

PRISON INDUSTRIES.

I have been extending my acquaintance a little this last week, and have been picking up opinions as to the quarters which, upon the whole, may be considered the most comfortable for the winter months. We cannot, it must be remembered, all of us betake ourselves to summer climes when November fogs and frosts come down upon us; but just as in the summer time those who cannot go to the Rhine or Switzerland can at least go hop-picking, so in the winter those who cannot take flight to Mentone or Cannes can at least go to Wandsworth or to Coldbath Fields, and be sure of a genial and comfortable atmosphere. Any one who on a raw, uncomfortable winter's morning has stood at the portal of the famous noisiness of Coldbath Fields and watched those who are turned out after doing penance there for a time must have experienced a feeling of commiseration such as he would be likely to feel at seeing a dormouse or a squirrel turned out of its warm nest into the winter's snow.

"Jolly miserable out 'ere, Bob," an old stager was heard to remark on emerging the other morning into the bleak outer world. "I'm in again for the winter, I reckon."

"I have reason to believe that that is by no means a singular sentiment." Of course it is only here and there one who has the hardened turpitude to admit a preference for the inside of a gaol on his own behalf. A liberated gaol bird will usually disclaim any such idea with sad and solemn emphasis, but he will generally be of opinion that "some fellows" would rather be inside than out. "It all depends, ye see," said a new acquaintance of mine lately. "Some chaps have got good 'omes to go to, and some ain't. Some got a trade to go to work at, and some ain't, and some chaps are rather particular about their feed, and some chaps ain't. There's coves as 'll feel nice and tight and comfortable like after a breakfast o' bread and gruel. Lor' bless'e, yes; and its the same all sorts o' ways. I ha' know'n chaps as'd sleep well on a bed o' tin-tacks if they had to do it, and there's some as don't sleep on them plank beds not ten minutes together. Then the sort o' work you drop in for has a good deal to do with it. Own trade? Yes; but you all ha' do yer month solitary first, and that's all hoakum-pickin'. Don't mind hoakum-pickin', I don't. It's the solitary as gives you the hump. After that if you've got a trade you can work in 'sociation. Mo? No. I ain't got one—not to say a trade, yer know. I can drive a haws or took a hairer o' vegetables, and I can make a tidy basket, mind ye, if I could find work. Yes, I learned that inside. Must have been a long-term man? Yes, that's true enough, sir; I had eighteen months of it. No, that wasn't my first, I'm sorry to say. My little go was for six months, and then a part o' my time I was in the laundry. I hates that line, I do. Why? Well, blessed if I knows hardly. There's two or three things. In the first place, a cove don't like bein' made into a sort o' cock washerwoman; 'tain't what you may call a man's work. Then they tasks you in that. They gives 'e a little tiddy bit o' soap, and you has to wash thirty shirts. That's a day's work, and every man has to put his own tally—that's a little bit o' tin with yer number on it, ye know—on to his own lot, and when they be dry, if they ain't just tip-top as they ought to be, they bundles 'em back, and you has to do 'em over again to-morrow, as well as another thirty. You can't shirk a bit there. There's a warden sits up on a high stool, with a slate in his hand, and puts down the things as you do 'em, and if you does your day's work all right you gits eight marks, and you has to git 672 marks before you can see any o' your friends, or write to 'em or them to you. Pays? Yes, they pays according to marks, but its hawful poor pay. I did my little bit all right and square for six months, and then I came out with 9s. 2d. in my pocket. That's all anybody can earn in there in six months. Goes? Ah! I should think it do, too. After yer been six blessed months without a pipe or a drop o' hanything better nor gruel and soup and cocoa, a chaps apt t'ave a bit of a fling. Ah! that nine and tupp'nce was all gone afore night—that was on a Wednesday—and afore Sunday I'm werry sorry to say I was in again. Treadmill? No; they don't give 'e no treadmill nowadays; leastways not as I knows. There ain't no treadmill in London. Used to be one in Coldbath Fields, but it got burnt down. Just built up again? You don't mean it, sir. I know a chap as don't know that. Golly! won't he be sold!"

I have met with several indications of the repugnance with which this particular form of labour is regarded by old prison hands, and it seems to be one of the peculiar hardships of the criminal career just now that the new prison arrangements have rendered it so difficult to be quite sure that the treadmill will not be the penalty of any little peccadillo into which the troublesome ways of this wicked world are so apt to beguile a body. Time was when a man might pick his own lodgings, so to speak, and if from his own experience or from mere authenticated report he had reason to object to any particular prison he had only to keep clear of the locality identified with it to be quite sure he would not find himself there. A culprit, for instance, who should commit any offence in Surrey would, at one time, have been sure to be lodged in Wandsworth gaol. In these topsy-turvy days there is no telling where he may go. It may be Wandsworth or it may be Clerkenwell, Coldbath-fields, Winchester, Maidstone, Newgate, or Holloway. A crime committed in Essex would formerly have certainly landed the perpetrator, if caught, in Chelmsford Gaol. Now, it may be Chelmsford, or Cambridge, or Ipswich, or Newgate, Holloway, Coldbath-fields, or Clerkenwell. This adds materially to the perplexities of a poor man trying to select comfortable winter quarters.

One effect of a centralized prison administration has been to render practicable considerable modifications of prison labour. The Commissioners say, in their last report, that while they attach due weight to making prison labour remunerative, the objects they desire to keep primarily in view are—first, "to provide prisoners with such employment as will interest and develop their intelligence." Secondly, they desire "to avoid concentrating too large a proportion of the labour of prisoners on one trade, and especially to diminish the amount of matmaking throughout the kingdom." Thirdly, they make it a point "to work for Government departments as much as possible in preference to working for private employers." These principles look to be sound and sensible, but no doubt their practical application is a matter involving a great deal of difficulty, or a good deal of the work going on in prisons at the present moment would long before this have been done away with, or would be carried on upon a different footing. Considering the large number of public institutions of one sort and another in London, in which mats are in requisition, it might certainly be expected that there would be no manufactures of this kind finding their way into the market from London prisons. Yet Coldbath Fields has now, as I believe it has done for many years, some two-and-twenty looms at work making mats, which are taken under a contract by a well-known London firm. This great metropolitan prison is largely made up of workshops of one sort and another, all of which in their lightness, roominess, warmth, and general comfort are about all that the most exemplary working-class citizen could desire. The work done in most of them is largely directed to the supply of the requirements of Coldbath Fields and other prisons, and so far tallies with the third principle enunciated by the Commissioners. A good deal of the work, too, is of a character to interest prisoners and develop their intelligence in accordance with the first of those principles, while so far as the supply of prisons is aimed at, of course there is no danger of "concentrating too large a proportion of the labour of prisoners on one trade."

In the fine commodious tailors' shop a number of men are always employed in making clothing for themselves and other prisoners as well as for their officers. Every "local" prison in London is supplied wholly or in part from this establishment. Similarly the carpenters' shop turns out plank beds and every other wooden requisite for gaols besides such articles as may be required in Government service. Just now, for instance, the carpenters in this prison are making "specie boxes" for the Post Office. A handsome little altar for the Roman Catholic chapel of the prison is also among the things in hand. The appearance of the place is that of an ordinary spacious, well-appointed carpenters' shop, the only difference being—and it is a very striking one—that every man of course is dressed in the dirty-looking drab uniform, and numbered conspicuously, while an armed warden stands behind an elevated desk watching all that goes on. Basket-making is going on in another apart-

wicker work is nice, light, clean work. Only those who have had some previous experience at it, or who are under sentence of considerable length, are put to this work, for which a skilled basket-maker is regularly employed as instructor. Many of the prisoners take great interest in this. The most impressive-looking place is the blacksmith's shop. A door is thrown open at the end of a rather gloomy approach, and the blazing fires and dark shadows, and sad-faced, silent, drab-uniformed operatives present a very striking scene taken in connection with the general gloom of the place. All sorts of ironwork and tin ware are turned out here by men who, for the most part, have been blacksmiths or something of the kind outside. There is a splendid laundry, and an equally fine bakehouse and kitchen, presenting the very picture of cleanliness and comfortable warmth; and when one remembers the kind of lives that thousands of the honest poor outside will lead during the next few months of slush and snow and bitter winds it certainly is a little provoking to think of these sturdy rogues—as many of them are at any rate—working here in leisurely comfort. The oakum-picking, too, which, as in most other prisons, goes on here, is very unsatisfactory. It is notoriously unprofitable, and it is more pastime for men. I was assured the other day by one who had been a "gentleman's gentleman," and whose hands were therefore somewhat delicate, that he had "nothing to say against oakum-picking." Then again there are about 120 men and youths usually to be found seated in a large, comfortably-warmed room in Coldbath Fields, sorting waste paper from various Government offices, or tearing up old telegrams and Post-office money order forms previous to their being despatched to the paper makers. It is a curious assembly of crop-headed, drab-suited, silent men. They are seated on forms after the manner of a school, the floor sloping down to one side of the room, so as to bring every individual under the ken of a warden in front of them. The work would be very light for girls, and here are 120 men employed in it. "Makes yer back ache sittin' on them blessed seats," said one of my new acquaintances. "You would like an arm chair, eh?" I returned. "Yes, a harm cheer or a sofer and a pipe, and there wouldn't be no cause to grumble," was the answer.

Of course the enforced silence, the stern rigid discipline, the plain fare, and many restrictions and restraints must not be forgotten in criticisms of this kind, and it would be unfair to forget also the many restricting circumstances under which employment has to be found for the 170,000 or 180,000 prisoners in English gaols. But for all that it is difficult to contrast the outside and the inside of gaols, more particularly at this time of year, without feeling that for confirmed criminals much of the work and many of the conditions of prison life are too favourable. This is probably inevitable under the existing system, by which all criminals undergoing the same term of imprisonment are on the same footing. Ideal justice can, I suppose, never be attained to. Prison discipline must always be rather rough in its application; but we should get a much nearer approach to ideal justice if the oakum-picking, and paper-tearing, and basket-making, and cookery, and so on, were reserved for those who were not old stagers in the ways of vice. Everybody who has seen something of the inside of gaols must often have felt that the system may be well adapted for the discipline of those who made a false step in life and need to be impressed with the degradation and criminality of law breaking, but that it is not adapted for deterring the really degraded and abandoned. There are, I suppose, some 1,800 prisoners in Coldbath Fields at the present time. Hundreds of these, probably, are old and hardened offenders; but if they have the low cunning to behave themselves they will get through easily and comfortably. Numbers of them are known to be arrant rascals; yet they will be in no way distinguished from the unlucky wight whose humiliation is breaking his heart, who may, perhaps, be set to labour that may well nigh break him down. Consideration for such as he forbids that the general severity of prison discipline shall be increased. But there is nothing to forbid the known criminals by long habit being picked out and separately dealt with. They do, of course, many of them ultimately reach the convict class; but your habitual criminal of the meaner sort knows how to avoid that. He prefers the local prison and short terms. He can earn a little money and come out and have his fling, and if he cannot break the law again without going back, why he is prepared to go, though perhaps he would rather not. Such vermin ought not to be put in the warmth of a comfortable kitchen in the winter time, or be set to tear up Post-office orders. He ought to have nothing but crank and treadmill, and other exhilarating exercises of the kind. If it really broke him down and wore him out it would, after all, be only what plenty of better men than he are subjecting themselves to in their efforts to do their duty.

MR. SPURGEON.—The Rev. C. H. Spurgeon leaves town to-day for Mentone, South France, where he purposes remaining until about the middle of next month, for the benefit of his health. Yesterday morning the reverend gentleman was accompanied to his pulpit by his father, who, at the afternoon and evening services in the Baptist Chapel, Regent-street, Lambeth, conducted the ceremonies and delivered the discourses. Mr. Spurgeon, in giving out the day's announcements, stated that next Thursday's address in the Tabernacle will be given by the Rev. Dr. Parker, of the City Temple.

ELECTION PETITION JUDGES.—At a meeting of the Judges held at Westminster on Saturday last, Baron Pollock, Mr. Justice Manisty, and Mr. Justice Lopes were selected to act as Election Petition Judges for 1882-3. The Election Petition Judges are generally exempted from going on circuit during their year of office.

THE PUBLIC USE OF REGENT'S PARK.—A conference was held on Saturday at Lancaster-house, Savoy-street, under the auspices of the Regent's Park Association, for the purpose of considering what improvements seemed desirable and practicable in Regent's Park.—Mr. J. Loye, chairman of the Regent's Park Association, presided, and said forty years ago a great agitation was set on foot, Parliament discussed the matter, and in the end Regent's Park was dedicated to the use of the public under certain conditions. The park consisted of 543 acres, of which 332 were inside the outer road. Of these 332 acres, 175 were opened to the public, 135 leased to various persons, and 22 acres were water. The other 210 acres were leased for building purposes. He maintained that the Crown had no right to the revenue received from the leases granted for sites in this park, which was specially purchased for the use and benefit of the public. If the park was not too large for the population of 40 years ago, what must it be now, when the population had vastly increased? There were 14 acres of the park set aside for the exclusive use of privileged persons, which he contended was an encroachment on the rights of the public. That reserved land if thrown open to the public would enable the people to enter the park at the south-western corner, whereas now they had to go to the north or eastern parts of the park before they could enter on the greensward. There were many vested interests against this movement, but the law was on the side of the public. The cost of maintaining the park was 10,000*l.*, but he contended that there was great extravagance in the management, and with economy the park could be made more useful and beautiful without extra expense.—In the end the meeting agreed that the metropolitan members of Parliament should be written to on the subject, and also Mr. Shaw Lefevre, M.P., who was in favour of the movement, asking for Parliamentary action in the matter.

MISSIONARIES AS EXPLORERS.—(To the Editor of the Daily News.)—Sir,—Amongst the many interesting discoveries due to missionaries we may now reckon an important find by the Rev. J. Brodbeck, a Moravian missionary upon the east coast of Greenland. In consequence of the inhospitable nature of the country and the icebound shore, very little is known of this side of Greenland, and yet history records that there were once important Norse colonies there, whose sudden disappearance in the course of the fifteenth century is one of the most insoluble of mysteries. It is conjectured that, after being decimated by the black death, the colonists were overwhelmed by the Esquimaux, and the native legends seem to confirm the theory. The west-coast natives seem to have still a fear of the "East Greenlanders," and it has been thought that Norse blood could still be traced in their superior physique. Hitherto few ruins of the old Norse colonies could be found, although we know that there were 190 hamlets and 12 churches on the east coast, but now the Rev. J. Brodbeck has found (August, 1881) a delightful plain, evidently artificially irrigated, and important Norse ruins by the side of a river. He is the first European to see them. He says: "There could be no question as to their origin, for of this the huge blocks of stone were unmistakable evidence. 'No Greenlanders' people in this style" was the unanimous opinion of my people. Some of the stones could not have been moved by the united efforts of ten strong men. I think it was a large dwelling house, not a church, although its dimensions are forty yards by ten. The stone walls have fallen down, and are partly covered with vegetation, but their course can still be traced." The heathen of the east coast say that ruins extend up to 63 deg. north latitude on well-selected spots up the fells. Probably further research may bring to light interesting particulars respecting the early Norse colonisation of Greenland. The Rev. J. Brodbeck's report is to be read in "The Moravian Quarterly" for July, 1882, and his sketch map appears in the August number. Hitherto missionary efforts have been almost exclusively confined to the west coast, where there are many Danish trading stations and some six Moravian mission posts; but now a bold effort is being made to extend operations to the inhospitable east coast, and this discovery is one of its results. May the incident have the effect of quickening public interest in these most self-denying and apostolic of missionaries!—I am, Sir, your obedient servant, FRANK A. GALLER.—Croydon.

BRIEFING PRISONERS.—10,000 articles at moderate prices may be seen at Perkins and Glegg's, Oxford-street, Aldgate, writing-cases, dressing-gowns, boots, instep-streets, double-breasted jackets, and the like.