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New Corrections Facilities

1911

November 22nd, 1911. s

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Your favor of November 30th informing me in full of the great necessity of a new reformatory and a new workhouse with a single cell for each inmate is at hand. The account you give of an average of eight men to each cell, and of four women to each cell, and the immoralities which inevitably result therefrom, is most distressing. We are arresting and convicting people for certain vices not very easy to mention by name, and at the same time by confining more than one person in each cell in our penal institutions we are encouraging and propagating these very same vices. You also point out that in place of there being an air space or ration of 400 cubic feet to each person, as the laws of modern hygiene require, there is a space or ration of only 226 cubic feet. It is not to be wondered at that all the prison congresses, international, national and state, have through their visiting committees condemned these things as uncivilized. No doubt the funds should be appropriated forthwith to remedy these evils, although

the amount necessary may be millions. The trouble has been for the last few years, and is now, a disposition in the government of the city to cut down all expenses to the last dollar, and to omit necessary appropriations entirely, especially in the case of expenditures chargeable to corporate stock, in order to have funds or borrowing credit to build subways. Some of us have tried to remove this condition by getting the offer of operating companies to put up part or all of the money necessary for subway construction accepted by the city. As you are aware one company offered to put ^{up} about \$100,000,000 for that purpose, but in one way or another its offer was not accepted but frittered away. I am quite certain the Comptroller is alive to this matter, and I trust that the subways will in the end be financed by private capital to an extent which will leave us a corporate stock margin adequate for the things which you mention, and for ^{hospitals,} court houses, bridge approaches, parks and playgrounds, and many other things which I need not mention and which are now held up. The notion was propagated in the community by false statements daily repeated in certain newspapers, that if the operating companies put money into subway construction they would own the subways, whereas the subway statute is such that only the city can build and own

subways, whoever puts up the capital, and the operating companies cannot get a lease or franchise one day longer by putting up capital for subway construction. Whether the city puts up the capital or the companies put up the capital the franchise they get is the very same. I have always deemed it lamentable that one or two newspaper proprietors should have been able by the persistency of their false statements to propagate a contrary notion even among intelligent people.

Very truly yours,

W. A. R. Ryan,
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P. A. Whitney, Esq.,
Commissioner of Corrections,
New York City.