The Social Functions of Crime
(poem presented by Albert K. Cohen as part of his Sutherland Address at the 1993 ASC meetings in Phoenix)

A learned man, Emile Durkheim,
Had much to say concerning crime
And most of what he had to say
Became a book, and so today
The thoughts he had in 1910
Are read by other learned men,
Who then proceed to write a lot
Of books on Durkheim’s life and thought,
And I am sure that someday you
Will write a book or maybe two,
Destined to be widely read,
On what they say that Durkheim said.

Now, Emile D. advanced the view
Which at the time was rather new
That crime and impropriety
Were useful to society,
For if we all obeyed the laws,
Why then, he said, we’d have no cause
To punish folks. If this were so
The moral sentiments would go
To pieces, for the frequent use
Of guillotine and hangman’s noose
Illuminate and help define
The somewhat thin and shaky line
’twixt right and wrong, and they are good
As well for building brotherhood,
For men are closest to their brothers
When they join in stoning others.

Other scholars also state
That crime and criminals create
Useful work at decent pay
For constables and such, and they
Are seldom plagued, we must agree
With what is called redundancy.
Let me add–and I will soon
Be finished–there’s another boon
We reap from crime, and I refer
To the fact that if there were
No crime–no muggers, hustlers, crooks–
There’d be no journals, theses, books,
No lectures, seminars, reports
On crime, probation, prisoners, courts,
On everything, as it turns out,
The ASC is all about,
And so I pen my final rhyme:
A toast to criminals and crime.