

T. M. OSBORNE TO BE WARDEN AT SING SING

**Noted Prison Reformer Will Take
Office on Dec. 1—Approved
by Glynn and Whitman.**

BIG SHAKE-UP PREDICTED

Warden-Elect Disapproves of Capital Punishment, but Would Make Executions 'Public Exhibitions.'

Thomas Mott Osborne of Auburn, N. Y., retired manufacturer, world traveler, lecturer, writer, and prison reformer, has accepted the offer of John B. Riley, State Superintendent of Prisons, of the post of the Warden of Sing Sing Prison. He will take office on Dec. 1, and will relieve ex-Judge George S. Weed, who was temporarily assigned to Sing Sing, when Warden Thomas J. McCormick was ousted on Oct. 30 as the result of the Sullivan scandal. As Warden Mr. Osborne will get a salary of \$3,500.

The selection of Mr. Osborne has the approval of course of Gov. Glynn, and also of Gov.-elect Whitman. The acceptance of the wardenship was not made public by the State Prison Association until after Mr. Osborne had spent several hours with Mr. Whitman. Mr. Osborne is a Democrat, but he has long worked against the control of the Democratic Party in this State by Charles F. Murphy. The appointment is not regarded in any way as a political appointment, and Mr. Whitman, while refusing to talk about Mr. Osborne's selection, seemed most pleased. The Governor-elect had publicly expressed himself in favor of Mr. Osborne on several occasions.

It was only after a long consideration that Mr. Osborne consented to "take the job," as he put it last night. Gov. Glynn and Supt. Riley, it is understood, had to use much persuasion to get him back into official life. Mr. Osborne, in his letter of acceptance, made it clear that he was accepting the post for the simple reason that he was convinced he could be of service to the cause of prison reform in Sing Sing. Here is his letter:

Hotel Belmont, New York City,

Nov. 19, 1914.

Honorable John B. Riley, Superintendent of

Prisons, Albany, N. Y.

My Dear Sir: You have requested me to accept the post of Warden of Sing Sing Prison, and Gov. Glynn has joined in that request. I appreciate very deeply the confidence thus expressed, and my delay in giving you a definite answer has been caused only by my doubt as to whether I could best serve the cause of prison reform by accepting an official position.

There has been expressed to me from many directions so strong a desire that I should undertake this responsibility that I have decided to do so. I am not unaware of the many difficulties connected with the position, but the possibilities of service seem great enough to more than counterbalance them.

The administration of its prisons has in general in the past been deeply discreditable to New York State. There has not only been the handicap of disgraceful physical conditions and inadequate legislation, but there has been only too often a lack of plain honesty and ordinary intelligence. The effect of this upon the human beings held as prisoners by the State has been most deplorable, resulting not only in unpardonable injustice during imprisonment, but also in the yearly return to society of many hundreds of men less able to get along in the world than when they were first sentenced.

I have sympathized fully with your efforts to remedy the evils of the old system, and have rejoiced in the results. It has been a great privilege to assist in the really wonderful beginnings of a sane and sensible prison system at Auburn under Warden Rattigan. If I can now be of use in helping forward the cause at Sing Sing, I do not feel at liberty to decline the task, notwithstanding the serious difficulties that surround it. Complete success does not seem to me possible under existing conditions; but I have been frequently surprised at what can be accomplished by the application of sincerity and common-sense to difficult problems.

I am willing to become Warden of Sing Sing Prison and do my duty in the office to the best of my ability as long as I can be of more service there than elsewhere to the cause of prison reform. Yours very truly,

THOMAS MOTT OSBORNE.

Members of the State Prison Association were much pleased by the selection of Mr. Osborne. They had come into close touch with him as Chairman of the Commission on Prison Reform, but they had little hope of seeing Mr. Osborne accept an official position. Dr. O. F. Lewis, General Secretary of the association, said last night that he considered the appointment a master stroke. He intimated that a general shake-up among minor prison officials in Sing Sing would follow.

Mr. Osborne is 55 years old and a graduate of Harvard University of the class of 1884. His father founded a big harvester manufacturing concern which later became a part of the Harvester Trust. Thomas Mott Osborne engaged in business after graduation, but gradually got out of business and took interest in politics. He was the first member of his family to join the Democratic Party. He became popular in Auburn and was twice elected as Mayor of that city, overcoming strong Republican majorities. In 1907 Gov. Hughes appointed him as a member of the up-State Civil Service Commission, and he resigned in 1910 to fight the evils of the political machines of the State. Gov. Dix appointed him as Forest, Fish and Game Commissioner in 1910, and he resigned from this commission, too. Gov. Sulzer made him Chairman of the Commission on Prison Reform.

It was in the capacity of Prison Reform Commissioner that Mr. Osborne last Fall voluntarily entered Auburn prison for a "term of service." For six days he followed the routine of the convicts and experienced every form of prison degradation at hand. He expressed the belief at the time that he had to live with the prisoners to best understand what course to pursue in the matter of their reformation.

When seen at the Hotel Belmont last night he seemed quite elated over his chance to do something in the way of reform for Sing Sing. He refused to say what changes he would institute at Sing Sing. His writings on prison reform, however, indicate that he will organize a welfare league; that he will keep the prisoners outdoors as much as possible, and that he will give every opportunity for self-government. Mr. Osborne believes that existing penal conditions make bad men worse.

For one thing Mr. Osborne does not approve of capital punishment. When a reporter of THE TIMES referred to recent scenes in the death chamber of Sing Sing Mr. Osborne expressed his disgust over the electrical chair.

"You'll never see me in the death house when a man must go to the chair," he said.

"Doesn't the law provide for the warden's presence?" asked the reporter.

"I think there is a way out of that," replied Mr. Osborne.

"Will you advocate legislation for the abolition of capital punishment?" he was asked.

"I will support such legislation," he replied. "If we cannot have an abolition of capital punishment we ought to have public exhibitions of executions, I believe."

"Do you mean that you would favor the public staging of deaths in the electric chair?" asked the reporter.

"Yes, why make it a secret affair. If we must have capital punishment we might as well make it the greatest possible deterrent of crime," he said.

The New York Times

Published: November 20, 1914

Copyright © The New York Times