

Are Prisons Necessary?

Pëtr Kropotkin

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If we take into consideration all the influences indicated in the above rapid sketch, we are bound to recognize that all of them, separately and combined together, act in the direction of rendering men who have been detained for several years in prisons less and less adapted for life in society; and that none of them, not a single one, acts in the direction of raising the intellectual and moral faculties, of lifting man to a higher conception of life and its duties, of rendering him a better, a more human creature than he was.

Prisons do *not* moralize their inmates; they do *not* deter them from crime. And the question arises: What shall we do with those who break, not only the written law — that sad growth of a sad past — but also those very principles of morality which every man feels his own heart? That is the question which now preoccupies the best minds of our century.

There was a time when a time when Medicine consisted in administering some empirically-discovered drugs. The patients who fell into the hands of the doctor might be killed by his drugs, or they might rise up notwithstanding them, the doctor had the excuse of doing what all his fellows did; he could not outgrow his contemporaries.

But our century which has boldly taken up so many questions, but faintly forecast by its predecessors, has taken up this question too, and approached it from the other end. Instead of merely curing diseases, medicine tries now to prevent them; and we all know the immense progress achieved, thanks to the modern view of disease. Hygiene is the best of medicines.

The same has to be done with the great social phenomenon which has been called Crime until now, but will be called Social Disease by our children.

Prevention of the disease is the best of cures: such is the watchword of a whole younger school of writers which grew up of late, especially in Italy, represented by Poletti, Ferri, Colajanni, and, to some limited extent, by Lombroso¹; of the great school of psychologists represented by Griesinger, Krafft-Ebing, Despine on the Continent, and Maudsley in this country; of the sociologists like Quételet and his unhappily too scanty followers; and finally, in the modern school of Psychology with regard to the individual, and of the social reformers with regard to society. In their works we have already the elements of a new position to be taken with regard to those unhappy people whom we have hanged, or decapitated, or sent to jail until now.

¹Cesare Lombroso (1835 — 1909) Professor of psychiatry and criminologist. He purported the existence of a link between criminality and certain physical characteristics. This hypothesis is nowadays discredited. His work encouraged also a more humane treatment of the convicts.

Three great causes are at work to produce what is called crime: the social, the anthropological, and, to use Ferri's expression, the cosmical.

The influence of these last is but insufficiently known, and yet it cannot be denied. We know from the Postmaster-General's Reports that the number of letters containing money which are thrown into the pillar-boxes without any address is very much the same from year to year. If so capricious an element in our life as oblivion of a certain given kind is subject to laws to as strict as those which govern the motion of the heavenly bodies, it is still more true with regard to breaches of law. We can predict with a great approximation the number of murders which will be committed next year in each country of Europe. And if we should take into account the disturbing influences which will increase, or diminish, next year, the number of murders committed, we might predict the figures with a still greater accuracy.

There was, some time ago, in *Nature*, an essay on the number of assaults and suicides committed in India with relation to temperature and the moisture of the air. Everybody knows that an excessively hot and moist temperature renders men more nervous than they are when the temperature is moderate and a dry wind blows over our fields. In India, where the temperature grows sometimes exceedingly hot, and the air at the same time grows exceedingly moist, the enervating influence of the atmosphere is obviously felt still more strongly than in our latitudes. Mr. S. A. Hill, therefore, calculates from figures extending over several years, a formula which enables you, when you know the average temperature and humidity of each month, to say, with an astonishing approximation to exactitude, the number of suicides and wounds due to violence which have been registered during the month. Like calculations may seem very strange to minds unaccustomed to treat psychological phenomena as dependent upon physical causes, but the facts point to this dependence so clearly as to leave no room for doubt. And persons who have experienced the effects of tropical heat accompanied by tropical moisture on their own nervous system, will not wonder that precisely during such days Hindus are inclined to seize a knife to settle a dispute, or the men disgusted with life are more inclined to put an end to it by suicide.

The influence of cosmical causes on our actions has not yet been fully analyzed; but several facts are well established. It is known, for instance, that attempts against persons (violence, murders, and so on) are on the increase during the summer, and that during the winter the number of attempts against property reaches its maximum. We cannot go through the curves drawn by Professor E. Ferri, and see on the same sheet the curves of temperature and those showing the number of attempts against persons, without being deeply impressed with their likeness: one easily mistakes them for one another. Unhappily this kind of research has not been prosecuted with the eagerness it deserves, so that few of the cosmical causes have been analyzed as to their influence on human actions.

It must be acknowledged also that the inquiry offers many difficulties, because most cosmical causes exercise their influence only in an indirect way; thus, for instance, when we see that the number of breaches of law fluctuates with the crops of cereals, or with the wine-crops, the influence of cosmical agents appears only through the medium of a series of influences of a social character. Still, nobody will deny that when weather is fine, the crops good, and the villagers cheerful, they are far less inclined to settle their small disputes by violence than during stormy or gloomy weather, when a spoiled crop spreads moreover general discontent. I suppose that women who have constant opportunities of closely watching the good and bad temper of their husbands could tell us plenty about the influence of weather on peace in their homes.

The so-called 'anthropological causes' to which much attention has been given of late, are certainly much more important than the preceding. The influence of inherited faculties and of the bodily orga-

nization on the inclination towards crime has been illustrated of late by so many highly interesting investigations, that we surely can form a nearly complete idea about this category of causes which bring men and women within our penal jurisdiction. Of course, we cannot endorse in full the conclusions of one of the most prominent representatives of this school, Dr. Lombroso, especially those he arrives at in one of his writings [Sull'Incremento del Delitto, 1879]. When he shows us that so many inmates of our prisons have some defect in the organization of their brains, we must accept this statement as a mere fact. We may even admit with him that the majority of convicts and prisoners have longer arms than people at liberty. Again, when he shows us that the most brutal murders have been committed by men who had some serious defect in their bodily structure, we have only to incline before this statement and recognize its accuracy. It is a statement — not more.

But we cannot follow Mr. Lombroso when he infers too much from this and like facts, and considers society entitled to take any measures against people who have like defects of organization. We cannot consider society as entitled to exterminate all people having defective structure of brain and still less to imprison those who have long arms. We may admit that most of the perpetrators of the cruel deeds which from time to time stir public indignation have not fallen very far short of being sad idiots. The head of Frey, for instance, an engraving of which has made of late the tour of the Press, is an instance in point. But *all* idiots do not become assassins, and still less all feeble-minded men and women; so that the most impetuous criminalist of the anthropological school would recoil before a wholesale assassination of all idiots if he only remembered how many of them are free — some of them under care, and very many of them having other people under their care — the difference between these last and those who are handed over to the hangman being only a difference of the circumstances under which they were born and have grown up. In how many otherwise respectable homes, and palaces, too, not to speak of lunatic asylums, shall we not find the very same features which Dr. Lombroso considers characteristic of “criminal madness” Brain diseases may favour the growth of criminal propensities; but they may *not*, when under proper care. The good sense, and still more the good heart of Charles Dickens have perfectly well understood this plain truth.

Certainly we cannot follow Dr. Lombroso in all his conclusions, still less those of his followers; but we must be grateful to the Italian writer for having devoted his attention to and popularized his researches into, the medical aspects of the question. Because, for an unprejudiced mind, the only conclusions that can be drawn from his varied and most interesting researches is, that most of those whom we treat as criminals are people affected by bodily diseases, and that their illness ought to be submitted to some treatment, instead of being aggravated by imprisonment.

Mr. Maudsley's researches into insanity with relation to crime are well known in this country. But none of those who have seriously read his works can leave them without being struck by the circumstance that most of those inmates of our jails who have been imprisoned for attempts against persons are people affected with some disease of the mind; that the “ideal madman whom the law creates,” and the only one whom the law is ready to recognize as irresponsible for his acts, is as rare as the ideal “criminal” whom the law insists upon punishing. Surely there is, as Mr. Maudsley says, a wide “borderland between crime and insanity, near one boundary of which we meet with something of madness but more of sin (of conscious desire of doing some harm, we prefer to say), and near the other boundary of which something of sin but more of madness.” But, “a just estimate of the moral responsibility of the unhappy people inhabiting this borderland” will never be made as long as the idea of “sin,” or of “bad will,” is not got rid of.

Unhappily, hitherto our penal institutions have been nothing but a compromise between the old ideas of revenge, of punishment of the “bad will” and “sin,” and the modern ideas of “detering from

crime,” both softened to a very slight extent by some notions of philanthropy. But the time, we hope, is not far distant when the noble ideas which have inspired Griesinger, Krafft-Ebing, Despine, and some of the modern Italian criminalists, like Colajanni and Ferri, will become the property of the general public, and make us ashamed of having continued so long to hand over those whom we call criminals to hangmen and jailers. If the conscientious and extensive labours of the writers just named were more widely known, we should all easily understand that most of those who are kept now in jails, or put to death, are merely people in need of the most careful fraternal treatment. I do not mean, of course, that we ought to substitute lunatic asylums for prisons. Far be it from me to entertain this abhorrent idea. Lunatic asylums are nothing else but prisons; and those whom we keep in prisons are not lunatics, nor even people approaching the sad boundary of the borderland where man loses control over his actions. Far be from me the idea which is sometimes brought forward as to maintaining prisons by placing them under pedagogists and medical men. What most of those who are now sent to jail are in need of is merely a fraternal help from those who surround them, to aid them in developing more and more the higher instincts of human nature which have been checked in their growth either by some bodily disease — anemia of the brain, disease of the hearth, the liver, or the stomach — or, still more, by the abominable conditions under which thousands and thousands of children grow up, and millions of adults are living, in what we call our centres of civilization. But these higher faculties cannot be exercised when man is deprived of liberty, of the free guidance of his actions, of the multifarious influences of the human world. Let us carefully analyse each branch of the moral unwritten law, and we shall always find — as good old Griesinger said — that it is not due to something which has suddenly sprung up in the man who accomplished it: it is the result of effects which, for years past, have deeply stirred within him. Take, for instance, a man who has committed an act of violence. The blind judge of our days comes forward and sends him to prison. But the human being who is not overpowered by the kind of mania which is inculcated by the study of Roman jurisprudence — who analyzes instead of merely sentencing — would say, with Griesinger, that although in this case the man has not suppressed his affections, but has left them to betray themselves by an act of violence, this act has been prepared long since. Before this time, probably throughout his life, the same person has often manifested some anomaly of mind by noisy expression of his feelings, by crying loudly after some trifling disagreeable circumstance, by easily venting his bad temper in those who stood by him; and, unhappily, he has not from his childhood found anybody who was able to give a better direction to his nervous impressibility. The cause of the violence which has brought him into the prisoners’ dock must be sought long years before. And if we push our analysis still deeper, we discover that this state of mind is itself a consequence of some physical disease either inherited or developed by an abnormal life; some disease of the hearth, the brain, or the digestive system. For many years these causes have been at work before resulting in some deed which falls within the reach of the law.

More than that. If we analyse ourselves, if everybody would frankly acknowledge the thoughts which have sometimes passed through his mind, we should see that all of us have had — be it as an imperceptible wave traversing the brain, like a flash of light — some feelings and thoughts such as constitute the motive of all acts considered as criminals. We have repudiated them at once; but if they had had the opportunity of recurring again and again; if they were nurtured by circumstances, or by a want of exercise of the best passions — love, compassion, and all those which result from living in the joys and sufferings of those who surround us; then these passing influences, so brief that we hardly noticed them, would have degenerated into some morbid element in our character.

That is what we ought to teach our children from the earliest childhood, while now we imbue them from their tenderest years with ideas of justice identified with revenge, of judges and tribunals. And

if we did this, instead of doing as we do now, we should no longer have the shame of avowing that we hire assassins to execute our sentences and pay warders for performing a function for which no educated man would like to prepare his own children. Functions which we consider so degrading cannot be an element of moralization.

Fraternal treatment to check the development of the anti-social feelings which grow up in some of us — not imprisonment — is the only means that we are authorized in applying, and can apply, with some effect to those in whom these feelings have developed in consequence of bodily disease or social influences. And that is not a Utopia; while to fancy that punishment is able to check the growth of anti-social feelings is a Utopia — a wicked Utopia; the Utopia of “leave me in peace, and let the world go as it likes.”

Many of the anti-social feelings, we are told by Dr. J. Bruce Thompson and many others, are inherited; and facts amply support this conclusion. But what is inherited? Is it a certain bump of criminality, or something else? What is inherited is insufficient self-control, or a want of firm will, or a desire for risk and excitement or disproportionate vanity. Vanity, for instance, coupled with a desire for risk and excitement, is one of the most striking features amidst the population of our prisons. But vanity finds many fields for its exercise. It may produce a maniac like Napoleon the First, or a Frey; but it produces also, under some circumstances — especially when instigated and guided by a sound intellect — men who pierce tunnels and isthmuses, or devote all their energies towards pushing through some great scheme for what they consider the benefit of humanity; and then it may be checked, and even reduced almost to nothingness, by the parallel growth of intelligence. If it is a want of firmness of will which has been inherited, we know also that this feature of character may lead to the most varied consequences according to the circumstances of life. How many of our “good fellows” suffer precisely from this defect? It is a sufficient reason for sending them to prison?

Humanity has seldom ventured to treat its prisoners like human beings; but each time it has done so it has been rewarded for its boldness. I was sometimes struck at Clairvaux² with the kindness bestowed on sick people by several assistant in the hospital; I was touched by several manifestations of a refined feeling of delicacy. Dr. Campbell, who has had much more opportunity of learning this trait of human nature during his thirty years’ experience as prison-surgeon, goes much farther. By mild treatment, he says, “with as much consideration as if they had been delicate ladies [I quote his own words] the greatest order was generally maintained in the hospital.” He was struck with that “estimable trait in the character of prisoners — observable even among the roughest criminals; I mean the great attention they bestow on the sick.” “The most hardened criminals,” he adds, “are not exempt from this feeling.” And he says elsewhere: “Although many of these men, from their former reckless life and habits of depredation might be supposed to be hardened and indifferent, they have a keen sense of what is right or wrong.” All honest men who have had to do with prisoners, can but confirm the experience of Dr. Campbell.

What is the secret of this feature, which surely cannot fail to strike people accustomed to consider the convict as very little short of a wild beast? *The assistants in hospital have an opportunity of exercising their good feelings.* They have opportunities of feeling compassion for somebody, and of acting accordingly. Moreover, they enjoy within the hospital much more freedom than the other convicts;

²The former Abbey of St. Bernard at Clairvaux in France had been transformed by the state rulers into a prison where Kropotkin was detained from 1883 to 1886 on charges of being a member of the International Workingmen’s Association which had been outlawed by the state rulers after the Paris Commune of 1871.

and those of whom Dr. Campbell speaks were under the direct moral influence of a doctor like himself — not of a soldier.

In short, anthropological causes — that is, defects of organization — play a most important part in bringing men to jail; but these causes are not causes of “criminality,” properly speaking. The same causes are at work amidst millions of our modern psychopathic generation; but they lead to anti-social deeds only under certain unfavourable circumstances. Prison do not cure these pathological deformities, they only reinforce them; and when a psychopath leaves a prison, after having been subjected for several years to its deteriorating influence, he is without comparison less fit for life in society than he was before. If he is prevented from committing fresh anti-social deeds, that can only be attained by undoing the work of the prison, by obliterating the features with which it inculcates those who have passed through its ordeal — a task which certainly is performed by some friends of humanity, but a task utterly hopeless in so many cases.

There is something to say also with regard to those whom criminalists describe as qualified assassins, and who in so many countries imbued with the old Biblical principle of a tooth for a tooth, are sent to the gallows. It may seem strange in this country, but the fact is that throughout Siberia — where there is ample opportunity to judge different categories of exiles — the “murderers” are considered as the best class of the convict population; and I was very happy to see that Mr. Davitt, who has so acutely analyzed crime and its causes, has also been able to make a like observation. It is not known as generally as it ought to be that the Russian law has not recognized capital punishment for more than a century. However freely political offenders have been sent to the gallows under Alexander II and III, so that 31 men have been put to death during the preceding reign and about 25 since 1881, capital punishment does not exist in Russia for common-law offences. It was abolished in 1753, and since that time murderers are merely condemned to hard-labour from eight to twenty years (parricides for life), after the expiration of which term they are settled free for life in Siberia. Therefore, Eastern Siberia is full of liberated assassins; and, nevertheless, there is hardly another country where you could travel and stay with greater security. During my very extensive journeys in Siberia I never carried with me a defensive weapon of any kind, and the same was the case with my friends, each of whom every year travelled something like ten thousand miles across this immense territory. As mentioned in a preceding chapter the number of murders which are committed in East Siberia by liberated assassins, or by the numberless runaways, is exceedingly small; while the unceasing robberies and murders of which Siberia complains now, take place precisely in Tomsk and throughout Western Siberia, whereto no murderers, and only minor offenders are exiled. In the earlier parts of this century it was not uncommon to find at an official’s house that the coachman was a liberated murderer, or that the nurse who bestowed such motherly care upon the children bore imperfectly obliterated marks of the branding-iron. As to those who would suggest that probably the Russians are a milder sort of men than those of Western Europe, they have only to remember the scenes which have accompanied the outbreaks of peasants; and they might be asked also, how far the absence of executions and of all that abominable talk which is fed by descriptions of executions — the talk in which English prisoners delight most — has contributed to foster a cold contempt for human life.

The shameful practice of legal assassination which is still carried on in Western Europe, the shameful practice of hiring for a guinea an assassin to accomplish a sentence which the judge would not have the courage to carry out himself — this shameful practice and all that hardly-imaginable amount of corruption it continues to pour into society, has not even the excuse of preventing murder. Nowhere has the abolition of capital punishment increased the number of murders. If the practice of putting

men to death is still in use, it is merely a result of craven fear, coupled with reminiscences of a lower degree of civilization when the tooth-for-tooth principle was preached by religion.

But if the cosmical causes — either directly or indirectly — exercise so powerful an influence on the yearly amount of anti-social acts; if psychological causes, deeply rooted in the intimate structure of the body, are also a powerful factor in bringing men to commit breaches of the law, what will remain of the theories of the writers on the criminal law after we have also taken into account the social causes of what we call crime?

There was a custom of old by which each commune (clan, Mark, Gemeinde) was considered responsible as a whole for any anti-social act committed by any of its members. This old costume has disappeared like so many good remnants of the communal organization of old. But we are returning to it; and again, after having passed through a period of the most unbridled individualism, the feeling is growing amongst us that society is responsible for the anti-social deeds committed in its midst. If we have our share of glory in the achievement of the geniuses of our century, we have our part of shame in the deeds of our assassins.

From year to year thousands of children grow-up in the filth — material and moral — of our great cities, completely abandoned amidst a population demoralized by a life from hand to mouth, the incertitude of to-morrow, and a misery of which no former epoch has had even an apprehension. Left to themselves and to the worst influences of the street, receiving but little cure from their parents ground down by a terrible struggle for existence, they hardly know what a happy home is; but they learn from earliest childhood what the vices of our great cities are. They enter life without even knowing a handicraft which might help them to earn their living. The son of a savage learns hunting from his father; his sister learns how to manage their simple household. The children whose father and mother leave the den they inhabit, early in the morning, in search of any job which may help them to get through the next week, enter life not even with that knowledge. They know no handicraft; their home has been the muddy street; and the teachings they received in the street were of the kind known by those who have visited the whereabouts of the gin-palaces of the poor, and of the places of amusement of the richer classes.

It is all very well to thunder denunciations about the drunken habits of this class of the population, but if those who denounce them had grown up in the same conditions as the children of the labourer who every morning conquers by means of his own fists the right of being admitted at the gate of a London dockyard, — how many of them would not have become the continual guests of the gin-palaces? — the only palaces with which the rich have endowed the real producers of all riches.

When we see this population growing up in all our big manufacturing centres we cannot wonder that our big cities chiefly supply prisons with inmates. I never cease to wonder, on the contrary, that relatively so small a proportion of these children become thieves or highway robbers. I never cease to wonder at the deep-rootedness of social feelings in the humanity of the nineteenth century, at the goodness of heart which still prevails in the dirty streets, which are the causes that relatively few of those who grow up in absolute neglect declare open war against our social institutions. These good feelings, this aversion to violence, this resignation which makes them accept their fate without hatred growing in their hearts, are the only real barrier which prevents them from openly breaking all social bonds, — not the deterring influence of prisons. Stone would not remain upon stone in our modern palaces, were it not for these feelings.

And, at the other end of the social scale, money that is representative signs of human work, is squandered in unheard-of luxury, very often with no other purpose than to satisfy a stupid vanity.

While old and young have no bread, and are really starving at the very doors of our luxurious shops, — these know no limits to their lavish expenditures.

When everything round about us — the shops and the people we see in the streets, the literature we read, the money worship we meet with every day — tends to develop an insatiable thirst for unlimited wealth, a love for sparkish luxury, a tendency towards spending money foolishly for every avowable and unavowable purpose; when there are whole quarters in our cities each house of which reminds us that man has too often remained a beast, whatever the decorum under which he conceals his bestiality; when the watchword of our civilized world is: “Enrich yourselves! Crush down everything you meet in your way, by all means short of those which might bring you before a court!” When a part from a few exceptions, all — from the landlord down to the artisan — are taught every day in a thousand ways that the *beau-ideal* of life is to manage affairs so as to make others work for you; when manual work is so despised that those who perish from want of bodily exercise prefer to resort to gymnastics, imitating the movements of sawing and digging, instead of sawing wood and hoeing the soil; when hard and blackened hands are considered a sign of inferiority, and a silk dress and the knowledge of how to keep servants under strict discipline is a token of superiority; when literature expends its art in maintaining the worship of richness and treats the “impractical idealist” with contempt — what need is there to talk about inherited criminality when so many factors of our life work in one direction — that of manufacturing beings unsuited for a honest existence, permeated with anti-social feelings!

Let us organize our society so as to assure to everybody the possibility of regular work for the benefit of the commonwealth — and that means of course a through transformation of the present relations between work and capital; let us assure to every child a sound education and instruction, both in manual labour and science, so as to permit him to acquire, during the first twenty years of his life, the knowledge and habits of earnest work — and we shall be in no more need of dungeons and jails, of judges and hangmen. Man is a result of those conditions in which he has grown up. Let him grow in habits of useful work: let him be brought by his earlier life to consider humanity as one great family, no member of which can be injured without the injury be felt by a wide circle of his fellows, and ultimately by the whole of society; let him acquire a taste for the highest enjoyment of science and art — much more lofty and durable than those given by the satisfaction of lower passions, — and we may be sure that we shall not have many breaches of those laws of morality which are an unconscious affirmation of the best conditions for life in society.

Two-third of all breaches of law being so-called “crimes against property,” these cases will disappear, or be limited to a quite trifling amount, when property, which is now the privilege of the few, shall return to its real source — the community. As to “crimes against persons,” already their numbers are rapidly decreasing, owing to the growth of moral and social habits which necessarily develop in each society and can only grow when common interests contribute more and more to tighten the bonds which induce men to live a common life.

Of course, whatever be the economical bases of society, there will always be in its midst a certain number of beings with passions more strongly developed and less easily controlled than the rest; and there always will be men whose passions may occasionally lead them to commit acts of an anti-social character. But these passions can receive another direction, and most of them can be rendered almost or quite harmless by the combined efforts of those who surround us. We live now in too much isolation. Everybody cares only for himself, or his nearest relatives. Egotistic — that is, unintelligent — individualism in material life has necessarily brought about an individualism as egotistic and as harmful in the mutual relations of human beings. But we have known in history, and we see still, communities where men are more closely connected together than in our Western European cities. China is an

instance in point. The great “compound family” is there still the basis of the social organization: the members of the compound family know one another perfectly; they support one another, they help one another, not merely in material life, but also in moral troubles; and the number of “crimes” both against property and persons, stands at an astonishingly low level (in the central provinces, of course, not on the sea-shore). The Slavonian and Swiss agrarian communes are another instance. Men know one another in these smaller aggregations; they mutually support one another; while in our cities all bond between the inhabitants have disappeared. The old family, based on a common origin, is disintegrating. But men cannot live in this isolation, and the elements of new social groups — those ties arising between the inhabitants of the same spot having many interests in common, and those of people united by the prosecution of common aims — is growing. Their growth can only be accelerated by such changes as would bring about a closer mutual dependency and a greater equality between the members of our communities.

And yet, notwithstanding all this, there surely will remain a limited number of persons whose anti-social passions — the result of bodily diseases — may still be a danger for the community. Shall humanity send these to the gallows, or lock them up in prisons? Surely it will not resort to this wicked solution of the difficulty.

There was a time when lunatics, considered as possessed by the devil, were treated in the most abominable manner. Chained in stalls like animals, they were dreaded even by their keepers. To break their chains, to set them free, would have been considered then as a folly. But a man came — Pinel³ — who dared to take off their chains, and to offer them brotherly words, brotherly treatment. And those who were looked upon as ready to devour the human being who dared to approach them, gathered round their liberator, and proved that he was right in his belief in the best features of human nature, even in those whose intelligence was darkened by disease. From that time the cause of humanity was won. The lunatic was no longer treated like a wild beast. Men recognized in him a brother.

The chains disappeared, but asylums — another name for prisons — remained, and within their walls a system as bad as that of the chains grew up by-and-by. But then the peasants of a Belgian village, moved by their simple good sense and kindness of heart, showed the way towards a new departure which learned student of mental disease did not perceive. They set the lunatics quite free. They took them into their families, offered them a bed in their poor houses, a chair at their plain tables, a place in their ranks to cultivate the soil, a place in their dancing-parties. And the fame spread wide of “miraculous cures” effected by the saint to whose name the church of Gheel was consecrated. The remedy applied by the peasants was so plain, so old — it was liberty — that the learned people preferred to trace the result to Divine influences instead of taking things as they were. But there was no lack of honest and good-hearted men who understood the force of the treatment invented by the Gheel peasants, advocated it, and gave all their energies to overcome the inertia of mind, the cowardice and the indifference of their surroundings.

Liberty and fraternal care have proved the best cure on our side of the above-mentioned wide borderland “between insanity and crime.” They will prove also the best cure on the other boundary of the same borderland. Progress is in that direction. All that tends that way will bring us nearer to the solution of the great question which has not ceased to preoccupy human societies since the remotest antiquity, and which cannot be solved by prisons.

³Philippe Pinel (1745 — 1826) Physician and advocate of a psychiatry pioneering the humane treatment of the mentally ill.

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