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THE NEWS

ADELAIDE: FRIDAY, JULY 11, 1924.

INADEQUATE HEALTH LEGISLATION

Public feeling should be deeply stirred by the paper which was read last week by Dr. F. S. Hone, president of the Public Health Association, on the urgent need for a new Health Act. It was a revelation of the grave inadequacy of the health laws, which the general public should read and assimilate. A case is set out which the Government and the Legislature have a solemn duty to grapple with, urgently and effectively.

In a comprehensive pronuncement upon the health laws, the keynote is the absence of provision for the operation of preventive medicine. Since the Health Act was passed in 1898, enormous advance has been made in the science of preventing disease, but the public are not enjoying the fruits of wider knowledge, because there is no legislation to give effect to it. No demonstration is required of the self-evident proposition that prevention is better than cure; it is a truism.

With a wealth of admirable detail, Dr. Hone sheets home the fact that the effect of the administrative provisions of the Health Act is in the direction of effecting cures and not in the prevention of disease. The figures are convincing. In 1919, when the death rate from typhoid fever was .04 per 1,000 of the population, there were 125 cases reported, but in the following year, though the death rate had fallen to .03 per thousand, the number of cases had increased to 176. This is true not only for those particular years, but for a series of years.

Clearly and unmistakably the story which those figures tell is that medical science, on the curative side, is reducing the mortality from typhoid, but that nothing is being done in the preventive area, because the number of cases increases or is at least maintained. Like results are obtained from the statistics of diphtheria and scarlet fever. With preventive and curative methods working together in full operation, the public health would be vastly improved and the State would be a great gainer economically and in the efficiency of its people.

Of what avail are the more enlightened methods of curing disease, if there is no provision for dealing with germ carriers or to restrain those who are becoming convalescent from infectious diseases, from mixing with the general public and spreading anew the seeds of further infection? Preventive science in the great war preserved the armies from the scourge of typhoid, despite the existence of the most terrible conditions, and it can be surely reduced to a negligible quantity, if not exterminated altogether, in the abodes of civilisation. All that is necessary is new legislation, so that cases of one carrier infecting 14 persons with typhoid, which Dr. Hone relates, may be securely guarded against.

Added to all this is the alarming fact that, notwithstanding its wonderful climate, which is ideal for the treatment of the disease, Adelaide shares with Hobart the ignominy of having the highest death rate from tuberculosis of any capital city in the Commonwealth.

Reforms in the health laws will be required in the whole administrative scheme, but there should be no difficulty in that, now that the necessity of the reform has been demonstrated. The chief difficulty will be finance. There is, however, no greater asset than good health, and no cost is too heavy to ensure it. Whatever the outlay, it must be faced, because, beyond the call of humanity, enterprise, efficiency, and progress are hampered and impaired by ill-health and disease.

Dr. Hone's paper is of surpassing importance, and cannot be permitted to pass into oblivion. It is a clear call from medical science to the commonsense of the community in a matter of vital concern, and the onus is on the Government to see that the principle of the recommendations he makes are translated into law.

Registered.

15 JUL 1924

CENTRAL AUSTRALIA.

APPEAL FOR FAR-OUT PIONEERS.

Dr. W. G. Woolnough (formerly professor of geology at the Adelaide University) recently lectured to the Killara centre of the university extension board on "The great lonely land—the centre of Australia." Dr. Woolnough said:—In the great central area of Australia monotony is the keynote. The most diametrically opposed opinions have been expressed regarding the interior from the days of the earliest explorers to recent newspaper articles. The reason for this discrepancy, Dr. Woolnough continued, is the extraordinary variation in the appearance of a country in which the seasons, wet and dry, extend over cycles of years, instead of recurring annually, as they do in countries nearer the sea. The relief of the land surface of the centre of Australia is generally low, and stream channels are dry except for brief periods. Vegetation is universal, but is sparse and stunted; much of the area is treeless, but in spite of these apparent drawbacks, it is a land of fascination.

Great Potential Value.

Dr. Woolnough added:—Contrary to the almost universal belief, there is very little land in central Australia not carrying stock at the present time. Much of it is excellent sheep country, the chief disability being, not lack of feed and water, but the ravages of dingoes. Over much of the area stock-water can be obtained from wells of reasonable depth, while a considerable section is supplied by artesian water, which the lecturer described as Australia's greatest asset. Mineral wealth is widely distributed, but is mostly "lying fallow" as yet, on account of lack of transport. At favoured spots, such as Cobar, Cloncurry, Broken Hill, and Kalgoorlie, Dr. Woolnough continued, great industries have been founded, and towns and cities have arisen. With these exceptions, the population is extremely scattered, and transport facilities are almost non-existent, while the conditions of life are hard and lonely. Dr. Woolnough concluded by saying:—Although Central Australia can never carry more than a very scattered population, the country is of great actual and potential value to Australia as a whole, and the people of the more favoured districts must help to make the lot of the pioneers more endurable. Among the agencies by means of which this end may be achieved are motor cars, aeroplanes, wireless, and freezing machines.

THE NEWS

SATURDAY, JULY 12, 1924.

THE DEATH PENALTY

(By Professor Coleman Phillipson.)

The question whether the death penalty should be abolished is constantly being raised in many countries, and quite recently it has been discussed here. It is incumbent on the community, and especially on leaders of thought, to have clear views on the subject one way or the other; indifference is inexcusable. But our views should not be the outcome of mere feeling—whether soft sentimentalism or stern indignation; they should be based on a dispassionate weighing of facts and theories in the search for truth without partisan prepossession.

As late as 1800 there were in England more than 200 offences punishable with death, and when capital punishment was abolished for nearly all of them there was no increase in those crimes. It has been entirely abrogated in many countries—the Argentine, Brazil, Costa Rica, Holland, Italy, Mexico (in three States), Norway, Portugal, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland (in 15 out of the 22 cantons), Venezuela, United States (in 11 States)—and in Belgium and Denmark the practice has been discontinued without formal abolition. In none of these countries, so far as I know, has a resulting increase of murders been reported. There is a movement in the same direction in other parts of the world—as an accompaniment to the evolution of democracy and of the sense of social solidarity and interdependence, and as a manifestation of the scientific spirit increasingly applied to the investigation of human affairs and relationships.

Purpose of Punishment

In former articles I endeavored to show that the objects of criminal punishment have from time to time been expiation, retribution, disabling prevention, deterrence, and reformation. I suggested that expiation might in these days be eliminated, and that the other objects should be duly combined to produce a new resultant—social utility or social self-defence—as the dominant basis of social reaction to criminals. Some people would banish the retributive element; but when society is unlawfully attacked, and its peace and security endangered, its righteous indignation is inevitable and reasonable.

Indeed, a would-be criminal would be much less disposed to commit an offence if he was certain it would call forth the indignation of every citizen; the melodramatic tears evoked by the condemnation of a man who possesses "nice" eyes or "nice" manners behind prison bars are a veritable peril to the community. The attitude of unreasoning humanitarians must therefore be deprecated as well as that of those fatalists, alienists, and medical men who believe, with such fatal facility, that crime is a mental disease exempting the criminal from responsibility and constituting him a hospital patient. Punishment must be made very unpleasant and disliked, though it should never be unnecessarily cruel and crushing to deprive the person punished of all hope and self-respect.

Is the Death Penalty Deterrent?

The capital penalty clearly fulfils two of the purposes of punishment—retribution and disabling prevention; but it is equally clear that penal servitude will fulfil them just as well. Further, the infliction of death altogether destroys the reformative element, which civilisation, enlightenment, and social conscience increasingly demand as an indispensable element in penal administration; while reformation might be achieved by imprisonment under proper conditions.

So far, then, it appears that penal servitude is a more expedient penalty than capital punishment. Thus, one question remains: Is the threat of death a greater deterrent from the commission of murder than penal servitude? If those who are in favor of maintaining capital punishment can clearly establish this, and can prove that the existence of this penalty restrains many from murder who would in the absence of this penalty kill their fellow-citizens, then its effectiveness will be universally admitted, and, despite the sacrifice of the all-important reformative object, abolitionists would soon change their minds and vote with the conservative section on this question.

Opinions of Experts

The views of careful observers and experts in regard to crime and criminals are worthy of consideration. A prominent official at the Home Office in London was quite recently reported to have observed: "We of the Home Office know that capital punishment does not act as a deterrent upon those who have murder in their minds. It might, probably would act as a deterrent upon those who—like ourselves, for instance—would never be likely to contemplate the commission of such a crime. Therefore it seems to me that the primary purpose for which it exists is futile."

Sir E. Ruggles-Brise, for many years chairman of the Prison Commission in England, says that so far as deterrence is concerned penal servitude might well be substituted for hanging. Mr. L. E. Lawes, warden of Sing Sing, the great American prison, and president of the American Prison Congress, challenges those who would maintain the death penalty to produce anything in its favor except the sentiment against change and the sentiment of fear. He says that only two American Governors approve it, and adds the remarkable statement, based on figures for the United States: "The number of homicides per 100,000 of population for a given State, in those States where capital punishment is in effect, is higher than in States where it has been abolished."

Let us abolish the death penalty and substitute long penal servitude with plenty of wholesome, profitable work. The death penalty does not deter more; it is irrevocable in case of mistake; juries rarely want it to be carried out, so that their verdicts sometimes confound the administration of justice; it encourages factitious pleas of insanity; it is a survival of the old barbarous lex talionis, and has a degenerating effect on the community or on certain sections of it; it is incompatible with the humanising, cultural, and scientific spirit of our growing civilisation.

Register.

15 JUL 1924

ELDER CONSERVATORIUM.

Vocal and Organ Recital.

There was a large attendance at the Elder Hall on Monday evening, when the eighth concert of the 1924 session—an especially fine vocal and organ recital by Miss Hilda Gill, A.M.U.A., and Mr. Harold Wylde, F.R.C.O.—was given. Miss Gill possesses a voice of particularly mellow richness, soft when she is crooning cradle songs, but fully equal to forceful and dramatic effects. This fine contralto told especially well in the "Inflammatus et accensus," from Dvorak's "StabMater." The impressive opening was given with deeply devotional feeling, and each phrase was rendered with exactly the right stress and intonation. A particularly well-chosen group of songs opened with Schubert's beautiful writing "To Music," in which each phase of feeling was charmingly conveyed. "In summer fields" (Brahms) Miss Gill sang with special tenderness; while in "A swan" (Greig) she brought out the full pathos, the last line especially expressing the message of this beautiful song. There was wonderful delicacy in her rendering of "The quiet of the woods" (Max Reger), and "To the sunshine" (Schumann) made a fitting climax to a beautifully interpreted series, to which the special characteristics of each were happily stressed. The impression already made was intensified by Miss Gill's singing of Cesar Francks' "La procession." The expressiveness of her treatment of Duparc's "Extase" was equalled by the tenderness with which she embued Herbert Howell's old-world cradle song, "O my deir hert." The old Manx ballad "The fuchsia tree," by Roger Quilter, was given with especial delicacy, but perhaps even more delightful was the manner in which the singer brought out the full restful beauty of the Dorset-folk song "Linden Lea" (Vaughan Williams). In response to an insistent recall Miss Gill sang "A good child."