

BOOK REVIEWS—cont.

"new" idea—it is an old one which needs fairly frequent airing.

The critical examination of the White Paper ends with Dr. Peter Scott's "Psychiatric and Psychological Aspects". Dr. Scott, Consultant Physician at the Maudsley Hospital and visiting psychiatrist at Brixton and the L.C.C. Remand Homes, first praises the White Paper's reference to research and says that we cannot be too grateful for such statements "which only a few years ago would scarcely have been dreamt of in an official statement of policy". He has some new thoughts on classification of offenders, and various anti-social personalities are described in a clear, graphic style. The layman can read these descriptive passages with profit. In an attempt to define the modern meaning of "training" Dr. Scott makes a number of references to the contribution of staff and suggests that it is going to be difficult to deal with the "trainee" and train away feelings of anger and resentment unless he has day to day contact with staff who he feels are friendly and interested and prepared to let him talk. Finally, as Mr. Rolph began by asking for a change in public opinion so Dr. Scott says "would it be too much to ask that the community's attitude to crime and its capacity to change that attitude might also be investigated?"

After reading this booklet many times (and it deserves such treatment), one cannot but describe it as an excellent piece of critical work, deserving a wide sale to prison and borstal staffs.

MARK WINSTON.

FORGOTTEN MEN

Merfyn Turner

The National Council of Social Service, Inc.
1960. pp.91. 5s. 0d.

THE PATTERN OF falling leaves on the brown cover is sadly symbolic. In fact, the prevailing atmosphere of the Common Lodging House (sometimes, euphemistically, 'Hostel') is one of incipient decay, of failure and hopelessness. Failure not merely by individuals, but of society which allows these human equivalents of the Municipal 'Tip' to exist. It is a disturbing picture, and a poignant revelation of a little-known problem—or perhaps one should say, of a part of a problem.

The author is familiar to many for his achievements in hostel work of a very specialised kind, and as a sincere and lively speaker. It was a pleasure, therefore, to discover in him a prose style which loses nothing by comparison with his other talents. "Forgotten Men" is as well-written as it is worth reading. Commissioned by the Gulbenkian Foundation, it is "a research into the mental and physical needs" of the residents of London lodging houses. There are some twenty-five of these, and "Domino Lodge," where most of the work was done, is one of the largest, a place capable of providing 600 beds a night.

Under the heading "Residents" Mr. Turner gives us a collection of individual portraits of Hogarthian shrewdness and diversity, and shares with us the slightly horrible quality of his first impressions. For here in the flesh (and much of it bug-infested) is that good old cliché "the dregs of humanity"—the tramps, alcoholics, petty criminals and general ne'er-do-wells.

BOOK REVIEWS—cont.

Some stay for a night, or two, some have no other home. For the most part they are suspicious of enquiries, but in confidence some will admit that by coming here they have lost their last shred of self-respect; others merely sit and stare into space, and scratch, indifferent. But there is hardly one who entertains the remotest degree of warmth for the place that houses him. For the finest and cleanest of lodging houses (and some are alarmingly clean) is as personal to its lodgers as any Main Line Station, and there is simply no belonging to it. This is the tragedy of Domino Lodge.

Probably about a quarter of these men are habitual criminals—lodging house staffs tend to put it lower than this, but it is characteristic of their attitude not to seek to know too much of clients' private affairs. Many of the oddities who drift in and out are recognisable prison types, under the whiskers and grime, and a certain nostalgia for prison is discernible, where at least one is fed and clothed and cared for. It is clearly a hostile and difficult world that turns a man's steps towards the lodging house. Most are on some form or other of "Assistance," the word is always present like a black spell, never uttered in gratitude, and rarely without imprecations. N.A.B. officials may deny it, but "the frequency with which the 'No address—no assistance' complaint appears makes it unlikely that all the complaints are false."

Mr. Turner does not make it very clear how long he spent "on site," and under what conditions, nor how closely he himself became

involved in the day-to-day activities of the place, and one feels there is a good deal left unsaid which would have been illuminating. About lodging house staffs, for instance. There is a curious detachment about parts of the study, as if the observer had somehow been watching it all through a glass roof, rarely descending to floor level and physical contacts—except, of course, with the men interviewed in detail. As Mr. Turner is not this kind of observer, one can only assume either that he was held at arm's length by the administration, or that he was puzzled to find a common language of communication. Perhaps it was a little of both. There are certainly passages where he is obviously straining charity to its limits to avoid downright condemnation of an attitude, an obtuseness of outlook.

Not that all the informants are obtuse and hostile—the Superintendent who "told me to get out, because, he said, I was trying to teach him his job" was in a minority of one. There is generally no lack of kindness we are assured, but there is a vast indifference to the real needs of these men behind the masks of sloth and indigence, a lack of understanding, a "reluctance to accept that their lodgers have problems." And "when all the debts have been acknowledged . . . the term social service applied to lodging houses remains a mere euphemism." To the trained social worker there must be something appalling in this weary, futile trafficking in beds and meal-tickets, something demented in the mentality which looks on a full house nightly as an end in itself. Some superintendents and their assistants see this, perhaps, but in the end it is less frustrating

BOOK REVIEWS—cont.

to find one's satisfactions in "improvements"—white-tiled lavatories replacing Victorian glazed brick. "There is no indication that to make men feel wanted *it may be necessary to become involved* in their troubles and difficulties, and their often pitiful attempts to turn failure into success." Crime, for instance, is "not so much the first choice as the last . . . the last link in a chain of factors over which they had but incomplete control."

Involvement, we are made to feel, is the real issue—and surely not only for lodging house keepers? These failures, these grossly inadequate personalities, says the author, are quite simply incapable of adapting to the demands of modern life, of forming attachments or putting down roots. "Why? There is no easy answer. "The day of single causes has passed . . . the variations in human personality are infinite, and never more so than when we are dealing with defective adaptability."

Perhaps then there has been too much seeking after causes, too many triumphant cries of "Eureka!" from political platforms and social science faculties alike, when the truth is somewhat simpler. Maybe we need to get a little more involved with our subject, in a perfectly personal, human way—with insight and a plan, but with warmth of feeling too. Here is a problem which Twentieth Century science, economics and

Welfare State have so far failed to tackle any more effectively than Nineteenth Century "charity" did. Certainly the denizens of Domino Lodge stand in desperate need of something less tangible than meal-tickets and clean beds (to be vacated by 8.30 a.m.). Social casework grows ever more clinical and objective—does there perhaps tend to grow with it something almost akin to a phobia for the human touch?

Comparisons with Norman House were of course inevitable in this study, and excusable, though modestly enough disguised. The need, in economic terms, is for official recognition of this dreary system as the wasteful business it is, and the determination to provide smaller, more positive units, where some attempt to stop this human rot would be possible. And for suitably qualified people (i.e. people who *understand*, which implies that they both know and care) to undertake the work. Houses of 100 might be practicable, sixty would be ideal. And this is, after all, in line with current thought in other fields—notably on prisons. There is very much more in "Forgotten Men" than this sketchy outline of its theme suggests, especially from the angle of reclamation. It should be read by all who are concerned with the problem of social readjustments, and one must hope that it may not pass unnoticed either by those who hold the purse-strings of local government.

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