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Robert H. Gault

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EDITORIAL

HONORING HUMAN NATURE IN PRISON

The numerous prison disturbances in the United States in the course of a year and more past have shocked our complacent moods and have brought us to thinking anew of the management of our prison populations.

It is all very well to say that our great problem is to prevent the development of such characters as are finally landed in prison. But the end of prisons is not in sight. We may as well face that fact, and screw ourselves up to the point of utilizing the prison to its full bent.

It is at least a considerable inconvenience to have a lot of rioting prisoners tossing things about, and moreover, no one takes exception to our proposition that it is more satisfactory to have prisoners leave the penal institution with their disposition to prey upon society reduced rather than unaltered or augmented. The prison presents a job for a first rate manager of personnel.

In America where the system of parole has been more developed than in any other land we have been too much disposed to let the cold gray walls and the parole officer "do it"; and there are suspicions afloat that neither the walls alone nor the parole system alone is entirely as fit as we should like to have them. It is probable—yea certain—that our interest in preventing, probationing and paroling has subtracted too much from our interest in the inside of the prison. We must quit subtracting and begin to add.

Prison terms almost at their shortest are long enough to give the prisoner an opportunity to develop a deeply rooted attitude toward society and the law that have placed him behind the bars; and we are using the term *attitude* in the sense in which we employ the same term as applied to the physician when we talk of his professional attitude. It is hard to break up. It is all but inevitable that this man will behave after the manner of a physician.

It is supremely important that the prisoner should finally become a free man with a friendly *attitude* toward society and our social institutions. That cannot be accomplished by a process of sentimental coddling, but only by rigid discipline that is at the same time considerate of the requirements of human nature and therefore constructive. It is in keeping with this that there is to be found

in various places in the United States a renewed interest in the prison farm that is only semi-secure in the sense that prison walls are secure against escape.

The latest announcement of a movement in this direction is from the Department of Public Welfare in the State of Illinois under the direction of Rodney H. Brandon who for many years before he entered office was a successful student of boys and young men in his capacity as superintendent of the institution for youth at Mooseheart, Illinois. There are many conspicuous examples of farm prisons in America. Their successful operation depends upon their freedom from political influence and upon the reliability of our methods of selecting the men and women who are to be trusted in the situation of partial freedom that the farm implies. One great merit of the plan is in the incentive that it affords to the best human timber in the prison to show themselves worthy of greater and greater privileges. Students of prison affairs will recognize in this idea the spirit of John L. Whitman¹ of Illinois who gave his life in the interest of a rational prison economy.

ROBERT H. GAULT.

¹See this JOURNAL, ix 3, pp. 378 ff.