NEW PRISONS.

JOHN HOWARD, the great philanthropist, in his "State of Prisons," published at the latter end of last century, when recommending the erection of new and suitable prisons, wrote as follows:—

"The penitentiary houses I would have built in a great measure by convicts. I will suppose that a power is obtained from Parliament to employ such as are now at work on the Thames, or some of those who are in the country gaols under sentence of transportation, as may be thought expedient. In the first place, let the surrounding wall, intended for full security against escapes, be completed, and proper lodges for the gatekeepers. Let temporary buildings of the nature of barracks be erected in some part of the enclosure which will be wanted the least till the whole is finished. Let one or two hundred men, with their proper keepers, and under the direction of the builder, be employed in levelling the ground, digging out the foundation, serving the masons, sawing the timber and stone; and as I have found several convicts who are carpenters, masons, and smiths, these may be employed in their own branches of trade, since such work is as necessary and proper as any other on which they may be engaged. Let the people thus employed consist chiefly of those whose term is nearly expired, or who are committed for a short term; and as the ground is suitably prepared for the builders, the garden made, the walls dug, the building finished, let those who are to be dismissed go off gradually, as it would be very improper to send them back to the hulks or gaols again."

This is precisely what is taking place at this present moment, just a hundred years since Howard spoke so eloquently, and worked with such heroism and unflagging zeal. The experiment has been tried at more than one point, and on a large scale. At the close of 1874, two establishments were started under the auspices of Colonel (now Sir Edmund) du Cane—one in the neighbourhood of Rochester, the other of London itself—and both have prospered with great and conspicuous success. Last year a third was commenced also in Kent, and is making rapid progress. They have one and all been conducted on the principles laid down by Howard—first of all the strong enclosure, then the lodge, then the temporary barrack, lastly the prisoners and a due proportion of officials in charge. These prisons have been instituted for various purposes. That near Rochester, known as the Borstal Prison, will house eventually a large multitude of convicts, whose task it will be to construct a line of forts covering Chatham.

The second Kentish prison, smaller in its scope, is to provide labour for the erection of magazines at a secure point behind Upnor on the Medway.

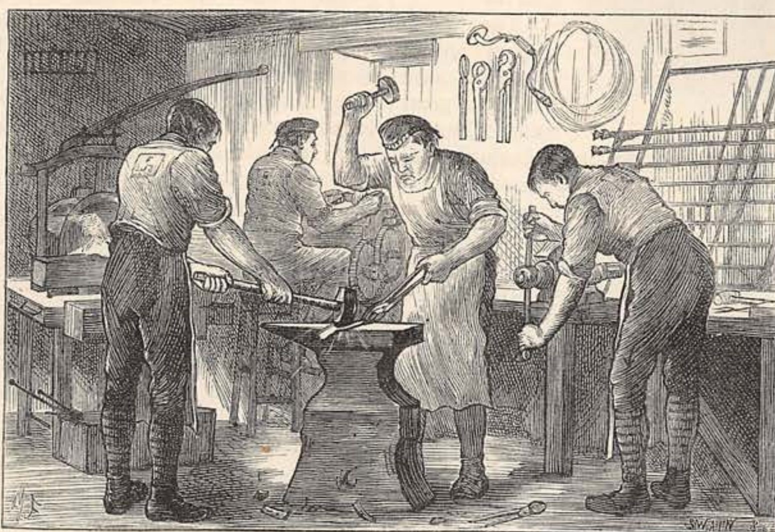
The third has, perhaps, the most important and ambitious aim, being intended ultimately to replace Millbank, the famous Penitentiary whose towers and gloomy portals are sufficiently familiar to those who travel by the great highway of the Thames. It stands on the confines of that waste land or common between Notting Hill and Acton, which has long enjoyed the euphonious title of Wormwood Scrubs. It may be seen already raising its high-pitched red roof, its clustering chimney-stacks, its turrets and its pinnacles, by all whom business takes along the Great Western Railway or pleasure attracts to the Arcadian groves of Shepherd's Bush. Already, within three years, one large block has been completed and occupied—no small undertaking when it is considered that from first to last the work is almost exclusively and entirely the work of convict hands.

Any visitor who had been permitted to enter the prison enclosure at Wormwood Scrubs in the winter of 1874, would have seen little more than a wide space of meadow-land, surrounded by a wooden hoarding or fence some ten feet in height. Two buildings only were standing, one the little temporary prison—Howard's Barrack—which was to give shelter to the first arrivals, and close to it a shed, which served as kitchen and store-room. But the prison was a prison only in name. It was roofed, certainly, had iron gates and doors, but within it was little better than a shell. Intended ultimately to contain two tiers of cells, 100 in all, only a few of these were ready for occupation; and these, with their thin partitions of corrugated iron, and small windows lightly barred, seemed scarcely a secure cage for the felon-birds who were soon to enter them. But the first draft of convicts that reached Wormwood Scrubs, nine in number, were of the description called "Blue-dress," or "Special-class" prisoners—men, that is to say, who have entered already upon the last year of their sentences, and who, having freedom almost in sight ahead, and captivity fading away behind, have given as it were substantial guarantees of good behaviour.

This handful of workmen, under the supervision of competent and trustworthy warders, began operations at once. They were all handy men, a few were skilled artisans and mechanics, and each was turned into the groove best suited to him. One to draw water and cook; a second, who was a smith, hammered away at an impromptu forge; a third, as a carpenter, quickly

built a rough shed to travel over the snow (it was an unusually severe winter) and thus open up communications with the nearest high road.

Presently, under their industrious and skilful hands a great change was worked in the place. By degrees new cells, more and yet more, were built, till the first hundred were finished and filled. A second wing was thereupon undertaken, and with the building of this the little temporary prison was actually completed. The numbers now rose to 200, a strength sufficient to approach the more serious business of the enterprise. A primary consideration was the formation of a road or track through the fields, and for this there were no better materials available than burnt clay, known technically as "ballast"—a species of artificial gravel, brick-dust in colour, which has been largely used for the same purpose in the north and north-west of this great town. A second important proceeding was the preparation of brick-making materials, as the bricks of which the prison was to be built were to be manufactured on the spot. The soil within the enclosure, similar in quality to that in the Notting Hill region, was almost entirely of clay, a stiff strong clay, varying in quality and requiring invariably admixture with chalk, sand, "mac" (road-sweepings), to produce the serviceable yellow "stock brick" of the trade. Busily occupied with these important preliminaries, the spring slipped away, and summer saw the brick mills in full swing. In the early autumn the foundations of the first great block, of which there are to be four in all, in parallel lines, were excavated, concrete laid in, and the bricks, scarcely cool as yet, brought from the "clamp" in which they had been burnt, and the permanent building began. Once grappled with in real earnest, rapid advance was made. Many of the subsidiary requirements had been prepared beforehand either on the spot or at other prisons, but always by convict labourers. Door-frames and doors came from Millbank and Brixton; all the ironwork—bars, window-frames, gratings, staircases—had been cast at Portland. From Portland, too, came stone, and granite from Dartmoor, while stone-dressers, carpenters, smiths, had been constantly employed at their various trades in the prison itself. Many of these, of course, were skilled workmen "outside;" *vauriens* who preferred to honest labour, burglary perhaps, or some other form of the profession of the depredator, because its prizes are sometimes large enough to outbalance its penalties and its risks. But a large percentage of tradesmen were prison-taught, the bricklayers especially, concerning whom the head of the establishment gives some interesting facts in his printed report for the current year. "At this moment," he says, "there are in all ninety-two bricklayers upon the building, and of these only two ever handled a trowel before they entered a prison, the remainder are therefore entirely prison-taught. Quite a dozen are now first-class workmen, and came here as such from other prisons. Thirty-eight were sent here partially instructed, and have since greatly improved, but the balance of forty remaining I have seen pass under my own eyes through the several stages from the clay to carrying the hod, from the hod to the trowel on the interior walls, till finally they have graduated and been advanced to the honour of 'face work,' which many now execute to entire satisfaction."



PRISON BLACKSMITHS.

There can be no two opinions as to the value of a system which produces such results as these. The antiquated theorists who would condemn all prisoners to labour purely penal and unremunerative are rapidly losing ground, and it is accepted as an axiom that prisons should be as nearly self-supporting as they can be made. This is not to be accomplished easily, perhaps. To find industrial employment that will repay outlay in teaching and material is difficult enough. The criminal is not necessarily an artisan, and he is often by nature an idler who will not work even if he knows how. Moreover, the time and op-

portunity needed to develop many varieties of labour are generally lacking in a prison. Hence it is that prison rulers have too uniformly directed their energies into a single groove, and one trade, that of mat-making only, has been generally adopted, with the unpleasant consequence of bringing prison labour and free labour into competition. The employment of convicts upon large undertakings, such as the construction of new prisons or the accomplishment of great public works, certainly escapes this reproach. Such operations naturally bring into play all manner of trades. There is work for the excavator and the navvy, for mason and stonecutter, scaffolder, digger, carpenter, fitter, engine-driver, and smith. A constant stream of workmen flows through the prisons; the skilled are utilised, the unskilled gradually turned into suitable channels; and thus the great army of crime, which is at constant warfare with society, pays its indemnity, and in a measure recoups its victims for the injuries and losses it has inflicted on them. How substantial has been this return, will best be understood by considering to what an extent the country has been enriched by convict labour. The great breakwater at Portland is an enduring monument of convict skill. It is nearly two miles long, and runs out into the water to a depth of fifty or sixty feet. Some 6,000,000 tons of stone were quarried for this great national undertaking. On the bleak uplands of Dartmoor the convicts have reclaimed miles upon miles of stony waste; at Chatham and Portsmouth they have extended the dockyards, built magnificent basins capable of holding a whole fleet of men-of-war. In battling with sea and tide, with mud and slush, in pile-driving, excavating, brickmaking, and converting slimy foreshores into solid hard ground, in building vast fortifications, in beautifying public edifices, our convicts have been steadily and usefully employed for more than twenty years. But the economic results of this vast experiment, in which by the cruel irony of fate they have been compelled to build their own dwellings, more than outbalance any previously obtained. Within the limits of existing prisons, additional cell accommodation has been provided at a cost of little more than half what even the cheapest contractor would have charged; and yet more conclusive are the facts in connection with Wormwood Scrubs. This prison, intended to replace Millbank, as has been said, will be as large or larger than the Penitentiary. The bill for the latter, all told, was half a million of money; the estimated cost of Wormwood Scrubs, based upon calculations that cannot err, is rather less than a fifth of that sum.

Now, after an existence of more than three years, the new prison commenced under such peculiar auspices is making rapid strides towards completion. A good hard track leads up to the great gates, and upon them an immense V.R., with the crown above, shows that the State has thrown its ægis over the place. No hive of bees could be busier than the scene within the enclosure. A hum of industry falls upon the ear: the sound of hammers, the rattle of engine-wheels, the sharp whirr of the steam-saw, the dull, gritty rumble of the mortar-mill; the bricklayers' trowels ring out sharply as they are struck upon the brick which is being shaped into a "skue-back," or broken to fit into its particular place; the sing-song cry of the sailor is heard giving time for some united effort, raising a mighty scaffold-pole, or moving a giant block of stone on to the "benchers," where it is to be cut and dressed. These long sheds surround a place dignified by the name of the Artisans' Yard, and in them the skilled mechanics are at work—a series of benches closely packed fill the carpenters' shop, and herein some five-and-twenty men are employed upon many diverse and difficult jobs. That ventilator for a cell-window, fashioned in oak and bound with neat brasses, is as delicate and neatly finished as if it had been made in Paris. The inoffensive-looking little man at work upon it is a well-known desperado, who made a most daring escape from Portland, and was only re-captured after an absence of some days. Next to him is a notorious London burglar, a lynx-eyed, though withal a somewhat intelligent-looking carpenter, who has the bad repute of being one of the leading cracksmen of his time. Several "big jobs" are, it is to be feared, remaining open to his too skilful hands outside; only such an "artist" as he can put the finishing touch to the preparations, or carry out the operation itself. The moment he is released the chances are but too great that he will return to his old courses. He may succeed again once or even twice, but he will at last fail, and will find his reward in the heaviest sentence of penal servitude. A quick and able workman this, who would be certain of fair, not to say liberal wages, yet dishonesty is so engrained that he prefers the risks of his adopted calling to the ease and comfort of a regular trade. Already, although a young man, he has spent some fifteen years in prison, and he will assuredly spend more under the same restraint. It is for such an incorrigible offender that the principle of perpetual imprisonment often recommended, but not yet adopted, seems especially suited. Meanwhile, with all the intensity of which he is capable, he is fitting together the bed-board of a cell. Near him is a comrade skilfully controlling the movements of a morticing machine; another is making a door-frame; a third and fourth are upon the "king-posts" and "purlines," parts of an enormous roof; next door are the painters grinding colours, or using sash-tool or double-tie; further on is the forge where evil-eyed convicts, rendered yet more forbidding by coal-dust and grime, are wielding such terrible hammers that the life of the warder seems scarcely worth a song. But they are harmless enough, these felon blacksmiths, and very clever at their trade. The slender, strong iron gates, the richly-wrought window-bars, are models of workmanship; an ex-watchmaker of German extraction, who is at the lathe, is producing some beautiful brass fittings for the ventilator above-mentioned, and by his side another neat-fingered gentleman is cutting out elaborate stencil plates for use in the office of the clerk of the works. Further on is the shed of the stone-cutters, Portland-bred many of them; next the steam-saw bench, at

which works an unfortunate engineer, who once possessed much valuable "plant" of this kind of his own; he is skilful and rapid in his manipulation of the machine, and his assistant, no better once than a thief, is quickly learning the same trade. But outside and beyond this enclosure is the real scene of action. Here is the great block on which the mass of labour is turned, and to which all other works are subsidiary. This is the second wing; the first, of which more directly, is finished and filled. This second is advanced to the third tier of cells, and will be ready soon for the roof, one other floor only remaining to be built. Ascending to the highest point of the scaffolding, no contemptible coign of vantage, it is easy to take in at one glance the whole scene below. Extraordinary activity prevails on every side; wherever the eye rests it falls on convicts singly or in groups, performing industriously and in silence their various tasks. Up aloft among the spars, fearless as sailors, active as cats, the riggers are raising the scaffolding to higher levels; the carpenters are fixing up the door-frames, or laying the floors; hundreds of bricklayers, mostly of the class already described, prison-instructed, are hurrying on with the building in a way to suggest a spirit of emulation one with another, which is actually the case; as many more are passing nimbly to and fro with hods full of bricks, with mortar or cement in buckets. Dividing the whole distance, two large lifts worked by a "crab" from below send up an incessant stream of these supplies; by the lifts come up concrete also for the cell-floors, door-frames and window-sashes, iron ventilating gratings, joist and flooring timbers, enormous iron girders, hoop-iron also, to be laid in long bands and built in with the bricks.

Looking away from the building itself to the more open ground beyond, other works are observed busily in progress. Down there the mortar is made; special white bricks are being ground and scraped into various shapes for arches and angles; here come a line of trucks brick-laden, from a distant clamp, there a long line of convicts are wheeling, on barrows, clay and other brickmaking materials to the great "kerf" heap from which the brick-mills will be kept constantly supplied; one party of a dozen or more are preparing the "hack" ground, or drying-place for the green bricks, and laying down the "hack" boards; for now the spring is approaching, and with it the dry season when only bricks can be made.

All at once a bell rings out loud and clear from the gatekeeper's lodge, and everything suddenly comes to a full stop. This is the signal to cease labour; the dinner-hour, and with it a short period of breathing-time, has arrived. "Put up your tools," shout the warders shortly and sharply to their men, and this order having been promptly obeyed, the convicts are formed up quickly two deep, and marched by their respective commanders to the parade-grounds. Here each party falls into its allotted place, it is counted over by the chief warder, every man is closely searched to guard against the secretion of weapons, or implements, which smuggled later into the prison might prove of use to facilitate escape; then, these formalities concluded, the whole force files silently and orderly, by separate routes and various doors, into the wings and halls of the prison-buildings. Of these there are two—first the little temporary block which housed the first arrivals three years back; it accommodates two hundred, and is still stout and strong, though dwarfed into extreme insignificance by its big neighbour, the first permanent block. A tremendous structure is this great wing, seeming narrow perhaps for its great length, but lofty, airy, well lighted and warmed. There are four tiers of cells; neat but simple staircases, cast at Portland, lead to the upper storeys; they have slate landings, along which runs a railing of very artistic iron-work, wrought upon the spot. The cells are all upon the same pattern, as a matter of course—a boarded floor, whitewashed walls, a window of thick opaque glass. In one corner stands the bed-board on end, the bedding hanging over it; in another, shelves, on one of which reposes the inmate's library, books devotional, educational, and instructive; on a second, his dinner-service of tin ware, his tin knife and his wooden spoon, on a third his toilette appliances, one small comb and brush. In a third angle, hard by the door, and under the gas jet—which is lighted from without and kept by a strong sheet of glass from the prisoner's interference—is the small table at which he sits on a three-legged stool when at home. He is not often at home, however; only when the darkness has ended the day's labour, and he prepares to go to bed, or as now at meal-hours. His comrades who are orderlies for the day bring him his dinner, carrying the baskets backwards with both hands engaged, a precaution against thefts of food; and he is left to discuss it, with an appetite sharp-set by his morning's work. It is not too full, this meal, yet ample. To-day he has a pint of strong thick soup, a small loaf of bread, and a pound of potatoes; to-morrow it will be five ounces of beef or mutton, the next day suet-pudding, another day cheese, variety being deemed indispensable where the individual has to subsist on the same style of diet for a number of years. He makes short work of his allowance, you may be sure; and of the "dinner-hour" he will have quite forty minutes left for himself. How will he employ them? In meditation, perhaps, in vain repinings and regrets for the past, not seldom in vague plans and hopeful conjectures for the future. Will he, when once more free, fall again "into trouble," as he euphemistically styles incarceration? Certainly not, he declares to himself with a resolute insistance, but his good resolves unhappily do not very frequently bear fruit when put to the test of new temptation. It is hoped, however, that he will never return to occupy a cell which, as one of the number in this new prison, he has built with his own hands.