

Pentonville

A Sociological Study of an English Prison

A. B.

TERENCE and PAULINE MORRIS'S sociological study of Pentonville is likely to arouse in members of the Prison Service the same feelings as would be engendered by two guests who were given the freedom of one's home and had the insensitivity to describe the poverty of its furnishings, and the shortcomings of the cooking, and paused to make some slighting references to the social origins of the family. The temptation to become defensive is almost overwhelming.

The temptation should be resisted. First the institutions in which we work, no matter how closely we identify with them, are not as personal as our homes; secondly, no intelligent person would deny the considerable gulf which exists between the public and private face of any organisation, no matter how convenient it may be to show the first and conceal the second; and thirdly, since civil servants are disabled by their constitutional situation from publicising their own critical assessments of the work in which they are engaged, they have to rely

on departmental committees—the time-honoured device for initiating change or, as in recent years, with some courage, on research workers whose dispassionate assessments are not easily accepted.

The Morrises sat themselves down like social anthropologists in the village street, observed the scene, talked to the inhabitants and recorded their pattern of life. All social observations, indeed, the inclination to observe at all, proceeds from some conviction some pattern of interest. The standpoint of the Morrises is that of the trained social worker committed to penal reform, and this has determined their interests. Each member of the Service will want to take issue with them on some detail or another, but this reaction proceeds out of one's own position and estimate of oneself. Here is an image of one of our institutions; the question for all of us is whether it is fair, and if fair, whether we like it. If we don't, we should concern ourselves with the reality on which the image is based. There are encouraging signs that we are concerned, and the recent

declaration of the Prison Officers' Association subscribing to the changed role of prison staffs is a significant contribution to the aims of the service.

Pentonville,
TERENCE and PAULINE MORRIS
assisted by BARBARA BARER
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Price 50s 0d.

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