

GIVE THE BAD BOY A CHANCE THE PLEA THAT HAS WON A STATE



MRS. FREDERIC C. SCHOFF

A Little Girl of Eight, Playing with Matches, Started a Fire That, Fanned by Mrs. Frederic C. Schoff, of Philadelphia, Grew Into a Sweeping Blaze of Juvenile Reform.

Copyright, 1906, by the New York Herald Co. All Rights Reserved. In Colorado a judge has won a name and reputation for his work in the Children's Court. In Philadelphia lives a charming woman whose work in behalf of unfortunate children in that city and State, carried on for ten years against the greatest difficulties, is second to none, not even that of the Colorado Judge.

Judge Benjamin B. Lindsey is official Judge of the Children's Court of Denver. Mrs. Frederic C. Schoff is just Mrs. Schoff, without official title, and yet none the less she is the actual Judge of the Children's Court in Philadelphia, and the magistrates and judges of that city with one voice accord to her that title.

Nor is the title merely honorary. Philadelphia has a rather peculiar judicial system. Its judges rotate. They sit a while in one court, then move to another, then to another, until they have made the rounds. Consequently the Children's Court is presided over by some fifteen judges, coming one after another, each one quits unacquainted with the records of the little chaps lined up before him. One might have appeared before this same Judge a twelvemonth ago and have been a prodigy of virtue since, yet the Judge, fixing him with an eagle eye, remembers only that first appearance, while another who has appeared quite frequently within the last ten months is, to the Judge, a new offender.

Consequently Philadelphia judges are dependent mainly for their decisions upon the information given by the probation officer. And the probation officer every week goes over her cases in every detail at a joint meeting of probation officers, at whose head is Mrs. Schoff. The probation officer may be new and the records of the boys may be only matters of scheduled reports to her, but Mrs. Schoff knows. For ten years she has heard cases, gone over detail after detail, and she remembers this boy and that and his home surroundings. She it is who decides that a boy is to be found work and kept at it, and that employed he stands a chance of graduating from court altogether. She it is who demands that a father be called before the court and made responsible for his son, and her decisions are handed down via the probation officer to the presiding Judge, who accepts them with a sigh of relief as he hears.

"Mrs. Schoff recommends that"—and why? Why should the word of one woman carry such weight? One must go back ten years to answer.

One day in May, 1899, a Philadelphia newspaper printed as one of its first page stories an account of the arrest and imprisonment of a little girl of eight years. She had set fire to the house in which she lived. When asked why she had started the fire she said frankly:—"To see the fire burn and the engine run."

The account was accompanied by a picture of the child and stated that the presiding Judge had sent her to a reformatory. The child's history revealed the fact that she had been left motherless at two, placed in an orphanage, and recently been made a household drudge in a city boarding house, with no associates save ignorant servants. The whole account was surrounded by the startling headline—"A Prodigy of Crime."

The city read and was properly shocked by such depravity in one so young. Doubtless several mothers remembered the day their Marys set fire to the lace curtains "just for fun," and set the paper aside with a sigh of sympathy for the unfortunate little wail.

One Mother Roused. One mother alone seemed to feel a need for action. Sitting in the comfortable library of her home, at No. 3418 Baring street, Mrs. Schoff read the story.

"Prodigy of crime!" she said indignantly. Then she looked at her own daughters at play. Suppose one of them had set fire to the house in a spirit of fun, would she have been sent to a reformatory? What was to become of this innocent girl, to be associated with companions whose ways had been proved evil? Mrs. Schoff put on her bonnet. She kissed her own daughters and hurried from the house. An hour later found her in the office of the Judge who sent the child to the reformatory.

"But, Mrs. Schoff," pleaded the Judge, "what am I to do with her? I have no other place to send her, and, truth to tell, they do not want her there, because of the character of her offence."



To See the Fire Burn and the Engine Run," She Said Frankly

pealed to the New Century Club, an organization of six hundred women, to help her. When a committee had been formed Mrs. Schoff demonstrated one of the remarkable qualities that assure her leadership. The women with her, horrified by the tales they had heard, were for proceeding at once to relieve single cases, but Mrs. Schoff insisted that nothing be done until a thorough study of every State in the Union be made, not only as to methods but as to results, both as to expense and as to effectiveness in saving the children.

These women worked all winter compiling a report, "The Statutes of Every State in the United States Concerning Defective, Delinquent and Dependent Children." Massachusetts, Michigan and Illinois had the best records, so Mrs. Schoff packed her trunk, kissed her own children and visited Massachusetts, Michigan and Illinois, which had just introduced a juvenile court and probation system, produced a profound impression.

Urging the Reform. Armed with this data the women got to work. Mrs. Schoff went to the Governor of Pennsylvania, to various political leaders, urging that reform measures be taken. When questions were asked she was ready to answer. When statements were questioned she produced her data. At every turn she met them.

Then she employed a lawyer to draft two bills for the Legislature. These bills provided:— First—Separate time and place for trial of children's cases and no detention of children in police stations or prisons.

Second—Probation officers whose salaries were not to be paid from the public treasury, yet who were appointed by the Judge.

Third—A house of detention in all cities of first and second class for children awaiting trial.

Fourth—Boards of visitors composed of men and women for all children's institutions.



Children in Every County Prison

Immediately the managers of the Eastern House of Refuge arose in opposition. Deprive them of children and lose their places! Nevertheless the bill went through and in May, 1901, the laws were made.

Then there arose a storm of opposition. Pennsylvania is a conservative State. Hundreds of persons resented the fact that the old laws were good enough, hundreds of place holders saw reformatories, orphanages and "homes" emptied, and hastened to the politicians. Mrs. Schoff and her committee were privately termed "a nuisance," and although, as they were not officials, their position was impregnable, certain organs of the press sought by satirical comment and much publicity to discourage them.

But Mrs. Schoff is not easily discouraged. She found a probation officer and the New Century Club guaranteed her salary. Then she got the Pennsylvania Congress of Mothers to supply a second probation officer. With these Mrs. Schoff and her committee, and the Judge who happened to be sitting, and who was only too glad to be helped along in this new order of procedure, opened the first juve-



Trying to Learn How To Be Efficient Fathers and Mothers

nile court of Pennsylvania, on June 14, 1900. Meanwhile the disgruntled place holders, their friends and allies started a suit against the constitutionality of the laws. Mrs. Schoff at once engaged the best legal talent, and when, in February, 1903, the laws of 1901 were declared unconstitutional Mrs. Schoff had also ready and presented to the Legislature one month before five new bills covering the defects of the previous laws. These were fought every step of the way. Mrs. Schoff and her committee went to Harrisburg. The Pennsylvania Congress of Mothers and the New Century Club held meetings and sent to the Legislature hundreds of requests for their passage. Even after their presentation to the Governor an appeal was made for a vote, but the bills went through and still stand.

But Mrs. Schoff did not feel that the work had ended. She induced the Jewish people of the city to provide the salary of a probation officer who could speak Yiddish, she spoke at prayer meetings in various churches, and obtained the salaries of several others. Then she met these officers every week without fail at her own home and went over with them, detail by detail, every case. She attended the Juvenile Court almost daily. She became acquainted with the young offenders. She also became acquainted with their parents. This gave her a far better sense of the offences of the children were, in a majority of cases, directly due to the deficiencies of their parents, why not train the parents?

Fathers, Too, Interested. There had been sporadic attempts at mothers' clubs in connection with the public schools before this. But Mrs. Schoff wanted a far better one as well as a mothers' club, and so she suggested the new name. These associations were joined for the primary purpose of assisting parents in the training of their children. After one year of work there were thirty thousand parents in these associations meeting at the public schools, trying to learn how to be efficient fathers and mothers.

Having set the ball rolling, Mrs. Schoff never stopped. In addition to the New Century Club Mrs. Schoff was formerly president of the Pennsylvania Congress of Mothers, which office she resigned to become, in 1905, president of the National Congress of Mothers. Into each one of these three organiza-

tions she introduced her juvenile court work and parent-teacher associations. Arousing their interest she has been able to give an impetus to movements that have accomplished wonders. Always at a crucial moment she has left her home affairs in the hands of her grown daughters and hastened to the centre of the fray.

One year after the opening of the juvenile court in Philadelphia, at her instance, a similar court opened at Pittsburg. Now they extend all through the State. Other States in which Mrs. Schoff has been a direct influence in starting the juvenile court and probation system are Connecticut, Louisiana and Idaho. The National Congress of Mothers, stimulated by her influence, is establishing parent-teacher associations in every State in the Union.

Mrs. Schoff has been the recipient of unique honors. She is the only woman who has spoken at their request before the members of the Canadian Parliament. This was in 1907. Both houses adjourned and held a joint session to hear her address. At their request she trained two probation officers, and as a result, juvenile court and probation work is well started in Canada.

Despite her sudden accession to prominence in national affairs, Mrs. Schoff is just the same approachable, unassuming woman that she was before 1899. She is the mother of seven children.

"My family," she says, "is the best part of my life, and the most delightful is being a grandmother. Without the direct responsibilities of motherhood, I can thoroughly enjoy my grandchildren."

Only one year ago a certain Philadelphia magistrate resigned because, as he stated to the reporters, "Mrs. Schoff meddled too much and she gave too much advice. One had no authority."

Concrete results of her work are best shown in figures. There were six hundred children under sixteen years of age in Moyamensing prison in 1900. To-day there are none. There were three hundred children a month passing through station houses in Philadelphia. To-day there are 50 per cent of that number arrested, and these are held in the House of Detention. There were 1,468 cases in the Philadelphia Juvenile Court in 1908.