

COMMENT

IN most countries it may be said that the successful live in the twentieth century, the failures in the nineteenth. In England it is particularly true because so many of our institutions for the failing—prisons, hospitals, nursing homes, law courts, workhouses and private hotels and boarding houses—are nineteenth-century buildings with furniture, customs and custodians to match. In this number we are given a glimpse of sex-life in English prisons which, in a society which produces more and more homosexuals and yet retains all the old-fashioned legislation for punishing them, are naturally fuller than ever. In the most intelligent and readable of modern accounts of psycho-analysis, *The Mind in Action* (John Lehmann, 15s.), Dr. Eric Berne writes: 'Experiments with marihuana show that a usually normal man may even make love to a bridge lamp if his libido becomes aroused sufficiently and there is no reasonable outlet available. It is not surprising, then, that where there are no women, men will sometimes turn to each other for sexual satisfaction. . . .' It has also been noticed that when men hypnotized on the stage are handed a mop and told 'That is your favourite film star' they begin to fondle the handle with lubricous embarrassment. Should these unfortunate people go to prison too? It is a nice question. Another institution which we are apt to forget in the heat and sport of this first true post-war summer is the army, into which young men are now conscripted at the age of eighteen. One wonders how many of the readers of HORIZON are males who can remember what it felt like to be eighteen and how they regarded the customary week-a-year which they had to spend, if in a school O.T.C., under canvas. Imagine, at the most sensitive moment of intellectual growth, multiplying this week by fifty-two and we get a vague idea of the year's sentence of hard labour and monotony which we have imposed on the young and which must inevitably retard their development. This problem is also treated in this number and, with the story by the young American writer, Donald Wyndham, and Durrell's analysis of Henry Miller, the theme of oppression and revolt is complete. As the threat of war recedes, and for the moment it has receded, the basic questions of human rights make themselves heard. What do we think human life is about? and

how do we propose to put our thinking into action? It is not a bad idea to imagine a man from Mars, a woman from Venus, or an angel, if you like, arriving with an earnest curiosity about this planet and then to see how some of our most cherished institutions such as customs barriers, frontiers, currency restrictions, the Berlin Corridor, licensing laws, censorship, prisons, armies, working in offices, divorce, probate and admiralty—our whole experiment in gracious dying—sound when patiently explained in such circumstances. Mr. Salkeld reveals the existence of a state of mind to be found both among old warders and old convicts known as ‘prison rot’. One would like to know more about its symptoms. Or do we know too much?

PABLO SALKELD

THE UGLY HEAD

FIFTY years have passed since Oscar Wilde was sent to prison, but in the intervening half-century the great mass of the uninformed public still views with scorn and derision those often unfortunate people who are caught out in the committal of sexual offences.

This biased attitude goes further than the masses; it is a known fact that certain judges are particularly prejudiced against, for example, homosexuals. For this reason defending lawyers will do all in their power to switch such cases to courts presided over by less biased judges.

Among thinking men and women the whole attitude towards the sexually abnormal has changed. The official outlook, too, is now more tolerant, and it is a healthy sign that a joint Committee of the British Medical Association and the Magistrates Association recently agreed that drastic changes should be made in the laws relating to the treatment of sexual offenders. Furthermore, the Committee suggested that British law regarding homosexuals should be brought into line with Continental law, so far as consenting adults are concerned.

To generalize, when trying to describe prisons, is impossible. The English prison today runs from the dirt and squalor of the London and provincial slum gaols, to the light and healthful surroundings of the modern 'open camp' prison and the regional 'Training Centre'. Unfortunately, the great majority of prisoners are obliged to serve their sentences in the former, or in the equally sordid local or county gaols.

In trying to give a clear and unbiased picture of actual conditions during the past few years, it is fairest to mention only those places which one has seen and to quote only that which one has learned from unimpeachable sources, such as prison Governors, Assistant Governors, Medical Officers, and the more serious and reliable prison officers.

The prisoner has no access to the files of his fellows, which is right and proper. What he knows about another prisoner is learned from prison talk, newspaper reports—the banned Sunday papers are always obtainable at a price—and from accounts by