

Mr. L. W. Fox, Chairman of the English Commission, in addressing a recent conference of prison officers, posed the question,—

What is it that as a Service we are asked to do? We have to take all the social misfits, menaces, and nuisances whom the Courts decide to punish by imprisonment, and to apply that punishment in such a way as in those hallowed words of the Gladstone Committee, which after fifty years still remain the overriding directive of our Service, “to send them out of prison, so far as is possible, better men and women than when they came in . . .” Unless you can keep those words constantly in your mind I do not see how your work can ever be anything but a rather cramped and pointless grind . . . a keen and constructive interest in the real values of the job can make the job worth while . . . Security and discipline are no longer the only needs of the prison, but they are still the foundations, and unless these are sound the building we have to erect upon them will never be firm. I ask every officer to keep before him in his daily work the idea that you form part of a great social service that is worth while, not only materially but spiritually.

Mr. James Bennett, Director of the Bureau of Federal Prisons in United States of America, in “The Way to Prison Work,” writes :—

To the average prisoner the prison officer is a representative of that authority which has deprived him of his liberty. He recognizes three types of prison employee: those he can take advantage of, those who take advantage of him, and those who strike a happy balance between these two extremes . . . The happy medium is the employee who is honest and who is scrupulously fair in his dealings with prisoners. He is firm with those requiring firm treatment, but is never cruel or abusive. He is lenient with those deserving leniency. He keeps his temper even in the most provocative situation and he does not lose his sense of proportion.

There have been isolated instances where a member of the staff has failed in his trust by being a party to trafficking, or has not deported himself with a due sense of propriety. There were two cases during the year of alleged mishandling of prisoners. Both were the subject of judicial inquiry and were held to be without foundation. The general body of controlling officers and staff have rendered excellent service, and I desire to take this opportunity of paying a tribute to those prison officers who have loyally risen to the heavy demands a depleted staff have involved and to express appreciation of the valuable and important service rendered to the country under difficult circumstances.

CONCLUSION

I desire to place on record the Department's appreciation of the help rendered by Visiting Justices, Visiting Committees, and Official Visitors. These constitute an independent body, apart from departmental officers, who maintain a check on the standard of conditions, and also provide an independent avenue for the ventilation of any complaint that a prisoner may have regarding his treatment.

The Department is also grateful to the various ministers of religion, officers of the Salvation Army, and members of the various voluntary welfare organizations, and many other public-spirited individuals, who have kindly assisted in ministering to the spiritual well-being of those placed in the Department's care. After-care work is recognized as an integral part of the correctional plan for reinstatement in the community as the objective, and in this regard the special thanks of the Department are due to the Women's Borstal Association and the various Prisoner's Aid Societies, the Probation Officers, Maori Welfare Officers, and Employment Officers.

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