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Editorial

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EDITORIALS

PATHOLOGIC VAGRANCY.

The Acting Superintendent of the New York Municipal Lodging House has recently completed a study of 2,000 vagrants. The report contradicts several popular impressions. The majority of the group investigated were not out of employment by reason of age. Only five per cent of them were under 21 years of age and but 6.85 per cent were over 60. Practically all of these persons are natives of America. But 9 per cent had been in New York City less than a year. The average term of residence in the metropolis was 32 years and 4 months. Since 36 years was the average age of the group, these tramps had lived practically their whole lives in the city of New York.

The evidence on which the author bases his belief in the pathologic nature of a large proportion of vagrants is as follows:

About 35 per cent of the homeless men who seek the shelter of the municipal lodging house are unemployable. Twelve per cent of them showed definite evidences of defective mentality. The infirm from age and those handicapped by the loss of a limb represent about as many more. About 10 per cent are habitual loafers and confirmed beggars who have lost the habit of work. Thirty per cent are victims of excessive drinking.

About 65 per cent of the group are victims of seasonal trades which employ many men at certain seasons and few at others, leaving large numbers without definite occupation during several months each year. Probably much of the evidence for defective mentality among these vagrants admits more than one interpretation. Indeed, the author himself suggests what seems to us to be a potent cause of vagrancy when he says that many men when out of work become discouraged and depressed and are then unable to arouse themselves to labor again. It is a result of this, we believe, that many men are unable to make a satisfactory response to our tests of mentality. Much defective mentality, therefore, is not native, but is acquired secondarily.

Judge William N. Gemmill of the Chicago Municipal Court well expressed this thought in our last issue at page 174:

“Among the many arrests each year are thousands who belong to the army of defeat. They are not men and women, but the remnants of them only, from whom have departed hope, pride, ambition, cour-

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age, self-sacrifice and all other qualities which distinguish the human from the animal world. This army of derelicts is an appalling menace to every large city. They all march under the one banner upon which is written in large letters the word Failure. * * * Their weak and emaciated bodies are burned out with drugs and liquor. They are friendless and homeless and hopeless." ROBERT H. GAULT.

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE INSTITUTE.

As at present arranged, the sixth annual meeting of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology will be held in Washington, D. C., on October 23. All meetings are scheduled to be held in the New Willard Hotel. At 6:30 p. m. an informal dinner will be served to members and their friends, and this will be followed at 8 o'clock by a "Report on the American Society of Military Law," by Col. Nathan William MacChesney, president of the society.

The first session will be opened at 9 o'clock a. m. by the Honorable Quincy A. Myers, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Indiana, who will deliver the President's Address. This will be followed in the course of the morning session by reports of the committees on Employment and Compensation of Criminals; Sterilization of Criminals, and the Classification and Definition of Crimes.

In the afternoon session there will be reports on Insanity and Criminal Responsibility; Judicial Probation and Suspended Sentence; Draft of a Code of Criminal Procedure; Indeterminate Sentence; Crime and Immigration and Criminal Statistics.

Information as to details may be obtained from the Secretary, Professor Henry W. Ballantine, Madison, Wisconsin.

ROBERT H. GAULT.

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The problem of the prison official is precisely that of the educator: to find the best that there is in an individual and to use it as the basis for the development of desirable habits and attitudes. The educator in our regular schools who approaches his work from this viewpoint soon finds that he has discovered a valuable antitoxin for the undesirable dispositions of his disciples. It is no different in the prison and in the reformatory. At one time this thought was on the plane of mere hypotheses even in respect to our public education. Now it is common sense, and as such it is expressing itself with wonderful emphasis in the establishment of sanitary prisons, farms and colonies for criminals and defectives all over our country. The extent of this movement is

indicated in Judge Gemmill's address in the last issue. These institutions may check over the catalogues of morons, feeble-minded, etc., which are being supplied by our laboratories, and so supply a needed supplement to them against the day when an approximately perfect system of mental tests shall have been developed.

In this connection it is appropriate to publish a letter received recently by the undersigned from the editor of *The Joliet Prison Post*, Mr. Peter Van Vlissingen. The letter speaks for itself.

"Anent your leading editorial for March, may we call your attention of the May number of *The Joliet Prison Post*?

"Under the title, 'Authoritative Announcements from Actual Work,' we state what this institution is beginning to do. There are some prisoners here who are earnestly supporting the warden's plans to make the life of the men here as normal as the conditions and the requirements of an institution of this character will allow.

"The attitude of the prosecution toward a person on trial, makes it impossible for the accused person to disclose himself to the jury and to the judge as many accused men would like to disclose themselves.

"We are undertaking here, where the administration is accepting the policy of eliminating punishment and where the men are accepting the policy of eliminating condemnation, to make the relationship of the authorities to the prisoners who are subject to that authority, such that the prisoners can and will make themselves known exactly as they are.

"Under this policy the men tell many things that, where the authorities are not seeking the welfare of the men, would count against them, things that, under the policy of prosecution as practiced in the courts, they keep hidden as far as they are able to keep them hidden; but besides this, the policy of good faith between the administration and the prisoners, is bringing out qualities and virtues in the prisoners which the prosecution will not have brought out and which in any event the prosecution will not allow to be taken into account at a trial.

"Dealing with men on the broad basis of their natural human rights and taking into account the whole quality of their character, instead of dealing with them wholly on the ground of a particular offense, is disclosing a new element in man. This it will be necessary to take into account, in any proper consideration of the question of criminology and in determining in what way to deal with men who have committed social offenses so as to protect society and at the same time to preserve for society what social value, despite the offences the man has committed, there may still be in the man.

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"Artificial plans have no place in the purpose which is being worked out here. There is, we believe, no 'holding over, in another form, of the conventionality that has associated goodness with a certain anaemic passivity.' We are dealing with real life and we accept the issues which the actual life of the men here present.

"Here is a community which has its problems just as any other community has its problems. We have taken up the burden of solving our problems in accordance with the truths of human life so that what we actually learn here may be of benefit everywhere. It is in this sense that we feel that this place is a social laboratory.

"In the editorial, 'The Convicted and the Unconvicted,' in the May issue of the *Prison Post*, p. 226, occurs this statement:

"The honor system contemplates relieving prisoners who are believed to be worthy of trust, from the surveillance of a keeper, so as to give the prisoner a chance to show that the watchfulness of the keeper is not necessary, that there is something in himself that can be trusted, to show that he is able, despite the conviction of a particular defect, to live true to the qualities in him that go to make a good citizen.'

"This statement seems to express the same thought that is expressed in the last paragraph of the editorial in the March issue of the *JOURNAL OF CRIMINAL LAW AND CRIMINOLOGY*, already referred to.

"We are proceeding upon the principle that the problems of neither individual nor social life can be solved by dealing only with the wrong in man; that the solution is to come through awakening and building up the good in man. And this is being made a place of actual experiment and test. We are not given to speculation. What we say is in some measure proved before we say it.

"We may move forward slowly and with little spectacular demonstration but what we do will be real. It will serve every other community as well as our own.

"We wish you to know that we who are helping to make things better are encouraged and strengthened in finding that you are pointing out the things which we, too, have felt should have and must have attention."

ROBERT H. GAULT.