some publicity perhaps . . . Every last one of them is going to lose time. And money". Their behaviour, it would seem, arises from a desperate conscientiousness in defending their clients. "Every last one of them will be on the lookout for whatever capital he can make on behalf of his team and his defendant. Every last one will be watching me every second, waiting for me to make the slightest legal mis-step so that he can call foul, mistrial, and possibly get a break for his boy." The over-sensitive appeals system in the United States, which leads to cases like Chessman, must be in part responsible; but not entirely. The spectacle is at one with other scenes which strike the insular eye. Throughout the trial, the newspapers try the case over and over again; the judge is under constant

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police protection; and he appears to regard a police inspector's statement "In twenty-two years on the force, I have never witnessed an act of police brutality" as clearly incredible. All this is sobering and it is natural that by the side of it the crime seems less outrageous.

Judge Davidson says "The trial is over—but as far as the question of juvenile delinquency is concerned, the jury is still out". Though this does not mean anything it is expressive of Judge Davidson's deep concern, which was aroused by his experience of the trial. In an appendix he puts forward a plan to deal with what he calls "incipient juvenile delinquents"—boys from broken, poverty-stricken homes, of low IQ, with a record of truancy. His plan, for self-governing boys' communities, is now being studied by the New York State Youth Commission. Judges are as a rule most unimpressive when they talk about what should happen to people convicted in their courts. Judge Davidson is an exception; he has given his mind to a plan—"not a panacea: a start"—which might possibly save some from ever appearing before him.

A. PHILLIPS GRIFFITHS.

**STREET WALKER**

Anon

Bodley Head, 1959. pp.191. 12s. 6d.

"SCIENTIA non est individuorum". But the individual case can suggest scientific hypotheses. The author, we are told, is a young woman who for ten months was a prostitute in the West End of London; it seems that the book is essentially autobiographical, and that it is the lady's own work not the concoction

of ghost-writers. Before considering its scientific interest, therefore, it seems appropriate to look at the book's artistic merit. This is quite considerable. There is a clarity of prose style, a skilful invocation of atmosphere and near-poetic powers of observation. Presumably there has been some arrangement of material, and the result is a well-structured story—a traumatic experience with a client of unusual tastes drives her into the arms of a ponce, in complete reversal of her previous policy. The ponce's ill-treatment of her is itself traumatic, leading her to give up the game altogether, and incidentally to write this book. How much, if anything, of veracity has been sacrificed in the interests of literary streamlining or psychological self-defence we cannot, of course, know, and in any case it probably does not matter very much. In a book of this kind we are generally interested primarily in authenticity of atmosphere, and as has already been said, the writer's powers of invocation seem unusually high. Also very high are her powers of describing the various sub-groups which make up her underworld.

The book's chief merit is, in fact, the picture it gives of a certain segment of life as seen contemporarily through the eyes of a prostitute of quite unusual literacy. It has little or no value as a study of the causes of, or even factors associated with, prostitution. It is not even particularly illuminating as to why this individual became a prostitute: "From childhood, I had been a renegade, turning deliberately and callously away from everything my parents wanted me to do, and yet paradoxically suffering from an over-whelming feeling of guilt for so doing".