

The John Howard Association

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JOHN HOWARD
ASSOCIATION

proves ex-convicts can become assets rather than liabilities.

IT WAS THE all-too-familiar pattern. Fred Coles had dropped out of high school and joined a gang of boys who shoplifted for kicks. He was caught and sentenced to Chicago's House of Correction.

When released, he again resorted to thievery. That brought him a year in the county jail. Next, he broke into a car. This earned a sentence at Stateville Penitentiary in Joliet, Ill.

Now a tall, thin man of 23, Fred recently walked out of Stateville in a prison suit with \$25 in his pocket. What will he do? He was the child of a common-law marriage. His mother had died when he was three; now his father claims Fred's not his son. So Fred has no home.

It's hopeless, you say. You've heard that "once a thief, always a thief"; therefore a man like this is past help. Then what is to be done? Let him go back to stealing, the only thing he's known? No, things can be different for Fred—thanks to the John Howard Association.

With modest offices in Chicago, this association is devoted to helping men who are released from prison. For 55 years it has worked for crime prevention in its most challenging area: keeping offenders from repeating.

It is estimated that one out of every three men released from prison today will return there within five years! Sound discouraging? It used to be two out of three!

Routinely, the John Howard Association receives a list of inmates who will be released from Stateville during the month. Every Saturday, two case workers visit the penitentiary to talk to these men and offer help. They learn that some prisoners have families waiting for them, some have jobs to return to. Others, like Fred, don't know what to do.

Fred's record showed that he got along well in the institution, where he was in a controlled environment. Now he seemed anxious to make a complete break with his past. Two days after his release he went to the association for help.

He wanted a job, and enough money to buy another suit, for he felt that everyone recognized his prison garb.

Like so many ex-prisoners with similar records, Fred had not been taught any vocation in high school,

and he was not equipped to do any work which would give him satisfaction. Fortunately, our prisons are beginning to fill the gap in vocational guidance, so that men like Fred can finish their high-school education and learn a trade. Fred had been assigned to the prison furniture factory.

He told Mrs. Faith Jefferson Jones, the association's case-work supervisor, that he would like employment in that field. With his immediate need for money, however, he had to take the only job available: washing dishes. He worked diligently for two days, was half an hour late the third day and was fired.

Mrs. Jones had sent Fred to an institution where he could rent a room cheaply. He had too much to drink one evening, got into a fight, and was thrown out.

Not a very encouraging specimen, was he? Why bother with someone like that? But Mrs. Jones, who has a master's degree in social-service administration, did bother.

She sent Fred to take aptitude tests. There he revealed superior academic intelligence!

He displayed high interest in music and literature, as well as in clerical and selling areas. Now she knew in which directions to work. After all, the John Howard Association's object is not simply to find a man a job and shelter. It is to give him vocational guidance, help him develop new social interests, even help him solve domestic problems, if such arise.

Mrs. Jones contacted a friend of the association, a manufacturer who had

successfully helped 15 men adjust after prison life. He said he knew someone in the furniture business, and if Fred wasn't accepted there, he thought he might be able to use him in his own plant. He had dinner with Fred, talked with him about his problems, and left Fred with the feeling he'd found a friend.

Fred was able to get assembly work at the furniture shop, but there soon came a slack period and the only job left for him was running the elevator. He disliked this intensely.

"Too much like a jail," Fred told Mrs. Jones, and wanted to quit. But she helped him to understand there were times when he had to discipline himself to do an unpleasant job in order to get something better.

Fred stayed on. As he transported passengers, it became evident that he enjoyed talking with people so he was given a chance in the sales department. He's still there. He now lives in a one-room apartment and has a new hobby, a record collection.

Fred's case shows how unique and important the work of the John Howard Association has become. It is convinced that with intelligent treatment, many more men considered social liabilities can become human assets.

This cannot be done, however, unless the community accepts its responsibility to help rehabilitate released prisoners. During the Korean conflict, as well as during both World Wars, the association had little difficulty finding work for the men who came to it for help. They proved satisfactory workers and made good,

sometimes excellent, adjustment.

Now the association is having more difficulty placing its applicants. But if a man is continually rejected, unable to find work, what will he do? He will be forced to think of himself as a criminal and to seek alliance with that class of men who consider themselves a faction apart from society. This is precisely what the association fights to prevent!

The John Howard Association is named after a homely, dedicated little Englishman who fought for prison reform in the 1770s. He visited every prison in England and published reports of the injustices and distressing

For a directory of other prisoners' aid societies throughout the country, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to Mrs. Ruth Baker, Secretary, International Prisoners' Aid Association, 125 E. Wells, Milwaukee, Wis.

conditions he had seen in his tours.

Depending on voluntary contributions, the association works for crime prevention in Illinois through the rehabilitation of released prisoners, prison reform, and public enlightenment. Also, it works in close cooperation with similar agencies in other parts of the country. Looked upon as one of the authorities in correctional work, it has been contacted by committees from many states for advice on how to create similar societies.