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## SOME IMPRESSIONS OF ITALIAN PRISONS.

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Visitors to Italian prisons must be impressed by the fact that the insufficiency and imperfection of their plants are largely compensated by the excellence and ability of their administrative and disciplinary personnel. With notable exceptions, Italian prisons are still housed in more or less ancient buildings; not infrequently they were formerly convents, which, however remodelled and modernized, are structurally unsuited to the best forms of penitentiary construction and unadapted for the installation of helpful hygienic contrivances. On the other hand, the men who superintend and manage them are splendidly equipped for their work. It is not merely that politics plays no part in prison appointments; it is that prison management is a profession and offers a life's career with a pension and certain official honors to those who follow it.

Prison directors must be university graduates with a law degree, except in the case of directors of penal institutions for the insane, who must be physicians. All are encouraged to take courses in criminal sociology and penology, and advancement depends on length of service and merit.

The guards are generally members of the police force but specially picked for this work, and are under military discipline. To some of the prisons is attached a school for the training of detectives and for students of criminal science.

An example from each of the various classes of penal institutions will best, I think, give an idea of how prisoners and convicts in Italy are kept and of the kind of men who have charge over them.

The "Stabilimento of San Gimignano," on a precipitous rock on the site of the wonderful medieval town of that name, was the first attempt in the old Duchy of Tuscany at prison reform. It is an old, massively-built convent, the small monastic rooms having been converted into splendid prison cells, one prisoner to each. One can, however, attribute the striking cleanliness of the institution only to the splendid management of its director, as without it the plant itself would be a focus for disease. The toilets are old, the jugs for liquid-refuse in the cells are kept in boxes, the workshops are poor, the bathing facilities are insufficient and the washing of clothes has to be done in a dark cellar. But despite all this the place is remarkably free of disease, the convicts seem healthy and

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satisfied and a great deal of good work is done. The money earned by prisoners is divided, 60 per cent to the State and 40 per cent to the prisoners who, except by special permission, must accumulate his earnings. The food is excellent and plentiful but prisoners are allowed to spend a small amount daily for extras; letters can be received by prisoners at any time, but they can write only once every three months.

Punishment consists in reduction to bread-and-water-diet and to specially rigorous confinement, but it can be applied only with the consent of the prison physician.

The prison is for the expiation of serious crimes during the period of solitary confinement. This is carried to the extent that the convict even, when he attends Mass, is placed in an individual box or cell looking out on the church, and takes his daily exercise in an open air enclosure all by himself. It is the opinion of the director that such solitary confinement tends to mental derangement except in a few cases, where such solitary existence seems to result in a calming effect.

The prison has a fair hospital and school and its 127 inmates are taken care of by 27 guards, although the general rule in Italian prisons is ten guards for every one hundred prisoners.

The Regina Coeli at Rome is a different type of penal institution, being one of the Italian *Carceri Giudiziarie*, for persons awaiting trial, or those convicted but whose sentence is on appeal. In such jails are also placed convicts who are at the last stage of their period-of incarceration. Such institutions, in short, are less rigorous in discipline than those of the type of S. Gimignano.

The prison is a collection of buildings originally used as a penal institution under the Papal dominion but now greatly modernized. It was built to accommodate 1,200 prisoners, but on the day of my visit the prison population was considerably larger.

The general impression made by this institution was one of lack of orderliness and of no very active attempt at rigor of any sort. Its cells are, as a rule, fairly large, with sufficient light. Each prisoner cleans his own slop pail, the only toilet convenience supplied to the cells. The pails looked old but no offensive smell could be detected. Shower baths are plentifully provided, but I was informed are seldom used.

There is very little space for open air exercise and the men I saw were so huddled together in the open enclosure allowed them that no exercise was possible.

Prisoners awaiting trial get one substantial meal a day besides the usual Italian breakfast of bread and coffee. They can, however, order food from the prison-kitchen at a fixed tariff. I was present at meal time and food was being eaten anywhere that a prisoner happened to be.

There was no mess hall at all, which added to the impression of disorder. The prison kitchen was dark and only fairly clean. But the food was good and plentiful and the prisoners seemed to be in fair condition.

Except where prisoners are waiting trial or are sentenced to solitary confinement, they are placed in groups of not less than three and not more than five in a cell. Italian prison directors claim that having three in one cell prevents certain forms of vice. On the other hand, the purpose of keeping prisoners awaiting trial in solitary confinement is to prevent their preparing alibis.

Consultation-rooms are provided for prisoners awaiting trial; these have large glass doors through which a guard keeps constant watch because, as one warden said "some lawyers are worse than their clients."

Women prisoners are in a separate division and are under the charge of nuns. Italy is still behind in the matter of a prison system for women.

The hospital division is excellent; surgical cases are sent here from other penitentiaries. A number of well-equipped operating rooms and a large number of individual hospital cells are provided.

The most striking thing in Regina Coeli is its industrial system. Besides the usual labor of carpentry and shoemaking there is a very large printing establishment where every branch of the trade is presented from the making of type to the issuing of complete, bound books. Most Government reports are issued here and even the laws of the Kingdom are here printed by those who break them. If ignorance of the law is no excuse this is certainly the clearest example of it!

The prison at Palermo in Sicily is another *Carcere Giudiziario*, perhaps the largest of its class in Italy. It has accommodations for 2,000 prisoners, though its present and average population is about 1,200. Part of it is a modernized ancient fortress; the smaller half consists of modern prison buildings. The institution is divided into nine separate sections, each with a large court yard and a *Giardino* or cultivated field. Such fields are rented to outsiders and cultivated intensively by prisoners.

One section is for women prisoners under the direction of sisters of charity and a few matrons. There is a school for the elementary instruction of inmates. The prisoners sleep and "live" in large rooms, twenty to a room. I saw no direct light in them, the only sun entering through the grated door which opened on a spacious but cloistered yard.

Another section is for minors, and some attempt at mental and moral instruction is here made. But the section is in an old part of the prison and the boys are crowded together three in a room and seem to be under few restrictions.

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The modern part of the prison consists of several tiers of cells opening on inside galleries with running rails. The cells have direct light but not overmuch of it. Toilet facilities are poor; each cell has an iron bucket kept in an iron box which has two doors, one opening in the cell and one into the gallery from which the bucket can be removed when necessary. Bedding is changed once every two weeks. The hospital is in every respect excellent.

There are only 90 guards for 1,200 prisoners, but a company of army infantry does sentry duty at the prison.

Everything considered, and excepting for the spacious court yards where prisoners are allowed to exercise, the general impression was not very favorable.

Of special interest are those institutions in the Italian penal system which represent the more scientific aspects or efforts of penology—the reformatories and the prisons for the criminal insane. Of this latter I shall briefly describe the one at Aversa (*Manicomio Giudiziale*) which is typical of what I have stated at the beginning of this paper—the excellence and experience of the director contrasted with the poverty of the plant.

Dr. Saporito, its director, is a physician and psychiatrist of distinction, and an efficient administrator. The problem he has had to struggle with has been to convert an ancient convent to something like a penal institution. He has begun reforms by knocking down walls to get more space and air. There are about 200 inmates who are either "*guidicabili*," i. e. awaiting trial and under observation as possibly insane, or convict-lunatics. There are life prisoners and long and short termers. At the expiration of the sentence, if cured, they are discharged; if not cured they are transferred to the insane asylum of their domicile.

Dr. Saporito is strongly in favor of completely changing the existing system by having inmates committed to a given institution according to the *class* or kind of mental disease, *irrespective of the character of crime committed or of the quality and quantity of the sentence*; under the existing system epileptics, the violent insane and the docile are all placed together.

While the institution is provided with a good laboratory, excellently furnished with scientific apparatus, a fair library and very detailed records, it is shockingly unprovided with means for remedying or allaying mental troubles. It is essentially a prison, not a hospital, and the rules applicable to penal institutions are generally in force here. But in the lack of all really remedial agencies, in its absence of open air or agricultural work, in the lack of trees, gardens or even large open spaces, the institution is an evidence of that peculiar combination characteristic

of Italian penology—a wonderful application of scientific principles coupled with a great absence of any human kindness.

The men, except the violent ones, pass the day in various court yards, a few working at making cement blocks, a few engaged in the needs of the institution, some employed in poorly lighted and worse ventilated shoe and carpenter shops. In rainy weather they are herded in very dingy "sitting rooms;" they sleep in quarters holding from five to ten beds although the "better class" have individual cells. No moral, physical or mental instruction is attempted, and no regular amusements provided.

The director endeavors to make life easier by granting "hearings" to any inmate once a week and by putting no limit on letter writing or to seeing relatives. Smoking is allowed, but wine is forbidden; the food is good, and more generous and more varied than in the regular prisons. No punishments are allowed, calmatives are sparingly resorted to and straight-jackets are exceptional. Bathing facilities as remedial agencies are scarce, toilets are poor and cleanliness very relative.

There is one guard for every inmate; the prisoners wear the regulation prison garb but rigorous discipline is not strictly enforced. The general impression made on the visitor was of being in the presence of very degenerate types, beyond hope of remedy.

So far, in Italy, no provision has been made for insane female criminals; such women are committed to civil hospitals for the insane. Neither is any special provision made for insane or mentally-defective minors.

The saving element in this institution is its director. He combines considerable scientific training with practical and kindly good sense. The inmates seem attached to him and he interprets and applies prison rules very liberally. He has improved the grounds as best he could and is buying adjacent properties so as to have more space. But Dr. Saporo struck me as so imbued with the need of scientific inquiry into, and analysis of criminologic data and of mental disease, that he placed somewhat in the background the effort at remedial treatment. But this may be explained by the intent of the Italian law which, while utilizing such institutions as laboratories for the study of criminologic data, look upon them essentially as penal houses.

Turning to the brighter side of penal institution life, we find in the Reformatory of San Michele in Rome another example of poverty of plant with excellence of management and an eloquent proof of how much an able, persevering and well trained man can do despite poverty of material. The reformatory is now called the "Institute Aristile Gabelli" after a famous lawyer and teacher, the idea being to remove even

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in name the appearance of a prison in all restrictive institutions for minors. Dr. Gaetano Rastelli is its efficient and successful director.

This reformatory receives wayward children between nine and eighteen years of age. Under the Italian law, parents may "denounce" their wayward children to a local magistrate who, after due inquiry, may commit them to such an institution. The parents, however, do not lose their "*patria potesta*" but may apply to such magistrate to have their children returned. It is admitted that abuses exist both in the applications by parents to have children committed (so as to be relieved from supporting them) and in applications to have them sent home when parents think such children have arrived at the age when they can earn wages. The children are committed to reformatories away from the parent's domicile.

Although the institution is housed in an ancient Papal building, yet it seems permeated with kindness, good sense and an effective and practical application of reformatory principles.

From the age of twelve the boys are assigned to a special trade, carried on in conjunction with school instruction. The trade training is begun by placing the younger boys in a sort of playroom where tools of various kinds are supplied, together with simple examples of wood-carving, clay modeling, colors, drawings, metal work, etc. They are allowed to try their hand at anything that takes their fancy, but under the supervision of teachers. Upon such efforts, the director, in conjunction with the examination of other data and with due regard of the wishes of parents, decides upon what trade to assign to each boy. The course itself is most thorough, consisting of one year of general preliminary technical training and four years of graduate work leading to a diploma recognized by the Government as equivalent to the diploma of technical schools of like grade, and carries no stigma. The trades include carpentry, shoe or cabinet making, mechanics and telegraphy.

The product of the trade school is not sold; it is either used in the institution or kept for its museum. The modelling, wood carving, cabinet making and mechanical work (a number of small boys were engaged on the building, piece by piece, of a large boiler and engine, riveting every nail and bolt, turning out screws, connections and valves) was of unusual merit and of great artistic promise.

The boys wear a quasi-military uniform, merit and good conduct being rewarded by silver stripes or the leadership of squads, more tempting food, greater privileges, or more frequent outings, besides the honor of representing the institution on special public occasions. Punishments are rare and limited to censure below the age of 12, and from 12 on to deprivation of certain privileges, and confinement to quarters.

The boys rise at 6:30 a. m. make their own room, go through calisthenic exercises and then have their breakfast of milk and bread. At 9 the work begins, at 12 lunch is served, consisting of a soup, macaroni, bread, a little native wine and vegetables or fruits. Then recreation till 2 p. m. and then from 2 to 5 work again. The evenings are given to recreation, reading, study, etc., and practicing by the boys' band. A small infirmary is provided, but long or serious cases are sent to the municipal hospitals. Twice a week the boys are taken to visit places of interest in the neighborhood. The house has unfortunately small space for outdoor exercise and the building has still barred windows and some of the bedrooms have the old appearance of cells and are not satisfactorily ventilated. The boys sleep each in a separate room and bathe every other day.

On public occasions the boys of the reformatory, march together and sit with the boys of the ordinary schools. They look rather delicate and undersized, but happy and satisfied. Numerous evidences of the attachment of graduates were visible.

The desire to instil right habits of mind and body is visible everywhere and the general impression is that, in comparison with what these boys would get at home, they are most fortunate in having been committed to the intelligent care of Dr. Rastelli.

Italian students have admittedly been the founders of that new and still rather vague science called criminology, and penal science likewise owes a great debt to Italy. But whether because of the great conservatism of Italian legislators, or because of historical causes which retard the spread among the people of a more scientific conception of the criminal, the underlying idea in the Italian prisons is, that the primary purpose of incarceration is punishment. Earnest men and studious thinkers have labored and in a great measure succeeded in bringing science to the aid of prison management and criminal law. But the country at large is still in the grasp of ancient views regarding the criminal and the prisons reflect such popular conception, despite the best efforts of the most trained and efficient directors. In short the prison system of Italy and its criminal legislation today show clearly that the influence of Cesare Lombroso, in its good and bad points, has been more potently at work than that of his, to me, greater and more humane compatriot, Cesare Beccaria.