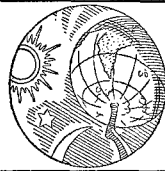


STRAWS IN THE WIND

Significant notes in American life to-day



"Let's Riot"

By JACK CALLAHAN

WITHIN the last two years convicts have staged a series of savage rebellions in the prisons of New York, Missouri, Kansas, Ohio, Colorado, and Illinois which resulted in the death of three hundred and twenty-seven of their comrades, five prison officials, and the destruction, via the torch, of prison property valued at approximately five million dollars.

I predict that what has already occurred in your penal institutions is nothing compared with what will occur within the next year or two if society does not get down to business immediately and start treating desperate criminals as they should be treated.

I approach this discussion of prison riots, what causes them and how to prevent them, as an ex-convict who knows life behind the walls and as a student of theoretical penology and criminology on this side of the walls.

There is no foundation for the popular widespread belief that the rebellions at Auburn, Dannemora, Canon City, Jefferson City, Columbus, Leavenworth, and Joliet were caused by bad food and overcrowding. The absurdity of this bad-food and overcrowding theory, circulated by prison-reform workers and mollycoddling wardens, becomes apparent when one considers the background of the average convict. Who is he? Is he a product of the slums where bad food and overcrowding are common things or does he hail from the Park Avenue districts where beef stews, back alleys and congested tenements are unknown? Why should conditions with which he has been familiar since birth suddenly drive him to desperation? If the rub and stench of sweaty human bodies didn't drive him to desperation in the tenement districts where he was born and raised, why should such things drive him to desperation in the "big houses" where he is now staging riots?

I have been in prisons that were overcrowded and I have been in prisons that provided a cell for every prisoner and I can tell

you that the convict loves the prison in which he can get together, in groups, with his comrades in the cell-house, in the cells and in the yards. He prefers a partner or two, or three, or as many as can be got in a cell, to solitary confinement. The "stir" in which they can congregate in the cell-houses, cells and yards is rated "a hell of a fine joint," while the "stir" which deprives them of these privileges is rated "a hell of a tough joint."

The prisons of to-day provide an incomparably superior menu to the prisons of ten or twenty years ago. I received no oatmeal and milk, prunes or stewed apples, fried potatoes or good coffee ten to twenty years ago. I received bread and molasses and the worst coffee, minus milk and cream, that ever trickled down the throat of mortal man.

I had no spring bed or comfortable mattress to rest on ten or twenty years back. I slept on a "shake down" on the floor with a hundred other law breakers, all of whom were chained together by the ankles. Did we riot? No, we never rioted! We were too tired to riot. We worked from sunup till sundown on railroads, in rock quarries and in foundries. But even if we had been disposed to stage a little rebellion there was *that* strap hanging in the warden's office to give us pause. Only the man who has had the strap can testify to its power as a deterrent. I have had several applications of it, so I ought to know. There never was a riot in a prison where the warden swung the strap!

But there are no straps in prisons to-day. Prison-reform workers said the strap was inhuman and that it degraded the whipper and the whipped. Well, I can't speak for the whipping bosses who gave me "the leather." I can speak only for myself. The strap did not degrade me. It had the opposite effect. It provoked meditation and strangled the ambition to become known as the hard guy of the "big house."

Prison-reform workers have bombarded the

press and public with considerable nonsense about antiquated prisons.

Speaking as one who has done various bits in these "antiquated hell holes," I herewith declare that they didn't destroy me mentally, morally, and physically. I acquired an education in them. I learned self-discipline in them, and the hard, laborious toil to which the old rough-riding wardens subjected me has left me with the constitution of an ox. At forty-five I am as hard as nails and heir to none of the common ills of man.

Before the prison-reform workers became active a twenty-year term meant sixteen years and eight months, a ten-year term meant eight years and four months, and a five-year term four years and two months. Two months per year was the time allowance for good conduct. There were no life terms for fourth, fifth or sixth offenders, of whom there were many and are to-day. It frequently happened that a first or second offender was dealt with more severely than an old offender.

Then came the era of the new penology and criminology with prison-reform workers, parole boards, shorter sentences and more liberal allowances for good conduct. Under the régime of the reformers a twenty-year man got one month off the first year, two off the second, three off the third, four off the fourth year, and four off every year thereafter up to twenty, making a twenty-year term thirteen years and ten months. Later on the reformers succeeded in obtaining more liberal allowances. A twenty-year man, in some States, became eligible for parole at the expiration of ten years, a five-year man was eligible for parole at the expiration of two and one-half years, while a lifer could get out any time if he had money and friends.

Then courageous and far-seeing men, like Baumes of New York and Sadler of Illinois, got their heads together and worked out some mighty good laws. They said that all fourth offenders should be labelled habitual criminals and isolated for life. They said a twenty-year term should mean twenty times three hundred and sixty-five days, with no allowance for good conduct. They said that there should be fewer paroles for first, second, and third offenders.

I was, and still am, heartily in accord with Mr. Baumes and his associates. I always have believed that crime waves could only be stopped by putting away for all time the people who create crime waves. I always have believed that the crook who demands rewards for good behavior should learn how to be-

have himself outside where the rewards are infinitely more substantial. I have always believed that severe punishment is a deterrent because I have been deterred by severe punishment. I never robbed a bank in Delaware because the whipping-post always scared me.

But the prison-reform workers thought otherwise. They said the Baumes laws were cruel and unjust and that it was not right to treat criminals so severely.

"We can't maintain discipline in our prisons," said the reformers, "if we rob prisoners of all hope. We must modify these laws which will inevitably render men hopeless and desperate."

These protests laid the foundation for the riots in the prisons of New York, Ohio, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, and Illinois. The convicts knew that they had the sympathy of the Golden Rule men and women and no small part of the American press, so they rioted. First came the Canon City rebellion with its torch and gats to spread death and conflagration, followed with the flare-ups at Auburn, Dannemora, Columbus, and Joliet. If Colorado hadn't hoisted the white flag there would have been no rebellions at Auburn and Dannemora. If New York hadn't hoisted the white flag with appropriations for new prisons, improvements in old ones and appropriations for better food, better clothes for discharged prisoners and more money for discharged prisoners and intimations that the Baumes laws would be modified, you can bet all the tea in China that there would have been no revolutions at Jefferson City, Columbus, and Joliet. Every time a State yielded to the demands of the rioters it paved the way for rebellions in other States.

As I write this, two weeks after the flare-up at Joliet, the boys at the Thomaston, Maine, State Prison are in revolt because the warden has restricted letter writing to two letters per week. Heretofore they've been sending out, some of them, as many as thirty and forty letters a week, sending them, mark you, to matrimonial advertising agencies. If the warden of the Maine prison surrenders to those "hoodlums" he is headed for all kinds of trouble. His surrender will create trouble for the wardens of other prisons. The inmates of other prisons reading about the success of the boys in Maine, and other States, will kick up a fuss of their own. Thus, like a forest fire, does the spirit of revolt spread from State to State, while sentimentalists preach the Golden Rule and rave about the good qualities of bandits, burglars, and assassins!

The revolts against the Baumes laws, the Sadler laws and other pieces of legislation attest their potency. These laws have put the fear of God, and Justice, into the hearts of bandits, burglars, and assassins. I tell you that discipline could be maintained if every prison in the United States was jammed from cellar to garret with lifers and long-term convicts. And here's how it can be done:

First, dismiss every prison official who advocates the Golden Rule system. Why in the name of common sense should a crook who already has demonstrated his inability to govern himself be clothed with authority to govern other weaklings? I've been in prisons where this silly Golden Rule business has been tried. It breeds stool pigeons. It breeds dissension and petty jealousies. The cons love it because it makes prison life soft. The officials love it because it makes their jobs soft.

Next, close your prison gates against the sob sisters and sob brothers who already have converted your prisons into playhouses. Throw them out and keep them out. Isolate the lifers from the short-term men. Abolish the "trusty" system. "Trusties" have been known to bring guns, dynamite and dope into prisons. It is through the "trusty" that convicts make contacts with the world beyond the walls by the way of smuggled letters. Abolish all entertainment. Singing jail-birds never think. You can discourage singing and encourage thinking by the simple process of substituting hard labor for entertainment. You can't convince a hard-headed crook that crooking is a bad business if you entertain him with band concerts, baseball games, handball games, moving pictures, crap games, poker, casino, cooncan and farobank. I'm not trying to be facetious. I have played craps, poker, casino, cooncan and farobank in your prisons.

Restore the strap. Convicts fear the strap. It is not degrading. It did not degrade me. Babying a full-grown man is decidedly more degrading than strapping him. It makes him insignificant and mean. One admits his weakness when he gets into prison, doesn't he? Then why baby him when babying only increases his weakness? You can't maintain an efficient prison without rigid discipline. You can't maintain any sort of business without a rigid system of routine or discipline. Abolish discipline in a manufacturing plant and you have a drop in production and a rise in costs. Abolish it in a prison and you have a drop in the production of rehabilitated law-breakers with disorder and violence to follow.

I think a review of the evolution of penal

conditions in Illinois will convince the impartial observer that this Golden Rule system of prison management will not do. Here is a prison, Joliet, which cost the taxpayers of Illinois approximately six million dollars. It has every modern convenience. The cells are eleven feet six inches long, by six feet six inches wide, by eight feet six inches high. There is hot and cold water in every cell, spring beds, comfortable mattresses and lavatories. The boys have a band, a baseball league, each cell-house playing against the other. They have boxing contests, handball courts, quoit-pitching fields. Once a week they have moving pictures. The food is excellent. I know that it is the best prison fare in the United States!

The warden did everything within his power to make life pleasant for his charges. He even provided a huge room wherein convicts and their friends and relatives could meet on visiting days and dine as they talked. And yet they rioted at Joliet. And why? Because of bad food and overcrowding and "the disgraceful conditions of an antiquated prison"? No, they rioted because a courageous parole board refused to release them as rapidly as they thought they should be released.

Now come with me through the old Joliet "stir" where I served a term for safe-cracking sixteen years back. The cells were seven feet long by four feet wide by seven feet high. We had no spring beds, comfortable mattresses, hot or cold running water. We had no band concerts, handball games, baseball games, quoit-pitching games or boxing contests. There were no luxuries of any kind in the old Joliet "stir." The silence system prevailed, therefore we could plan no riots. We wore stripes and marched the lock step. Hard labor was the word. We worked eight hours a day in the rock quarry and the foundry and when we "hit the hay" at night we slept the sleep of the just.

The first violation of the rules brought a reprimand. The second brought five days in the dungeon on a bread-and-water diet, a punishment which no hard-boiled fancy thinker feared. Any reasonably hard-headed crook can stand on his hard head for five days. I did it many times.

The third offense against the prison rules brought a "slugging." Third offenders were rare because all the cons feared the "sluggings," which were administered in various ways—by a big guard's fists, by a blackjack, by the strap and by the paddle. I got it all four ways. I got it for trying to carve up a

keeper with a knife, for telling the warden what I thought of him, for trying to hop over the walls, and for refusing to work in the quarry.

But nobody ever punished me without cause. When I behaved myself I was treated decently but firmly. I have never met one of those sadistic prison wardens who delighted in breaking the heads of convicts and I have been in some tough "stirs" in my day. That sadistic prison-warden stuff has been worked to death by ex-convict lecturers and writers, the boys who never lose their "Oh, God; help me, for I have suffered neurosis."

I found a good library in the old Joliet "big house." I discovered Herbert Spencer there, Oscar Wilde, Carlyle, and Goethe. Joliet always had a fine library.

In 1911 prison-reform workers descended upon the prison to abolish the "degrading striped uniform" and the "humiliating lock step." I have never been able to understand just how the stripes and the lock step degraded and humiliated a convict. Personally, I was never very much concerned about what I wore in prison or how I walked, and I never met a convict that was. Why should we? Nobody ever saw us except an occasional visitor and the keepers.

In April, 1913, the first Golden Rule warden, Edmund H. Allen, a kindly gentleman, arrived at the prison to take charge of us. He was accompanied by his lovely and accomplished wife, who subsequently became known as "The Angel of Joliet." Mrs. Allen spent most of her days, and many of her nights, ministering to the wants of the convicts and spreading the gospel of hope and good cheer throughout the prison.

Warden Allen believed that the man inside was pretty much like his brother outside. He embraced the idea that the criminal was simply a good man gone wrong, a man who could be reclaimed with Golden Rule methods. Mr. Allen began his administration by abolishing the silence system and all forms of corporal punishment.

"These men are human beings," he said; "treat them as such and they will respond. The day of the blackjack and the strap has passed."

He organized a band and a monthly magazine, the *Joliet Post*. He instituted smoking privileges. He gave us moving-picture shows, yard privileges. He gave us baseballs and bats and gloves. He provided an optician to look after our eyes and prescribed glasses. He reorganized the hospital along scientific lines. He improved the food. In short he and "The Angel of Joliet" turned the ancient "big house" upside down. And then one lovely June morning, about two years after his arrival at the prison, "The Angel of Joliet" was found dead in her bed, murdered by a "trustee" whom she and her kindly husband had befriended!

And yet the mollycoddlers say: "There is so much everlasting decency among the boys at the prisons if they are treated decently." Boys among whom there is a shred of "everlasting decency" do not murder their benefactors, use the torch and cold-bloodedly shoot down keepers. Boys who do such things cannot be reclaimed with tracts, sermons, affectionate pats on their broad, burglarious backs, and entertainment. Such boys require the iron, deep and hot, the opinions of the mollycoddlers to the contrary notwithstanding. If you don't start giving them the iron right now I predict that what has already occurred in your prisons is infinitesimal compared with what will occur within the next year or two.

As I write this on May tenth, I predict riots in the following prisons: The Massachusetts Prison at Charlestown, the New Jersey Prison at Trenton, the Maryland Prison at Baltimore, the Rhode Island Prison at Cranston, the Eastern Penitentiary at Philadelphia, and the Western Penitentiary at Pittsburgh. The boys at Dannemora will kick up another fuss. The boys at Jefferson City will kick up another fuss. There will be another riot at Joliet if the mollycoddlers are not kicked out. There will never be any riots in the Southern prisons. Why? They use straps down there and work convicts on farms, railroads and State roads and chain-gangs. Tired convicts never riot. Only idle convicts riot. Idleness and entertainment breed more riots than bad food and overcrowding.

A complete short novel, together with "Life in the United States," true narratives of American people, "Straws in the Wind," a group of brief articles on significant aspects of modern life, and "As I Like It" by William Lyon Phelps appear in every number of SCRIBNER'S.

A Young Man Gives Big Business Its Due

By EDMUND S. WHITMAN

THIS is open season on Big Business. Right now it is fashionable to cite the case of the young man who was voted by his class the most likely to succeed, who entered Big Business and was forthwith slapped into a drab clerical mold and squeezed dry of all the milk of promise and originality. It is smart to say that no youngster of decency and honor should soil his hands with Big Business, that the great American legend of starting from scratch and making good is so much sales talk and that the only sure way to arrive is to be the old man's son or his son-in-law.

There are many shortcomings to Big Business, as to any business. The power it gives to small-minded men who have won to positions of authority by the constant application of soft soap is an example. The ruthless and unconscionable deceits men will practise under the drive of personal ambition is another. The running to the executive office with stories aimed to hurt another's chances under the guise of company welfare. . . . All this sort of thing is very painful.

But viewed as a problem to be solved rather than as a personal issue, these conditions should serve to spur a man on rather than break him down. Big Business is largely in the hands of big men, men who bear with a youngster's unstudied criticisms and excursions into office politics with astonishing patience. And if poor old Most-Likely-To-Succeed ever learns that priceless lesson of keeping his mouth shut and takes his marketing as seriously as his squash he may still vindicate the judgment of the Class of '29.

That the benefits Big Business bestows upon young men far outweigh any contributions these young men make to Big Business is illustrated by my own ten years with a large corporation. And in speaking autobiographically, I include a host of other youngsters who have gone through the mill with me, no two of us having had precisely the same experiences but all of us having taken far more out of business than we have put into it.

My college career having lacked distinction, I was not one of the favored young men chosen by certain of the great corporations to take their training course. Rather I was one of the hardy band who made the rounds of the "adventure" corporations looking for jobs

along civilization's rim—or beyond. Such jobs are vividly (and erroneously) discussed on every campus: Standard Oil (with mythical contracts calling for a brief apprenticeship in such locales as South America and the Far East, at a juicy salary, then the recall to New York, the glass-topped desk and the life of Riley); Bemis Bag (offering grand jobs said to involve a gay social life in Calcutta); United Fruit (with fine travelling accommodations and a life of red-blooded adventure on a banana frontier stretching across nine or ten countries); National City Company (they send you to Paris right away to learn banking punctilio as it is practised on the Continent); Firestone Rubber (with fascinating plantation propositions in Java and Sumatra). . . .

Several of us finally landed with an organization capitalized at a couple of hundred million, growing rapidly, almost rankly in a score of countries. We were all set to take this company for a ride, still half-believing in the American stencil of starting at the bottom and making good. There was plenty of room at the top (we were told that by a serious youth who was himself as far from it as we were) and meanwhile there was that association with Big Business, that feeling of power and superiority that only a couple of hundred million can give to a group of college men starting at the bottom at the princely salary of seventy-five dollars a month.

If anybody had said seventy-five dollars a month to us on the campus he would have been howled down. Foreign jobs just didn't pay that sort of chicken feed. . . .

But they did—and they do—and at that it was more than we were worth.

And if the personnel manager didn't come altogether clean with us about the foreign assignment we were undertaking, by the same token neither did we come clean with him about some of our own plans and unmarketable idiosyncrasies. We didn't inform him that we were out for all we could get, that we intended to joy-ride around the world at company expense, that we planned to gather material for our own uses, that we might not hesitate to transfer our affections to another company if we could command a better position.

So we went to work on one of the com-