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ARCHITECTURAL ENVIRONMENT IN RELATION TO PRISONERS¹

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The recent serious disturbances in some of our State penitentiaries have brought the question of the housing of prisoners forcibly to the attention of the public. What goes on inside of the prison wall has always been more or less of a mystery to men in the street and, therefore, novels, movies and newspaper articles about prison life provoke a keen and sometimes a morbid interest in the subject.

The failure of our communities to provide adequate prison and reformatory facilities has caused serious overcrowding in some quarters and we are faced with the immediate duty of providing new prison buildings.

The question must therefore soon be settled as to what will be the character of these new buildings and in order to determine this question we must consider what our general approach to the whole problem of the treatment of the prisoner is to be. The importance of prison architecture cannot be over-emphasized and in a sense it is fundamental to the whole problem of prisoner management and rehabilitation.

At the outset we find ourselves faced by certain rather serious conflicts of opinion. Society, having decided to sequester an individual in a prison, demands first of all that he be kept there. Therefore, the first requirement of a prison would seem to be that it be so designed as to provide the requisite strength of control. On the other hand, keen students of human nature have proclaimed that the traditional type of steel and stone structure is so forbidding and so hopeless in its aspect as to make difficult, if not impossible, the more recently demanded task of improving the individual character of the prisoner. These people point out that practically all of our prisoners are released again into the community but if the effect of the prison has been such as to make them more anti-social and more dangerous then the prison has failed in its whole purpose. On the other hand, if the purpose of the prison is to protect society, it could do

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so better by rendering its inmates less dangerous, more productive and more law abiding.

Some of these difficulties may have arisen out of the fact that the prison was originally designed as a place solely of detention and other forms of punishment—death, torture, expatriation, fines and forfeiture—were imposed upon those who had been found guilty. The prison or jail was for those who were being detained pending their trial. In such an institution the sole consideration was that the person so held should be there when wanted and it was perhaps natural that steel and stone should be the predominant elements in such a structure. This feeling survives today and strangely enough we find our county jails infinitely more forbidding and repelling places than our institutions of punishment.

The development of the jail or prison as a place of punishment is comparatively recent and even when this evolution had taken place the idea still persisted that if the prison as a place of punishment was to supersede such forms of punishment as the rack, the thumb-screw, the torture chamber, it must, if it should properly fulfill its mission, be made as disagreeable and deterrent as the humanitarianism of those days would permit.

It was not long, however, before the opportunities of these permanent punishment places as agents of reformatory treatment became appreciated. John Howard, Charles Dickens, Dorothy Dix and the early Quakers in this country demanded something more of a prison than that it be a place of misery.

Our country first undertook the building of prisons on a large scale during the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Penologists are all familiar with the controversy which raged at that time, as to whether the so-called Philadelphia system or the Auburn system should prevail in the construction of our penitentiaries. The Quakers of Philadelphia built their big prison on the basis that best results could be obtained with large cells, each with a separate yard in which the prisoner should be completely incommunicado, there to regenerate himself through penitence and introspection and with the help of divine intervention and, separated from the contaminating influence of other prisoners, be released a better man.

This system did not have many converts in this country and practically all of our other penitentiaries were built on the Auburn or interior cell block type. This type made friends because of the presupposition that work and association during the day would justify the smaller and more restricted living quarters during the night. The

solitary system was however almost completely adopted by England and foreign countries and so we find across the water today nearly all of the large continental prisons built on the model of the Eastern Penitentiary in Philadelphia.

On the other hand, on my visits to 11 foreign countries in which I have seen 18 prisons of one kind or another I have never seen the counterpart of the steel and stone cell blocks which are common in our American penal institutions. Even the enthusiastic praise of Charles Dickens, who tells in his *American Sketches* about his visit to the new house of correction in South Boston where he saw an American cell block, did not shake the English attachment to the Philadelphia system.

We now find ourselves at the point where we question the wisdom of the steel cell block type of construction. First, because we do not think it necessary as the only means of restraining our prisoners. The prisons of England and the Continent prove that the amount of steel bars which we use is not necessary for this purpose. And, second, because we have felt that the unnatural and cage like atmosphere of the stone cell with the barred door or opening is such as to make the rehabilitation of the hopeful prisoner less likely to be accomplished. And so we hear the demand from the New Prison Building Commission in New York that discrimination be practiced in the housing of prisoners. They call for prisons of the maximum security type, others of the medium security type and still others of minimum security. This merely means that the thoughtful penologist of today is applying the hopeful doctrines of classification and individual treatment of erring humanity in the field of architecture as well as in the field of education and psychology.

It was my great good fortune to attend the session of the Tenth International Penal and Penitentiary Congress last summer in Prague. The question which occasioned the greatest amount of discussion was this very topic having to do with the housing of prisoners. Some of the more progressive delegates were determined to force a resolution condemning the practice of solitary confinement as the usual and ordinary rule of treatment. Many of the foreign countries, notably France and Italy, believe that solitary confinement is the most satisfactory form of discipline, but even the English who have made tremendous progress in prison management in the last 20 years did not seem willing to go beyond a resolution which called for association during the day time but insisted that the cellular confinement was the normal method of confinement at night.

Strange to say, the American delegates found themselves unable to agree even to this advanced English position and the reason for our difficulty was in the definition of the word "cell." To an American the word "cell" means a steel and stone cage forming a part of an interior block of cells of small size and forbidding aspect. With the foreign prison administrator the word "cell" means a commodious room ventilated directly from the open air and large enough to maintain a man with some degree of comfort under the separate system as generally practiced in those countries. With the growing feeling in this country that many of our prisoners may be safely lodged in dormitory wards and honor camps, we could not agree to a resolution which stated that the cellular system by night was an organic part of a progressive penal system. The debates upon this subject were the most stimulating and the most suggestive of any which took place in the Congress and clearly indicated the importance which it was felt the matter of prison architecture played in the general subject of treatment of the prisoner. Many of the continental delegates resisted hotly any attempt to break down the solitary system. The English, German and American delegates, however, succeeded in adopting the following resolution:

1. The cellular system should be considered an organic part of any progressive system. At night it is essential to modern administration.
2. As for prisoners on trial, the cellular system should be applied absolutely.
3. The cellular system by day for penalties of short duration has certain advantages and certain disadvantages. One can realize the advantages and avoid the disadvantages by adequate medical service and classification of the prisoners.
4. For long penalties the system of common cells by day can be used, provided the prisoners are never placed together while not working or being guarded. Surveillance can be relaxed in proportion to separation of prisoners in homogeneous groups.
5. One can also consent, so long as possible, to the request of the prisoner for continued isolation of prisoners of good conduct who might be worthy of special consideration.

It is understood that the cell should be a room which offers sufficient privacy and safety.

At the morning session to which this resolution was offered for adoption the American delegates tried to amend it still further by the substitution of the following draft:

A progressive system in penal administration could not be reduced to the cellular system and often demands for the prisoners recourse to the advantages of the system of dormitories by night and of working in groups

by day. Prisoners accused but not yet convicted, ought to be under a system whose purpose would be to protect them against contamination by other prisoners convicted or accused of important crimes.

While the Americans were not successful in the substitution of this amendment matters were amicably adjusted later by the adoption of a compromise paragraph proposed by Lord Polwarth of Scotland, as follows:

As a general rule systems of separate confinement by night must be regarded as an essential part of modern prison treatment, but there may be exceptional circumstances in different countries which require a system of dormitories or rooms in common.

There is no doubt whatever that so far as the safety of control is concerned many of our prisoners which we, through habit or custom, place in strong steel cells can be retained in a much less secure environment. Recently the Federal Government has taken out large numbers of men from our penitentiaries and today we have over 1,200 of them in honor camps. There have been remarkably few escapes. There are no guns, no bloodhounds and no walls about these camps. The prime consideration is that men should give to the Government an honest day's work and respect the obligations which they undertake when the Government gives them the privilege of finishing their sentences in less severe surroundings.

The second consideration, of course, must be whether the improvement in the character of these surroundings will so mitigate the terrors of punishment as to interfere with the purpose of our penal law. It is at this point that we must use our common sense and our power to diagnose and discriminate. We must be able to separate the men in our prison groups for whom permanent segregation and punishment is the only remedy but we shall find after this scientific diagnosis and segregations a surprisingly large number who will respond to more constructive and more humane and more scientific treatment. To say that all men who enter the prison door merit or deserve the identical kind of treatment is as senseless as to say that all men who enter a hospital should immediately be given a dose of Epsom Salts.

No movement in recent years has received greater public approval than the placing of prisoners in work camps in some of the States and counties and with the Federal government. It was immediately recognized that work in the open air is infinitely superior from a physical and mental viewpoint to stagnation in the confined and cramped quarters of the prison; that the hope for the ultimate

reconstruction in men's characters is much greater where their muscles are hardened, habits of industry are confirmed and their trustworthiness is developed than under conditions where their minds disintegrate, their bodies grow flabby and their morals sink to the level of the lowest among their fellows. The conception of a prisoner working out by the sweat of his brow his debt to society is much more agreeable to the average citizen than to see even the most hardened lawbreaker sitting in a cell plotting mischief for the future. It was Hawthorne, I think, who said, "That which isolates damns; that which associates saves." It is our business, however, to see that the association is a helpful and constructive one and that the isolation should be reserved for those who have shown they cannot with profit to themselves or with safety to the community be allowed to associate.

Consequently, at the new Federal penitentiary which is being erected at Lewisburg we are planning a variety of housing facilities. There will be a receiving building where prisoners will be quarantined for study and examination. There will be a disciplinary building in which will be the most rigorous type of steel cell block. There will be a cell block similar to the English prisons with individual strong rooms and the high window. There will be cell blocks of the English type with larger windows. There will be dormitories, both small and large, and with the high window and the low window. There will be honor rooms and honor dormitories for those few inmates who have shown that they merit that kind of treatment and in which men may be tested to see whether they have arrived at the stage when they can safely be paroled into the community. Camps will still be reserved for honor prisoners. In other words, we are attempting to follow not only the best features of the new German progressive system of treating criminals but we are trying to provide the new Warden with all the architectural devices to assist him in carrying out the program for individual rehabilitation. The place will have its prison aspect for those who need such but it will offer other types of housing for the hopeful and reformative type of individual.

I know of no better way to compare the purpose of the old and new schemes of penal treatment than to read two very interesting quotations. I have a book which was published in Boston in 1811 which is entitled "Rules and Regulations for the Government of the Massachusetts State-Prison, with a description of the edifice, an Act of the Legislature on the subject and remarks on the present state of the institutions."

The Massachusetts State-Prison, or Penitentiary, stands on the west-
 ernmost point of the peninsular of Charlestown, at Lynde's point, a pleasant
 and healthful spot, commanding a rich, variegated and extensive prospect.
 . . . The foundation is composed of rocks, averaging two tons in weight,
 laid in mortar. On this foundation is laid a tier of hewn stone, nine feet
 long, and twenty inches thick, forming the first floor. The outer walls
 are four, and the partition walls two feet thick. . . . The second story
 is like the first, except that the outer wall is but three and one-half feet
 thick, . . . with double glazed windows, double grated with iron bars
 two inches square. . . .

Competent judges pronounce this to be among the strongest, and best
 built prisons in the world. It has these advantages, over other buildings of
 this kind, it can neither be set on fire by the prisoners nor be undermined.
 The walls are built of hard flint stone, from six to fourteen feet long.

* * * * *

Sec. 7. *Be it further enacted*, That if the Warden or any other per-
 son employed as aforesaid, shall negligently suffer any convict committed
 and in custody as aforesaid, under sentence of solitary imprisonment, to
 be at large without the cell or apartment assigned to such convict, or to be
 there visited, conversed with, comforted or relieved, contrary to the rules
 and regulations of said prison, or shall negligently suffer such convict, or
 any convict there committed under sentence of confinement to hard labor,
 to be at large without the precincts of the said Prison, or contrary to the
 rules thereof, to be out of close confinement, the Warden or any other
 person so neglecting his duty in the premises, being thereof duly convicted
 in the Supreme Judicial Court, shall be punished by a fine not exceeding
 five hundred dollars.

* * * * *

Section 1. Each of the Officers of the Prison shall be furnished with
 a gun; bayonet, the necessary accoutrements, and a cartridge box contain-
 ing at least twelve cartridges with balls, and a strong heavy cutlass to be
 kept in good order in a safe and convenient place for use, in cases of in-
 surrection of the convicts, and when self-defense becomes indispensable.

Sec. 4. To prevent as far as possible intercourse with the convicts
 from abroad, to seclude them from the world, and thereby to leave them,
 as far as it is practicable, to their own reflections, to profit by the lessons
 of morality and religion bestowed on them while in confinement, that when
 they again return to society they may be improved in their minds and
 dispositions, it is important that as few visitors as possible be admitted
 within the precincts of the Prison.

* * * * *

The diet of the prisoners will be as follows:

Monday, Thursday and Sunday	}	Breakfast and Supper—Three gills of Indian meal made into hasty pudding, half a gill of molasses and a half a pound of coarse bread.
	}	Dinner—Three quarters of a pound of coarse meat or offal made into soup, half a pint of potatoes, and half a pound of coarse bread.

Tuesday } Breakfast and Supper the same.
and }
Friday } Dinner—One-quarter of a pound of salted pork, half a pint of
peas or beans, and a half a pound of coarse bread.

Wednesday } Breakfast and Supper the same.
and }
Saturday } Dinner—Half a pound of salted fish with one ounce of butter
or hogs' lard, and half a pound of coarse bread, and a pint
of potatoes.

* * * * *

In their regulations respecting visitors they have been governed by a knowledge of the evil which a promiscuous admission of company occasions. They hope in this and their other regulations to receive the support of their fellow citizens, and they sincerely desire that the blessing of providence may aid their humble exertions for the welfare of those unfortunate beings whose depredations on society have subjected them to the discipline of the Prison; and that those who are restored to society, as well as such who are condemned to pass their miserable lives in penitence and labor, may have reason in another and a better world to bless the authors of this institution.

Such was the prison of 1811.

I now take the opportunity to read the closing words of Alfred Hopkins' book, published in the summer of 1930, entitled "Prisons and Prison Building." Mr. Hopkins, by the way, is the architect for the new Federal prison to be built at Lewisburg.

Is this beneficent influence of beautiful building upon the offender a thing to be lightly treated? So for his sake let us abandon the ill-considered prison plan and the ill-intentioned prison design. Let us have decent prison building for this reason if for no other. But there *is* another. The effect upon the personnel of the prison by creditable structure is immeasurable. The effect of environment is just as noticeable and far more important upon the prison official than it is upon the prisoner. Put the soldier in uniform, and he becomes a different and a better soldier. Put a man in charge of an institution graced by dignified architecture, and he becomes more alert to that moral responsibility which is the very soul of his control there. Can the crassest critic of things supernatural and eternal shout out his derision in a cathedral? Could Voltaire himself go into Chartres and laugh at the faith which built it there? The spirit of ennobling environment never fails to make its appeal whether it be expressed in the sheltering structure of college or cathedral, or within the high enclosure of prison walls. The design of the prison becomes one more influence for the regeneration of the prisoner; it becomes one more factor in building up the morale and widening the scope of those who, as the long years go by, will come to exert their influence upon him; an influence which modern penological thought has proved should be wise and tolerant. And it is in this tolerance of the normal inconsistencies and the frailties of our human kind that the architect as well as the warden himself should go about his task. They may both well remember that

noble pronouncement of the poet and the prophet whose words I caused the mason to cut upon the lintel stone at Westchester:

"God hath made man upright, but they have
sought out many inventions."

The question might well be asked, will the improvement in prison architecture so as to provide decent living conditions remove the fear of punishment? If our hope of reducing crime was dependent solely upon the fear engendered by a prison experience, this question would have real significance. If the lessons of history were such as to teach us we could rely on the deterrent force of punishment, then it would obviously be our duty to make prison as gloomy and painful as possible. It is because of our growing belief that such a policy has not been successful that we are turning to something different.

Moreover, even in our best prisons today where many of the terrors of the prison of the past have been removed, we still have escapes, suicides and riots enough to demonstrate that enforced residence in a prison or reformatory is a real punishment to a man to whom liberty of action is the greatest possession. The cases of men who voluntarily seek incarceration in a prison, or who refuse to accept a parole when it is tendered to them, are still so rare as to be almost unnoticeable.

Conclusion

I was asked to speak on the cell block versus the prison camp. It must be quite clear that the cell block cannot be abandoned in its entirety and the prison camp set up as the sole solution of the prison building program. What we are sure of is that we can no more use the prison cell with benefit to the inmate and with safety to the community for the indiscriminate housing of each prisoner any more than we can safely turn all our prisoners loose in the honor camps which have been such a splendid success. What we are becoming each day more sure of also is that the future of prison work will depend upon our ability to devise and apply the kind of remedial measures which each individual needs and that our prison architecture must conform to this program. In other words, punishment need not lose its deterrent value simply because it is constructive.