

## BOOK REVIEWS

### ANATOMY OF PRISON.

Hugh J. Klare

Hutchinson, 1960. pp.160. 18s. 0d.

BECAUSE I find myself not always in sympathy with some of the suggestions put forward by the author of this book for the betterment of our prisons and the treatment of the inmates, I would not want it to be thought that I consider him to be in the wrong. Far from it. All that Mr. Klare has to say is well worth listening to, and pondering over. You realise, as you read him, that you are in the company of someone who is undoubtedly an idealist, but also full of common-sense; someone who has the rare quality of being compassionate without being sentimental. He sees, with disarming clarity, both sides of every question, and his approach to a problem is never made without regard to the opinion held by someone who, like myself, cannot whole-heartedly champion his cause. This reasonableness gives him an advantage over his opponents—too strong a word perhaps—that is almost persuasive in its effect. Indeed, I can think of no-one with whom it would be a greater pleasure to argue than Mr. Klare, or to whom one would less mind losing the argument.

That my criticism of the theories he expressed may be taken only for what they are worth, let me say at once that it is made from the standpoint of one who has never enthusiastically supported the tenets of the Howard League of Penal Reform, of which worthy body Mr. Klare was until recently the secretary. Once I earned the

severe disapproval of certain interested persons by referring to it as the *League of Penal Interference*; though in fairness to myself I should add that others, equally interested, took my innocent jibe as being not entirely wide of the mark. To condemn a school of thought that may well be in advance of its time is both foolish and wrong-headed. Nevertheless, in the matter of penal reform time is an important factor, and as at the moment our prison system, or rather its administration, has numerous difficulties to overcome (owing partly to the tremendous increase in crime, and partly to the lack of sufficient staff) it would seem that the present is not the time to clamour for fresh reforms. Let the system *as it exists* be implemented to the entire satisfaction of those directly in control of it before pressing upon them—however sincerely—designs for the creation of a penal paradise that is unlikely to be realised for some years to come.

My personal view of the prison system, arrived at after an investigation during which I deliberately went out of my way to criticise the established order that I might learn what its supporters had to say in its defence, ended by convincing me that prisons could be more easily, and possibly more successfully, run if less attention were paid to the advice given by outsiders. I came across examples of reforms introduced for the good effect they were calculated to have upon prisoners that appeared to me to be, if anything, more harmful than otherwise. An instance was the freedom of association allowed prisoners during their leisure hours, the opportunity it afforded them of chattering in groups. Now Mr. Klare is a great

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believer in group discussions, so that having read what he had to say in their favour, I put down his book and thought how much I would like to give him my view of the matter only to find on taking up the book again that in the very next paragraph he had generously expressed my view for me, and not found it worthless.

"Here we touch upon the crux of the matter", he writes. "The impact of prisoner on prisoner can be considerable, and although it may be useful and good, it may also be extremely harmful. A multitude of chance contacts, if they are of the wrong kind, may lead a man more deeply into crime. Moreover, such contacts, repeated again and again, gradually create a public opinion among prisoners. And public opinion is a very powerful thing, even though what is 'done' in the world outside may differ a lot from what is 'done' inside, and amongst prisoners. The system whereby large numbers of prisoners come together to some extent haphazardly for meals, recreation, and work, allows opinions and pressures to be built up which can be so strong, and so negative, that much rehabilitative effort may come to nothing."

In Mr. Klare's view, the rehabilitation of a prisoner while serving his sentence is of paramount importance. It is his belief that if properly treated by his enlightened superiors a man who goes to prison as the result of his anti-social behaviour can come out of it with the urge to lead an honest and industrious life. I have never been able to share that belief. Why, since it is next to impossible to change a man's character under normal conditions,

should the transformation be thought easier to accomplish in the frustrating atmosphere of a prison? Two prison governors I met, each of whom spoke his mind in no uncertain terms (incidentally each of them has since become a Prison Commissioner) was of the opinion that to expect the average inmate to come out of prison a better man than he went in, was nonsense; for the reason that nobody is the better for leading an unnatural life—which is what existence in a prison must amount to. Besides, what so many so-called progressive reformers choose to ignore, is the fact that professional criminals, those the public is most urgently in need of protection from, have no desire whatever to be reformed. For them crime—to a greater extent than ever before—can be a paying proposition. Going to prison is an occupational risk they are prepared to face, and to accept as the penalty of bad luck, or of a 'job' mishandled. I know this to be the case. Mr. Klare knows it too; and being, as I have already said, an exceptionally honest person, he does not hesitate to draw attention to it.

"It is remarkable", he says, "how conservative many old lags and habitual criminals are. They want the old, well-known discipline and often dislike a modern approach. . . In this they are joined by some of the older prison officers, so that, occasionally, a prison may seem to be full of men who do not want to be rehabilitated, watched over by men who do not want to rehabilitate them. In such a situation, both sides know exactly where they are, everyone's behaviour is reasonably predictable, and each side's idea about the other is most satisfactorily confirmed."

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Those words of Mr. Klare's express, to a larger extent than possibly he realises, what many reasonably minded people still consider a prison should be: a place to which men are sent to be disciplined as a punishment for the crimes they have committed. They need not be the inhumanly harsh places they once were, but nor need they be quasi-mental institutions in which the inmates are made to feel that their crimes were unfortunate mistakes, the result perhaps of some unavoidable complexity in their make-up. To reduce a prison to the level of an advanced school for backward boys by opening the gates to a flood of psychologists, tutor-organisers and social workers, and allowing them gradually to get the upper hand, could be as dangerous in the result as to shut them out altogether and return to the bad old days of degradation and near-torture. No one with a grain of intelligence, unless he has a heart of stone or a streak of cruelty in him, would think of opposing reformers, or seek to undo the valuable work they have unselfishly performed over the years. But there does come a stage where the 'enlightened' treatment of criminals—whose crimes have not noticeably decreased in their violence—seems scarcely to make sense. A case in point—small but significant—is the confusion of mind I was thrown into by a remark addressed to me by a young Assistant Governor walking me round a maximum security prison. As we passed beneath the high wall, over which several prisoners had recently escaped, I mentioned that sometimes the walls of orchards were topped by spikes to prevent people climbing over them. The

implication was obvious, since the top of the prison wall lacked any obstruction. The Assistant-Governor came to standstill, regarding me with an expression in his young eyes of alarm and suspicion. "Spikes", he said, "can do a man climbing over them a serious injury, you know." I told him that I did know. Whereupon he exclaimed, politely, "I say, you're a bit of a barbarian, aren't you?" I began to think that I must be one, until, some time later, another escape was made from the same prison, in the same way, and I had no more qualms about being spike-minded, when an occasion seemed to demand it.

On the whole, I am in favour—who in his right mind wouldn't be?—of Mr. Klare's pattern for the future, including as it does smaller prisons, accommodating specially selected prisoners, and run by a highly trained staff of experts. But I am also convinced that a speedy effort to achieve this commendable objective could easily defeat its purpose. True, reforms in any direction usually advance at snail-pace: yet an instance comes to mind, with regard to the Probation Service, which illustrates the inadvisability of demanding too much, too soon. A scheme whereby only men and women carefully trained, over a considerable period, in the arts of social science, were accepted as probation officers, has recently been found not to fill the bill. So that now suitable applicants, after no more than a couple of interviews, are also enrolled, and trained while actually on the job. An excellent idea. Though it is doubtful if the trainees in either case are encouraged to pronounce the magic sentence that I have always longed to hear addressed by a probation

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officer to the magistrate who has given him a new probationer: "With respect, sir, my case-load is already too heavy to enable me to give proper supervision to an additional client." I dare say some magistrates would look askance. But if the probation officer stuck to his guns, some real progress would have been made, by calling attention to the futility of trying to do the impossible in order to save one's face. The inability of a probation officer to give the concentrated, individual attention necessary to the boy whose character he is required to assess (say to aid a borstal report) is sometimes reflected in the boy himself, after he has arrived at an Allocation Centre. At two Allocation Centres I visited, I had pointed out to me by the officers in charge of workshops—each of them men of long experience—the various boys they instinctively recognised as unfit for borstal, because patently untrainable. All that was done about them—and I see no reason to consider them as isolated cases—was to make the best of a bad job. Not that the job had in the first place been badly handled by the probation officer. The poor man simply had not had the time any more than had the other contributors to his report, thoroughly to judge the boy's qualities—or lack of them.

The above instance of confused endeavour is not as unrelated to the subject of this review as it may at first appear to be. The point I wish to make is this: that until a sufficiently numerous staff has been recruited to facilitate the proper working of the Prison and Probation systems as they exist, extravagant notions of what miracles a team of dedicated specialists—sup-

posing you could find enough of the right sort—might work, are somewhat misplaced. And I am not at all sure that in this argument Mr. Klare doesn't find himself on my side. Eager reformer in spirit he may be, but the spirit is attached to a mind as balanced as it is penetrating. No one could more appreciate the difficulties which face the Prison Commissioners at the present time, nor is his understanding of the prison officers who serve them, at whatever level, any less acute. In no other book about prisons have I come across such sympathy for, and understanding of, the prison officer and his attitude towards his extremely demanding job. Mr. Klare has obviously studied the prison staff from every angle and has obviously gained their confidence in the course of his researches.

As a blue print for the future, to be put away (but not forgotten) until the time is ripe to act upon his constructive suggestions, his book is admirable. And no member of the general public who seriously wants to know what prison is about, can afford to miss it.

SEWELL STOKES

## CRIME AND THE PENAL SYSTEM.

Howard Jones, B.Sc., Ph.D.

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"OCTOBER. This is one of the peculiarly dangerous months in which to speculate in stocks. The others are July, January, September, April, November, May, March, June, December, August and February."

Had Mark Twain's delightful character Pudd'nhead Wilson been