

BOOK REVIEWS—cont.

THE ENGLISH PRISONS

D. L. Howard.

Methuen & Co., Ltd. 1960.

pp.174. 21s. 0d.

MR. HOWARD has written a book "The English Prisons" which for nearly four-fifths of its modest length is an account of the development of prisons as an instrument of society's purpose in dealing with the criminal. In two short chapters at the end he deals with present problems and takes a look into the future. It is well-written but is not for grandmothers.

Exponents of the "new look" in prisons are prone to describe the gloomier details of the past in reinforcement of their sense of virtue. This book, in that it describes how the cruelty which was the expression of a moral earnestness applied without variation towards the end of the last century, replaced the squalor permitted by the indifference of local government, covers familiar ground. Those who are acquainted with Mr. Howard's sources will not find anything new in it, and since he has not sought to place his description of prison conditions in their social context, the general reader may suffer an excess of emotion over reason.

Pentonville in 1841, with its cells equipped with water-closets, must have seemed a marvellous sanitary contrivance to the London poor in Mayhew's day. At a time when the treatment of prisoners was marked by indifference and cruelty, members of the armed services were treated no better; the treatment of the mentally-afflicted was often worse, and the condition of the unfortunates in free society was degradation and poverty. Prison conditions must have

seemed less black to the contemporary viewer than they do now from our different standpoint. As late as the mid-nineteen-thirties a borstal boy wrote to his mother "Dear Mum, We get a Sunday dinner here every day of the week". Having regard to society's attitude to the individual, who is either a burden or a threat, it would have been miraculous had prisons been better than they were.

The concept that the individual is important has received scant and intermittent attention. Not until 1944 was the way to higher education opened to all those who might benefit from it. We had to wait until 1949 for the formulation of the positive yet nebulous declaration of purpose as contained in No. 6 of the Prison Rules. The borstal system had long anticipated this declaration and so, too, had the first tentative modifications of the prison system.

The difficulty is not one of intention but the practical one of how to give effect to the intention. Mr. Howard makes certain recommendations. He himself is a Social Science graduate and sees the improvement of the Prison Service in the recruitment of Social Science graduates. They have never been excluded but for the greater part they prefer to deal with prison problems at a distance. Social workers are generally reluctant to work in prisons, possibly because they see little scope for their work in a strongly hierarchical structure, and feel that their aspirations run counter to the popular aims of imprisonment. Yet paradoxically they are much more likely to achieve an easy gratification in the exercise of their skills and to

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receive the gratitude of their clients against a background of harsh impersonal discipline. In a situation of permissiveness they are likely to encounter the same difficulties that will beset a prison staff who, having been required to surrender the easier methods of preserving their authority, have to deal individually with the astonishing variety of selfish behaviour, not as the case-worker would have it, in a tidy clinical situation, but continuously throughout the day in situations of conflict. Mr. Howard would like to see better buildings, the provision of more useful work, improvements in the training of staff, and balances his argument for decentralisation by suggesting the addition of more specialists to the central administration. He adds the familiar arguments for an increase in prisoners' earnings, better after-care, more research. And what about treatment and training? Mr. Howard understandably has little to say about this. Criminality has no specific cause, lends itself to no precise definition; its origins lie in human nature, its occurrence depends upon a combination of circumstances. Reasonably it may follow that there is no specific treatment. We can offer to those in our charge a useful social experience in controlled conditions, eliminate the harmful effects of exclusion from the community, reinforce the intentions fostered during a period of imprisonment by improved after-care. We shall all recognise in this the expression of vague hopefulness that characterises work in this field. Members of the Prison Service will be glad to find themselves in general agreement with the author of this

book in yet another expression of generalities.

ALAN BAINTON.

PIONEERS IN CRIMINOLOGY
(Library of Criminology No. 1)

Ed. Herman Mannheim
Stevens & Sons Ltd. 1960. pp.402.
45s. 0d.

**RESTITUTION TO VICTIMS
OF CRIME**

(Library of Criminology No. 2)
Stephen Schafer
Stevens & Sons Ltd. 1960. pp.130
25s. 0d.

MESSRS. STEVENS are to be congratulated in inaugurating the Library of Criminology. The value of such a library is that it permits of systematic development of the subject and enables students to have a link with each other. Certainly that has been so in the case of other studies, and more particularly of law. Only with the regular publication of text-books did we have the exploration and definition of principles. Again, there is a need, among both practitioners and theorists for a standard selection of works which may be expected to cover the main branches of the study.

While we must welcome this new venture, we ought to be aware of the temptation to neglect those works which are not "text-bookish". To look at another field of study, one may well wonder whether outstanding books like Sabine's *History of Political Theory* have become substitutes for reading Plato, Aristotle, Hobbs, Locke and the other seminal political Thinkers. This indeed is the temptation; and we are in danger of becoming readers of books about books—Charles Lamb's *biblia a biblia*. It may be argued that the great text-book is so complete that it leaves the impression in the student that he need not read the source material; on the other hand, surely a strong