

"A woman (afterwards acquitted) was kept in a police cell from Tuesday till the following Sunday; the only sanitary utensil provided for use at night was an ordinary bucket. In the daytime the sergeant's wife brought her meals, and when rung for took her to the lavatory. At night she was in sole charge of the police constable, who looked at intervals through the spy-hole. Once a day she was allowed to wash herself, but during the whole time she could not undress. She was unable to obtain the sanitary towels which she required, though the sergeant's wife in kindness gave her two old pieces of tablecloth."

#### PREVENTION OF CRIME ACT, 1908.

Attention is drawn to the "Prevention of Crime Act, 1908," the object of which is, on the one hand, the reformation of young offenders, by what is now known as the Borstal System, and, on the other, for the segregation of habitual criminals over a longer period under Preventive Detention.

#### THE BIRMINGHAM EXPERIMENT.

In the progressive City of Birmingham "a serious attempt has been made by the magistrates to prevent the committal (especially in mental cases) of persons unfit for prison life. The medical officer of the prison, who is an expert, appointed at the magistrates' request, watches all cases on remand; and the appointment of a doctor to report on other adjourned cases out of custody has also been approved by the City authorities.

A large number of persons unfit for prison conditions have been saved from imprisonment by this procedure. "Investigation has shown that the criminal is to a large extent defective mentally and physically," says the committee responsible for the inauguration of this scheme, "and proper medical advice may in many cases remedy his defect and make him a decent member of society." The committee adds that "physical defects are in many cases responsible for crime," and that, "in practically every one" of the cases referred to the prison doctor, "some defect in the offender has been found" so that his report has in each case enabled the Justices to deal more satisfactorily with the offender.

The magistrates of the Bradford Bench have adopted a similar scheme.

#### LACK OF DEFENCE FOR POOR PRISONERS.

The authors draw attention to the helplessness of many prisoners, particularly in police courts. "The poorer a prisoner is the less chance he has of receiving justice. No expense is spared, as a rule, in the prosecution, but beyond the totally inadequate Poor Prisoners' Defence Act (which only applies to prisoners tried in a Court of Assize or a Court of Quarter Sessions) no provision whatever is made for the defence of a poor prisoner."

#### THE MACHINERY OF THE PRISON SYSTEM.

One chapter is devoted to the Machinery of the Prison System, and the authors consider the words "machinery" and "system" particularly

well suited to describe the elaborate, centralised and rigid manner in which the administration of our English prisons is conducted.

We gather that criticisms and recommendations from those in a position to give them are not encouraged. "Every summer the Commissioners draw up a report addressed to the Home Secretary in respect of the year ended on the previous 31st of March. During the years preceding 1915 this included 'extracts' from the reports by the governor, chaplain, and medical officer of each prison, since which time this has been discontinued from motives of economy. One chaplain told the Committee that his experience was the Commissioners would not publish any portions of the report from a governor or chaplain with which they disagreed, and another that when he first entered the Service he used frequently to include in his reports to the Commissioners both criticisms and recommendations, but that he ceased to do so after some years, seeing that they were not published, and that no attention appeared to be given to them."

A medical officer reported a similar experience on the part of prison doctors, and a governor states that he has "lots of plans" which he inserts in his annual reports, but that "nothing gets done."

#### THE THICK FOG OF OFFICIAL SECRECY.

The authors claim that "the thick fog of official secrecy in which the prison administration has been, and still is, enveloped, is open to very serious objection, that the Prison Commission is both autocratic and irresponsible. It is theoretically under the control of the Home Secretary, but, practically, is largely independent of him, that the Commissioners do not come into personal touch with the prisoners, that the enquiries that they hold are secret, that the Standing Orders are not published, that the staff are forbidden to criticise or to divulge the details of the prison treatment, that there are no conferences of prison officials and experts on the subject of penal methods and prison treatment, that there is very little research among prison officials into the problems of penology, and, lastly, that owing to these defects the Commissioners have remained too dependent on their own limited and uniform conception of prison discipline; and they have been deprived of the practical enthusiasm of an experienced staff enjoying opportunities of initiative, as well as of the stimulus exerted by a powerful and correctly informed reforming movement among the outside public.

(To be continued.)

#### A WORD FOR THE WEEK.

"Every action has its own appropriate joy. The true art of life is to discover the joys appropriate to those actions which it is our duty to perform."

*Dhammapada.*

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