

## A PRESSING NEED

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Some time ago, my distinguished friend President Villamor requested me to write something for the PHILIPPINE LAW JOURNAL, on the subject of reformatories. Now, of course, I do not pretend to know all about it, but I believe I have read and thought enough of this subject to enable me to say a few things which, while well-known to some, are unknown to the majority, who consider the topic of such meagre importance that it is not worth their while to think twice over it.

Reformatories, as we understand them now, are comparatively a modern institution. They are hardly fifty years old. In the beginning they were started by private institutions under the name of Houses of Refuge or other similar denomination, and their purpose was to provide a shelter for wandering or neglected boys and girls who would have otherwise starved in the streets or become the cadets or victims of white slave traders.

Later the government took an interest in the good work that was being done by these institutions, and with the establishment of juvenile courts, the reformatories together with the industrial and truant schools are regarded today as an absolute necessity in every civilized community.

Reformatories are so numerous now in the United States that there is hardly any state which does not have one, and sometimes as many as five or ten, supported either by the government or by some religious denomination, as the Catholic, Jewish or Protestant church. The more advanced nations of Europe have theirs too, but it must be acknowledged that the best ones are in the United States.

The first reformatories for young offenders were more like jails than anything else. The modern reformatories are more like schools, with very few and liberal rules to observe and a good many privileges to enjoy. The high walls, the dark chamber, and corporal punishment have disappeared. The buildings are generally erected out in the country, but not so far removed from some big city and suitable means of communication that the children or their teachers may not enjoy all the comforts that a suburban center may afford or that they may not be visited as often as convenient by their relatives or friends.

The children live and work in the open air as much as possible and while agriculture is their main occupation they are also taught many other useful trades. The modern conception of a reformatory is to provide a place where two things have to be accomplished above all others, *viz.*: the transformation of the body and the soul. The first is accomplished through well directed physical training in the gymnasium or the field, or by proper medical treatment, if necessary, and good food; the second, by religious and literary exercises, from the kindergarten to the study of history, literature, bookkeeping and shorthand.

The development of character and the acquisition of moral principles are also of the utmost importance. The school of character differs from the ordinary school in that the function of the first is to awaken and direct the moral nature. The fundamental principles of the methods of such a school are, according to Prof. Henderson, first, that a man must be taught to know what he ought to will, because he cannot rightly will unless he knows what right conduct is; and, secondly, that ideas of right disposition and conduct, when clearly, vividly, persistently and agreeably and in great variety kept before the mind, tend to take possession of thought and to pass on to emotion and action.

A method which helps a good deal in developing the moral tendencies of any child or grown-up person is the discussion of the many topics and problems of daily life, such as work and idleness, consciousness of duty, the blessings of social order, thrift, wealth, domestic virtues, rest and pleasure, gambling and its evils, truth and lies, honor, fear of God and the like.

The teacher as well as the chaplain of any reformatory should be selected with care. One cannot do the work of the other because each has an entirely different field of action, but both must be healthy and vigorous men. They must be enthusiastic, cheerful and communicative, and above all they must have spiritual insight and faith in God, believing conscientiously that there is a power which, in spite of all, is working out the salvation and enlightenment of the soul entrusted to their care.

The warden or director of a reformatory should also be a man of exceptional qualifications. He must be not only a scholar, well posted in history, literature, mathematics and business methods, but an educator as well. A reformatory is not precisely the place to put a retired soldier, a vanquished politician, a ruined business man or a literary crank with a head full of crazy theories. Politics should keep its hands off these institutions, whose control should, as far as possible, be entrusted to a governing body composed of men of different professions and social standing in the community so that they may in turn select, free from undue influences, the man most fitted for the position of director or warden.

The warden, in turn, should have absolute control over the appointment of the teachers, instructors, chaplain and other assistants, but the governing board should see, by periodical inspection, that the rules of the institution are properly complied with and approve or disapprove the expenditures and the methods employed by the warden in carrying out the work of reformation entrusted to him.

In some of the most advanced states of the Union the boys and girls are housed not in one more or less spacious building but in several small cottages, each under the care of what they call a father and a mother. This is the so-called "cottage system," which, while more expensive than the ordinary reformatory, resolves another problem of reformation, that is, the bringing up of the children under surroundings as nearly like those of a home as possible.

I cannot, in the limited space of an article discuss the pros and cons of this system, but it appears to have given excellent results wherever it has been established. Of course the so-called father and mother must be a couple without children of their own and already too old to beget them, so that they may devote all their time and affection to the reformation of the youths entrusted to their care. The cottage system does not prevent, in the least, the exercise of the necessary control by the warden, while it may facilitate the establishment of communities where such systems as the George Junior Republic and the Mettray colonies may be safely started.

Under the cottage system, also, a more careful selection and separation of the children could be made, so that the little thieves may be apart from the little swindlers and these from the incendiaries and so forth. In our present reformatory, there is practically no dividing line to keep each group from learning the vices of the others, and what is worst yet is that children who have committed no crime but are arrested by the police for wandering in the streets and have to be sent to our so-called reformatory because there is no other place to send them to, upon arriving there are mixed with the rest who are more or less depraved.

I would like to say a good deal more about this interesting and important subject, but I am afraid that this article is getting too long and that with my limited command of the English language I cannot express all my thoughts in so forcible a manner as to win the sympathetic attention of my readers. I hope, however, with the little I have said, to have impressed upon all the absolute necessity of undertaking, as soon as possible, the establishment of a modern reformatory for the juvenile offenders of this country, separating them according their ages, the nature of the offense committed and the degree of reformation required, and providing them at the same time with all the means that should transform them into useful and law-abiding citizens.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>If the reader wishes to know all my views about prison reforms, I would direct him to an extensive article which I wrote for the *Philippine Law Review* and which was published in Nos. 3, 5, 6 and 8 of said publication in the year 1914.