

And the camera has pulled back too far,
is framing them in dry space.
This is no cast of thousands
it is a shuffle of survivors
the programme pulled together for a few pounds.

Here is a token Kraut in a costume hat
"Vee should neffer enemies haff been"
Here is a close-up of a tight-lipped
handshake.

Now poppies are falling from
the Albert Hall and Eddie Calvert
is playing a golden trumpet,
lest we forget an institution.

Hard of hearing,
the old men no longer know
what their loud leaders are shouting about.

They do not understand
that war is dead and tomorrow
will bring only a collision of deterrents.

They hang tunelessly
on the last note of their old bugle,
certain that some memory
of something will survive.

Peter Redgrove

Museum

A tapestry of scenes of love and hunting
Embroidered as the bed's testimony or tester,
A cloth mirror to watch one's after-love thoughts in,

Big fat bees of damask sewing.
In the museum, the Still Zoo, the salmon
Sheds scales like a dead rose behind glass,

The lighted mirrors of the carp's skin go out;
In life it likes the muddy waters that mute its brilliance.
There is a section of the mole's fortress, who has bitten off

The head of each worm in its leader with exquisite neatness;
The carp again, like marquetry of pearl; the Fantomas Eel;
The grindstone coughing at the model cottage door,

Sneezing sparks, a cold of fire; through glass a tree
Opening and shutting its high doors
Its sliding green sashes continually.

NOTES & TOPICS

Walls Do a Prison Make . . .

Criminal Issues—By EDWARD PEARCE



“**B**ASE DURANCE and contagious prison”, says Ancient Pistol. And we have commonly looked upon the institution in that sort of light, wherever possible averting our eyes. It is a commonplace among politicians whose set of illusions calls itself an enlightenment, to

suppose that we have too many convicted persons here in prison. The actual number fluctuates in and around 42,000. And according to the school of penology which attracts Mr Roy Hattersley, the Shadow Home Secretary, that figure should be a ceiling if indeed it is not brought down.

We are told seriously by serious people that the number in prison should accommodate itself to a fixed figure. If crime goes up, if the number of convictions increases, the number of imprisoned persons must stand pat. Adjustment can take the form of earlier and better parole—down from two-thirds of sentence, to a half, to a third, to the least fraction one’s heart or whim desires. Or it can take the form of a wise abstention by judges from giving custodial sentences.

Now this is an odd view, for we are living in Britain with a crime rate which marches forward like the boundaries of a limitlessly ambitious irridentist state.

It is argued that prisons are old, unhygienic, and crowded. So they are. Mr John McCarthy, the former Governor of Wormwood Scrubs prison, has won himself a place alongside the community policeman, Mr John Alderson (who was formerly Chief Constable of poverty-stricken, riot-blasted Devon and Cornwall), as one of the Samurai of progress, guaranteed applause and reflex esteem in

the press by first denouncing his own prison as a dustbin and then, with maximum attention, resigning from the prison service.

They join the liberal pantheon on prison and police questions. Liberal orthodoxy does not greatly believe in the efficacy of prison; it wants its term reduced by subterfuge, and looks upon the release of convicted persons on to the heads of the general public with a satisfaction which could out-smirk the Buddha. Unfortunately we also have a foolish body of opinion which thinks in terms of crude, brutal punishments and casts a long, lingering look behind at the old regalia of cruel punishment—the birch, the cat-of-nine-tails, and the gallows.

For my own part I am not disposed to make precedence between the two mentalities. We need the bull-ring mentality of the death-and-mutilation school the way we need Lord Liverpool for Prime Minister. And the early-parole, fixed-ceiling-for-prison-accommodation people are playing Fidelio with street-wise brutes and in the process making witless war upon poorer people, those first and last victims of crime, whose condition of life deteriorates as offences against small property and unimportant people become the norm.

WE NEED TO CLEAR our minds of the two stupidities and to do some thinking on the subjects of both prison and the police. We are not at America’s pass.

And if you want to duck the issue you choose the right set of figures to make your comparison with. Set against Detroit or New York, Liverpool and London are nowhere. Set against London and Liverpool 25 years ago, they are terrifying. There is not only more crime but specifically more street crime. The principal losers from it are solid respectable working people, who have watched decent districts fall apart in less than half a lifetime.