

John Galsworthy's Justice as an Indictment of Law, Penal System, and Prison Administration.

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Abstract

Justice deals with the shortcomings of the English legal system and judicial procedure. The subsidiary issues explored in the play include the prison system, solitary confinement, and the ill-treatment of women by their husbands. One of the greatest evils of the legal system is the notorious practice of solitary confinement, which is the severest punishment that can be inflicted upon a prisoner. Galsworthy presents the law as an inhuman and malignant institution. Another serious defect is that, even after a prisoner's release, he is required to report regularly to the police regarding his whereabouts. Any irregularity in reporting may result in his re-arrest. This procedure prevents an ex-prisoner from forgetting his unfortunate past and beginning a new life. Once branded as a criminal, he continues to be treated as one throughout his life. Thus, a legal system that is intended to prevent crime often compels an individual to commit further offences.

Keywords: Penal System, Forgery, Solitary Confinement, Prison Reform, Psychological Suffering, Social Justice, Crime, Rehabilitation, Ex-Convict.

Justice is a powerful indictment of the English legal system, the penal system, and the prison administration of its time. The play exposes the defects of the existing prison system in England and played a significant role in bringing about prison reforms. Public opinion was strongly aroused against the practice of solitary confinement. Among those who witnessed the performance of the play were Mr. Winston Churchill and other senior officials of the Home Office, whose attention was drawn to the urgent need for prison reform. As a result, the use of solitary confinement was considerably reduced.

According to W. C. Ward, *Justice* is essentially "a commentary on prison administration." Solitary confinement not only wastes human potential but also destroys the physical and mental well-being of prisoners. It exerts a devastating effect upon the mind, reducing an individual to despair and hopelessness. Falder himself feels as though "the iron has entered into his soul." The prison system transforms a first offender into a habitual criminal. Within its walls, the prisoner gradually loses all sense of ordinary human life and human relationships.

When Falder is finally released from prison, the consequences of his imprisonment become painfully evident. He emerges mentally shattered, emotionally exhausted, and spiritually broken. However, the greatest cruelty lies not within the prison itself but in the treatment he receives from society after his release. Because he is branded as an ex-convict, he is denied opportunities for rehabilitation and is driven towards despair. Such treatment is enough to push even a strong and determined person towards hopelessness and suicide, let alone a weak and sensitive individual like Falder. His words to Cokeson reveal the depth of his helplessness: "The fact is I am struggling against a thing that's all around me. I can't explain it-as if I was in a net; as fast as I put it here, it grows up there."

The treatment that Falder receives from his relatives, employers, and acquaintances is equally harsh and disheartening. His brother-in-law is so ashamed of him that he refuses even to meet him. No employer is willing to appoint an ex-convict to a respectable position. Consequently, Falder finds it extremely difficult to secure or retain employment. Apart from the question of whether it was just to imprison him for so long for his first offence, committed under exceptional circumstances, a more important question arises: Why should Falder continue to suffer even after he has completed the punishment prescribed by law? The issue here is not merely one of legal justice but of social justice, of which legal justice is only a part. Why should Falder be pursued relentlessly by a self-righteous society that regards itself as entirely free from criminality? Why should an ex-convict be condemned to live as a social outcast for the rest of his life?

Galsworthy suggests that crime should not be regarded merely as an offence against the law but also as a social and psychological disease. Therefore, there is an urgent need to reform both the penal code and the prison system. The machinery of justice should adopt not only a punitive but also a preventive and rehabilitative approach. Prisoners should be treated as individuals suffering from moral or psychological weakness rather than as irredeemable criminals. Thus, *Justice* offers a powerful criticism of the existing penal system and prison administration in England. The wheel of justice relentlessly grinds down its victims. The law, as it exists, compels

even the most enlightened judge to administer punishment according to its provisions, however deeply he may feel that such justice destroys rather than reforms the offender.

In *Justice*, Falder, a lawyer's clerk, is deeply moved by pity for Ruth Honeywill, whose life has become miserable under the cruelty of her brutal husband. Desperate to rescue her and unable to find the necessary money, he commits forgery by altering a cheque in a moment of emotional weakness. Sensitive and emotionally unstable by nature, Falder is not in full control of himself when he commits the offence. Yet that single impulsive act determines the course of his entire life. Once the machinery of justice is set in motion, it crushes him mercilessly. Ironically, Falder becomes the victim not of injustice but of justice itself. Such is the tragic paradox that Galsworthy exposes in the play.

The play also presents a deeply moving picture of the effects of prison life upon the offender. Galsworthy portrays the stifling misery of solitary confinement with remarkable realism. Falder's experiences within his prison cell reveal a silent horror that words alone can scarcely express. His mental agony, loneliness, and gradual psychological disintegration constitute one of the most powerful indictments of the prison system in modern English drama.

The irony of the situation lies in the fact that those responsible for administering the law sincerely believe that they are serving society by inflicting such punishments upon convicts. Even the prison doctors concern themselves only with the prisoners' physical condition, measuring their weight and pulse, while completely ignoring their mental and emotional suffering. Far from preventing crime, the prison system merely perpetuates the cycle of criminality. Instead of reforming offenders, it destroys their confidence, dignity, and hope, thereby making their return to normal social life almost impossible.

The principle of justice has been effectively illustrated by the dramatist in *Justice* through the character of Falder. Falder is an unintentional criminal who falls into the trap of the law. In a moment of emotional crisis, he commits forgery by altering the figures on a cheque in order to obtain money to rescue the woman he loves, whose life has become unbearable. His forgery is detected, and he is arrested, tried in a court of law, and sentenced to three years' rigorous imprisonment. The law is portrayed as a blind and relentless force. It takes no cognizance of the circumstances behind a crime but judges a person solely on the basis of evidence. It remains indifferent to humanitarian considerations.

Mr. Frome describes prisons as "ill-starred ships" manned by luckless crews. No one who embarks upon such a voyage ever truly returns; he is lost forever. This, according to him, is the fate of those confined to prison. Many prisoners who committed crimes under the pressure of circumstances could have become respectable citizens had they not been subjected to the destructive influence of the prison system. Instead, they are transformed into habitual criminals because of its inhuman discipline. Within the prison, individuality and personal identity are completely erased. Falder ceases to be an individual and becomes merely Prisoner No. 3007. Every inmate is indiscriminately branded as a criminal type, regardless of the circumstances of the offence.

In *Justice*, Galsworthy vividly reflects the miserable condition of prisoners. Moaney, one of the luckless inmates, is exhausted by solitary confinement and finds it almost impossible to endure the monotony of prison life. The work assigned to him is wholly unsuited to his previous experience and temperament. O'Cleary complains bitterly about mat-making, declaring: "Oh! I can do it on my head. It is the miserablest stuff—it wouldn't make the brains of a mouse."

Clipton, on the other hand, complains of the continual darkness in the prison cells. Gradually, his eyesight begins to fail because he is deprived of sunlight and forced to live in perpetual gloom.

Prisoners undergoing solitary confinement are not permitted to receive visitors. Consequently, they become desperate and gradually lose their mental balance. To them, a few hours of solitary confinement appear as long as years. Falder expresses this unbearable psychological suffering when he says: "A day shut up in your cell, thinking and brooding as I do, is longer than a year outside."

Unable to endure the isolation, he paces restlessly within his cell like a caged wild animal. He feels an irresistible urge to dash his head against the wall. Even Mr. Cokeson remarks that he would not keep a dog in solitary confinement. The mere thought of returning to prison becomes so terrifying to Falder that, when he is arrested once again, he commits suicide.

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