

# These 37 Men, at Least, Have Come Back

## Old Offenders Now Hold Responsible Jobs

By Frederick B. Edwards

**B**ACK in 1916, when Warden George W. Kirchwey stepped out of Sing Sing to allow Thomas Mott Osborne to return for a while to the wardenship, Dr. Kirchwey was interviewed. He said, among other things:

"Looking always for sensations! No wonder people get a wrong idea of Sing Sing. We turn a crook into a man—that's no story. But if somebody will only escape, maybe there'll be a shooting—scandal—that is a story and a chance to belittle Sing Sing's reforms."

Dr. Kirchwey was speaking of the newspapers of New York. This is the story which proves that Dr. Kirchwey was mistaken when he said that the newspapers do not regard the turning of a crook into a man as a story.

Around a long dining table in an uptown hotel there sat on a recent evening a dinner party of forty men. They were, all of them, keen eyed, firm lipped, steady of glance and apparently prosperous.

It might have been a gathering of old friends, the reassembling of an alumni society; a dinner of technical or office men brought together to do honor to a loved executive.

About the coffee cups and above the cigar smoke the talk buzzed along the usual lines. The peace treaty, reconstruction problems, labor troubles, recent football and future baseball were the popular topics.

**The Gift**  
The chairman, white haired, with a clipped mustache above a firm, friendly mouth, with blue eyes that gleamed from behind rimless nose glasses, rapped for order. In the sudden silence he said:

"Gentlemen, we have gathered here to-night for the express purpose of honoring a man who has done more for us than any other man living. A man who has shown us what we could be and who has encouraged us to become what we are. We are going to offer him a gift, which, though it is small, is still important, not because of its intrinsic value, but because it is the outward and visible sign of the esteem in which we hold him."

He lifted into view one of those creations of brown pigskin, gleaming glass and burnished silver which is called an English kit bag, possibly because it is not English and is certainly not a kit bag.

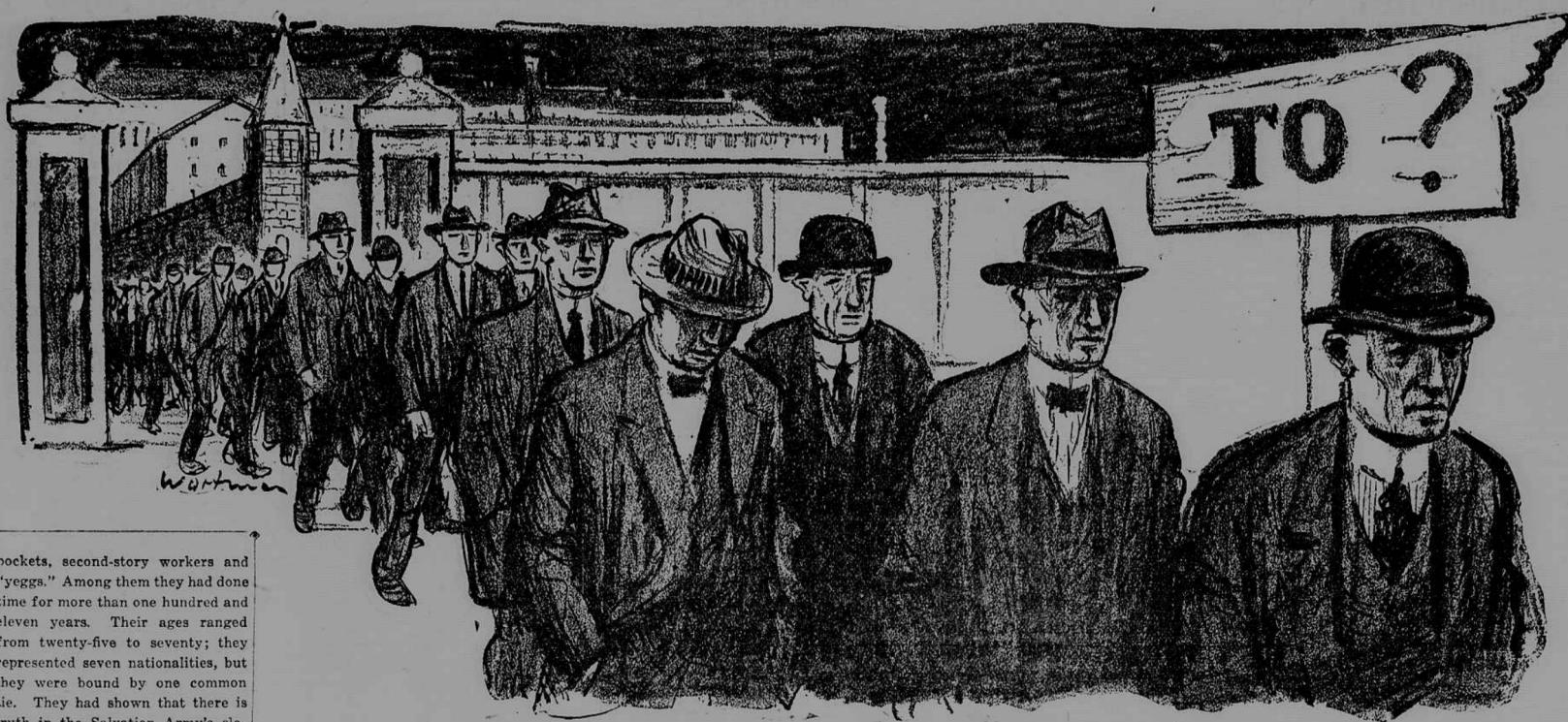
"With this trifling gift," the chairman went on, "we offer to our guest our sincere gratitude, not only because of the things he has done for us in material affairs, but, most of all, because he has inspired within us that spirit which has enabled us to conquer oceans and to overturn mountains; because he has made us men."

There were ripples of applause, and the chairman, who once was known to Sing Sing as B-6592, turned to Thomas Mott Osborne and handed over the glittering bag.

Of the forty men who sat around that table thirty-seven were former inmates of Sing Sing Prison. The rest of the party was made up of the guests of honor, Dr. Kirchwey and Martin F. Loonan, secretary of the Welfare League Association. The dinner was organized and carried through by a committee of the thirty-seven ex-convicts, every one of whom is to-day busily engaged at an honorable industrial occupation, free of the prison taint, living uprightly and fearing no man.

### The Givers

At that dinner there was at least one man who has served a long term for manslaughter; a gambler who has been in jail in seven different parts of the country and whose name was for years a notorious one in the underworld of New York; a gunman who had served three terms for carrying concealed weapons; a man who had served five years for an attempted robbery; men who had been sneak thieves and forgers, "con" men and pick-



pockets, second-story workers and "yeggs." Among them they had done time for more than one hundred and eleven years. Their ages ranged from twenty-five to seventy; they represented seven nationalities, but they were bound by one common tie. They had shown that there is truth in the Salvation Army's slogan: they had proved that though a man may be down, he is never out. They were thirty-seven living denials of the cynical theory that they never come back.

Many things have happened since Thomas Mott Osborne, under the alias of Tom Brown, served a voluntary term in Auburn Prison in order that he might know what it really meant to be in jail. Osborne has been warden of Sing Sing since then, and has had an opportunity to convert his humanitarian theories into chiseled achievement. He has met much criticism and has not vanquished it all, and he is now, as the head of the United States Naval Prison at Portsmouth, still fighting for what he calls a square deal for the incarcerated man.

Whatever may be the popular opinion as to the practicability of Osborne's ideas or of the advisability of official adoption of the Osborne theories of prison government, there is no escaping the fact that thirty-seven men who have risen from the husks that the swine did eat to assured and prideful place in the community of clean souls have given to Thomas Mott Osborne the credit for showing them the road to rehabilitation.

### One Who Reformed

Listen to this (the speaker is one of the guests at the Osborne din-

ner). A little more than three years ago he completed a five-year term in Sing Sing. In his day he was admired by his fellow second-story workers and hunted by the police every time an especially neat job was turned in his particular line. The Sing Sing stretch was his second experience of prison discipline.

To-day he is the proprietor and manager of one of the most successful eating places in the theater district. This is what he says:

"It's a damn hard job to be a crook, but it used to be a damn harder job to go straight once you had gone the other way. I worked Riverside Drive once, but Tom Brown changed all that for me. Work and save your pennies. That's my advice. It beats being a crook by more miles than there are between here and Berlin."

Then there is the chairman of the evening. He used to be known as the king of the light-fingered fraternity which adds to the perils of rush hour subwaying. He knows Elmira, Sing Sing and Auburn from the inside. Six years ago he was released from Auburn. To-day he holds responsibility for an important branch of the work of a famous moving picture firm.

"I've heard a lot about honor

systems," he said, "but I defy any one in the world to duplicate this scene—a group of former convicts dining their former keeper.

"Think of what it means to us to have had a chance to go straight; and not only to us, but to the whole community. Men in Chicago who come out of Joliet with a record are arrested on suspicion right away. They know they will be arrested whether they deserve it or not. What chance have they got? And remember, that used to be the system in New York. If it had been the system when we came out what chance would we have had to be here to-night?"

The man who used to be among the smartest confidence men known to the New York police, who has done, altogether, eighteen years in prison and who at first regarded the stories of the Welfare League as "bull," now takes care of a \$2,000 pay roll every week. He is a trusted employee of a large coal concern. Judge Wadhams, he said, helped him to go straight.

"When I left Sing Sing Judge Wadhams told me to go straight. He told me if I was forced to the wall to go and see him. Well, I played the ponies for a while, then I went broke. I went to the judge and I told him I'd sooner steal than

starve. He sent me to the Welfare League and they put me in touch with my boss. He started me at \$20 a week. That was three years ago and they'll never see me inside stone walls again."

### The Nestor

Similar experiences were recited as the speechmaking became general. There was a young man who had done five years for attempted highway robbery. While he was in Sing Sing under Osborne's jurisdiction he learned typesetting and to-day he is employed by a leading magazine house. There was the chap who once did a five-year stretch for grand larceny, who is now a clerk at a fashionable hotel and one of the best clerks that hostelry ever had, by the confession of its manager. There was the "daddy" of the party. He is past threescore and ten.

"I thought I was done for," he smiled. "They sent me up for assault. I guess it was all right, but at my age it's a terrible thing to go to prison. I couldn't see anything for it when I came out but the river. I was a seagoing skipper before I went up the river, and who would give charge of a ship to a man with a prison record?"

"But they fixed me up. I got a

ship three days after I walked out of Sing Sing, and I have a ship yet, and, please God, I'll have a ship to the day I die. I thought I was wrecked—a total loss. They brought me into a safe anchorage, and as long as I have to live I'll owe Osborne and his friends a debt that I cannot possibly hope to repay."

There was the short, stocky, grizzled chap of middle age who completed a fifteen-year term for manslaughter. He is now overseer in a large garage. The gunman who served three terms for shooting and carrying concealed weapons is now the caretaker of the townhouse of a multi-millionaire.

How is it done? By what alchemy are these men drawn from their criminal careers to the paths of honest back-aching or brain-sweating toil? Simply, according to Osborne and the Welfare League Association, by assuring them a fair chance.

The scheme originated in 1915, when a group of committees was formed at the suggestion of the National Committee of Prisons. Later, the committees were incorporated as the New York State Prison Council, which became, in time, the Welfare League Association. The Welfare League Association is not to be confused with

the Welfare League. The association is composed of leading citizens, who are interested in humanitarian movements to conquer crime by kindly treatment and the honor system. The league is composed of men inside the prisons. They elect their own officers. They pledge themselves and their fellow members to go straight when their time is up, and when they leave the prison walls they cease to be members of the league. The league is a prison organization only.

### Finds Him a Job

From the Welfare League the newly freed man comes under the wing of the Welfare League Association, which undertakes to find him a job. In most cases the job is waiting when the man comes out. The employer is informed only that the man has been in jail and is looking for a chance to rehabilitate himself. The rest is up to the man.

"Heretofore," says a recent manifesto of the association, "prison reform has followed the sentimental policy of bestowing favors and privileges on prisoners whether they have asked for them or not and regardless of whether they have shown that they were qualified to receive or to make proper use of them. The result has been, too

## Way to Reform Not Closed to Convicts

often, the demoralization of prison discipline or the aggravation of the prisoner's discontent and contempt for society. Such a policy does nothing to develop self-respect or to encourage ambition. It is not constructive. Experience has shown already that the prisoners appreciate the privileges conferred upon them in this way far less than those which they have earned for themselves. It is characteristic of human nature that the free gift is valued far less than the quid pro quo."

The answer to the question of "How is it done?" is found in the last quoted paragraph. In effect, the system says to the men, "Here is your chance to make good. It is up to you to show that you can make good." The recent dinner to Thomas Mott Osborne supplies the evidence in thirty-seven cases.

It does not always work out so happily, of course. There are cases in the association's records of men who have had every possible chance to go straight, but have failed to make the grade. But there are fewer of these, the association declares, than there are of the other kind—the kind who have grasped the proffered opportunity and have clung to it, resisted temptations of terrifying strength to turn aside from it and have conquered in the end.

One of the thirty-seven men who sat around that banquet table the other night submitted to an interview. He was a little tremulous of publicity.

"I am not ashamed of what I am now," he said, "but I am ashamed of what I was, and I have new and valued friends. Keep my name out of it."

### The Jail Smell

"I was a bad egg when I was a kid. I didn't have much training, except what I picked up on the streets. I saw the inside of Sing Sing before I was twenty-one, and I saw it again six weeks after I came out. Things were like that then. When you had once got the jail smell on you—good night! You didn't have to do anything. You only needed to be suspected.

"I'll tell you the main thing. It's the chance to go straight. Most crooks are intelligent, and they know as well as the next man that being crooked doesn't pay, but before they never had a chance to go straight. How many men were there who would hire a chap with a jail record? Not one. The only chance a man had was to keep his record hidden, and he couldn't do it. He might get away with it for a day or two, or maybe sometimes for a month. Then some Dick'd spot him, and farewell job! I've known cases like that, dozens of them.

"But not now. It's surprising how many men there are who will give a chap a chance if they feel that he's got good stuff in him, jail smell or no jail smell. He has to show it, of course, while he's inside; but before they started this thing he didn't have a chance to show it while he was inside. That's the big thing—the chance to show that the vital spark of manhood is still there.

"It's up to the man himself in the long run, of course. If he has a permanent bad streak in him it'll come out, and he'll slip back; and sometimes it's hard work, even if a chap really means it. You can't blame a business man for being a bit leary of the jail smell, but it can be done. I've been out three and a half years. I'm making \$50 a week, and making it steady, and making it honest; and I've got two thousand in the bank, every nickel of it earned.

"Why, I'm even thinking of getting married. Can you beat that? She's a wonderful little girl, too. She knows all about me, and she's satisfied to take the chance.

"That's the big thing. The chance to go straight. We're going to hold another dinner soon. Some time in the spring. The boys are talking about making it a semi-annual affair. A sort of a reunion. That's a funny one, isn't it? A Sing Sing Alumni Association!"

But why not?

## A Plea for Comicy, Which the Germans Bombed

**C**ORMICY is one of the villages of the Marne, for which an appeal is being made by the Reconstruction Committee, at the head of which is Jacques Pierre Forgeot, deputy for the Marne and Mayor of Cormicy. Contributions should be addressed to the Cormicy Reconstruction Committee, Hancock County Bank, Pass Christian, Miss.

M. Regnier, former sub-prefect of Rhims, has written the following account of the devastation of the village:

"Availing myself of the cooperation of my friend, Charles P. de Boissy, whose devotion to a number of causes organized for the relief of the unfortunate and helpless is only too well known, I venture to call to the attention of American generosity, the modest little village of Cormicy (Department of Marne), which numbered, before the war, 1,200 inhabitants.

"Cormicy is situated, or rather was situated, in the 'arrondissement' of Rheims, only seventeen kilometers (a little more than one mile), from that city, on the railroad between Soissons and Guignicourt, and was connected with Rheims by an electric car line; it rose on the banks of the Aisne near the junction of the river and the canal.

"From August, 1914, until September, 1918, it was almost constantly within the firing line and during that period was twice occupied by the Germans. After the great Battle of the Marne in 1914, the enemy, suspending his retreat, established himself less than one mile from Rheims and still nearer the village of Cormicy.

"I was very warmly received by the people, especially so, for the reason that since the beginning of its terrible ordeal, no public official had visited the village, and it remained without visitors during the entire period of the war, except for the visits of Pierre

Forgeot, Deputy from Rheims, who accompanied me several times afterward, when I returned to Cormicy in my attempts to bring relief and a little comfort to the remaining inhabitants.

"Although not a large city like Rheims, the population, nevertheless, suffered as much. It is true that other villages suffered because of their position on the firing line; I know, for I

visited all of them within my district, but it is for Cormicy that I have always felt the most compassion. I visited it as often as possible, riding in a low, gray car and taking advantage of cloudy and rainy days.

"The population continued to grow smaller; daily new victims were

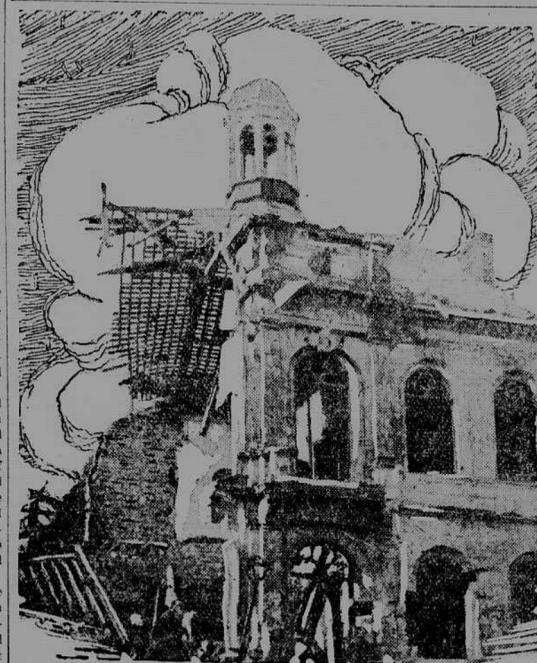
claimed by the enemy's shells, on one day alone twenty-three persons having been killed in the cellar of the City Hall. Finally, in April, 1916, sixty inhabitants were left. Among them a noble and courageous old gentleman, D. Masse, a former mayor, who upon my request, and without the assurance of any compensation, again took the direction of the affairs of the commune and of the council, which had entirely disappeared.

"Then in May, the French military authorities, in anticipation of strategic operations, decided upon the evacuation of the village. Its people protested and I succeeded in having the decision set aside. However, a few months afterward, Mr. Masse received a formal order to evacuate immediately. He dispatched a motorcycle to Rheims to beg of me to intervene, and I lost no time in visiting three army officers, including General Franchet d'Esperey, commanding the army. But they were inflexible and I was told that this was a general measure and applied to all the communes of the sector which happened to be on the firing line.

"When I entered Cormicy as the bearer of this news the inhabitants informed me that they would not leave. There were again tears and protests. Mme. Masse, wife of the mayor, declaring that she would rather die than leave. I did my best to persuade them; I tried to make them understand that if the military authorities took such a step, it was to save them from certain death and I gave them hope that their exile would be of short duration. But I left without the certainty of having convinced them.

"The order to evacuate was to be executed within twenty-four hours, at midnight. At the time set, several long automobiles, which in other days had conveyed happy tourists across France, arrived to take the inhabitants to the station at Muizon. They did not resist; it was hardly worth while;

the town church when the invader had passed



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