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Editorial.

PRISON REFORM.

"Force is no Remedy."—*John Bright.*

We have it on the authority of Lord Kimberley's Commission in 1878, and repeated by a Departmental Inquiry Committee in 1895, that our present methods of carrying out the penal laws not only fail to reform offenders, but produce a deteriorating effect upon them; and the late Lord Justice Mathew stated that our existing system of penal laws is a hundred years behind the times. The statement of the Home Secretary in the House of Commons last week, therefore, that it is proposed to introduce some changes in the treatment of prisoners at once, and that others are to be the subject of future legislation, is welcome. Mr. Churchill submitted that the first real principle which should guide any one who was trying to establish a good system of prisons was to prevent as many people as possible getting there at all. There was an injury to the individual and a loss to the State whenever a person was committed to prison for the first time, and every care, consistent with the maintenance of law and order, must be constantly taken to minimise the number of persons committed. He also expressed the opinion that no boy ought to be sent to prison unless he was incorrigible or had committed some serious offence. It should be possible to discover some form of disciplinary detention or correction for minor offences outside the prison. No youth ought to receive any sentence which had not a definite curative and educative character. Next year, he hoped to submit to Parliament more detailed and definite proposals when public opinion had concentrated itself on the subject.

Another point mentioned by Mr. Churchill

was that forty years had elapsed since the Education Act of 1870 was passed, and we now had a class of men in our prisons who needed brain food as well as the ordinary nourishment. For some time there had been occasional lectures given in prison, and a few months ago the Somerset Light Infantry sent their band to Dartmoor Prison to play to the convicts. The effect produced on those poor people was amazing, and their letters for months afterwards were eloquent of that fact.

Amongst the reforms proposed by Mr. Churchill is that four lectures or concerts are to be given every year in every convict prison in the country. Also that passive resisters, "suffragettes," and other persons not convicted of offences involving great violence or cruelty, are not to be compelled to wear prison clothing, to be specially searched, to have their hair cut or shaved, to take the regular prison bath, or to clean their cells.

Other reforms are the granting of time to every person of fixed abode in which to pay any fine inflicted, the suspension of the whole system of police supervision, and the abolition of the ticket-of-leave system except in old refractory cases.

The whole of the proposals of the Home Secretary are in the direction of a more enlightened and humane treatment of prisoners. We hope that before he introduces legislation upon the subject next year he may also take into consideration the fact that, as many prisoners are feeble-minded and mentally unstable, it is of great importance that warders and wardresses should be trained to understand and manage these conditions, and that the infirmaries of our prisons should be staffed by fully-trained nurses on the staff of a recognised Prison Nursing Service.

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