

A Plea for Trained Nurses in Prisons.

At the present day we are becoming accustomed to hear of all sorts and conditions of persons going to prison for reasons quite apart from crime, but it was somewhat of a surprise to us recently when a trained nurse asked, "Where do you suppose I have been lately?" to learn that as a conscientious objector to paying her rates, for a reason which we consider quite justifiable, she had been incarcerated at Holloway. Although the experience is an unpleasant one for the individual, it is not without benefit to the public, for the eye of the trained nurse is able to see defects in the management of the health of the prisoners which surely have only to be brought to the attention of the Home Secretary to be remedied.

There are many avenues of work now opening up to the trained nurse, and we believe that in none would her services be more valuable than in our own prisons where punishment must, it is true, be meted out to offenders, but where there is no reason why the laws of hygiene and decency should be outraged, or why supervision should not be given to the health of the prisoners by trained nurses acting under the general direction of the Medical Officer, to whose attention our informant bears witness, but who, obviously, cannot give preventive care, as well as attending to his own onerous duties, to the daily hygienic requirements of 1,000 prisoners. It depends much on the humanity of the wardress whether the life of a prisoner is tolerable, or whether it is unnecessarily hard, though two officials holding similar posts may equally enforce prison regulations.

THE ROUTINE ON ADMISSION.

The routine on admission as regards the women prisoners is that they are received by a wardress in the underground cells, when they are taken to a room and told to strip. This may be a necessary precaution to ensure that a prisoner has nothing concealed upon her, but it is indecent and an outrage that it should be performed in the presence of her fellow prisoners. Self-respect must be inspired in, and regained by the most degraded if they are to again become respectable members of society, and that they should be required so to expose themselves before other prisoners certainly does not conduce to this. Disgust makes us hesitate to refer to certain conditions in which women prisoners may be. This inspection should be carried out decently, and in order, before women officials only.

The next step is that the new arrival puts on a chemise and is weighed by one prisoner, the other taking down her hair, the wardress exercising a general supervision. In this scanty garment she presents herself for inspection to the male medical officer.

Our informant says that in her own case she was then placed temporarily in a cell with two other prisoners, which was unsuited for one. It was lighted by a skylight, and, so far as she could tell, there was no ventilation. Moreover, its condition was filthy, a former occupant had been sick there, and the evidence of this had not been removed.

HYGIENIC CONDITIONS.

The hygienic conditions also call for comment. Each prisoner is provided in her own cell with a tin chamber utensil, which every morning at 6.30 she is required to empty and rinse at the slop sink. This office has to be performed by 24 prisoners in a very few minutes, and *it is during this time* that the prisoners are supposed to relieve their bowels, which is manifestly impossible. At other times they must use the tin utensils in their cells for purposes of evacuation. It must be remembered that they are locked in their cells from 5 p.m. to 6.30 a.m. During this time the utensil is used for all purposes. If a prisoner has diarrhoea it affords her only means of relief. Then, after a necessary perfunctory rinsing at the sink, she has to dry and polish it with the two small cloths which alone are provided her to polish all the tin utensils kept in the cell, including those for her food and drinking water.

Our informant points out that the change to prison diet is likely to produce either constipation or diarrhoea. The wardresses are not qualified to deal with the health of the prisoners in regard to this matter, and the conditions of health would be much improved if it were the duty of a trained nurse to ascertain each day who needs aperients or medical attention and daily to report to the medical officer on the physical needs of the prisoners.

The small amount of outdoor exercise (none at all on Sundays) and the confinement, necessarily depreciate the health of the prisoners, and if there is constipation or diarrhoea also, due to want of access to the necessary conveniences, their condition is a miserable one, indeed.

Our informant says that owing to want of opportunity and worry she had no relief from Saturday to the following Thursday, and, as she had abdominal lesions owing to a recent accident, and a previous operation, her sufferings were intense. A nurse will understand

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