

NATIONAL PRISON CONGRESS.

Annual Address

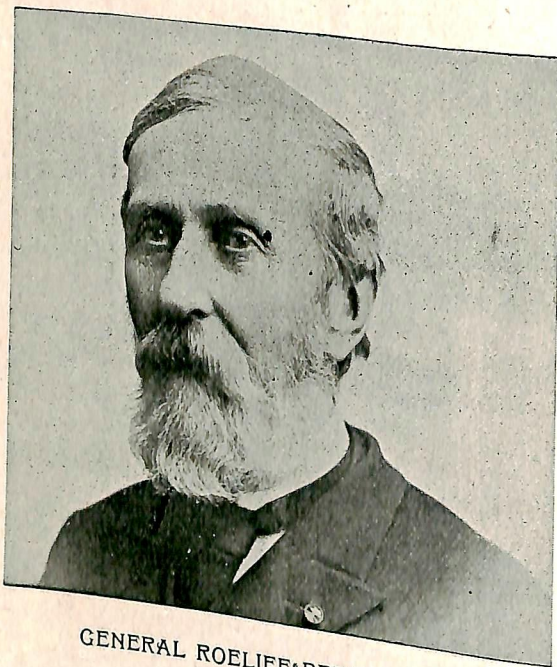
— OF —

GENERAL ROELIFF BRINKERHOFF, President,

AUSTIN, TEXAS,

Thursday Evening, December 2, 1897.

Compliments of
R. Brinkerhoff.



GENERAL ROELIFF BRINKERHOFF.

ANNUAL ADDRESS

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GEN. ROELIFF BRINKERHOFF,

PRESIDENT NATIONAL PRISON CONGRESS,

— AT —

Austin, Texas, Thursday Evening, December 2, 1897.

In response to the cordial welcome we have received I am very sure I voice the consensus of the Congress when I say that we appreciate very highly the generous hospitalities extended to us, and that we anticipate large enjoyment during the days of our sojourn in your midst.

For the first time since the organization of the National Prison Association we find ourselves in the far southwest. Only twice before have we been south of the Ohio river, once in Atlanta and once in Nashville, and therefore to be in Texas is an experience which, in itself is very interesting.

To the most of us Texas is a great ways from home, but yet we are glad to remember that wherever the flag of the Union floats, with its galaxy of stars, that all who give allegiance to it are brethren and we realize that we are not aliens in Texas, but children of one household.

Personally I have been interested in Texas from the days of long ago when Sam Houston, and Governor Houston, and General Houston, and President Houston, and Senator Houston, was the hero of my youth.

During the intervening years I have been in every state of the Union except Texas and South Dakota, and therefore it is a memorable event in my history to find myself in Texas, which is no longer a lone star, but the biggest star in the galaxy of the American Union.

Certainly Texas is a wonderful state, and its future, who can foretell?

Some of us are accustomed to consider Ohio the greatest country on earth, and in most respects we are sure it is, but territorially we are compelled to admit that we are but a pigmy compared with Texas, for six Ohios could find room within her bounds and leave space enough without crowding for half of the New England States, with Delaware added.

Still more, Texas is not a barren waste of Alkali plains and sage brush like some other western states, but like Ohio, almost every acre is productive, and it is possible that there are people in this room tonight, who will live to see a population of 20,000,000 within her borders.

However, we are not here for material glorification, but for mutual conference in regard to the prison question.

By prison question I do not mean simply the management of prisons, but also the wider field of prevention and cure, which include everything that enters into the reduction of crime, whether punitive, legislative or educational.

In this exchange of ideas we expect to gain information and instruction from your experience in the South. Certainly we are not here to criticise, for we are aware that your conditions in the old slave states are very different from ours in the north, and therefore it is very likely we have much to learn from you, and possibly you may learn something from us.

If, in this mutual exchange of ideas, we are both benefited, the purposes of this Congress will have been attained, as they have been in the past.

TWENTY-SIXTH ANNUAL CONGRESS.

The Annual Conference of the National Prison Association, which we are here tonight to inaugurate, will be known upon our records, as the twenty-sixth, which means that it is twenty-six years since the organization of the society in 1870.

As a matter of fact however, only eighteen National Conferences have been held. Prior to the death of Dr. E. C. Wines in 1879, who was the founder of the Association, four Conferences were held, the first in Cincinnati in 1870; one in Baltimore in 1873; one in St. Louis in 1874 and one in New York City in 1876.

After the death of Dr. Wines the Association remained in a condition of inactivity until 1883, when a number of its members were convened at Saratoga, as a section of the Social Science Association, when it was revived and re-organized, by the election of Rutherford B. Hayes, as President and Wm. M. F. Rownd, as Secretary.

In the year 1884 the regular Annual Conference of the Association was held in Saratoga, in the month of September, but under its supervision two additional Conferences of Wardens of Prisons, and Superintendents of Reformatories were held, the first in February, in New York City, and the second in December in Chicago.

All of these Conferences were well attended, and under their inspiration a new era of interest in the prison question was inaugurated, and since then the annual meetings of the National Prison Association have been continuous, and its influence has steadily increased.

Prison Sunday.

As an auxiliary of these Conferences there was inaugurated in 1884, at the February meeting in New York, what has since been known as Prison Sunday.

Prison Reform is the child of Christianity, and the Congress has always felt that it ought to have the active support and co-operation of christian churches, and therefore it made an appeal to the churches of all denominations to set apart one Sunday each year, for the consideration of prison topics.

After conference with a large number of clergymen, the fourth Sunday in October of every year, was designated as Prison Sunday and during the years that followed, this day has been observed by an increasing number of churches, with results of the highest value in the creation of a healthy public sentiment upon prison questions, and it is to be hoped that its observance will become universal.

Certainly in the Southern States, where the people are more generally christian in faith, and more American in blood than those of the North, Prison Sunday ought to receive its warmest welcome.

Purposes of the Association.

Whilst the primary purpose of the Association has been to

bring together for conference prison officers of all grades, it has, also, always extended a cordial welcome to all others interested in prison topics, and especially to judges, legislators and professors of sociology in colleges and universities, so, as the years have gone by, its horizon has extended beyond the boundaries of prison walls, and includes not only the administration of prisons, but everything else that pertains to the repression or prevention of crime.

In addition, in order to secure a wider hearing, and a wider influence, it has been the policy of the Association to hold each annual meeting in a different state, and thus far under its new organization this has been effected, and during fourteen years we have met in fourteen different states, as follows: Saratoga, New York; Detroit, Mich.; Toronto, Canada; Atlanta, Georgia; Boston, Mass.; Nashville, Tenn.; Cincinnati, Ohio; Pittsburg, Pa.; Baltimore, Md.; Chicago, Ill.; St. Paul, Minn.; Denver, Col.; Milwaukee, Wis., and Austin, Texas.

During all these years it has been the policy of the Association to allow the largest freedom of discussion and to decide nothing by a formal vote, leaving the truth to be discovered by the facts adduced, and the weight of argument in its favor. Under this policy questions that are settled, and there are many such, pass out of the realm of debate, and only remain as axioms in the new science of Penology, and the Association goes on to regions beyond.

Conservative in Organization.

Whilst the Prison Association has been very liberal in discussion, it has also been very conservative in organization, and therefore during all these years it has had but three presidents. This policy, however, with the present Congress changes—wisely too I think—and hereafter every president will be ineligible for re-election, and therefore at the threshold of this new departure it seems proper for the retiring president to devote his annual address to retrospection as well as prophesy, or in other words to report something of the accomplishments of the past, and of the hopes of the future.

Retrospection.

During these years, commencing with the Conference of prison officers in New York City, in February 1884, it has been

my high privilege to attend all of the Conferences of the Prison Association, and with rare exceptions, every session of them.

During the first ten years, under the administration of President Hayes, I was Vice-president, and since his death in 1893 I have been President, so that I ought to be fairly well acquainted with the accomplishments of the Association, and its hopes, although I have serious doubts as to my ability to present them as they should be.

Accomplishments.

In the brief time allotted me, of course, I can indicate only a few of the attainments made since the organization of the Association in 1870, but that real progress has been made in dealing with the criminal classes, is very evident even from a cursory examination.

Public Appreciation.

First and foremost, however, the Association has fully established itself as a recognized authority in Prison matters, and has created a public sentiment that realizes the importance of the prison question.

With people, whose opinions are worthy of consideration, the members of the Prison Association are no longer cranks or sentimentalists, but are earnest practical men, who are dealing with questions of vital importance to every citizen.

In short Penology has been elevated to the position of a science which considers, not only the care of men inside of prison walls, but also everything that will aid in keeping men out of prison, whether educational, or legislative, and as a science it is now recognized in our leading universities, and teachers of sociology are teachers of many of its phases.

Protection of Society.

Through the influence of the National Prison Association the attitude of society towards the criminal has largely changed and is no longer that of an avenger enforcing the requirements of an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. On the contrary the rule of action is self protection, and nothing more nor less.

If any person encroaches upon the rights, or privileges of others it is the right and duty of society to deal with the offender in any way that may seem best to put an end to his encroachments.

If necessary he can be placed in prison, and kept there, until his conduct and character shall give assurance that he may be trusted outside. But in the meantime he is entitled, as a fellow man, to such treatment as shall not degrade his manhood, but promote his restoration. In short he is a child of the state and should be treated in the same spirit that a wise and prudent parent, treats an erring child.

This does not require that he should be coddled with feather beds, or hotel fare, on the contrary the conditions of life should be hard, and discipline as strict as on a man of war, and all comforts received should be fairly earned by good conduct and hard work. Every prisoner should clearly understand that crime is hateful both to man and to God, and that the way of the transgressor is hard.

Mere sentimentalism has never met with favor in the National Prison Association, and cranks and rosewater theorists rarely present themselves, and never a second time.

Reformation.

Under the rule of self protection, however, reformation, when possible, is far more effective than deterrence by severity. Reformation is a permanent cure, but deterrence lasts only whilst fear lasts and eternal vigilance is on guard.

Therefore reformation has the first place in an up to date prison; and therefore prisons have been graded so that young men convicted of a first offence, which does not indicate special depravity, can be sent to a reformatory prison, entirely apart from old offenders and more vicious criminals, where he can receive a special treatment, which is now known as the reformatory, or Elmira System, under which a large majority can be saved, as experience has fully demonstrated. So also youths who have violated law, when treated by themselves in Juvenile Reformatories are graduated into good citizenship as largely as the pupils from our public schools.

Incorrigibles.

On the other hand experience has shown that there are criminals who are incorrigible. Some of these are congenital criminals or moral idiots, some have deliberately made a profession of crime and for such there seems but one adequate remedy for the protection of society, and that is their permanent seclusion

inside of prison walls, with compulsory labor sufficient to pay the current expenses of the prison.

Surely any one who, by repeated convictions of crime proclaims himself an enemy of society, is entitled to be adjudged an incorrigible, with imprisonment for life.

Prison Construction.

Under the new era prison construction has been vastly improved, and penitentiaries (I do not say jails) are now very rare, in which the sanitary conditions are largely objectionable. Even our county jails and village lock-ups, bad as they are, are vastly better than they were, before their conditions were considered and made known by the discussions of the Prison Association.

Prison Officers.

One of the most noticeable improvements, clearly traceable to the influence of the National Prison Association, is the superior qualification of prison officers. Prison management has been elevated to the dignity of a profession, and it is now clearly evident that, in order to meet its highest requirements, prison officers must have a training and experience equal to those of any other profession. In fact it is now recognized that there is no profession in which men of character, and conscience, and high intelligence are more essential than in the management of our convict prisons.

That our ideals in this direction have been fully attained is not claimed, but that progress in this direction has been steady and continuous, I am sure every one will testify who has been familiar with American prisons, or who has been a regular attendant at the annual meetings of the National Prison Association.

Moral and Educational Influences.

Another noticeable attainment is in the moral and educational influences brought to bear upon prisoners, and prison schools, and prison libraries, and other moral appliances, are essential requirements in all well ordered prisons, and indispensable aids to prison discipline.

The Indeterminate Sentence.

Through the discussions of the Prison Association, very

largely I think, another forward movement is now in progress, and that is the substitution of indeterminate, for definite or time sentences less than life.

We are not all agreed yet as to the limitations of this movement, but that time sentences are vastly unequal, and often unjust, every one admits, and everyone I think will agree that a remedy is needed, and that the indeterminate or indefinite sentence is the most promising remedy thus far proposed.

County Jails.

Of all our accomplishments, the least satisfactory perhaps, is in our county jails. That they have been largely improved in construction, and management and sanitary conditions, is admitted, but in the association of prisoners with its corrupting influence which is the crowning defect of our jail system, we have made but little progress.

If there is any one thing upon which the members of the National Prison Association are absolutely of one mind, it is that prisoners awaiting trial, or serving short sentences in jail, should be kept entirely separate from each other.

Heretofore, as a rule, old offenders and mere tyros, innocent and guilty alike, together with witnesses and insane people who have committed no offense whatever, are crowded together in a common hall, with results for evil which cannot well be exaggerated.

That they are schools of crime and seminaries of vice, nobody denies, and that the absolute separation of prisoners is the only certain remedy everybody admits, but how to secure such separation is a problem that still awaits solution. In a few states considerable progress has been made in this direction as for example in Massachusetts and Minnesota. So also in Ohio, where fully one-fourth of our jails have been especially built to secure separation, and a law has been passed making it unlawful to allow association, and yet, except in a few instances, separation has not been enforced.

Just what to do about it we hardly know, but my own opinion is that we shall never secure adequate separation, until the jails are placed under control of the state as they are in Great Britain.

Prior to 1877 British jails, after which ours were patterned,

were just as bad as ours, but after that date all this was changed, and now all over the British Islands all jail prisoners, from the time they enter the prison van at the police station, until they are finally discharged, are kept entirely separate, and the result has been that from that date to the present, there has been a steady reduction in crime, which is more than can be said of any other country.

Post-Penitentiary Treatment.

Another attainment which is quite limited as yet, but which has the unanimous approval of the National Prison Association, and is making progress, is the care of prisoners after discharge.

In the reformation of prisoners, and their restoration to honest citizenship, the most difficult point is their discharge from prison. Unless aided there with a helping hand, the chances are against them, and therefore every prison should be supplemented with a Prisoners Aid Society. This is the rule in England, and in various continental countries, and they are considered an indispensable help in the saving of prisoners.

Hopes for the Future.

The hopes of the Prison Association in its war with crime, are centered more and more, as the years go by, in prevention, rather than in repression or cure.

With all improvements possible for, dealing with criminals after they have reached the prison stage, and are incarcerated within prison walls, it is clearly evident that we shall not be able to make any large reduction in the volume of crime. It is true something has been done by deterrence, and much more by reformation, but still our prisons are full and more are needed, and the conviction is steadily forced upon us that our largest hope and best work in the future, must be in keeping men out of prison.

How to do this is now our greatest problem, and to its solution the Prison Association has given attention more and more in recent years.

To present this subject with any degree of fulness would require a volume and therefore only a brief outline can be attempted here.

The Schools of the Future.

First and foremost what is most essential to be done is to revolutionize our educational system from top to bottom, so that good morals, good citizenship, and ability to earn an honest living shall be its primary purpose instead of intellectual culture as heretofore.

To effect this purpose more fully we must commence earlier with our system of public schools, and make the kindergarten an essential and inseparable part of it. "The way the twig is bent the tree is inclined" and kindergartens, properly conducted, can be used to empty our prisons more effectually than all other agencies combined. Certainly as an aid to other school agencies there is nothing more hopeful.

The Probation System.

One of the most promising methods for keeping out of prison persons who have been convicted of minor offenses is what is known as the probation system which had its origin and fullest development in the state of Massachusetts.

This system proceeds upon the assumption that many persons who are arrested for such offenses may be saved from a life of crime if sentence is suspended and the convicted person has an opportunity to become a law abiding citizen before the stigma and contagion of a prison life is imposed upon him.

All such cases are committed to a probation officer, appointed by the court, whose duty it is to make a careful investigation of all the surrounding circumstances and report conclusions, and suspends sentence and places the offender under the supervision of the probation officer, and then, if he does well for a definite period, usually a year, he is discharged. If on the other hand, he goes wrong he is brought into court and sentenced.

The result of this system is that a large number of persons are kept out of prison and permanently saved.

This system was considered at the International Prison Congress in Paris, two years ago and has already been adopted in England, and is worthy of imitation everywhere.

The Parole System.

Another System for decreasing the number of persons in prison is the parole system, which is in force in all reformatories, and in a number of penitentiaries.

Under this system prisoners are divided into three or four classes and a prisoner by good conduct can work his way from the lowest to the highest, and then if he gives satisfactory evidence that he can be trusted outside he may be paroled and tested and finally released.

This system has so fully demonstrated its usefulness that it is to be hoped that it will be largely extended.

The Religious Factor.

Last, and greatest of all, in my judgement, in our outlook for the future in the reduction of crime is the religious factor.

In this last message I shall ever present to the National Prison Association as its President, I want to put it on record, with all the emphasis I can command, that if we are to make any large progress in the reformation of prisoners, or in the prevention of crime, or in the betterment of mankind, we must utilize more fully than we have heretofore the religious element which is inherent in the universal heart of man. You may call it superstition if you will, but yet the fact remains that man, although he may be a mere animal "whose little life is rounded by a sleep" and ends with the grave, nevertheless he is the only animal whose life is governed by what he believes, and who rises or falls in accordance with his mental ideals.

Personally I am a Christian of the "Apostles Creed", but for the purpose of this argument I do not insist that christianity is the only religion worthy of attention. What I do insist upon is that religion is inherent with all men. By religion I mean the realization of dependence upon, and a responsibility to an invisible power outside of themselves, which says thou shalt or thou shalt not, and that to this sense we must appeal more largely than we do in dealing with the prison question.

During the generation now closing, through false views of science, material life has been exaggerated and the spiritual discredited, to a greater or less extent, to the serious injury of society as a whole, but, fortunately this phase of social evolution

is passing away and science has become the bulwark of religion instead of its assailant.

All the great religions of the world are now recognized as essential parts of the Divine Order in the evolution of man, and that christianity as the highest of all has culminated in a world religion adapted to the universal needs of society.

Therefore it is to this religious sense, which science now recognizes and ignorance alone ignores, we must utilize as the most potent factor in the regeneration of men.

If this be true then it follows as the night the day that every prison officer, every teacher in our schools, and especially every editor of a newspaper, ought to be profoundly religious, for it is only by the education of our people in the eternal verities of God and the future, that society at its best can be developed and saved, and the Divine right of all men to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" can be fully secured.

Away then with the clamor for secular schools, which is a device of the Devil, or of his equivalent, for Godless schools.

I am not asking that creeds should be taught in our public schools, but that ethics should be taught, which is the science of morals, or of conduct as right or wrong, which all creeds recognize.

Does any sane man object to the teaching of the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount? If there are such I have never heard of them.

Let us have a text book that all creeds approve from Zoroaster to Christ, and from Christ to Herbert Spencer, for they all teach the responsibility of men to an Infinite Creator, and the possibility, through right living here, of a life eternal, and then with a text book thus approved, let it have the first place in every school curriculum, from the kindergarten to the highest university.

Do I exaggerate the possibilities of such a policy? Nay, verily it is the only light that can dispel the darkness that lies along the horizon of the future.

I do not expect to live to see the general adoption of such a policy, for man's limit of three score years and ten is not far off, and I am near enough to the infinite sea to hear the ripples on the shore, but as sure as God lives, if it is not adopted the time must come, and the cycle of National Life is not far off, when

the antiquarians of some nobler race will philosophise among the crumbling ruins of our modern civilization. *

God's Elect.

I trust no one will class me as a pessimist, for I am surely the opposite, in the broader field of the world as a whole. As I have said elsewhere, when we remember how slow the processes of evolution are, and how many Eons of time it has taken to bring the earth to its present development, let us be hopeful and not doubtful for we know that God lives and that the trend of humanity is upward and not downward.

We may fail here, through want of cooperation with the forces of the Infinite, and lose our own reward, but God's elect shall not perish from the earth, and man's redemption shall surely come. As the Great Globe swings in its mighty orbit around the sun, and lifts its polar ice crowns into the dissolving summer, so let us have faith to believe that in the grander cycles of human destiny, the long and icy winter of humanity is evolving into the golden summer of the Son of Man.

*Since the foregoing was written I have read a recent article by Professor Richard T. Ely, in which he says: "No Society has ever come into existence without the help of religion; no Society has ever thrived in which religion has not been a great, vital force; no Society has ever survived a general decay of religion."

The truth of this statement all history corroborates. As the decay of a vital organ means death to the body, so the decay of religion means death to society.

Again, in the "Cosmopolitan" for September, President Andrews of Brown University, writing under the head of "The New Educational Ideals" says: "There should be a continuous training in ethical matters, not confined to a single miserable term, which is only better than nothing, but running through the entire course."

Again, President Eliot of Harvard University is reported in the Outlook for November 6th as saying that "No educational system can be successfully carried on without education in morals, and that no education in morals is possible without a religious life."

