

Book Reviews

SAFE LODGING

Merfyn Turner

Hutchinson & Co. Ltd. 25s. 0d.

THERE HAS BEEN in recent years, a spate of books about prisons and prisoners. Some, by ex-prisoners mainly, have been of the kitchen sink variety, amusing but hardly edifying; others by over-enthusiastic "do-gooders" of the sentimental variety. More worthy of consideration have been those written by ex-governors or ex-Prison Commissioners.

I approached, therefore, the reading of Merfyn Turner's book *Safe Lodging* with some reservations, doubting the power of a book about people with whom I am in daily contact to grip me except in critical irritation. However Mr. Turner's book about the carrying out of an ideal has that rare quality of combining subjectivity and objectivity. It has the ring of authenticity and sincerity—the spirit of the true humanitarian who sets out to *do* something constructive about a grave social and emotional problem, not just to *talk* about it.

His observations on a prisoner's mentality and his phantasies about his rehabilitation into society are shrewd. Familiar to all who deal with offenders against that society are prisoners' excuses and self-justifications for being "inside"—"they were covering up for others

who were not in prison; their lapses were caused by a temporary foolishness, alien to their normal behaviour; they were 'framed'; or the police told them to plead guilty to make it easier for themselves".

Here in Merfyn Turner is someone who, in the section of his book which concerns itself with the birth of Norman House, has the honesty to admit that neither he nor his Homes, at least initially, had the experience to deal with the more complicated and specialized emotional problems of the true alcoholic or the homosexual or the inadequate psychopath. Here is someone with the courage and candidness to confess (as some who have devoted years of study must know but do not always acknowledge so frankly) that the more one studies human nature and its reactions to its own internal conflicts and external environment, the more there is to learn. Here is the humble expression in words which most of us only feel but can not express so well, of facing up to reality.

Mr. Turner points out what many social workers have felt, that just to satisfy a man's material needs and give him an admonitory pat on the back to help him on his way, is not an adequate answer to a man's problems as to how to deal with himself and the tough world outside prison. He emphasises the need to understand

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a man's mental, emotional and spiritual requirements—often so pathetically slight and easily supplied if only they are realised—a need for security, for a warm, comfortable home, for affection and friends, for a feeling of belonging to a family—because man is by nature a social animal—not a vegetable to be watered and fed that it may flourish and bloom to everybody's pleasure.

Mr. Turner has a firm grasp of difficulties which a man has to face after imprisonment—not only his struggles with his own personality and his readjustment to society, but society's acceptance of him—particularly the man alone in a large metropolis with no ties, no friends except his comrades of the underworld. To answer their unspoken pleas Mr. Turner describes vividly his search for a home—a real home for such men.

All his characters are described with a vivid terseness and reality which might be the envy of a novelist or playwright—a cross-section of all types of human nature. If just occasionally Mr. Turner verges on the over-sentimental, as in his description of Norman House's first Christmas, this is a fault that may be forgiven in one of so Christian a nature. He makes up for it in another chapter and in dialogue scattered throughout the book, where he does not pull his punches about the past inadequacy of certain social agencies.

I would recommend *Safe Lodging* to anyone who loves people and who has a sincere desire to do something practical to help society reclaim some of its prodigal sons—with an honest appraisal of their limitations when approaching a colossal task—rather than merely talking or reporting about such problems.

This book highlights very clearly by its descriptions of *real* people with genuine problems—the difference between the purely intellectual approach, the sociological survey and research—and the practical attack on these problems.

The two former methods have their place, but in the end, it is the realistic tackling of a problem which counts and is of the greatest worth to humanity.

SALLIE TROTTER.

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COMMON SENSE ABOUT CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

C. H. Rolph
Gollancz 6s. 0d.

THE PUBLICATION of this succinct and very readable book at a time when the problems of crime and punishment are causing such widespread concern is singularly apposite. Mr. C. H. Rolph has covered a wide range of topics in the 175 pages of his book, and while no doubt much of the ground will be familiar to the serious student of the social sciences, it is the type of book that is very much needed at the present time. I would strongly recommend this book to all