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EDITORIAL.

PENAL REFORM.

The question of penal reform is one which must be of interest to every humanitarian, for it is undeniable that our present penal system is punitive rather than deterrent and reformatory, which should be the aim of correction in all civilized countries. The work and programme of the Penal Reform League (1, Harrington Square, N.W.), well deserves careful study, and by none more than trained nurses; partly because they are brought into contact, in the course of their work with members of what are known as the criminal classes, and partly because there is scope for much usefulness for trained nurses, when prison doors are opened a little wider than at present. No doubt special qualities are needed by nurses for work in prisons, but none could be a greater power for good as matrons, in charge of infirmaries, and in certain positions as wardresses, for the training of nurses teaches them the management of men and women, they can watch and report to the medical officer in charge on the condition of their health, and at the same time they would be a wholesome, sympathetic, uplifting influence in the lives of criminals, for whose descent into crime the social conditions for which the community is responsible, are often mainly to blame.

The Penal Reform League advocates:—
“action for the wiser and wider application of the principle of probation; a satisfactory development of industries for convicted criminals, to be organised with a view to the education of character and capacity, and to fitting them to earn a livelihood usefully; the increased employment of capable women in the prison and allied services as organizers, as inspectors, as

governors and directors of institutions for women, as trained nurses for both men and women, and as stewards—seeing that without the help of women, domestic economy of prisons and such like institutions is not likely to be either domestic or economical,” and other desirable reforms.

Captain Arthur St. John, the hon. secretary, who has made a close study of prison systems, both in this country and in America, considers that women's prisons should be governed and staffed by women, with women doctors, under a board of managers composed of women, or under a woman director, that it should be recognized as an ideal to be earnestly aimed at that all prison officers should be of the probation-officer type—men of fine, strong, and sympathetic character, practical psychologists, leaders of men. One thing which he considers would perhaps raise the tone and morale of the prison service more than almost anything else would be the introduction into every prison of carefully selected gentlewomen as trained nurses.

Inebriates should, Captain St. John contends, not be sent to prison. They should be put on probation and required to undergo a cure in a special home or hospital, or in their own homes. Mentally defective persons should not be sent to prison; they should be sent to proper homes for feeble-minded, or put to work under proper care and supervision. Debtors and persons under 23 should not be sent to prison, they should be put on probation or sent to a Borstal Institution. Under these circumstances there would, he thinks, not be many left for prison. It is interesting to learn that all female officers joining the prison staff now pass through the one training school at Holloway, where they have a course of instruction designed to help them in the care of sick and infirm prisoners, and in Swedish drill.

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