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## Editorial

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## EDITORIAL

### PRISON CONGRESS—NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL

The discussion of penal problems takes on special significance at this time, midway between the meeting of the American Prison Association in Salt Lake City and the International Prison Congress to be held in London the first week in August. The dominant note of prevention and juvenile delinquency which characterized the former is clearly indicated in the proposed agenda of the latter.

To one who has watched the discussions of the American Prison Congress for twenty-five years, it is gratifying to note the growing spirit of optimism and humaneness which has become prevalent rather than incidental. Instead of institutions, maintenance, rules, punishments and other material incidents appearing as an end in themselves, the problems of character formation, morals, reformation and education are attacked from a sane and intelligent point of view.

A change of spirit has come over the official world with regard to the treatment of both juvenile delinquents and adult criminals. While the unthinking still clamor for savage penalties about in proportion to their ignorance and aloofness from the actual problem, those who see actual offenders in the light of science and the spirit of the Golden Rule, now see the futility of the old procedure. With a keener sense of responsibility for these wards of the state, men and women are recognizing that the home, the church and the school, as well as society in general, "must not only clothe the children of the world with the shield of their strength, but must also cover them with the garments of their love."

Parental indifference, home neglect, defective education, moral illiteracy, social dissipation; all were stressed in varying phrase by many of the speakers throughout the program, including President Johnson in his opening address. He stated that villainy is too often made attractive by newspapers, the screen and the stage. In speaking to the subject, "A New Light in Prison Life," Dr. Frank Moore, the new President, pleaded for more spiritual vision in dealing with offenders. The writer of this article proposed a "school for parents" as a remedy for home neglect as a cause of crime. "The crimes of society against offenders are greater than the crimes of offenders against society," was the striking declaration of Miss Carol Bates. Others

charged "wasteful expenditure and careless exposure of wealth, underpaid employees, neighborhood neglect, defective parental and school training" as fruitful causes of crime.

Mrs. Mabel Wildebrant, Assistant Attorney General, in a brilliant address to the Congress, declared that the greatest need of prohibition enforcement, as in prison administration, is complete divorcement from politics. "Punishment," she said, "to be effective, must always have a socially recuperative purpose and value." There is need, also, of uniform penalties, and a unity of purpose between legislators, prosecutors and correctional officials.

The prison labor problem was not solved. Idleness is the increasing despair of many officials, as prison populations increase. While holding steadfastly to the idea that the purpose of a prison is to make men, and not money, nevertheless delegates realized that only insanity and inefficiency can result from idleness. Neither adequate trade training nor wages to prisoners can be hoped for so long as the development of correctional institutions is dominated or even influenced by political considerations.

The purpose of the American Prison Congress is not only to furnish a forum for the discussion of questions of mutual interest to its members, but to educate the public on the practical needs in this field of reform. It does not aim to bind its members by resolution to a united policy of action, but naturally tends to standardize methods of dealing with delinquents.

For example: Throughout its history, there has been complete agreement as to the crime producing character of the present county jail system. For several years, in its recommendations for preventive legislation, it has declared for a Federal Reformatory for young offenders, and for a Federal Probation Law, the latter of which has now been enacted.

In order to promulgate these and other desirable measures, the annual membership fee of \$5.00, heretofore the only source of revenue, is by no means adequate. The new President, Dr. Frank Moore, Rahway, New Jersey, is making an appeal for an Endowment Fund of \$100,000 for a wider circulation of the proceedings of the Congress, and for other similar educational effort.

When we turn to the program of the International Prison Congress, we find in prospect very much the same preventive and forward looking discussion. This is especially significant when it is remembered that we are dealing with a particularly conservative body. Here his-

tory and precedent play a larger part than in pioneer America. It is only after exhaustive discussion that new principles are accepted.

For example, when the Congress met at Washington in 1910, the two topics of greatest interest seemed to be "The Indeterminate Sentence" and "The Payment of Prisoners." Both appeared to be new ideas to most European delegates. After thorough discussion, however, both were accepted in principle and were so adopted by resolution of the Congress. Now these principles are taken for granted and proposals are made as to methods of applying them under differing circumstances and with different classes of offenders.

Here, on the other hand, a new question is raised for serious discussion. For more than a hundred years, the state has assumed that the only thing to do with an offender is to be rid of him by committal to a prison or other institution. Now, for the first time in any similar deliberative body, we are asked why we should take it for granted that that is the best way to handle the problem, and what can be done instead of imprisonment.

The Congress, which throughout its history has convened every five years, has been prevented by the war from meeting for fifteen years. During this period considerable prison reform work has gone over the mill, and problems of prevention and child welfare have come into the ascendancy. Meanwhile, the helm has been held by Great Britain's statesmanlike Commissioner of Corrections, Sir Evelyn Ruggles-Brise. In the *London Times* of January 6, Sir Evelyn has this to say in regard to the coming Congress: "This year's meeting in London, being regarded as a sort of jubilee of the Congress of 1872, will, it is anticipated, be the occasion of a considerable gathering of many nations. It is likely to be a remarkable gathering of men and women from all quarters of the globe, distinguished in their respective countries in official or private life for their zeal, knowledge and experience in all that concerns the improvement of penal methods." The questions of greatest international interest, he declares, are "individualization of treatment; the most effective way of dealing with limited responsibility in the case of persons accused or convicted; the institution of psychical laboratories in prisons; the application of the indeterminate sentence; substitutes for, or alternatives to, imprisonment; the classification and employment of prisoners; the supervision of persons under conditional conviction or liberation; preventive methods of saving children and all young persons."

The Congress is carefully organized, both as to program and methods of discussion, as a sort of international debating society where

experience and experiment meet. Three sections, namely, Legislation, Administration and Prevention, are provided, with four questions each. General sessions will discuss these proposals seriatim, followed by sectional meetings in which intensive consideration will be given by the delegates; resolutions prepared and referred back to the Congress for action.

Seven delegates to this Congress from the United States will be appointed by President Coolidge. He will be guided in these appointments by a list of prominent men and women in this field, nominated by the Congress at Salt Lake and by recommendations made by Mr. B. Ogden Chisolm of New York, who is the American member of the International Prison Commission. Delegates attend the Congress at their own expense. Others who are interested may attend the general sessions, but may not vote. This important conference should mean much, not only to the cause of prison reform and crime prevention, but in furthering international accord.

F. EMORY LYON.