

# The Prison Mirror.

Edited and Published by the Inmates.

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## 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.

An annual winter meeting of the Editors' and Publishers' Association of Minnesota will be held in the Chamber of Commerce, St. Paul, Feb. 12 and 13. THE MIRROR received one of the programs with this written across the back: "If you can't come you can be with us in spirit." All right.

"The Eye" found its way to our table for the first time this week. It comes up fully to what it claims to be—a journal of society, literature, drama, politics and fiction. It is the best journal of its class published west of New York that we have seen. It is convenient in size, neat in appearance, and there is not a dull word in it between the covers.

An inmate of the state prison at Anamosa, Ia., was found dead in the dungeon one morning last week. He was found hanging by the neck to an iron ring in the wall of the dungeon where he had been confined for several days. He had no known friends so he was buried in the prison graveyard. Sometimes it is better to die than to live.

THE PRISON MIRROR, published by the inmates of the state penitentiary at Stillwater, Minn., is one of the brightest and best of all the exchanges received at this office. It is always filled full of good sound writings. It is a four page, four column sheet, neatly printed and doubly worth the subscription price—\$1.00 per year.—New Prague Times.

No more welcome sheet than THE PRISON MIRROR, edited and published by the inmates of the Stillwater (Minn.) prison, comes to our table. 'Tis a bright little sheet and does credit to the present editorial staff. Shut off from the outside world—cramped by the monotony of prison life, the contributors still show a cheerfulness that proves "Many a noble heart beats beneath a rough exterior." Success to THE MIRROR and may the lads who edit it come forth from the prison walls more able to withstand the temptations that cross their path, schooled as they have been by that severe teacher, experience.—Lone Tree Press, Seymour, Ia.

The state prison at Deer Lodge, Mont., is greatly overcrowded at present, and the management is perplexed with the question of what to do with the output of the spring courts. If Montana had a parole law, as every state should, it could exercise it now to a good advantage. Under a wisely administered parole law it would be many years before additional prisons would be necessary; the cost of maintenance would be greatly reduced; and a large number of men now being worked in prisons at a loss to the state might be outside earning their own living and in many cases supporting their families who are being made the greater sufferers by the imprisonment of their natural providers. It is true that some families are better off by the absence of the husband, but there are many who, left destitute, are dependent on begrudged charity. Everybody deplors such a result

of the law's effects, and nearly every one considers it unavoidable, but it is not so in all cases. The purpose of imprisonment in many such cases can be more fully attained by a well conducted parole system. The time is not far distant when every state in the Union will recognize the value of a parole law.

## HOME READING.

We are in prison. How we come to be here makes little difference now. We all want our liberty. No other boon could be granted us that we would hail with so much delight. Never a day goes by but what our thoughts dwell upon that time when we will be called to doff the felon's garb, don a "freedom" suit, and with a glad heart pass out through the vestibule by which we entered with a sinking heart. But how will it be with us a week, a month or a year after we have left the prison. Will liberty seem so dear, such a priceless treasure? To some it will certainly not. They will not have realized their prison dreams. They will imperil its safety in the pursuits of something of infinitely less value. They will attempt to obtain quickly by unlawful means that which a little patience and perseverance would entitle them to. They will barter their liberty to gratify a desire for some pleasure that they could easily do without. A very small percentage of the crimes committed are prompted by anger. Most crimes are committed in the direct or indirect pursuit of pleasure. They want to dance without paying for the piper; partake of the feast without helping in its preparation; eat the kernel from which others have removed the shell; in short, they wish to gain at one fell swoop that which patient industry has been years in accumulating. Most of us are inclined to justify our own dishonesty by referring to the thousands of rogues who have become rich by defrauding the public and individuals, but are permitted to roll in luxury undisturbed by the hounds of the law. We say that it is no worse for us to pick a pocket, rob a safe, plunder a dwelling, or forge a check, than it is for the tradesmen to defraud by false weights and measures, sell worthless stocks, etc. Neither is it any more wrong in a moral sense, but it is a greater wrong to ourselves, not simply because public opinion, which rules the world, is more severe in its judgment of such offenses, but because they have a more degrading, more brutalizing effect upon the nature of the individuals who practice their commission. The doing of such things degrades us in our own estimation and makes us outcasts from what we ourselves consider respectable society. We who have the power to reason logically—and few will admit that they have not such power—must see that we are not only committing crimes against those who never wronged us in any way, but against ourselves. We are prostituting the noble faculties given us by the Creator for some nobler purpose than that of pandering to the base cravings of a structure of mere earth and conducting it through a brief and aimless existence. If the whole human family should undertake to get through life's journey as many of us have tried to, it would not be long before the emnants of the race would be seeking safety from each other in mountain caves. We have no toleration for those who injure us, therefore we should respect the rights of others. We burn with indignation when we read of some scoundrel defrauding the poor of their hard-earned savings; yet we will excuse ourselves for doing the same thing in some other way. See how it is with us here in prison. We are unsparing in our condemnation of those of our fellow-prisoners who occasionally pilfer things from our cells while we are absent working in the shops. We think there is no punishment too severe for them; yet they are no worse or their offense any greater than that of the man who robs the homes of industrious, law-abiding persons outside of prison. Some of you will say, "Oh we are like a family and should not rob each other." That is a good reason, but is just as applicable outside of prison as inside; for humanity is nothing more than one large family whose happiness and well-being is regulated by the conduct of its members and the confidence they can repose in each other's

trustworthiness. We all despise a traitor; yet we are traitors who have betrayed the confidence of our neighbor by despoiling him of his legitimate rights. But in such a course we are the greater sufferers, for we lose all the real sweets of life, which are self-conscious integrity, respect of our fellow-beings and the doing of good to others. So while we are here in prison where we realize the full worth of liberty, let us plan how we may retain it when it is again in our possession rather than how we may deprive others of rightful possessions. Let us prepare for liberty and not imprisonment and then when we are free we will be free indeed.

## Female Convicts.

It is rather strange that dealing with the subject of crime and its cure, so little attention is given to means by which female criminals may be reclaimed.

Women, as a rule, form a very small percentage of our convicted criminal population. It may truly be said that if men were in any slight proportion as honest and upright as the weaker sex, crime would not be such an all-important torment to thinking people of this age.

Upon looking over the records of the crimes of which most female prisoners are convicted it will be found that the percentage of regulation robbers, such as burglars, pickpockets, etc., are very small. The offenses generally attributed to women are, in nearly every case, the result of unsound social conditions. While these offenses are very often of an extremely heinous nature, still, if the whole truth were known in many cases, it would be found that the circumstances of the commission of such crimes are not lacking in extenuating conditions. Very often the brutal and inhuman conduct of husbands leads women to the commission of crimes the very thought of which would send them into hysterics under ordinary conditions.

It must be remembered that women are practically defenseless when domineering man so loses his sense of manliness as to trample on their natural rights and make them his slaves; and in such cases when woman, in her just anger, seeks retaliation it must be decisive. It is generally a severe strain upon woman to make the effort that will rescue her from an unbearable tyranny, and if not successful when she makes the attempt, must ever afterward succumb to her enforced serfdom.

When a woman is convicted of any specific crime, society gives her a secondary trial and usually finds her guilty of all other crimes it is possible for the most degraded woman to commit. She is charged with being immoral and is shunned by the most intimate friends of her own sex. It matters not what the original charge may have been, the elongated-visaged scandal-mongers will prove to you that it is not the only crime she has committed. Let us consider a moment what the result would be if society dealt in an equally harsh manner with male criminals. Certain it is that the latter have no path of roses to traverse after serving a term in prison. Still their lot is an enviable one when compared to that of the female ex-convict. In her case all legitimate means of employment are denied her wherever her record is known or hinted at. Men and women who go to church every Sunday and pray for "the poor benighted souls that are following in the path of wickedness," shudder at the sight of the woman whom society has branded as an outcast, and chases her away from their door, fearing that even the sight of her will taint them. The only door that is freely opened to the discharged female prisoner, and the one to which she is constantly drawn, is the portal that opens to a life of misery and shame.

It seems to make no difference what the nature of a crime is that a woman is imprisoned for—the world will always consider her guilty of a special additional crime, even though there is not one iota of actual evidence to substantiate the belief. And even though it were really true that these women are guilty of the additional crime alleged, does that make them any worse than the male prisoner, or to go still further, does it make them any worse than a very large percentage of the average men of to-day? If the writer was offered a choice between the acceptance of one cent for every impure man found, and \$10.00 for every one who could conscientiously "throw the first stone," he would choose the former if his intention was to accumulate wealth rapidly. In dealing with many serious subjects of every-day life society's written and unwritten laws are a mass of rancid rottenness, the only excuse for the existence of which is the tissue paper covering of propriety that prevents such decrees from enveloping the makers in their noxious exhalations.

Women are the preservers of the purity of the world and it is the greatest injustice to shun one who has fallen by the wayside, as though she were a loathsome leper. If

any preference is to be shown by the philanthropically inclined, it should be to women who have fallen rather than to men. At present the reverse is in vogue; there are people who will gladly help a man to rise from his degraded condition, but if a woman applies for help for a like purpose she is coldly received—if received at all—and the most that is ever done for her is the giving of a large dose of that cheap tonic—good advice.

Very often we notice that the reports detailing the falling from grace of a man are headed "A Woman in the Case." Where will you see a similar excuse or palliating circumstance mentioned when a woman commits a crime? It is decidedly wrong to condemn women to a life of infamy simply because they have committed a single misdeed, while men may commit crimes daily and still be received by the world with open arms. Women should be given the same opportunities as men have to regain what they may have lost by past follies. Until the oppressive yoke of social ostracism is taken from the necks of women who have sinned it will be impossible for them—no matter how great their efforts—to cleanse their character of the stain that is in many instances, caused by the very persons who are loudest in deriding them. RONDA.

## Good Words From California.

There is no subject that should be more carefully looked after than prison reform, or to make it more plain, the reformation of those who have by some act become inmates of the prison. We have in this country some few philanthropists who give this matter attention, and yet there is a field for a great deal more work in that direction than is being done. There is no heart that is entirely callous to all affection or if not affection at least that interest that makes one feel, no matter how steeped in crime, that there is some person who cares for them, and although they may be incarcerated between dark walls to pay the penalty of crime they have not been entirely forgotten by their fellowmen. We have just been reading an account of a Christmas dinner given the inmates of the Minnesota penitentiary and the good feeling and the grateful acknowledgments of these unfortunates. \* \* \* There is no penitentiary in the broad land that is so well and humanely conducted as that in Minnesota, and we venture the assertion there is no other institution of the character that sends out so many of its inmates reformed men and women who lived down the misfortune that has befallen them. Kindness is one of the best reformers on earth and those who are thus kindly and considerately treated cannot help but to become better.—The Lake County (Cal.) Avalanche.

## Saved By His Boy.

A 2½ year old child saved his father from going to the penitentiary the other day. The father had been arrested on complaint of his wife for abuse and neglect. He was addicted to drink, and his family had been made to suffer all the miseries which that habit entails. On being brought before the police magistrate that officer was inclined to give him the punishment which the law provides. The wife began to relent and beg the magistrate to be lenient for this time. Seated on a chair near by was the little boy, apparently engrossed in admiring the cuts in a newspaper he was holding upside down. The magistrate, after mentally resolving to give the man another chance turned to the boy and said: "What do you say, my lad; shall I send your father to the penitentiary?" The little fellow lifted his big blue eyes from the paper, gazed at the group in an inquiring way, and then, in a deliberate manner and with all the dignity of a judge on the bench he said: "I wouldn't do that." The father was released at once.—Albany Argus.

## Hope.

Like a bubbling spring which constantly throws up its pure, sparkling water and refreshes the flowers that bloom at its base, so is Hope to the human heart. Each day brings its troubles, with each day comes sorrow, each day is burdened with care and disappointments, yet Hope never falters. No matter how heavy the load may be, Hope whispers—"courage, all will be well," and the weary toiler in life's battle nerves himself for another struggle, led on by that silent monitor that always cheers in the darkest hours of one's career. When hope dies, despair asserts control, and life no longer has any charms. All becomes dark, and weary, and dreary, and then—DEATH! SUICIDE! Without Hope life would be a blank; with Hope it is a struggle to the end, and even beyond the confines of this world Hope beckons us on into the untried fields of another land. Oh! blessed, precious Hope! Thou art man's true friend; without thee the world would be shrouded in darkness, while with thee smiles play amid the tears of an incomplete, struggling, hopeful human race.—T. M. Newson, in Midway News.

Death advertises itself in many ways, and it generally performs what it advertises.—Texas Siftings.