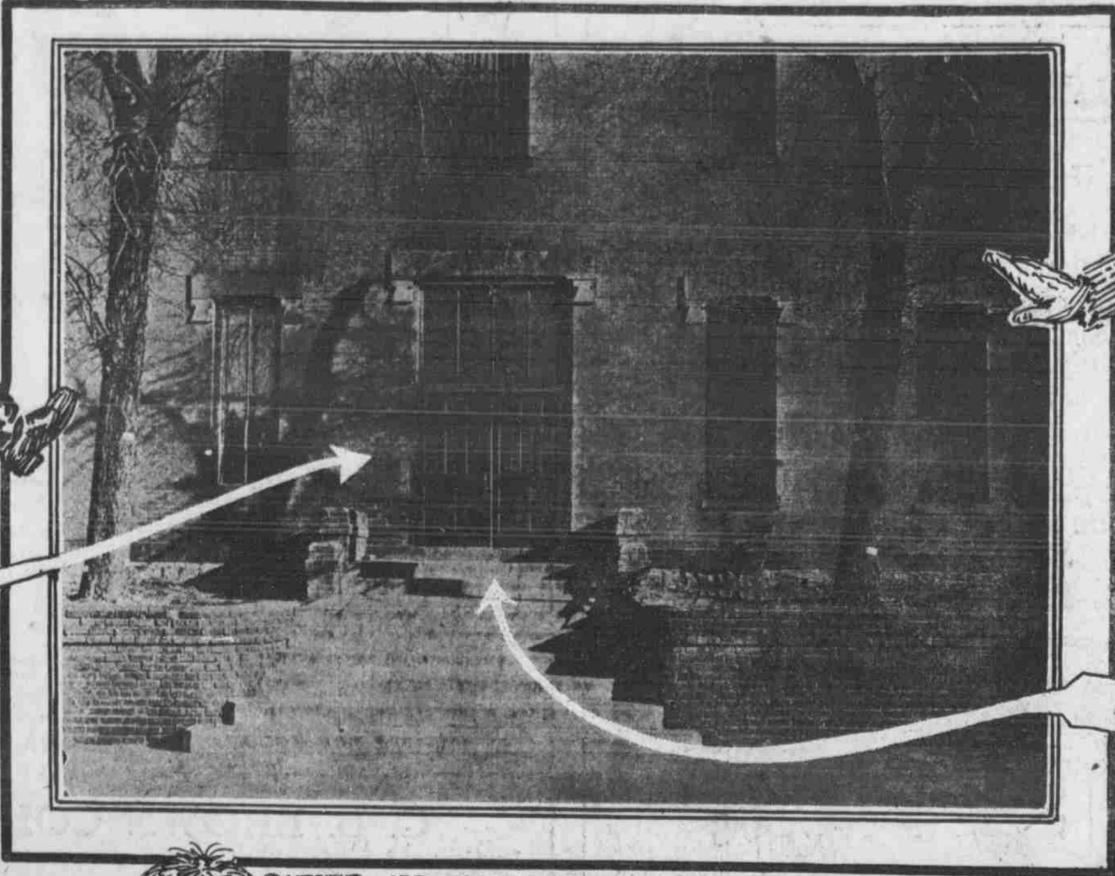


# THE OMAHA SUNDAY BEE MAGAZINE PAGE

## Old Outpost of Civic Virtue is Now Haven of Hopeless



DOORWAY - OLD DODGE ST. SCHOOL - NOW THE CITY JAIL



**A** CROSS the stone threshold of the old Dodge school have skipped the feet of happy childhood, light and nimble as fawns. Over the same threshold goes today the weary feet of the derelicts of life. Where devoted teachers gave their consecrated efforts to instilling the elementary lessons of good citizenship into budding minds, there today is found the climax of mistake, of passion, of weakness—the accumulated sum of degradation.

And the place itself is a blackhole verging so closely on the barbarous as to bring condemnation from all visitors. Inmates under compulsion must suffer tortures not contemplated by either corrective or punitive law. It would hardly be true to say they leave hope behind at the door, but having crossed the threshold, they have lost something of the courageous self-respect that attaches to decent manhood and womanhood. Only the strongest moral fiber can withstand the strain of any very lengthy stay in this detention depot for the offenders of a modern city. Here, indeed, is one very weak link in the community life of Omaha, as Chief Donahue and all his officers agree. Expert criminologists go farther, and have repeatedly said the place is a disgrace to the spirit of the time.

**Building Erected to Forestall Evil**

The happy chatter and the ringing laughter of exuberant youth have given way to the voices of protest, of blasphemy, of sorrow and of grinding discord. It is but another case of good intention frustrated by bitter experience; of hope shattered, and bright expectation gone astray. For the Dodge school had its being in the clean minds of men and women who desired to make it an outpost of righteousness that should stand against the approach of evil. The good school was built and ran its course; then gave way to the service of the very thing it was designed to combat.

When William A. Gwire had his residence on the northwest corner of Eleventh and Dodge streets—which was a good many years ago—he reached the conclusion that the establishment of a public school in that neighborhood was the one thing needed to improve its tone. Even in that early day Mr. Gwire observed that conditions were not what they should be in his immediate section, and were threatening to become worse. At the time discussion was rife on the subject of better school facilities. It was the day of the old North, South and West school, and in order to make good on his theory Gwire became a candidate for the school board, and was elected. He worked to such good purpose that the East (Dodge) school was built. It is today used as police headquarters and for the purposes of a city jail.

**Police Station Since 1898**

The city took over the building from the school board in April, 1898. It was late summer before the police department moved into the building, from the old headquarters in the basement of the Jones hotel, now the Savoy hotel, at Fifteenth and Jackson. In the meantime the driveway and barn had been constructed, the old double steps removed from the sidewalks on Dodge and Eleventh streets, the fence removed from the top of the brick wall at the street line, and some other changes made.

"Tell your troubles to the policeman" loses its

juocular aspect here, the focal point of all troubles incident to city life. And such troubles! They gather in number and kind, and unfold in such fashion that officers in charge and desk sergeants almost lose the sense of grief common to normal people when their fellows are in trouble.

### Grief Intrudes Day and Night

"It's all in the day's work," says Captain Dempsey, "but at that a man must maintain the right perspective to hold his faith in humanity." And even as he speaks a smartly attired little woman is referred to him from "the desk," where all inquiries go first. Her face indicates worry and tell-tale traces of tears are not lacking. She wants to see her husband, who has been locked up for assault and battery, and requests the privilege in a manner half fearful and half ashamed. After ascertaining what offense the man is charged with, the officer sends her to the turnkey, who brings the prisoner to the iron gate on one side of his little hallway room.

This little woman is but a type of many who sorrowfully find their way to the police station in the course of a week. Sometimes it is a wife, again a mother, daughter or sister; a father, son or brother. Even when the charge is merely of a minor nature, the visit of relatives to the city prison is the test of fealty to kin; and it must be said for the officers in charge that they exercise a sense of courtesy that is commendable when the offender is worthy of any consideration. The saddest and most trying incidents occur when murder has been done or very serious moral turpitude is involved. Then tears, regrets and expressions of penitence mingle with appeals, urgings, and mayhap the word of cheer and hopefulness. The first shock of finding a loved one locked up soon wears off in most cases, say the police officers; but in some instances every visit to the prisoner gives fresh poignancy to the grief of those who come to see him, especially if they are women.

"It may seem a strange thing to say, but fathers take serious cases the hardest," said an old officer who has had much experience at the station. "I mean by that, they do not recover their equanimity in the face of possible disgrace as readily as women. The mothers, wives, sisters and daughters may suffer more acutely, but they can more easily find excuse or palliation for the crime than can a man who has all his life traveled a straight road and made it a point to keep his honor unsullied. He takes the crime of his kin as a reflection on himself and assumes the burden of defense or help

as something peculiarly his own. He may conceal his grief more successfully than the women, but he is hurt more deeply, as a rule."

In spite of the inherent gloom attaching to a prison, the life of the men in charge is not all surcharged with sadness. There are many instances of a ridiculous or humorous character to lighten the day and the night. Along about midnight, when the city has gone to sleep, and even the night reporters are finding it an irksome task to kill time, it gives a new zest to life to have shouts resound from the front door. Immediately all ears are flapping and eyes wide open. Then there comes stumbling in a husky colored damsel, with arms waving and every fiber of her body quivering, disheveled from hair to heel.

### Dope-Takers Cultivate Bad Dreams

"Stop 'im, ketch 'im," she yells, and grasps the wire in front of the desk, panting and shivering, out of breath and eyes rolling like an angry sea.

"Coke," mutters the desk sergeant wearily.

"Lock 'er up."

"Dey's a-chasin' me," insists the excited woman.

"Dey'll cahve me sure of yuh-all don' stop 'em."

"Of course they will," says the officer, "unless you let the dope alone." And into the pen she goes to sleep it off.

The "funny drunk" is another source of relief. Too full to care for himself, too weak in the knees to navigate, he yet has excellent control of a busy tongue, with probably a revived memory for an old song, or the hunch to make daffydilla. Policemen learn repartee as they learn to swing a club, by association, and they practice the virtue of patience to the limit when some poor devil drifts in who can laugh at the fate that has overtaken him. Some drunks will give up substantial sums of money willingly, but will fight to retain a bottle of whisky. Cocaine users would give an eye if they could take to the cell with them some of their dearest enemy.

There are other scenes, astonishing in a way, but pathetic and pitiable. A wagon load will be brought in from a raid on suspected rooming houses or chop suey joints. Among the persons taken in the haul are often young girls or women who may be classed as occasional frequenters of such places. Sometimes white women are taken with colored men. If they have the necessary funds for cash bail, or a friend who will put up, the detention is not for long, and having given an assumed name, they go away with the determination never to be caught again. In the cases of first arrest, bitter tears accompany pleas to be let "go home." Fear of discovery is greater than sorrow for offending against morals and disregard of home training, and in the case of timid girls—and boys, too—one lesson may be all that is needed. This will be the case very often if the boy or girl has to go to a cell. Here, too, the officer in charge must exercise a wise judgment, and see to it that only the hardened and chronic offenders go into the general lockup. The matron's quarters will be the temporary refuge for the girls too young to be confirmed in wrongdoing.

### Cell Room an Inferno at Night

And what of the city jail behind the bars? The first whiff of the air inside the door tells the story; and the first sound is likely to bring swift confirmation. Crowded quarters these, even in ordinary hours, but when the congregated riffraff is numerous souls not seared with crime or deadened in misery must shudder at the prospect of a night therein. Noisy drunks, ribald vagabonds, piratical negro wenches, snoring hellions, singing incompetents—abandoned women and cursing, vindictive men—all combine in the raucous jesting and call-

thumpan vulgarity that produces a shockingly good imitation of hell. There is little or no ventilation, a stifling warmth, vitiated atmosphere, the aroma of unwashed bodies and broiled breaths, mixed with an effluvia of stench that is not to be too closely and can hardly be fittingly characterized.

### City Jail a Modern Blackhole.

The Omaha city jail is worse than war in danger to health and morals of those inmates who have left any pretensions to either. It is, perhaps, as good a place on which to center missionary effort as any in the world. It would be a tough jungle, indeed, that could offer any better. Here the worst of all nations arrive at one time or another during the year. Old soak and young desperado, lost woman and devitalized man, shrinking venturers in wickedness and plumed bravados of the demimonde, unfortunate working women and penniless wanderers, hot-tempered killers and victims of cruel circumstance, crafty thieves and bungling check workers, desperate burglars and sneaking holdups, strong fighting men and cowardly wife beaters, follow one another across the repellent scene day after day, in one long procession of discouraging disgrace and hopeless future. Perhaps the world is recompensed for the lost usefulness of these by the fresh energy and solid ideals of the thousands of boys and girls who spent happy days within the walls where the very antithesis of happiness rules the hour today.

Sufficient to all purposes having any relation to the work of policing a city is this Omaha jail plant. Not only are the law violators spotted from here, in a great many cases, and trailed from here by the plain clothes men, but here they are fed, given medical and surgical aid, washed, dressed—and then tried and sentenced. Talking of washing and dressing, it must be understood that this process depends largely on the man or woman. Some inmates, men almost exclusively, seem to have a horror of soap and water, born savages or cave men

by backward evolution, whose only hours of worry are when they are halfway clean.

One room on the ground floor is devoted to the uses of the police physicians, who here gather in a short time a goodly store of experience. All sorts of cases are treated in twenty-four hours, from a face cut to a gash opened by a razor swung with malicious freedom, from a gunshot wound to a poisoned stomach. Thus, in getting arrested, many a fractious citizen manages to dodge doctors' bills; and, too, many of the afflicted folk passing through the police station are decidedly better, physically, when they leave than when they arrived.

In the basement the food for the prisoners is prepared, not in fancy style, but with a generous allowance of bread, powerful coffee—and always the life-saving onion. When doctored, cleaned as far as may be, sobered and fed, the "cases" are escorted upstairs at the proper time to pass before the police magistrate. This ceremony occurs in what was once a school room, and the pupils—borrowing the term for the moment—act very much as juvenile offenders against school rules are wont to do. They hang their heads, shuffle their feet, bury their hands with hat or handkerchief, listen in sullenness or simulated amazement to the charges, and make pleas that through all the ages of man have varied but little. Here it is the student of human nature can gain a kind of knowledge available nowhere else. The work is not attractive, nor is the system anything approaching the ideal, but the action is swift. It is an important case that stops the wheels of this justice shop for more than a minute or two, and "records" are rather proudly mentioned by the attending officials, where several score of petty offenders have been called, heard and sentenced or acquitted. In the time it might take an agile fly to bore through the tender bald spot on "Judge" Mahoney's dome of thought.

"Move on," says the policeman. "Next," says the judge. And the prisoners mutter the irreverent comment of the famous gunner from Galway.