

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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PRISONS, POLICE, AND PUNISHMENT.*

"I was in prison, and ye came unto Me."

One of the gravest problems confronting society to-day is that concerning its dealings with those brought before our so-called Courts of Justice and found guilty of offence. And every contribution to the literature bearing on the subject may be welcomed as at least affording evidence of another mind awakened to the need of reform. The book at present under notice, however, should, for its own sake, command attention. Its author does not hesitate to probe deeply and to lay bare

the Absurd and Unenlightened Ideas

which at present prevail concerning crime and criminals.

The first chapter treats of Penal Systems, Past and Present, and in its opening paragraph the author remarks that "The penal systems of all countries probably pass through much the same stages of evolution. They begin with Revenge—an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; they pass on to the idea of Punishment—a semi-theological conception, a sort of sacrifice to the goddess of Justice; then they adopt the method

of Deterrence or Terrorism—society, itself stricken with fear, trying to stamp out criminality by fear; and only at the last, if at all, do they become human. Only at the last does



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the majesty of society, forgetting its own little fears, descend to the work of Reclamation, and to make the criminal once more into a fellow-citizen and a brother. Our public opinion, happily, is rapidly passing into this last stage, but our penal system itself lingers in

the stages of Terrorism and Punishment."

As to punishment, no legal institution can possibly fairly judge of moral guilt or determine what is proper punishment for, say, murder or forgery. For apparently similar crimes one judge inflicts one sentence and another one either more or less severe, and in reality there is no system—nor can there be.

In many respects, America, Japan and even Russia, are shown to be in advance of England. The Elmira (New York) reformatory, with its splendid achievements, is referred to, and also the fact that Japan gives to each prisoner

the Highest Class of Industrial Work

of which he is capable. In the Island of Saghalien, the Russian convict is, after a short term of imprisonment, settled out in a cottage with land attached. The consensus of opinion among those best fitted to speak is, "Make your prison horrible with soul-crushing severities, and your prisoners will re-visit it year after year. Make it decent and home-like, and full of help and instruction, and they will take care never to come near it again."

The chapter on Law and Punishment deals with the inhumanities and absurdities of law, both in the past

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