

The Prison Mirror.

Edited and Published by the Inmates.

Entered at the Post Office at Stillwater Minn. as Second Class Mail Matter.

Subscription Rates.

THE PRISON MIRROR is issued every Wednesday morning at the following rates:

One Year.....\$1.00
Six Months......60
Three Months......35
Single Copies......5

Subscriptions must be paid invariably in advance. Advertising rates given upon application. Address, EDITOR PRISON MIRROR, Stillwater, Minn.

TO THE PUBLIC.

THE PRISON MIRROR is a weekly paper published in the Minnesota state prison. All matter published in its columns is contributed by the inmates, except that properly credited. Its support must come from the outside as every inmate is given a paper without cost. It is published in the interest of the prison library and after paying for the printing outfit, contributed \$150 to the library fund the first year. Its objects are to encourage individual intellectual effort, provide a healthy journal for the inmates of this and other prisons, and, above all, to acquaint the outside world with the needs of the prison by reflecting its inner life and thus aid the cause of moral advancement and prison reform. THE MIRROR will be sent to any address on receipt of subscription price: \$1.00 per year, 60c. for six months.

FIVE YEARS HENCE.

My dear Dan: When your eyes rest upon these lines, and you note the place from which I am writing, do not think for an instant that I have again registered behind the bars, and taken up my residence here for a period of years; but note the fact that I am here as a visitor to the scenes of our former disgrace, and am looking with amazement at the wonderful changes that have been wrought.

I am seated on the brow of the bluff, under the shade of one of those little scrub-oaks which we used to look with longing eyes toward, especially when a couple of youthful lovers came here on Saturday afternoon to gaze down upon our disfigured forms in the attire symbolic of ferocity. I now look down upon the same prison buildings and see passing from shop to shop neatly-dressed men, in suits of three colors. I learned yesterday from the warden, after making a tour of the prison, that the inmates are graded, and the three colors represent the classes to which they belong. While at labor in the shops (the state account plan is now in vogue), each man has a change of working clothes, consisting of a cap, blouse and overalls. These are kept in a press to which each man carries his key, and on entering the shop he prepares for labor by removing his coat, vest and cap, placing them in the press, and dons his working suit. Ten minutes before leaving the shop he removes his working suit, washes his face and hands in a tin basin, one of which serves for four men, and again puts on his coat and cap. This method you will recognize as somewhat different from the plan in vogue when we were inmates of the prison. Then you will remember there were men in our shop who did not wash their faces and hands oftener than once a month, and only took their "annual" bath when compelled to by the officers. Now the bathing of face and hands twice a day and the body once a week is compulsory.

The process of grading will, no doubt, interest you, but I cannot describe it in full, though will give you some of its features: When a prisoner is delivered at the prison, he is taken into a room, while yet in his citizen clothes, and there by the Deputy Warden, with a stenographer present, he is questioned as to his past life, and the offense for which he is to undergo imprisonment. His story is taken by the stenographer, and whenever desired can be reduced to writing; but in most cases it remains on file in the Warden's office and is only referred to when necessary. The Warden related to me an incident which goes to show some of the many ways this plan assists them. He said: "About two years ago a man of striking appearance was sentenced to ten years for forgery. The offense was given wide-spread notoriety, as such matters usually are, and he was credited with being a refined gentleman, of good family, and a novice in crime. When he was delivered at the prison I was struck by the unusual agitation he was undergoing, and I in-

structed the Deputy to ascertain if possible its cause. After the interview by the Deputy, I had the stenographer read his notes to me, and I discovered that he had absolutely refused to tell anything regarding his identity. Among other things he said to the Deputy, in answer to a pressing question as to his identity, 'No, I will die before I tell you who I am. As regards my antecedents, I will tell you this, and if it will be of any service to you well and good, if not you will have to pursue the course you deem best: I am not a criminal; my relatives are respectable, and rank with the first families of my native state. I am here through mistaken identity and I have no hope of pardon for I will not reveal my identity, and I have no one on whom I can call for assistance without exposing myself.' I went to this man's cell while he was yet in his citizen's suit and tried to induce him to reveal himself to me. He would not do so, and I abandoned the effort. Well, when he was taken to the bath house to be measured and dressed (the Bertillon system prevails now in all the principal prisons of the country) he showed still greater agitation. So marked was it that the guard who conducted the measurements, came immediately to me, when he had finished. We compared his measurements with our register of other prisons, and a few minutes revealed the fact that the gentleman had been an inmate of no less than three prisons, and was not only a forger but an all-round thief." Now, Dan, you will recognize the advantages of the plans in vogue over those under which we were required to serve our terms. If the gentleman referred to by the Warden had been an inmate at the time we were, he would, in all probability, have gone to the topmost rounds of prison respectability, and would have reaped advantages innumerable over those more deserving. He was well educated, refined in manner and capable of commanding the entire respect of the prison officials. His agitation would have been taken for sentiment of the most laudable character, and he would have been a hero. But the Deputy's interview drew out his play and the system of identification destroyed his sentimentality. You see he had been in prison and knew just how to act to "win" the officers. He had not a true, manly principle in his nature, as was shown by his subsequent conduct. He is here yet but his whole manner is changed and he will doubtless go out no worse than he entered, and if he can be improved by imprisonment the opportunities are here for him to do so. The prisoner after being clothed in the suit of the lower grade, is assigned a place in the shop and may advance rapidly.

Another very great change is the board of pardons, which is composed of three fair, non-partisan, philanthropists. They are appointed by the Governor, but only two can be of one political party, and as the appointments are made from those nominated by the supreme judges of the state, they are practically free from political influences, and hold their office during life, unless removed for cause. When a vacancy occurs, each of the supreme judges of the state nominates a man, and from these nominations the Governor makes the appointment. The board convenes every month and its members are at all times privileged to go through the prison when they please. They are each required to spend two days a month at the prison, interviewing those prisoners who are seeking clemency, or may have grievances. They also make the acquaintance of every prisoner and when one is discharged by their decision or at the expiration of his sentence, they provide employment for him or sustain him until he procures employment. The fund for this purpose is furnished partly by the surplus from earnings of the prison and partly by appropriation. The parole system extends to all prisoners and as strange as it may seem to you there are but five men in the prison who were there when we were, and the population of the prison is but two hundred. Here you will see the direct effect of confining those in prison whom society has reason to fear and releasing those who have made a misstep but are in no respect different from the generality of society at large.

All prisoners are sentenced for a definite period of years, but may be released at any time when the board of pardons so decide. The indeterminate sentence does not prevail nor do I believe it ever will. The board supplies all call for an indeterminate sentence and the Bertillon system makes identity certain in a professional criminal, and it is made so sultry for him that he is usually very ready to accept an honorable position at the expiration of his sentence, and even the professional often receives the benefit of the board's action and fills with credit the position secured for him.

One very commendable feature of the prison, and one which struck me as one of the most sensible from every point of view, is the educational advantages offered. There is a regularly organized school comprising the whole prison. The better educated of the prisoners are teachers, and the others are pupils, organized in regular classes, and graded by a simple but effective marking system. The Chaplains are the superintendents of the school, and they together with the Warden and Deputy appoint the teachers. There is a reading room in which all the inmates of the first class may congregate in the evenings and on Sabbath afternoons and read the daily papers and leading magazines, when not employed in the school. Classes are so arranged that each inmate of the first class, (this class is made up of all degrees of education, the requirements for admission being manly, straightforward conduct) can spend at least three evenings a week in the reading room. Those of the other classes spend their time in study or as they think best, when not in school, but with few exceptions, the one object sought is to gain admission to the privileged class, for admission to it means probable consideration by the board of pardons, better clothes, better food, and numerous privileges. What a fallacy that was which so long held sway in the prisons, when all men were supposed to be treated alike. How much better it would have been if they had said: "We will treat you as you deserve to be treated—as your conduct warrants." Now a distinction can be made between servile, action, and true manly conduct.

Another change I will mention is the guards and their treatment. They, too, are graded and receive salaries from one thousand to two thousand a year and board themselves. By this means they can afford to be thoroughly interested in their work, knowing that the eyes of the Warden and the members of the board of pardons are always upon them.

And now Dan, I must close my letter and go down to the prison, as I want to see the men come in from the shops and I have but thirty minutes to make the trip in. When you write me let it be such a letter as can be published in THE PRISON MIRROR. The paper has improved wonderfully, and is now an eight-page journal with a circulation of five thousand. It has a regular correspondent in almost every prison of the country and gives a brief summary of the prison news throughout the country. In THE MIRROR office all the work is done by the inmates and they have a press, and a full-fledged printing outfit.

But I must "fly," so good bye until I can hear from you. Your friend,

OBSERVER.

Stillwater, Minn., Aug. 10, 1893.

[Original.]

THANKSGIVING DREAM.

There ne'er was a turkey like this I will mention
And if, gentle reader, you'll give your attention,
I'll tell you a tale of effect and its cause,
That will help you to chuckle and wiggle your jaws
In heart-felt enjoyment, just simply because
The like is unknown to natural laws.

This bird was raised on the shores of St. Croix,
(This was told to our Steward when he was a boy.)
And so great was its age and wonderful growth
That the Warden averred, and the Doctor made oath,
And the Deputies declared they would bet what they was worth
'Twould out-weigh Alexander, and Goldsmith out-girth.

So ponderous it was when it was delivered,
(By way of the lake), that the wharf planks were slivered
And ground in the earth, at a great loss to all,
For it lost the left wing by the force of the fall,
And in lifting his "highness" to the height of the wall

A toe nail-dropped off and stunned Steward Hall.
But once in the yard the boys were called round,
Some mounted step-ladders, some stood on the ground,
And with axes and saws and picks and crow-bars,
The task was pursued till out came the stars,
And declared to the carvers "The bird is from Mars."

"That's right," said the boys, "we've got her in tow
She may be from Sheol for aught that we know."
At nine in the evening the back bone is broke
By a sledge hammer blow by the sturdy O'Roque
And by twelve all was quiet, the cook had awoke
And lighted a fire and, laughed at the joke.

For joke it was: 'twas brought for a hen—
The joke was discovered by one of the men
When dissecting the creature, they said 'twould be tender
For all supposed 'twas the feminine gender
They soon laughed out and lauded the sender
For fooling our Steward on a pretense so slender.

To shorten our story we must skip past the acts
Of preparing and cooking, and whatever this lacks
You may charge to THE MIRROR for hurrying us through

To the gist of our story and making us do
In these few lines, what, twixt me and you
Would fill a large volume, and stick to what's true.

* * * * *
'Tis Thanksgiving day, the boys are released
To tell funny stories and sit at the feast—
Of the champion turkey of all times and nations
The dinner is served in extra-large rations
To meet the demand of these Thanksgiving sessions

Of we who are caged for our healths and salvations.
"But hold! is that turkey? No, this needs no proofs

That turkeys are bipeds and cannot have hoofs—
Not a bovine either for their hoofs are split
While this one is solid—a shoe has been fit—
'Tis the hoof of a horse in my dish I have—git
Away from my door, I'm having a fit."

So eadeth my dream, in joy 'twas begun,
But all is vanity under the sun;
The castles I build, so have builded all men:
Theirs ending in death and mine in the "pen."
DODO.

OYSTERS!

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