

Holmes Alexander Clark the Reformer

WASHINGTON—The attorney general of the United States must be, wrote a cabinet member in the regime of J. Q. Adams, "not only a good lawyer, but a safe statesman. . . . His labors are always connected with perplexing problems and relate to every variety of questions which can arise under our institutions . . ."

Ramsey Clark, 66th attorney general, takes this dual assignment of lawyer-statesman seriously. In the course of a lengthy interview, scheduled for 20 minutes but lasting over an hour, Clark set forth his philosophy as a prosecutor of criminal justice, limiting the discussion to that field.

He clearly thinks of himself as having responsibility for national improvement as well as for law enforcement. He is a reformer as well as a prosecutor.

Mr. Clark makes a neat division between the roles. His words, he says, meaning his public speeches, are one thing. His actions, meaning his prosecutions, are another. He keeps his sentiments out of his cases.

But there may be more ambivalence than he suspects. In his addresses he is pleading for a society that would make his work of punishing criminals disappear. It is hard to tell whether he is more attached to the vision than to the realities. He told the National Conference on Crime Control:

"Through long-range effort we can conquer poverty, ignorance, disease, discrimination, social tension, despair, family breakdown, the dehumanization of mass culture (and) injustice."

This is quite a catalogue of social planning, and it became evident in questioning Mr. Clark that he underestimates his content of evangelism when speaking before people who came to hear him discuss law enforcement.

Like Atty. Gen. Robert Ken-

nedy, who left his mark on the post-Eisenhower Justice Department, Mr. Clark divides the



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criminal population into professionals and amateurs.

Organized crime, he says, is a "still target," at which the department can take dead aim. This year's workload of criminal cases is 30 per cent higher than last year's. The several bills which Mr. Clark had recommended to Congress will keep him even busier against professional lawbreakers.

But the amateurs are much more numerous, and much harder to cope with. Most crime is "capricious."

About one-third of all murders are committed within the family circle. Almost half are the result of quarrels between friends and lovers. These killings are not preventable, and

their punishment is not very useful.

The most fertile breeding place of crime is in the penal system. Correction, especially among the young, can cut down crime at its lowest level. But four-fifths of the persons who get jailed for misdemeanors later get imprisoned for felonies.

"Prisons make criminals," says Mr. Clark. "Nine out of 10 criminals finally get released. I think we need longer and more flexible sentences. Society has a right to know that we either don't release dangerous characters or that we change them."

Deservedly or not, policemen are looked upon as enemies rather than protectors in areas where a high rate of crime exists. Mr. Clark feels that the best solution is to raise standards of police recruitment and to raise salaries.

Like most intelligent men without much experience to go on, Mr. Clark seeks wisdom in advice and in reading. He talks deeply with FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

In discussing crime, punishment and integrity of character, he referred to passages by the Russian author Dostoevski and Americans Jack London and Owen Wister.

At 39, Ramsey Clark very much wants to be the "good lawyer . . . safe statesman" that the job requires. He's still got a way to go, and he seems to know it.

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