

INTERSTATE COMMISSION ON CRIME

In Conjunction with American Bar Association Convention

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THE wisdom of attempting to rehabilitate criminal offenders by the application of some method of Parole is no longer a subject for debate amongst most thoughtful Americans. Further discussion of that principle has long since been foreclosed in nearly all of our States, as well as in the jurisdiction of the Federal Government. This considered judgment has been arrived at not only from the standpoint of aid to, and the welfare of the individual offender, but also from the standpoint of the ultimate protection and benefit of society itself.

The great majority of that large number of persons annually incarcerated for various offenses must in the nature of things be ultimately released from prison—turned loose, so to speak, into, and maybe on society. The attitude of the person, so released, and society, each to the other, then becomes one of the very greatest importance to both. In many instances a proper investigation shows that the imprisoned person can be given the help and encouragement resulting from a Parole, without the slightest injury to the interests of the public. In such cases it would be not only an injustice, but a form of cruelty and vindictiveness on the part of organized society not to grant a parole. It was for reasons such as these, and others, that there have been established throughout the Nation varying Parole systems.

The old spirit of "All hope abandon, ye who enter here," no longer hovers universally over the doors of our places of confinement. The burden of consideration has shifted therefore from the question as to the wisdom of a system of Parole, to the question of how to institute and administer such a system,—in a word, how best to make it work in justice, and to the benefit of both the public and the prisoner.

I have already called attention to the fact that systems of Parole in varying form have been established throughout the Nation. The statement can be conservatively ventured that no matter what the form of these systems in the various States, none of them will be found to be any better than those who administer them. No system ever is. Human nature being what it is, the administration of any system, including of course that of Parole, tends towards mistake and inefficiency if extraneous considerations are allowed to creep in.

Too many paroles have been granted because somebody wanted to be generous; some have been granted because somebody was either too lazy—too ignorant—too careless; and there have been instances in which there was apparently some ground for the belief that the act was brought about by improper considerations. I repeat, no Parole system can be expected to be, or can be more efficient and satisfactory than are the officials who administer it.

In the establishment and administration of a Parole system, the first step to be taken, as it strikes me, is the one that would appear as though it were the easiest—to wit, the selection of the person or persons to perform the function of investigating, considering, and recommending.