

# Reformatories Old and New

With Special Reference to the Institutions at Elmira and Mansfield

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**S**PAIN and Bavaria gave to the world the first successful examples of a Reformatory System. In 1835 Colonel Montesenis organized a prison at Valencia on a military basis. He divided the inmates into companies and appointed prisoners as inferior officers; instituted a comprehensive system of trades instruction and schools of letters and gave particular attention to the education and reclamation of boys under twenty years. Though the population of the Valencia prison at that time was over one thousand, a dozen old soldiers were the only guards Montesenis employed, and the escapes were few. Recommitments during Montesenis' term were reduced from 35 per cent. to 7 per cent. Beyond question this man personally exercised a great influence upon those committed to his keeping, but the most potent factor in the splendid record of Valencia was the power vested in the governor to reduce the term of incarceration one-third as a reward for good behaviour. And it is a significant fact that when this authority was removed and the full sentence insisted upon by the Legislature the whole system collapsed.

In 1842 Obermaier took charge of the prison at Munich, Bavaria. There he found seven hundred prisoners in a state of chronic insubordination. The ball and chain, the whipping post and all the other features of the old penal system were in evidence. And yet with them all it took one hundred soldiers to maintain a semblance of order. In a few months Obermaier had removed all the instruments of torture, discharged 70 per cent. of the soldiers and reorganised the industrial department of the institution, appointing a convict superintendent over each of the shops. It is said that during Obermaier's administration only 10 per cent. of the prisoners relapsed into crime after their discharge. But even at that early date Bavaria enjoyed the advantage of the indeterminate sentence, many of the men being sentenced to imprisonment without any fixed term. Another helpful feature was the supervision of discharged prisoners and the aid and encouragement afforded them by benevolent societies.

**A**MONG English-speaking countries Ireland first introduced reformatory methods into penal institutions. In this respect Sir Walter Crofton's name must be placed beside those of Montesenis and Obermaier. The reform of the prisoner, Sir Walter Crofton made the chief object of his system. This system achieved such gratifying results that in the early sixties it attracted the attention of Dr. E. C. Wines and Dr. Theodore Dwight, who were then investigating the prison problem in the interest of the State of New York. In a report to the Legislature in 1867 they pronounce the Irish system "the best model of which we have any knowledge." They define it as "an adult reformatory, where the object is to teach and train the prisoner in such a manner that on his discharge he may be able to resist temptation and inclined to lead an upright, worthy life". On this report legislative action was taken which resulted in the establishment in 1876 of the State Reformatory at Elmira, "for the reception of male felons between the ages of sixteen and thirty, not previously convicted of any crime punishable by imprisonment in a state prison." In the early days of the Elmira institution the improvement agencies appear to have been limited to employment at some useful trade. Subsequently a school of letters was organised, sessions of which were held in the evening. Then followed the trade schools, and other features which now constitute what is known as the Elmira System.

Beyond question the Elmira system has exercised a mighty influence in the betterment of the relation of society towards its moral defectives. In twelve different States of the

Union the reformatory idea has since been adopted. The Borstal prison in England and others on the Continent have been largely patterned after Elmira. The classification of its inmates has proved one of the greatest difficulties with which the management of the Elmira institution has had to grapple. Its population averages 1,400 young men, a large proportion of whom come from the city of New York. His very presence in the institution is evidence of the fact, that each of these young men has been considered a danger to society and thus cannot safely be allowed to enjoy his liberty. But while all, alike, are out of relation with the established order of things they differ almost as widely in character and disposition as the same number of young men enjoying free life. Some, inherently of good character, may have yielded to a temptation which few could resist. Others, occasional law-breakers, attracted probably more by the excitement and adventure which accompany violations of the law than the gain or satisfaction which crime affords its perpetrators. Then there is the third class, naturally vicious and rebellious, with little or no inclination to restore themselves to the honourable citizenship they have forfeited. The perfect reformatory system would at the outset isolate this last-named class and so effectually prevent its bad influence affecting the well disposed among the population. This, however, is difficult of accomplishment. The antecedence of the prisoner and the nature of his offence may afford unreliable data as to the character or disposition of the man or the prospects of his reform. So it is that in Elmira all prisoners are received on the same level and afforded like opportunities for improvement and promotion.

While generally speaking the conduct of the inmate towards the various means employed for his reclamation is a pretty safe indication of his real character, cases occur, no doubt, where the adroit criminal corresponds to the discipline of the institution for the sole purpose of obtaining early freedom to prey again upon society. These exceptional instances of misdirected leniency, however, offer no argument against the continuance of reformatory work in the interests of the great mass.

In its early history Elmira had four grades; now those have been reduced to three. Every man admitted to the institution is, on admission, placed in the second grade and his record determines whether he will be promoted to a higher or reduced to the third or lowest division. Faithful compliance with the rules of the institution and industry in the line of work to which he is allotted, within six months insures a promotion, while by a serious offence he may at any time be reduced to the lower grade. Inattentive work or lack of application in studies or trade school may also incur grade reduction. Each of the grades has a distinctive uniform. The first and second grades wear black

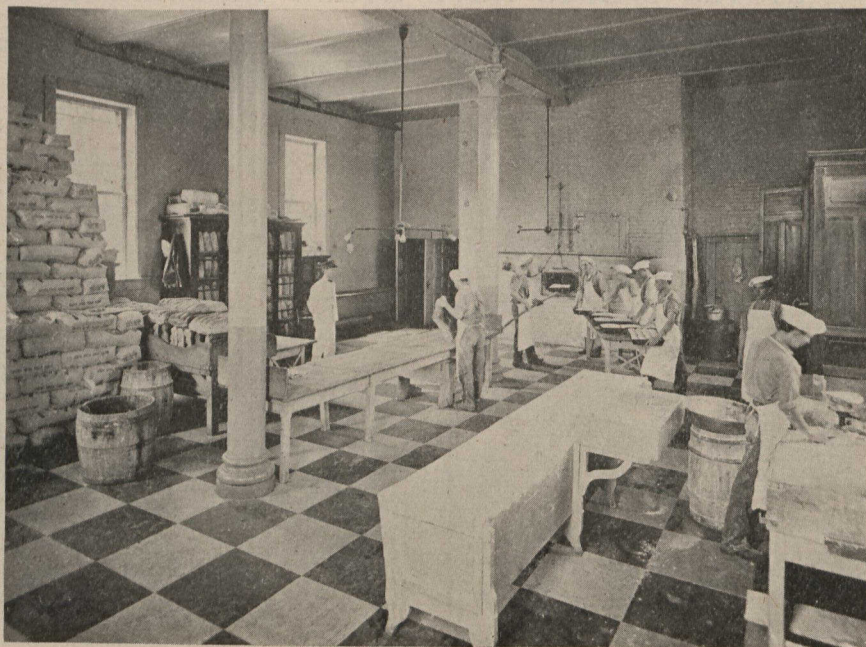
coats and grey trousers in winter and khaki uniform in summer, while in the lowest grade red coats and trousers are worn.

The value of self-support is emphasised by the Elmira system. Each inmate is credited with wages from the first day of his admission and charged with the full amount of his maintenance, lodging, meals and medical attendance. The wages are sufficient to maintain the industrious prisoner during the period of his incarceration, afford him at the time of his liberation sufficient money to pay for his transportation to a place of employment, and maintain him until he receives his first wages as a free man.

A distinctive feature of the Elmira Reformatory and one which has aroused considerable criticism is its elaborate military system. To successfully begin the work of reformation it is believed that the inmate must be in good physical condition. On his entrance to the institution, the young man is subjected to a close medical examination, and should it be found that he is the victim of any physical weakness, means are at once taken to restore him to perfect health. He may be ordered to the hospital or given special exercises in the gymnasium to build up his constitution. When he is once more a well man he takes his place in the ordinary routine of the institution; is allotted to one of the trade schools or factories and joins a class in the school of letters. Every man in the institution physically fit takes part in the military exercises. At first he is attached to the awkward squad and when a sufficient degree of proficiency in drill is acquired he is promoted to one of the regular military companies. The parade day at Elmira affords a rather imposing spectacle, to which the public is admitted. This feature of the system does not meet with general approval. Many hold that the publicity of the parade is not in line with good prison discipline, and that while it affords gratification to the morbidly curious it can do no possible good to the inmates. However that may be, the importance of reasonable calisthenic and military exercises in a reformatory cannot be overestimated. They help to straighten up the man, to smarten his movements, give him greater confidence in himself and a clearer perception of the necessity of order and obedience. As a system Elmira presents the most elaborate development of reformatory effort on this continent.

**E**STABLISHED largely on the same lines as Elmira is the State Reformatory at Mansfield, Ohio. Here, too, are the schools of letters, technical schools and military exercises, but all these as corrective agencies occupy a secondary position to the land. The one thousand-acre farm, operated by the trustees or graduating class is the great regenerating influence on which Mansfield depends for healthy reconstructive influence.

They have magnificent buildings, dining rooms, spacious and sweet-smelling, cell blocks which are models of perfect sanitation, splendidly equipped schools of letters and technical schools, and busy factories operated largely on the State-use plan. Mansfield in every detail seems to emphasise the most rational development of prison reform. And yet the Mansfield system accounts for but a small measure of her success. It is the personal touch, the sustained and kindly interest in the eight hundred human problems constantly presented for solution; it is the thorough consecration of a great man to a great work that has given Mansfield her well-earned distinction. System there must be—with all the necessary rigidity to restrain, and sufficient elasticity to encourage. But the best system in the world must fail if it is not vitalised and directed by a heart that can feel and a mind that can understand. Mr. J. A. Leonard has not only made a study of the criminal class: he makes a study of every unfortunate committed to his charge. Surrounded daily



The Bakeshop at Mansfield.