

THE PRISON OF THE FUTURE.

Mr. Sanford Bates, Director of the Bureau of Federal Prisons in the United States, having been invited to address the First International Congress on Mental Hygiene on the subject of prisons and prison reform, chose as the title of his communication, "The Prison of the Future." After paying debts of gratitude to England for her impartial and speedy system of criminal justice, to Holland for her successful system for the care and correction of juveniles, to Belgium for her splendid psychiatric studies in the prisons, to Germany for the modern and scientific development of adult prisons, to Italy for her convincing and brilliant contributions to the science of criminology, and to Switzerland for her remarkable success in the treatment of misdemeanour type of offenders on prison farms, the speaker proceeded to a review of the prison situation in America and to his visions of the prison of the future.

The problem of the prison is not isolated. It is inextricably involved in the problems of poverty, bad heredity, industrial inequality, and physical and mental inadequacy. In the past, prisons have failed to make the majority of their inmates tractable and law-abiding citizens, and it is certain that the prisons will continue to fail in this respect until they are organised and operated on an entirely different basis and with a different object. The attitude of the community must be one of helpful interest, not disdainful neglect.

In the past, the failure of the prison has been the culmination of our general failure to secure law obedience. Men have returned from the rigours and brutalities of warfare to find wages reduced and new facilities for crime, such as the easy use of the automobile, revolvers and even machine guns. Self-emancipation has been associated with disregard of the old orthodox religions whose control has been challenged. Little wonder, therefore, that in some countries the crime rate has risen in this period of desperate and selfish criminality.

The thoughtful observer to-day, who candidly questions the efficacy of punitive treatment, still hesitates to expose his community to the risk of abandoning the protection conferred by prisons. How can they be reformed so as at once to give protection to the community and to help the prisoner himself? Recent studies have shown that in most instances a prison term is not an improving experience. This is not entirely the prison's fault. It is obvious that if the prison is to direct its efforts towards the permanent protection of society, it must do more than make men temporarily miserable, more anti-social and eventually more dangerous.

Attorney-General William D. Mitchell has recently said, "The prison of the future should be at once a disciplinary school for those who can be reformed, a place of permanent segregation for the incorrigible, and a laboratory for the study of the causes of crime." In the opinion of Mr. Bates there are four features of the prison of the future which differ fundamentally from those of the prison of the past.

(1) The prison buildings and equipment will be so constructed and devised as to lend themselves to constructive rehabilitation. Barred doors may be necessary for a certain percentage of our criminal population, but they do not bring out the higher and nobler sentiments in human nature. We have been in the habit of putting our prison population into an environment suited to the needs of a small percentage. The most encouraging progress made in America has been in the treatment of the offender on extra-mural lines. Probation, parole, the juvenile court, the foster-home and placing-out systems are splendid examples of ingenuity and progressiveness in penal problems. The communities that have employed these

methods most extensively are those which are most free from crime waves. The prison of the future will give a prominent place to the hospital, the library, the school, the mental hygiene clinic, and the workshop. It will have a farm and a library. It will not be an asylum or a place of amusement or a dungeon. It will be clean and teach cleanliness. It will be busy and teach industry. It will be stern and teach discipline.

(2) The prison of the future will be staffed by persons trained in the science of understanding human nature. Too long has the conduct of prisons been in the hands of men picked at random on the basis of size, strength, and the inability to get a position anywhere else. Schools for prison officers must be established, in which are taught the science and theory of criminology, elementary medicine, psychiatry and first-aid, as well as jujitsu, floor drill and self-protection. In America the standard required of prison officers has already arisen so much that many college men have joined prison staffs in search of work of an intelligent and constructive character.

(3) The prison of the future will be administered on the principle that an idle mind is the devil's workshop. No serious prison riot has yet taken place in an institution in which all the inmates have been provided with study and productive labour.

(4) The most difficult and yet the most helpful function of the prison of the future will be individualisation. Men may be punished *en masse*, but it is doubtful if they can be reformed that way. What will help one man will not cure another. Here the psychiatrist and the mental hygienist will be of inestimable value in the development of the prison programme of the future. Before we can treat, we must diagnose and prescribe. The prison officials of the future will be aided by physicians, psychiatrists, educational instructors, librarians, athletic instructors, superintendents of schools, etc. They will all find their places as component parts of the programme of individualisation.

Speaking as a prison official, Mr. Bates asked the psychiatrists and mental hygienists to work with him and not apart from him. If such mental experts will realize the tremendous difficulties of the work of prison officials and will not content themselves with discovering what is, or what was, wrong in the prisoners, but take their coats off to help correct and cure these patients, they will be doing a great work. Such mental experts might go a step further and, by their studies of environment and heredity, enable the component members of the community to keep outside the prisons, present or future.

FOR ALL PRISONERS AND CAPTIVES.

Our new Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, who is a great-nephew of Elizabeth Fry, the famous prison reformer, has begun a tour of English prisons, which he desires to make in person before completing his important plans for a three-year programme of prison reform to be announced shortly.

These plans, based on the proposals of Sir John Dove-Wilson's committee, are nearing completion. They include steps to improve certain prison accommodation, and it is particularly in this connection that the Home Secretary wishes to see conditions for himself.

Sir Samuel Hoare has always had a close interest in prisons and prison reform. His great-great-grandfather was Chairman of the first committee on the subject of reform, and Elizabeth Fry also served on it. Sir Samuel's first speech as Home Secretary was on the subject of prisons.

He began his inspection with a visit to the women's prison at Holloway.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)