

Books for, by and about, Women

Collected by N. J. TYNDALL

PRISONS HAVE BEEN very much male preserves. Probably only in the established church have women taken so long to emerge as equal partners with a positive contribution to make.

But now emancipation is coming hot foot. A new Remand Centre has opened, with a woman acting as Deputy Governor on the boys' side. And a steady flow of books about women and by women is appearing in the criminological field. Recently there have been books about women reformers working both inside and outside the Prison Service.

...*The Better Fight* (Bles 25s.0d.) is the life of Dame Lilian Barker, told by her devoted niece, ELIZABETH GORE. This is the story of Aylesbury Borstal undergoing a complete transformation from a repressive prison regime to a system of hope and humanity. Dame Lilian was recruited by A.P. in 1923, and despatched on her duties by Queen Mary with an imperious, "We are so glad that you are taking Aylesbury for us." She was not the first woman governor there, but twelve years later she

became the first woman Assistant Commissioner.

While at Aylesbury she introduced Home Leave, and even took parties of her girls on holiday to the sea-side. Later, at the Prison Commission, she seems to have been largely instrumental in the pre-war plans to demolish Pentonville and sell the site to the L.C.C. for flats, move the men to Holloway and construct a new prison for women near Staines. But the war and London Airport frustrated her plans. Yet though Pentonville remains still, Lilian Barker's influence on the service was explosive.

By contrast, KATHLEEN SMITH left the Prison Service after a short career because, in the words of the dust jacket on *A Cure for Crime* (Duckworth 12s.6d.), 'her experiences led her to believe that her carefully considered ideas for reform would be better expressed outside the prison service itself.'

Much of what she saw in the prisons appalled her: the useless work, the daily round in the exercise yard, inequitable sentences, the air of futility, the inability of

the criminal to compensate his victim and the few shillings in the pocket of the discharged prisoner.

So far most would agree with her. But perhaps she has been less discriminating in concluding that "the treatment of the treadmill, the Bible and solitary confinement has given way to cushions, psychiatrists and group counselling."

Her conclusion to the growing crime problem is the "self determinate sentence," a 1965 version of the Marks System, whereby prisoners have to win their discharge and pay back their victims by earnings from purposeful work.

This is an interesting suggestion, and certainly most people would welcome more positive industries. But, like all simple solutions for crime, it falls into the trap of seeking one general answer for the whole complex problem of criminality.

To Miss Smith, criminals are rational people who would be keen to repay their debt to society if given the chance and who would work to get out of prison at the first opportunity. She feels, for instance, that offenders imprisoned for arrears in wife-and-child maintenance would be forced by a self determinate sentence to face up to their responsibilities and that this might result in "fewer men thinking it worth while to desert their families: might result in more repaired marriages." Such optimism shows little understanding of the dynamics of a marital relationship.

The solution offered for those who do not co-operate is that they should sit in their cell. "Such people should not be mistaken for heroes. Such behaviour would simply confirm their ingrained anti-social attitude."

Perhaps if prisoners were as simple people as she suggests, they wouldn't be in prison. But certainly Miss Smith has given some positive thought to prison sentences, and this must not be scorned.

Mrs. Bishop's prisoner is a quite different person. He requires not so much the carrot of being able to earn discharge as "the attitude of acceptance and friendship accorded by ordinary men and women with whom he comes in contact on release and during his sentence." This in the long run will determine his future.

They All Come Out (Allen and Unwin 18s.0d.) by G.M.F. BISHOP is the fruit of nineteen years' observation of prisons as a magistrate and a member of visiting committees. The first part of the book is a factual introduction to prisons, which will not be particularly informative to prison staff.

The latter part of the book is more original, containing a description of her personal work in after-care through her Old Lags Association, and some fundamental suggestions for realistic after-care. It is worth following the progress of the old recidivist out of prison into the hands of Mrs. Bishop and meeting his problems

and crises through his own eyes. She amply shows that his difficulties start on the day of release.

Lack of after-care is high-lighted in another readable book about prison. BRIAN WILSON in *Nor Iron Bars a Cage* (William Kimber 21s.0d.) shows that what is good enough for Alcatraz is good enough for Chelmsford and Dartmoor. An isolate, he lavishes affection on birds, nursing them and finally hatching eggs under his arm pits.

His interest helped him through his prison sentence, but one wonders if it helped him in his relationships with people. Certainly the most poignant section of the book for me was when he came out, arrived at the gate of his parents' cottage, opened it but could not bring himself to go through it to face his people again. We still know very little about helping with this type of problem.

Crime in a Changing Society (Pelican 3s.6d.) by DR. HOWARD JONES is the month's best buy. The twelve chapters examine crime rates, causes of crime, sentencing procedures and treatment methods in and out of institutions—a basic syllabus for any course on the sociology of crime. No attempt to confuse with statistics, nothing too involved, but a series of provocative arguments to challenge our social prejudices.

His chapter on Criminals in Captivity is the most relevant one for prison officials. It looks as if

Dr. Jones has learnt from his experimental course of lectures for prison officers at Leicester. His endorsement of the need for prison staff to seek outside the Service for much of their training suggests he would like such experiments to be extended.

His discussion of staff attitudes, however, may not win him many friends. He describes a "most powerfully entrenched traditionalism" in the Service, to which the young officer must conform to be both an efficient officer and a neighbour and friend in staff quarters. It may be, he says, that in the past prisons "have recruited men whose psychological make-up is such that they are so disturbed by disorder that they must speedily put an end to it if they can."

Looking to the future, though, he wants the responsibility of after-care to rest with the staff of the institution. The treatment of the offender must be a continuous process inside the institution and afterwards, and this must not be jeopardised by a change of supervisor on discharge.

Finally this Pelican contains a useful reading list at the end. At the top of the list the author, with becoming frankness, states that the only British book dealing with the whole field is his own previous book!

Finally a welcome re-issue is JOIN WATSON'S *The Child and the Magistrate* (Jonathan Cape 35s.0d.) now largely re-written and revised.