Prison Reform

(By Professor Coleman Phillips.)

In my last article in "The News" I pointed out the general grounds and the special social and religious principles which, in my opinion, should guide the administrative authorities of a progressive nation in imposing the necessary of imprisonment upon offenders. I have already said, and in order to prevent misunderstanding I now repeat, that imprisonment in public work is a sound and just treatment for social misfits as though they were hotel guests, and to regard punishment as anything but a very unpleasant process and experience. Punishment should and must be unpleasant, but it need not be inhuman, savage, or in excess of what is sufficient and adequate for attaining the improvement of the offender—a duty duly balanced and rationally adjusted to show the religious influence, deterrent, preventive, and reformatory.

Reformative Devices

In order to ameliorate the lot of prisoners and to promote their chances for rehabilitation, various devices have been tried, and with more or less success, especially in the earlier stages of the development of the reformatory principle. For example, the system of providing medical services for good conduct has been tried in several countries, but without success. Another method was discharge by good conduct from the New York State Prison (New York) in 1837, and was continued at the Pennsylvania State Prison (1840-1880) by Capt. McConnelley in Tasmania, and by Sir Walter Cotton in England. This, however, is not a reformative device as it is based on the assumption that the prisoner will continue to commit no crime if he is not allowed to be imprisoned. Another method is called "education," and has been applied to a great extent in prisons, especially in the United States. This method is based on the assumption that the prisoner will be made a better citizen if he is given education and training. It has been tried in various forms, such as teaching trades, music, and the arts and sciences, and has met with varying degrees of success. The most successful method has been the teaching of trades, such as tailoring, carpentry, and plumbing, which have been taught in many prisons. However, the success of this method depends on the prisoners' willingness to learn and their ability to apply what they have learned. The most important factor in the success of this method is the prisoners' willingness to learn and their ability to apply what they have learned. The most important factor in the success of this method is the prisoners' willingness to learn and their ability to apply what they have learned.