

THE HEN

Hardly a month passes that Mary and I do not notice in our children some intellectual or emotional characteristic that is utterly alien to us but that is decidedly reminiscent of the traits of kinsmen or ancestors. A friend, who knows Mary and me quite well but who has never seen our relatives, once remarked about Alice, "I'll bet that little Johnston girl is a constant surprise to her parents." If she had been better acquainted with John, I am sure she would have included him in the list of surprises. It is little exaggeration to say that, in spite of our constant association with the children and of our unintentional tendency to mold them into our own style of life, they are today less akin to their parents than they are to their grandmothers.

Especially significant, I think, are our failures to train John and Alice into patterns of conduct that we consider to be socially advantageous. John, for example, is like his maternal grandmother in having an inflexible, almost wooden, personality. It took me five years to teach him to put his table napkin into his lap. Now, he refuses to eat without one! To get him to be more adjustable, more adaptable to circumstances, seems next to impossible. Besides, he has what is often called an artistic temperament. Vainly have we tried to interest

him in conventional masculine pursuits but we would find it quite easy to turn Alice, our "little storm," into a turbulent tomboy. Unlike my mother, my wife is an excellent housekeeper, but her precept and example have both failed to affect Alice, who delights to "make a mess" with mud, water, and a few colorful ingredients.

Do we really have the power to bend our twigs the way we wish?

John, Alice, and the children of the neighbors have, then, put question marks after many of my once accepted psychological doctrines. Can early training accomplish the marvels claimed by Watson and his followers? They admit their failure with mentally subnormal children. Yet perhaps training does more for average and superior children only because they can be more easily forced to abandon or reorganize traits they have really inherited from their forefathers. Oliver Wendell Holmes once observed, "Heredity is an omnibus in which our ancestors ride; and every now and then one of them puts his head out and embarrasses us." Nearly ten years of study of my children now convince me that our ancestors frequently — very frequently — put their heads out, both to delight and to embarrass us.

The Hen

*A fluffy miracle, with bright
Eye quiet (but never shut),
She sits creative on the nest;
Then utters — for Probatum Est —
Her "Cut-ka-darcut-cut!"*

*She bounces off, articulate,
A hen become the Word:
She scurries here, she scuttles there,
Most awkward yet most debonair —
Tremendous and absurd.*

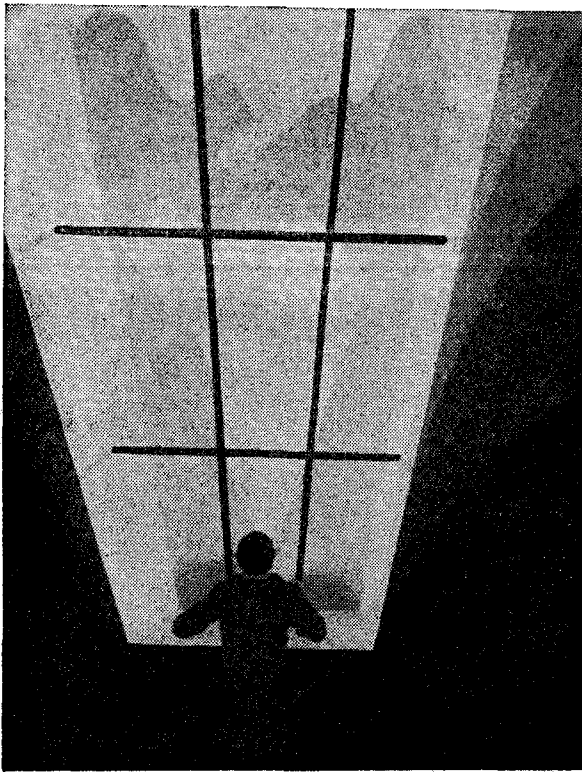
*She tells the world (and loudly), "I
Have given what you ask me:
I left behind me on the straw
The finest egg you ever saw;
Nor did it overtask me!"*

*So she brings breakfast, fresh and warm,
To any who may wish:
For paradisaal honey-brew,
She offers cockadoodledoo
Sealed in a lilac dish!*

E. Merrill Root

Pleader for the Damned

by HENRY F. PRINGLE



*Conception by John Vassos for Oscar Wilde's Ballad of Reading Gaol
Courtesy of E. P. Dutton & Co.*

WARDEN LEWIS E. LAWES of Sing Sing Prison looked out from his office window to the main gates, through which more than 100 trucks each day pass into the prison — trucks which, despite the utmost vigilance, *might* be smuggling revolvers, knives, or hack saws, sure preludes to the thing all wardens most dread: a prison break.

"We haven't had an escape for five years," the Warden remarked. But the siren may any minute shatter the normal prison quiet; guns will rattle from the guard towers; crumpled human beings will cough out blood and die in the prison yard. So he added, almost superstitiously: "But we're probably due for one. The law of averages works in Sing Sing, like anywhere else."

But something more than the law of averages

has been at work at Sing Sing. It is the personality of Lawes himself. Lawes has done more than any other prison administrator in history to spread the gospel that vengeance is not a cure for crime, that rehabilitation is possible if convicts are treated like men instead of beasts. Since 1920, when Lawes became Warden, the men have been treated fairly, and, in the main, know it. And so, while riots and escapes and killings have been frequent in many American prisons, Lawes has had but one disturbance — and that a minor one — in almost eighteen years.

Lawes has been criticized as a theorist — too "soft." But remember that even the best prison is a place of despair. Walk at night through No. 13 Gallery at Sing Sing, the oldest building in the prison. The cells are built of huge stones, and are but seven feet long, a little more than three feet wide, and not quite seven feet high — and once held two men each. No sunlight has reached them since they were built in 1825. Almost no air reaches them. You recoil, first, from the odor of human excretion, for the old iron slop buckets are still used. But you will recoil still more as you pass cell after cell and hear from many the sounds of men racked with sobs — the newly arrived prisoners. For freedom is behind them — freedom and a normal life and the out-of-doors. Women are behind them, too. Ahead lies either suppression or perversion.

Lawes once estimated that the 2,500 men in his charge would sacrifice an aggregate 20,000 years of life. So 60,000 men have forfeited almost 600,000 years since the grim fortress on the Hudson was built. Sing Sing's span of despair would stretch far beyond recorded history. During it men were flogged, starved, and abused until they went insane or died. Sing Sing has witnessed every filthy detail of man's inhumanity to man.

Under Lawes it has become — as prisons go