SINS, broadly speaking, are of two categories—those of commission and those of omission. The former are active and positive; the latter, passive and negative. Under the second must be included indifference to social ills that should challenge earnest attention and active effort. This form of sin seems to present nearly insuperable difficulties in the way of correction. The imagination of the average successful American, engrossed in his own affairs, seems incapable of visualizing the wreckage left in the wake of industrial evolution, of noting unutilized by-products of the Great Society, of salvaging valuable human resources now sacrificed on the altar of machine production. This good American citizen is unwittingly sinning by omission, and, in his preoccupation with his own success, he is blind to the needs and interests of those who can look to him alone for help.

Not without reason does the whole world in times of need and distress look with confidence to this self-same complacent individual. His generosity is pretty well measured by the degree of vividness of his realization of the other fellow’s hardship and suffering; the situation need only be “sold” him to guarantee his aid. Witness, for example, America’s recent response to such situations as Russia’s starving millions and Japan’s holocaust. Even former enemy children have not found America remiss in the face of a plain call of neighborly charity.

But alleviation of distress abroad should not blind America to misery and urgent need within its own borders. In the homeland of the richest nation on earth there are many pitfalls for those who would escape the sins of omission. The economic system under which we are living today has been characterized from the very beginning by extremes of fortune for the people who live in it. Lack of a fair start for those among the materially disinherited means denial of opportunity for many children to secure the education commensurate with potential ability that is often possessed. This situation presents to this affluent nation a great challenge for a constructive program of social amelioration. Without such a program our national slogan, “equality of opportunity,” will continue to be cant. Too long has America been allowing the material disinheritance of some of its citizens to be the sign and seal of intellectual disinheritance as well.

One avowed apologist for capitalism, Hartley Withers, admits in his book, The Case for Capitalism, that under private ownership of capital a fair start in life for all people is not given, and that if only everyone had this fair start it would be difficult to devise a more stimulating arrangement for human nature with its instincts for acquisition and rivalry.
In a general way, everyone is aware of the existence of a “submerged tenth” in our population, of homes where there is a constant bitter struggle to eke out a bare existence. What is rarely known or appreciated, however, is the poignant tragedy which generally characterizes the inner, subjective life of parents and of children in this luckless fringe of our industrial society. To imagine that many of them do not yearn and hunger for the satisfactions that attend the acquisition of the higher values of mental nurture in life is a tragic error.

Families dependent on charity are not by any means uniform and unvariegated within the drab confines of their poverty-stricken life. Each one has its own peculiar atmosphere and color. And yet observation discloses the fact that such families fall into two large, widely diverse groups. While all these families have a common history of dependency, nevertheless not all of them are characterized by certain degraded, socially pathological conditions true of others. The writer, in a study of 100 unselected charity families, found that 48 of them fairly reeked with such unwholesome conditions as brutality, drunkenness, crime, immorality, vulgarity, obscenity, venereal disease, filth and overcrowding. These families were differentiated from the 52 poor homes where such untoward conditions did not obtain. The down-drag of poverty and misery common to all poor families—degraded or undegraded—is the soil from which all poor children obtain their nurture, but the utterly dark background of the child of the degraded poor brings to bear upon such a child reared in it additional deleterious influences that inevitably leave their mark upon its life. Verily, “The destruction of the poor is their poverty.” The question arises, therefore, how much of good can come out of so much of spiritless misery and vicious evil? This question presents a matter not only of intense human interest but also of sociological significance as well.

When one pictures in his mind the social environment and general atmosphere surrounding the lives of the poor, one is likely to entertain the only too common but erroneous notion that the average poor parent does not usually have at heart the higher educational interests of his children. It is, admittedly, a natural assumption to make. The facts disclosed in these particular 100 poor families show that the average age of the children upon leaving school was fourteen years and three months. Furthermore, nine out of ten of the children who continued in school after the age of fourteen did so merely in order to meet the requirements of compulsory school attendance laws. The great majority had left in the sixth and seventh grades. And why did they leave school so prematurely? In truth, very nearly all did so at the order of their parents. Superficially, the case against the poor parent, whether degraded or undegraded, seems complete. It would appear to be only too evident that poor folk exploit the earning capacity of their children whenever it is possible. This is only too obviously true. What is not so clear, however, is the reaction of the poor parent to his own deed. Fundamental to this whole matter is the truth that no matter how desirous poor parents may be to obtain for their children the advantages of an education, or how eager their children may be to secure it, for all practical purposes and for the vast majority, continuance in school is simply out of the question. In such homes is revealed a situation where the savage strug-
gle for existence dictates no other choice than a grim determination to capitalize the available human assets of the family.

One would be led to expect that such depressing conditions of poverty and the still more disastrous conditions of degraded poverty would be reflected in totally negative ideas and attitudes of parents toward school and education. The fact is, however, that while these poor parents do believe that school pays they must consent hopelessly to have their children penalized educationally because of their lack of financial means. Most of these parents realize only too well what a handicap a poor education has been in their own lives and nearly all of them want their children to be free from this disability. One hundred of the parents who were poor but not degraded affirmed their strong belief in the value of an education, and even as many as 74 per cent of the degraded poor parents held to the same conviction.

A few statements, typical of the attitude of most poor parents, should be enlightening as well as convincing in respect to this. One illiterate mother of a degraded family said: "School does pay. I am worried that the boys had to stop. I can't write my own name, but I am only so glad there is school for the children. I wish my parents had sent me. I had to work hard all the days of my life. No! I would not have my children not go to school. What would they be without an education? Children should be better than their parents have been." And consider a statement like the following, made by a hardworking, sacrificing, poor mother, and decide whether poor parents who take their children out of school have educational ideals or not: "Education is all a parent can give a child, and had I been able, I would have given them all I possibly could have, even to college if possible. I wanted to send them through high school and take a commercial course but I couldn't do it after my husband deserted me. School does pay, if you can afford it, even though the child is old enough to work."

It is true, of course, that the hopelessness of their condition at times makes the poor feel dubious about the use of school or anything else. Thus it is that the hard reality of poverty which all such families experience creeps into and qualifies affirmative answers. The logic of a statement such as the following is irrefutable: "Yes, school pays if you can afford it, but if you can't, what are you going to do?" Or consider one like this: "School pays but how eat? I can't afford school. We have lots of children." We see here tales of defeated hopes and desires, undoubtedly one of the tragedies and costs of poverty with relation to education. But what is much worse, as we shall see, is that it may possibly connote that some socially valuable human material is being wasted in some of these families, perhaps irretrievably so.

We have noted that there appears to exist in this stratum of life a small minority of families, all of them degraded as it happened, where no educational ideals whatever seemed to be entertained. Where the conditions of life have too completely clouded and distorted the perspective of parents we are faced with what might be termed "poverty-bred ignorance." A few believe that school does not pay because, as one ex-convict father said, "'children only learn to dance and 'shimmy' there." The very fact that only a small minority of ostensibly depraved parents would answer in this wise shows how wholly distraught and un-American this attitude is. One is tempted to ask in this connection whether such parents are to be blamed for this perver-
sion of viewpoint. Are they not, perhaps, themselves products of the same conditions to which their children are subjected—people who should be understood and helped, if possible, rather than merely condemned. It is not hard to imagine that poverty, in its most squalid and deleterious phases, may produce a poverty of thought, with social and economic consequences which, one can deduce from observed instances, thus resembles an endless chain. Poverty of thought of parents, expressed in terms of perverted negative educational attitudes, eventuates in curtailed education of children. This spells curtailed opportunity which in turn admits only to the ranks of poverty, delinquency and dependency. So in the succeeding generation we reach the point from which we started, only to find material poverty and its concomitant, poverty of thought, continuing their deadly chain of cause and effect, interminably. This assumed law of succession is not inevitable in its workings. The pity is that anyone at all should be foredoomed to its operation.

It has been shown that the education of children of really poor parents, quantitatively considered, is indeed very meagre. The failure of the public high school, the people's college, as a real factor in the education of children from poverty-stricken homes is herein clearly disclosed. This whole matter was epitomized by one father, who may well have been speaking for poor people in general, when he said: "If I could afford it I would send my children to school. The poor pay taxes for the rich to go. It would be nice if all could afford it but I can't make ends meet." Certainly, in so far as this is true, this father's statement may be considered an indictment of our modern social order.

Not all children reared under the multiifying conditions of poverty have either the capacity or the desire to continue their education any more than do all children under the encraving conditions of extreme wealth. It will be granted, however, that potential ability, wherever found, should not be denied training and education commensurate with that ability. The failure to give it is to penalize children most unjustly for circumstances beyond their control, and, incidentally, but most important of all, to rob the social group of a possibly rich contribution which it always needs.

How many children with educational appreciation and undoubted ability may one expect to find, therefore, in poverty-stricken families, where educational opportunities are severely restricted by conditions of life? More than eight out of ten among 193 children, fourteen to twenty-one years of age, interviewed in 100 charity families, believed that it pays to go to school, and 72 per cent of them not only realized the value of school but also were sorry to have to leave school. Such facts would seem to indicate a high general level of educational appreciation on the part of children from poor families despite the prevailing lack of opportunity which prevents them from availing themselves of the benefits that they know inhere in school training. Consider the pathos of such answers: "Oh, indeed it pays to go to school! You get more wages and if you have no education you must take what comes and work like a fool every day. My brother urges me to go to night school but I am too tired to go." Another laconically said: "It means pick and shovel if you know nothing. A man who knows something can get a better job. Now a man like father who doesn't know anything must be a laborer." What one boy said seems
to sum up the difficulty for all of them: "School pays and one should go to school if you have the money. But if your parents need the help, it is in place to work." No answer could better voice the actual situation for these children with regard to school and education.

Yet despite their theoretical appreciation of the value of an education, two-thirds of these children of poor folk had lost real interest in further educational preparation for life. It is really surprising, however, that any at all had left the energy and enthusiasm necessary for desiring further schooling in view of the fact that their social status destined them to premature entrance into a life of struggle and hardship. Any child who refuses to be engulfed by an environment of deprivation (and often degradation as well) and who is able in any degree to break through conditions that never encourage but only retard, proves thereby a certain innate capacity that needs to be recognized and encouraged. The more frequent loss of educational enthusiasm is the cost incident to the necessary process of adjustment to the exactions of a poverty-stricken environment and of contact with the material demands of a workaday world. That the children can hardly win unaided in the battle which their desire for self-growth and education must wage with the forces of circumstance seems only too self-evident.

It is not surprising that only one-fourth of the children in these homes demonstrated clearly their potential ability by being able to make normal or better than normal school progress. The retardation disclosed in the school records of children from destitute homes is not so much a question of nature as of nurture. We witness here, for the most part, normal human aptitudes confronted with wellnigh insuperable obstacles to scholastic achievement. Social investigations have established the significant facts that, due to home conditions, physical defects are from two to three times as frequent among poor children as among well-to-do, and school absence at least twice as prevalent. Serious illness has been found to occur three times as frequently among the poor as among the well-to-do. Persistent illness and physical defect are directly related to an undue amount of absence from school and hence, to failure in school.

To physical handicap and illness must be added the prevalent spiritual palsy that is attached to the social conditions endemic in all poor homes—the disorganization attending fatherlessness and the absence of working mothers, the fearful overcrowding of children and boarders into cheerless rooms, not to forget in addition the contamination, neglect, and brutality of the home that is degraded as well as poor. Picture, if you can, the mal- or undernourished, anemic child of such homes as these, leaving for school in the morning with the empty stomach of a breakfastless day, without adequate shoes and clothing, and then perhaps it will be understood why this child can hardly seem otherwise than mentally slow or indifferent to school work. Besides all this, it was discovered that in 39 per cent of the homes studied by the writer the parents deliberately kept their children home from school at times on some pretext or other connected with the background of the family life. Certainly, this combination of inherent disabilities of poverty operates as a rigorous and unduly severe selective agency. Surely the 2.5 per cent who made normal or accelerated school

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3 Helen S. Trounstine, "Retardation in Cincinnati Public Elementary Schools" (Helen S. Trounstine Studies, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 14).
progress in the face of such drawbacks may be considered, in very truth, "a survival of the fittest" and possessed of more than average innate ability.

That the cards are stacked against the poor child seems pretty obvious from all this. Not only does a condition of life sacrifice him to parental necessity or cupidity but it also robs the school experience, or as much of it as he obtains, of its full possibilities. One more evil arising from the habitat of the poor child needs to be pointed out. Whatever superior native intellectual ability does reside in the children of the poor is in large measure lost. It leads to nothing more than a myopic mediocrity of outlook because of the absence of stimulus in a depressing poverty-stricken environment. This is one of the saddest costs of poverty with relation to education. The aspirations of most poor children are limited to the attainment of the general level reached in their stratum of society. Can there be any doubt that, given a better social environment, much worthier ambitions would be evoked?

All this bespeaks a social loss, a spectacle of rich potential child life withering in the bud due to the aridity of the soil from which its life happened to spring. This veiled, hardly appreciated social loss continues to mount while society seems to be unmindful and neglectful concerning it. But the really challenging social loss inheres in that modicum of genius, that small minority of "mute, inglorious Miltons" that undoubtedly exists unrecognized in this stratum of life. This quintessence of inherent ability is always in danger of succumbing to the vicissitudes of an unprivileged, disinherited position in life, unless a helping hand is extended. To say that genius creates its own opportunity is to theorize rather than to face reality as it is. Consider the case of three exceptionally bright, ambitious youths, discovered in these 100 homes, and speculate with regard to the difference that opportunity given or withheld will make as to the degree of self-realization they will secure or the kind of contributions they will make to the social group.

The first boy was the son of a convict father, an immigrant from Lithuania and a family deserter. The plaintive story was told the writer in a bare, cheerless, carpetless "parlor" by a wraith of a mother, sitting barefooted, who was hopelessly facing a death not far distant due to the terrible inroads of cancer. There were four living children, and the oldest boy, now seventeen years old, was the sole support of the family. Three years previously the police had reported to the Associated Charities that the mother and the children had nothing to eat but dry bread. Stolidly but hopelessly this illiterate mother affirmed her belief in the value of education. The boy, who had been an accelerated pupil in school, was forced to go to work in a cigar factory at the age of fourteen when his father deserted the family. He told how he had run away often to school early in the morning for fear his father would keep him home. His very nature revolted against factory work for his heart had been set on going to high school. Even after three years of the factory—slavery as it seemed to him—he could affirm, with high spirit, his passionate determination to continue his education in case the father were to come home and support the family. His only recreation was the Y. M. C. A.—a fact quite in contrast to the trivialities that passed for recreation among most boys in the group of families. It is true that he did not have a specific ambition. He had, however, a determination "to get along as well as he
could," as he said. This bright, straightforward boy, a product of the lowest of homes, had intelligence and integrity of character as well. Ambitious, he only needed opportunity to show him the direction in which his talents lay. Can society afford to permit the force of circumstance to circumscribe so narrowly the life of such a boy and to derive no benefit from the possibilities inherent in him? Unless some benefactor comes to his aid society will have only a factory worker's contribution to the social group where it might have benefitted by a career more akin to the boy's possibilities.

The second boy was one of six children of a widowed German-born mother. Since the father's death five years previously the mother was working hard doing washings at home. Later she moved to a small farm with a grown-up son. Here, amidst the penurious surroundings typical of German peasants, the writer found and talked to the small, shy, fourteen-year-old boy. This boy was accelerated one grade in school, was interested in drawing and had had some of his crayon drawings on exhibition at an artist's studio. The older brother merely sneered at the boy's artistic interest, remarking that "You can't earn money in drawing." He also referred deprecatingly to his brother as one who "was only good to go to school." And thus it is that a youth "only good to go to school," must become a farmhand unless his special aptitude for drawing is given recognition, trained and allowed to come to fruition. The family had been receiving charitable aid for six years and certainly could not afford to give him the opportunity. Some outside agency would have to step in to help him. Should society allow the wellsprings of artistic endeavor to be dried up because of the accident of poverty in a boy's life and, consequently, the lack of educational opportunity?

The case of the third boy takes us into the overcrowded section of an Italian quarter where poverty was a stark reality. Dire, unlovely need confronted one on all sides and here was to be found the most remarkable case of all. The father, a citizen of this country, having nine sons ranging in age from nine months to fourteen years, had been out of work when visited for more than six months. Shoes and clothing were being supplied the children right along. The economic pressure in this family and the continual struggle to keep body and soul together forced the parents to take the fourteen-year-old boy out of school against their own inclination. As the mother said: "I would rather send them to school than to work. They don't earn much anyway." But as in so many families of this sort the pittance earned was absolutely necessary to the family support and children were taken out of school because no agency stood ready to give the family the equivalent of the children's earnings. We witness here, without a doubt, the tragedy of a career of possible brilliance being abruptly brought to a halt. By the time the boy had reached the eighth grade, which he attended but a few days before having to leave school, he had already become accelerated two grades. He was known as an excellent debater. He was such a voracious reader that the parents feared he was reading too many books since he was at it all the time, reading far into the night. And most out of the ordinary was the fact that all this extensive reading was purposeful and correlated with his ambition to become a lawyer. Even as a boy of fourteen he had read all the books on law to be found in the public library. The practise of law was no mere passing fancy but the
very basic ambition of his life. More than any of the others did he need specialized and extended educational opportunities. Despite sentimental suppositions to the contrary the actual probability is that this boy, unaided, had not the slightest chance in the world to become that for which, to all appearances, he was so eminently fitted.

Our society needs the full contribution of all the talent that can be discovered. No matter in what social class children of talent and special ability may be found, they should all be turned to proper account; none should be wasted. It is not primarily the purpose nor is it within the scope of this article to explain the ways to achieve this desirable end. A few means to this end may be mentioned however. A reorganization of our public school system with a view to effecting a better adjustment to the needs of poor children is desirable and necessary. Vocational training, vocational guidance, psychological clinics and the visiting teacher movement are all helpful as are mothers' pensions and the Children's Scholarship plan. Scholarship funds in this country are privately contributed and privately administered. It would be well for this wealthy nation to begin to emulate the example of Scotland which has for some years been giving scholarships from public funds to keep in school children whose parents are too poor to educate them beyond a certain age. The Stuyvesant Neighborhood House in New York City is one private organization that is trying to discover genius among the children of the East Side tenements. This is a most commendable step in the right direction but, ultimately, it should be the duty of society as a whole, working through the national government, to seek out all such cases everywhere, subsidize them, and thus eventually enjoy the rich contribution they have to make to our social life. The utilization of such talent would more than pay for itself in the end. The subsidy could be repaid by the individual later on. The individual would secure the inestimable gift of self-realization and society receive the invaluable benefit of an individual capacity, at no great eventual cost to itself. Otherwise such gifts are being wasted on lowly forms of work and expression. It is but plain common sense, in view of these facts, to urge as a practicable next step the passage of the Constitutional Child Labor Amendment through the various state legislatures. Now is the time to strike in the interests of the State's most valuable asset, its child life.

How long can rich, generous America afford to sin by omission in this wise? How long before it decides to make what, in the last analysis, is but a commonsense investment? Ethically considered, the sin is indefensible; economically, it is a form of blundering, extravagant wastefulness. When ethical and economical considerations thus reinforce each other, successful America can no longer afford to ignore a plain duty in the face of plain facts.

The Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Playground and Recreation Association of America will be held this year at Asheville, North Carolina, October 5th to 10th.

A conference on parents and children will be held at Hotel Waldorf, New York City, October 26-28, under the auspices of the Child Study Association of America, Inc., formerly the Federation of Child Study.