

## 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.

