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THE SCHOOL IDEA IN PRISONS FOR ADULTS.

ALBERT C. HILL.¹

The attitude of the public towards its criminals has never been very kindly, just or intelligent. Hatred, revenge, cruelty, indifference, Pharisaism, exploitation have characterized the conduct of society towards those, who, for one reason or another, have been branded as criminals. Badness has often been tolerated and even condoned, so long as it did not end in conviction by a court, but the convict and the ex-convict have always suffered from the neglect and inhumanity of man.

A change in public sentiment, however, is now in progress. Society is becoming more and more sensitive to the sad cry of neglected children and to the despairing appeals of helpless and hopeless adults. The sentiment of human brotherhood is growing stronger and the call for help meets with more ready response than formerly. The sense of duty to the unfortunate and fallen is becoming more acute and a new conception of the relation of man to man is slowly developing. Even prison walls no longer isolate men from the sympathy of their fellows; a kindly purpose and a helping hand are sometimes found within these grim barriers.

The change of view regarding the treatment of criminals has, in some quarters, been very rapid. The pendulum is swinging fast from one extreme to the other. The futility of punishment seems to be quite generally admitted; the idea of rewards is now prevalent. Special privileges, honor badges, greater freedom have taken the places of the water treatment, the dark cell and short rations, as inducements to improve conduct. Radical changes are being made in the physical environment to secure the health and comfort of the men. Volunteers are entering prisons as inmates to get first hand knowledge of what is going on there and vivid and sometimes highly colored accounts of inside conditions are being published.

The mistakes of the past in prison administration have been so numerous and serious that reforms of the right kind are very much needed and will be heartily welcomed. The genuineness and permanency of reforms, however, depend upon their being carefully studied beforehand and based on principles well tested by experience. Altruistic impulses, admirable in themselves, must be governed by intelligence to make them effective in attaining beneficial results. Well meaning

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SCHOOL IDEA IN PRISONS FOR ADULTS

efforts to help individuals and communities sometimes do harm rather than good. Knowledge and judgment are specially necessary in dealing with men and women who have been segregated from society for violating its laws.

Education, in its comprehensive sense, and environment, which may be regarded as the same thing, are the fundamental and most important matters that society has to consider. They make individuals what they are and shape the community, state and nation. They include all the influences that act upon body, mind and morals, from the cradle to the grave. They develop, if, indeed, they do not create both vice and virtue, the criminal and the saint, the enemy of the social order and the zealous philanthropist. There is a growing consciousness that what is wanted in life must be put into homes, schools, and public places. When society really decides to rid itself of vice and crime it will follow the wise maxim of Solomon and train up the children in the way it wishes them to go; it will study and practice *euthenics* as well as *eugenics*.

Education and environment must be relied on also to undo, in the prisons, the mischief they have done on the outside. If they can do nothing, reformation is impossible, the case is hopeless. It is evident, however, that the environment surrounding men in prison must differ from that which was so instrumental in sending them there, if they are to get any benefit from it. It cannot be the same; it cannot be worse; it must be better. In the past it has been worse so that prisons have been called "schools of crime." At present two views are held, one that the prison environment should be the same as that outside, the other that it should be in some respects better. The latter may be called the ethical or school idea. According to this view prisons are "schools of character."

School is the fundamental concept of the movement to promote the welfare of society. The prison school is an effort to organize prison activities for the uplift of the whole prison community. It is an idea rather than a time or place; it is, broadly speaking, the whole prison working as a unit for a single end. Its aim should be to create the proper environment for restoring the inmates to mental and moral health. Its effect upon the prison community is a resultant of all the constituent forces.

It might as well be admitted at once that the school idea thus defined is as yet more a vision of what ought to be than a statement of a reality. It is not yet fully endorsed by prison officials and gets scant attention from reformers and the public. Gov. Foss, in his excellent

article on the "Ideal Prison," does not mention the school. The various individuals and societies devoted to prison reform do not seem to realize the tremendous importance of education and environment in the treatment of criminals. Much is very properly said of air, light and food; of recreation, amusement and sport; of probation, parole and pardon, but the mental and moral side of the task of preparing men to return to society as safe and sane citizens has thus far been given little thought. Effort seems to have centered on reproducing in the prison the environment of the outside world which helped materially to put the men behind the bars.

Everybody seems interested in securing the personal health, comfort and enjoyment of convicts, but their mental and moral sanitation are still very much neglected. Many officials regard a ball game or a moving picture show more important to the men than a school exercise. The one open door to reform is made more or less inaccessible and unattractive by the opposition or neglect of those responsible for its use. The school idea needs to get a firmer grip on the public mind in order to fully accomplish its beneficent purpose. It should be extended and developed until it is an active, permeating force in every prison in the country.

Schools in penal institutions naturally divide themselves into two classes, training schools for the young and reformatories for adults. The first kind of school seeks to overcome acute manifestations of evil intent by aiding the growth of latent impulses and as yet undeveloped capacity; the second appeals to the judgment of mature minds in an effort to secure reversals of decisions deliberately made and changes in modes of life fixed in the grooves of habit. Both rely upon environment as a means of attaining their end but the one seeks the environment suited to youth, the other that adapted to mature minds. One must use the methods of the home and the public school, the other must go to the business world, to the library and to the debating club for its models. It seems to be a serious mistake to apply reformatory methods to schools for young people in the formative stage, and an equally harmful blunder to deal with adults as though they were still children. The two classes of schools are quite distinct and this fact should be kept in mind in dealing with social offenders. Children may be educated; adults must educate themselves.

Reformation is mainly the choice and act of the individual needing it. He must reform; he cannot be reformed by others. He has reached full stature in character; his habits are fixed; he no longer has the growing power of the child and youth. He has gone to the end of the

SCHOOL IDEA IN PRISONS FOR ADULTS

road and must find a way back or perish. Can he do it? Will he do it? Can anything be done to help him do it? The answer to the first question is, he can. The answer to the second rests with the man himself. The state, which assumes control of the convict, must answer the third.

Can a bad man, who has been convicted of a crime and sent to prison, reform? The conclusive argument in the affirmative is that men of the worst character have faced about and become trusted and respected citizens. On the other hand, the old prison idea is that the convict is a hopeless case and this pessimistic view persists in the minds of many. The school idea is that reformation is possible and that something positive and active should be done to promote it. It maintains that the door of hope and opportunity must be kept open and the way made clear and inviting back to a life of honesty and self-respect. Men must be given a last chance which to some of them may have been the first also.

It is not claimed that the way to reform is easy or that a large percentage of the men in prison will make a radical change in life and character. The way out of the labyrinth is hard to find and harder to follow. There is no disguising the fact that nothing worse can happen to a man than being stamped a criminal. He may be unfortunate in business and regain his financial standing without much difficulty. He may be stricken with a serious disease and have a good chance to recover. But when the prison gate closes upon him his chances of ever regaining a place in society are very slim indeed. If his sensibilities are still acute, crushing remorse and the deadly chill of despair come upon him. He staggers beneath the blow and prays for death to end his misery. Physical pain is nothing compared with the torture of such a fall and failure. The message of the school is that there is a way out for the man who wishes and strongly wills to escape from moral thralldom, but through a rough and thorny path.

The belief that some men will reform under proper conditions is based to some extent on a knowledge of the kinds of men found in prisons. The men bearing the mark of criminals vary in character like other men. They are not all bad, and few of them are lacking in good qualities. If a hundred of the worst men in the country could be selected it is doubtful whether a majority of them would be found in prison. There is no criminal class. The microbe of criminality, however, is probably in every human being and needs only favorable conditions to develop. Crime is to a large extent a conventionality. An act, good or bad, in itself may be made a crime by statute. The neces-

sities of society and the desires of individuals have evolved the catalog of crimes and the penal code. What was a crime yesterday may be permitted to-day, and what is lawful now may be a crime to-morrow. Those who will not obey the will of the majority as expressed in laws are segregated and called criminals. This is a rough and ready way of safeguarding society, though it rests on no very sound basis of ethics and sometimes results in sending fairly respectable men to prison. Most men in prison, however, are in varying degrees mentally and morally unsound. They have fixed habits and modes of thought that are anti-social and dangerous. There are serious warps in their characters that must be removed before they will be fit to return to society. They must reform or continue to be a menace to the people with whom they live and to themselves. In a community made up of human beings of so many types, under conditions favorable to reflection, regret and the formation of new resolves, it is fair to assume that some will grasp a life line thrown out to them.

The elements of prison environment which determine the quality of the community life include the general administration of the prison, the religious atmosphere, the specific school work, the reading matter provided and the inmates themselves. Personality dominates in each of these spheres of activity.

The warden is the most important factor in the prison world. He selects officials, determines the rules of action, establishes the ideals that shall govern and inspires conduct. He is responsible for everything, and without his active co-operation little can be accomplished. He must be a rare man to measure up to the demands upon him for making the prison a "school of character."

The chaplain controls the religious atmosphere of the prison. He is in a position to give tone to the whole community life by reason of being in close personal touch with each individual. He has a difficult problem to solve. All his energies of body and mind must be taxed to their utmost to accomplish his part in the solution of the prison problem. He must be a man of high character, ready sympathy and good judgment. There is no place in a prison where the influence of a full orb'd man counts for more than in the chaplain's office.

The head teacher is the exponent of the school idea in its specific activity in the class room. It is his function to arouse and direct mental and moral force. He should co-operate with others in maintaining a proper environment throughout the prison. He needs to be well informed, skilled in the art of teaching and possessed of keen insight into human nature.

SCHOOL IDEA IN PRISONS FOR ADULTS

The librarian determines to a great extent the influence of books upon the character of the men. He is, in fact, an important part of the teaching force. It is his function to advise and direct the men in their reading and to discuss with them what they have read. The library is a large factor in the prison work and the kind of books in it and the way they are used measure its influence towards reformation.

The inmates themselves are a factor in prison environment. The spirit that prevails among them greatly helps or hinders the general uplift. The spirit of self help and altruism needs to be aroused and wisely directed. Reform to be effective must be largely a growth from within, a development in the community itself. The men must rise by their own efforts and raise others with them. They must become altruistic in order to reform themselves. They should be encouraged to assume responsibility for improving the mental and moral atmosphere in which they are living. There is an element of social virtue in every man and the capacity of helpfulness should be utilized. This is no doubt the thought of Thomas Mott Osborne in forming a mutual help association among the men in Auburn prison. Inmate teachers are employed in the New York prison schools. It seems evident that the inmates themselves should be enlisted in the effort to socialize the prison order.

In every department of the prison, the human factor must rank first in value in creating an atmosphere favorable to reform. A personality, a friend, is the most potent force in saving men. Character is contagious. Thus every officer, in the performance of his daily duties, is a teacher of good or evil. The warden, the guards, the chaplain, the head teacher, the librarian, constitute the corps of teachers of the prison school in its comprehensive and real meaning. If one of them fails to do his part the whole social body suffers.

Books are next in importance to men in creating the right prison environment. They are more available indeed than the living personality because they may be made constant and always helpful companions. They reveal men in action and tell of their experiences and achievements. They present the highest ideals in conduct and point the way to self mastery and success. They introduce the inmates to the best men and the finest deeds. They furnish useful information, material for thought, relief from mental anguish, rest and recreation. Those who will not listen to a human voice may hear the words of a great writer in their quiet, lonely hours. The printed page is the main reliance in convincing men that they may reform and that it is wise to do so. It also points the way and breathes forth courage and hope.

The environment of the outside world should not be literally copied in the prisons. The food of the strong and well is not always adapted to the sick. The abnormal mind cannot be treated in all respects as though it were normal. The harmful things that beset the pathway of ordinary people in society should not be found in prisons. For example, intoxicants, injurious drugs, weak and immoral reading matter, should be kept from convicts. Only that which is tonic and health giving should be included in the environment of men whom the state is trying to fit for a return to society.

The ordinary incentives are not the kind to use in prisons. Rewards for good behavior do not reach the disease and their effect is temporary and harmful. Men may be induced to be outwardly good, according to the prescribed standard, for a time, by the promise of immediate benefit, but no permanent change of character can be secured in that way. The economic value of prison treatment, either to the men or to society, is no measure of its real value. Preparing men to earn a living is important, but it does not in itself ensure reformation. Men are not bad because they are poor nor good because they are prosperous. The defect in much that is being done to rehabilitate the convict is that it is merely economic and sensuous, an appeal to the lower and grosser instincts. Many of the modern notions regarding the physical conditions that should surround prisoners are excellent and should be put into general practice. But when all that wholesome food, pure air and sanitary surroundings can do has been done, the real task is only begun. The root of the evil that must be reached and restored to sane activity is a mind diseased. The spiritual life, the mind and the emotions must be stirred. This is what the school seeks to accomplish.

Any method of treatment likely to lead to reformation must involve hardship to the men. The discipline of a prisoner must be strict. The notion that the men should be allowed to follow their own inclinations entirely is evidently fallacious. Convicts as a class are, undoubtedly, not as bad as they are sometimes painted, or as is commonly supposed, nor are they as reliable as some sentimental social workers would have us think. It is safe to say that they are no more trustworthy than people outside where policemen are still found to be necessary. Super-sympathy for wrong doers is unjustifiable and unwise. Crime must be abolished, though it is humane and desirable that as many criminals as possible be saved. The school idea favors strict discipline; it only asks that it be intelligent and just. The punishment that accomplishes a good purpose is wise. Will the individual

SCHOOL IDEA IN PRISONS FOR ADULTS

man or the social unit be benefited by this penalty? If so, it is proper and should be imposed. Special privileges should not be granted. Favoritism in prison is an enemy to reform. The men should be made to see the necessity of uniform rules and regulations and enlisted in the effort to maintain them. The discipline, however, must be of the right sort, not arbitrary, fitful and vindictive, but reasonable, persistent and kindly.

The ultimate success of the school idea depends upon an aroused public sentiment in its favor. Without such aid the best results cannot be expected. The conscious effort to improve prison conditions has scarcely begun and so far has been directed more by impulse and sentiment than by deliberate judgment based on knowledge. It has been influenced more by headlines in newspapers than by a careful and comprehensive study of the problem and the way to solve it. There has been a large element of exaggeration in what has been written about prisons. No prison is either heaven or hell. All prisons, however, may be made permanently better by improving the environment along the lines suggested.

The schools in the five prisons for adults in New York rest on the fundamental ideas that have been considered and are typical of what has been so far undertaken. In practice they have come as near the ideal as conditions would permit. Their work has not yet been as comprehensive as originally planned. Lack of time, room and help have delayed their development. There has been a constant fight with illiteracy that has taxed the capacity of the schools and retarded extension into the wide and fruitful fields of learning and thought. A foundation has been laid, however, and it may be hoped, if not predicted, that the idea will grow until the prisons of the state are in reality "schools of character."

The main features of the system may be briefly stated as follows:

1. School rooms are provided and equipped for twenty men each.
2. A civilian head teacher is in charge of each school.
3. A corps of inmate teachers is selected from the best qualified in scholarship, character and interest.
4. The work is divided into twelve parts called standards, each requiring from two to four months for its completion.
5. Uniformity and co-operation are secured by frequent conferences of the head teachers and by the advisory oversight of the State Education Department.
6. The schools are in session during each week day throughout the year, and each man is in the class room one hour each day.

7. The school day is divided into four periods, two in the morning and two in the afternoon.

8. The men come from the shops in companies and return at the end of the period to make room for others.

9. Personal benefit is the only incentive offered for study and there are no penalties for failure.

10. Extensive use is made of mimeograph lesson sheets. Most of this work is done outside of class.

11. School work is co-ordinated as far as is practical with the needs of the prison in preparing men for various positions as stenographers, bookkeepers, etc.

12. The steps are: (a) learning to speak, read and write the English language; (b) utilizing the ability acquired in getting and expressing knowledge of a practical nature; (c) using knowledge as material for thought and discussion on fundamental questions of government, business and morals.

Great importance is attached to small classes. There is no mass instruction by lectures. The men do the work and thus become self reliant. Each man takes part in the recitation, reads aloud, asks and answers questions, takes part in discussions, reads outside of class and reports results.

The ethical value of education is emphasized. The aim is to make the pursuit of knowledge a pleasure rather than a burden, a reward in itself rather than a means of escaping punishment. The constant appeal is to a desire for knowledge for its real worth, for the benefit it will afford in all the future. It is believed that school work carried on in this way is a most powerful incentive to reform.

It is not possible to measure results from prison school work, in regard to its permanent effects on character and success. The test comes after the men pass from the knowledge of prison officials. They are lost sight of in society, and their future is unrecorded. Statistics of reformation are unreliable. There is no way of telling how many are permanently restored to honest, law-abiding citizenship. The immediate effects are known and they are manifestly good. It is only fair to conclude that many are permanently helped.

The use of inmate teachers has been criticised. However, this practice, dictated by necessity in the New York prisons, is in harmony with the notion that the prison community must rise in part at least by its own efforts. The men are asked to help one another in the school, and have responded nobly to this call to altruistic effort. If the best men in the community are made teachers the plan is quite up to

SCHOOL IDEA IN PRISONS FOR ADULTS

the standard of outside society in the choice of teachers. An inmate is in closer touch with his fellows than a civilian could readily be. He knows the needs of the men and how best to supply them. It is by no means self evident that inmates are not, all things considered, the best teachers of their fellows. At least the question is not settled, and the objections of casual observers are not conclusive. No doubt more civilian teachers are desirable. It seems especially essential to the best results that the librarian be a civilian.

An eminent prison worker criticises the schools because, as he says, they do little more than teach men to read and write. If they did no more than this they would, nevertheless, amply justify their existence. A man who can read and write well has the means of unlocking the storehouses of knowledge and inspiration. He may associate with the wise and great of all time and all countries and gather hope, inspiration and suggestion from innumerable sources. He may stand on the shoulders of giants and see farther and accomplish more by reason of this acquisition. Gaining power to read and a taste for good reading is the main step towards an education. Learning to speak, read and write the English language is worth everything to the foreigner and does more to fit him for life in this country than anything else could do. It is true that the first thing the schools in New York prisons do is to weed out illiteracy. It is a fact, also, that there is so much work of this kind to do and the facilities for doing it are so limited that men are often dismissed from school too soon in order to make room for others more needy. Every prison built hereafter should have a separate building exclusively for educational purposes.

But speaking, reading and writing are not in fact all that is taught in the prison schools of New York. These are regarded as but means to a still greater end. The goal always in view is the utilization of reading as a means of creating a better mental and moral environment. Books furnish food for thought, and when men begin to think, they are in a condition to improve. False reasoning is a very noticeable defect in convicts. This results from insufficient knowledge, unusual experiences, an exaggerated sense of wrong, or from actual injustice. The school aim is to remove the fog and enable men to see clearly, and reason correctly.

The real fight of the New York prison schools for existence and efficiency is with the industries. The complaint is made that the day sessions interfere with the output of the shops. One of the most valuable features of the schools is that they meet in the day time. This adds greatly to their efficiency. Night sessions are in fact of compar-

atively little value to the majority of the men. Friends of the schools maintain that the loss of time in attending school is so small as to be negligible, and that it may be easily made up by increased efficiency in the shops; and that a material loss in output, due to the schools, would be no valid argument against them. Prisons are charged with the duty of returning men to society morally sound as well as economically efficient. Prisons should be run in the interests of the men and of society, and not for the products of the industries merely. The fallacy that has governed in the past should no longer control in prison management.

The school, in the restricted sense of the term, cannot bear the whole burden of making good citizens in society or of leading bad ones to reform in prisons. There must be a complete chain of influences, and every link must be strong. Public education is weak because it is too much segregated in schools. The home and the street are as truly factors in training children as are the schools and the church. Society should make all the environment of children wholesome and invigorating. The moving picture showman should be looked after as well as the teacher. Prisons have unusual control of environment, and can reject whatever is not healthgiving to body, mind and soul. A thorough house cleaning, inside and outside the walls, is needed to free young and old, good and bad, from influences that undermine and destroy character. The adult must be rescued if possible; the child must be kept out of the current. There is an undertow that is dragging society down about as fast as it can be elevated. Environment is the much-neglected word that suggests the cause and the remedy for the badness and criminality that is working so much havoc and filling our prisons.