

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED

THE NURSING RECORD

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No. 2035. Vol. 86

FEBRUARY, 1938.

Price Sevenpence.

EDITORIAL

THE PROPOSED LEGISLATION ON PENAL REFORM.

The question of the need for Penal Reform is one which has been exercising the minds of many of the members of the thoughtful public for some years. True it is that considerable progress in this direction has been made of late years, true it is also that prisons can never be pleasant places. But those who have visited our prisons, more especially trained nurses whose eyes are trained to discern the marks left by mental ill-health, cannot fail to be impressed by the fact that not only should the physical health of prisoners be the concern of the prison authorities, but that their mental condition, also, should be investigated by expert psychologists.

Perhaps one of the most striking illustrations of this need is to be found in the tragic condition of sufferers from sleeping sickness, who have recovered sufficiently to be allowed to return to their homes, but whose mental condition has been so affected by their illness that their disposition often appears to have completely changed, and their anti-social acts bring them within the arm of the law. Clearly they are still suffering from mental ill-health as the result of illness, and when this has been diagnosed by a mental specialist their illness should be recognised and treated. They are sick persons, not criminals, and should be treated as such, instead of, as has too often happened in the past, being convicted and sentenced to terms of imprisonment.

Much has been learnt of recent years through the study of psychology, and it is a fortunate circumstance that we have in the present Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, a humanitarian of wide vision, who realises the need for penal reform and has drafted a Bill, which it is hoped he will introduce early in the present Session, with the object of bringing legislation on penal reform up to date.

In a New Year's Message to the *Chelsea Chronicle*, a quarterly journal issued by the Conservative Association in his constituency, Sir Samuel Hoare, dealing with the proposed legislation, says: "By penal reform I mean principally three subjects: the treatment of young delinquents, the treatment of persistent offenders, and the treatment of men and women in prison. To each of these three branches of the subject I have been giving very close attention. Indeed, it is no secret that I have been preparing a Bill that deals with them. While I will not forestall the Bill's provisions, I can tell you that my three objectives are, first, to keep the young out of prison; secondly, to have a better system for protecting

the persistent offender from himself and for protecting society from the hardened criminal; and, thirdly, to develop the reforming side of prison life.

"It is many years since these questions were dealt with comprehensively, and since the last big Bill on the subject there has been a generation of new experience. The time is already overdue for bringing our penal system up to date and for adapting it to the lessons that have been taught by experience and to the recommendations that have been made by many committees of inquiry and men and women who have done invaluable work as magistrates, prison visitors, and social workers. Having an hereditary interest in the subject, for Elizabeth Fry, the most remarkable of prison reformers, was my great-great-aunt, I am particularly anxious to start a new and more hopeful chapter in the depressing book that deals with crime and delinquency."

The Home Secretary has given proof of his deep personal interest in the question of Penal Reform by paying personal visits to Dartmoor, Wandsworth, Wormwood Scrubs, Pentonville, and other prisons, and the knowledge he has thus gained at first hand has been supplemented by reports from Mr. Geoffrey Lloyd, Parliamentary Secretary to the Home Office, on his visits to Maidstone and Chelmsford. Both Ministers talked to prisoners and inspected every part of the prisons, including the punishment cells.

To nurses the question of Penal Reform must always be one of deep interest, for their work brings them in contact with all sorts and conditions of persons, including those who belong to what are known as the criminal classes, and they find so much good in the worst of them that they pass in uniform up and down in localities where police do not venture single-handed, unafraid and unmolested.

To them it is a matter for deep thankfulness that legislation in regard to Penal Reform should be in the hands of Sir Samuel Hoare, who has their confidence, and who they believe will deal wisely with this difficult question, both with regard to the efficient protection of the public and to the development of the reforming side of prison life. Nurses will follow closely the progress of the Bill through Parliament, and give whatever help is possible in its promotion.

The clinic and offices of the Institute for Scientific Treatment of Delinquency was recently opened by Lord Roche. The event will mark a step forward in the use of psychology in curing anti-social and criminal tendencies. Each patient at the institute's clinic receives a complete physical examination. He is also given a mental test to determine mental age. Psychological treatment is also given at the institute.

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