

Prison Reform.

We publish the following by request, it being the oration delivered by Miss Lulu Peterson at the Commencement Exercises of the 8th grade of the Monmouth Public School.

It hardly seems possible that men and women, made in the image of their Creator, endowed with minds to govern their actions, and consciences to guide them to do right, should become so depraved, that imprisonment becomes necessary for the safety of the public welfare, and as a means to their moral improvement.

It is supposed that mankind in times before history was written was so undeveloped morally, so dwarfed in mind, that barbarism, cannibalism and cruelties, such as ignorant and vicious humanity can practice was common to them; but after all these ages; ages of gradual enlightenment, ages that have all along been of an upward tendency in man's possession of the earth; to know that every country has its criminals, that every state of our most progressive nation has penitentiaries, and that every county of every state has its jails where men and women are kept secure for crimes they have committed against their fellows; to know this is to admit that with all our boasted civilization, moral growth, and quickened conscience mankind has much yet to accomplish for itself.

The anarchist preaches the destruction of all law; the overzealous preach a cessation of human endeavor entirely and a throwing of one's self, headlong as it were, into the arms of the Almighty.

The pessimists say we are all bad and every thing is wrong; while the optimists are rather inclined to the belief that we and every thing else are good and all is right, but in the face of it all we have our prisons, our reform schools, and our so-called sanitariums.

As a result we must acknowledge that there is much yet to be done to retard the growth of criminal intent, to smother immoral thought and to stop the onward march of crime.

When men or women commit crimes, it is no wonder we conclude something must be done with them; not so much perhaps as a punishment to the criminal as for our safety. And no doubt the most natural thing is to confine them where they will not be free to murder or steal. Many theories have been advanced from time to time and tried out as to proper prison discipline and the treatment of convicts in general. Some have proven entirely inadequate for the purpose, some were extremely cruel and unjust and did not bespeak either human kindness or sound judgment. For the extremely vicious and brutal man or woman, extreme measures seem to be necessary, such as the silent dungeon, the starving method, or the straight jacket, while the lash is sometimes used even yet. Perhaps best of all in the line of reform of prison methods is the indeterminate sentence, for as man is influenced in many ways and no two exactly alike, it is unjust to foreshadow what will bring the desired results, that is, the actual reform of the man or woman imprisoned.

We do not believe in the Mosaic law, as "an eye for an eye" and a crime for a crime. Neither do we take the other extreme, as proper; the casting of pearls before swine, for pearls there are a few yet, and swine there are many.

God, himself is just and His laws are immutable, but one of

His laws broken will inevitably bring reproach and pain to the breaker.

We believe and know that the present system of prison discipline is intended along the line of justice, and we also know that our wisest men have advised and arranged for the system of imprisonment as we now have it; but what stands out prominently before the whole world is the fact that imprisonment at present does not reform the prisoner, while it has the desired effect on the few it only checks the many until the prison doors swing open and they breathe liberty again when they immediately begin preying upon their fellow men, and so continue until the gloomy, and to us, awful walls of the penitentiary enclose them once more. Is this reformation? no! Is this justice?, perhaps so in a sense to the public, and to the criminal, but to God who gave us life and the privilege of being happy and wise? no! a thousand times no!

Our subject is prison reform and as yet we have recited only a few things regarding prisons or prisoners, but true prison reform begins in the home, long long, before the child knows or can know any thing regarding crimes or punishment of crimes by imprisonment.

Character is made in the home not in the school, not in the Church, not in the prison. And it is this same character or want of it that fills the nation with happy, contented and prosperous men and women or fills the asylums and prisons with miserable, vicious and wrecked humanity.

Fortunate is that girl or that boy who has a kind, loving and sympathetic mother and along with these graces is and must always be good, hard sense enough to chide, when chiding is necessary, to reprove, when reproof is for the betterment of the child, and a realization that God has given her these children to train and guide as well as to love and fondle, but never to spoil or drive bad by neglect or abuse, and with a father who is a companion to his boy or boys, takes an interest in their play as well as in their work, combine sobriety with industry and has the courage and good sense to realize that the mother is not to be alone to guide her children but needs his help and sympathy at all times.

With such a mother and such a father few girls will neglect their studies to walk the streets or dawdle their time away dreaming of lovers and gayety to the destruction of all that is good and worth living for, and few boys will become worthless hangers on at public places where only idleness and viciousness is learned by loitering, but will as surely, with few exceptions, become men among men to be loved, honored and obeyed.

What then! to attempt to control the stream with out first controlling the spring that causes the stream is worse than useless; and to attempt to reform the hardened, depraved, debased criminal is work for God alone, and too difficult for man.

But if "from the depth of the heart the mouth speaketh" then as truly we may say from the depth of the home character comes or goes; and as long as it goes prisons will be filled and reforms planned, but if the home is right, the criminal will never come forth.

We should love our country, we should love our state; but we love our home most of all.

May our boys and girls be taught truths at home that will destroy every prison in the land.



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