

PRISONS AND PRISON REFORM.
 AN INTERVIEW WITH THE REV. J. W. HORSLEY, M.A.
 BY OUR SPECIAL COMMISSIONER.



THE REV. J. W. HORSLEY, M.A.

THERE are few men so fully entitled to be heard on the subject of prison reform as the Rev. J. W. Horsley, who was for over ten years chaplain at Clerkenwell Jail, now, as the reader will be aware, done away with in deference to the widely expressed opinion of the undesirableness of the existence of prisons in the centre of thickly populated districts, and in consequence of the happy decrease of 5,000 in the daily average of our local prisons in the last decade. Not long since Mr. Horsley published his deeply interesting work entitled "Jottings from Jail,"* which we recommend to the attentive perusal of all who are interested in the subject, and wish to learn Mr. Horsley's views on other topics barely touched on in the interview which our special commissioner was enabled to have with him a short time ago.

"Mr. Horsley," he writes, "is a man of distinctly striking appearance. He is tall and powerfully built, with a figure well calculated to command respect even

from jail-birds, while his face, set off with a flowing auburn beard, has a pleasing expression, betokening energy of character and a kind disposition. He lives in one of the prettiest houses in the pleasant little colony of Bedford Park, where so many literary and artistic celebrities have found homes. Passing into the dining-room, I noticed an admirable likeness of Mr. Horsley, painted by his friend Mr. Hamilton Jackson. I was shortly afterwards joined by Mr. Horsley himself, who invited me into his study. He showed me a wonderful collection of burglarious implements, including 'jemmies,' 'twirls,' 'neddies,' and numerous other mysterious tools and weapons, whose uses it would almost require a lifetime to understand. Not the least interesting of his prison curios was a lace-bordered sampler worked entirely with hair from the head of an unfortunate woman who was during her lifetime over 300 times brought up for drunkenness and attempts at suicide, and who spent the greater portion of her unhappy existence in prison. She had a luxuriant head of hair, and in the intervals of enforced soberness was wont to do fancy work from her own hair!

"Mr. Horsley first contrasted the condition of prisons in the early part of the century with their state at the present time.

"All matters," he remarked, 'connected with prisons, and the treatment of prisoners, have made immense strides in recent years. The sufferings of those imprisoned a century ago are almost inconceivable, and prisons, as they existed throughout Great Britain, were a foul disgrace to a Christian country. Even thirty years ago, though much had been done by John Howard, the king of philanthropists, and others, in the way of needful reform, yet much still remained. An excellent description of the condition of prisons at this recent date is to be found in Mr. Hepworth Dixon's "Her Majesty's Tower." Most American prisons are, strange to say, at the present day surprisingly badly managed, and remind us of a state of things which we have long since left behind. There are, of course, exceptions, and a very different picture is seen in—for instance—the New York Reformatory at Elmira, a prison containing about 500 male inmates, whose ages vary between sixteen and thirty. There is at Elmira, amongst other admirable details, a system by which prisoners are released from jail on parole, when the reformatory authorities think that they may safely be set at liberty. These prisoners are known as "indefinites," and they can obtain conditional release within a year of their imprisonment, or absolute release within eighteen months, if their conduct has been sufficiently satisfactory. In fact, the prisoners at Elmira may be said to daily work out their freedom, to their own infinite benefit, and that of society at large. It must

* "Jottings from Jail. Notes and Papers on Prison Matters." T. Fisher Unwin. 1887.

be obvious how much better this system is than ours, under which an offender is, say, sentenced to five years' imprisonment, and is aware that he must, as he terms it, "do" at least four of the five years, the incentives for him to strive to become a better man being thus reduced to a minimum.

"There are," continued Mr. Horsley, "four great objects in the existence of prisons. First, we have in view the punishment involving pain and shame to the offender. Secondly, the deterring effect not only on the individual, but on others who might be desirous of committing a similar crime, yet have a wholesome dread of the known consequences. Thirdly, and of extreme importance, the reformation of the prisoner's character, so that he may be restored as a useful limb to society; and, lastly, we have to consider the protection of the State. It is very difficult, as may be supposed, to keep these four ends in view.

"The punishment in prisons is too often a farce. Many an honest working man works harder than our prisoners. The popular mind associates prisons with the treadmill, and imagines that the inmates have day after day to walk appointed distances, for long periods of time, without being permitted once to leave the track. The fact is that only about one out of every three local prisons, and none of the convict prisons, contain treadwheels. Thus, only two out of the nine prisons in London are supplied with this form of punishment. It is but fair to state that it is the intention of the Commissioners ere long to add to the number of existing treadwheels, since the "vertical care-grinder," as Bill Sikes terms it, exercises a wholesome influence upon the minds of the would-be criminal. Picking oakum, again, though monotonous in the extreme, and not the sort of occupation that any one would choose, is assuredly not hard work. The women have to knit stockings, sort paper, &c., those tasks being termed "hard labour." Practically, then, for most prisoners, true "hard labour" does not exist at all. There are no cranks, and only a few treadwheels. Where there are treadwheels, many prisoners do not get on at all; those who do, have to go on only for the first three months, except as a special punishment; and no one has more than six hours a day, which is divided into two periods. Besides this, every man has five minutes' rest allowed him at the end of each quarter of an hour. I would have each prisoner taught a trade, and forced to do really hard work. In America they contract for prison labourers; thus a brickmaker had leased out to him 150 men at seventy-seven cents a man per diem. This is hardly practicable in England, where the conditions of labour are so different. The intense jealousy of trades at the competition of prison labour is a narrow-minded, though natural, view, and aggravates the difficulty of finding the best method of employing prison labour. You might as well remove the bars from the tigers' cage at the Zoological Gardens, as let loose your prisoners ignorant of trade, and showing no signs of reform.

"I pass now to the moral aspect involved in the chief desideratum in connection with prison reform:

the restoration of the character of the criminal. This point is, I am convinced, not sufficiently attended to by the Home Office. Even the chaplain himself may be said to be merely a concession to the existing religious feelings, and I am not sure that he is not looked upon as a necessary nuisance by some of the authorities. According to the Home Office, apparently, the alpha and omega of good government consist in discipline and sanitation; hence the all-important functionaries are the doctor and the governor. The sanitary arrangements of our prisons are, in truth, admirable. Hardly a century ago John Howard describes as a typical example of a cell a room lighted and ventilated by means of a wicket seven inches by five, three men being confined therein; while "jail-fever" was as common as it was fatal. Now "jail-fever," or "typhus," is unknown, and each prisoner's cell contains an ample cubic amount of air, while separate confinement is the rule, not the exception. A proof of the excellence of the sanitation is to be found in the fact that the death-rate is 8.4 per thousand, against 21 per thousand in London, and this notwithstanding the extreme unhealthiness of the classes from which our criminals mostly come. It would be well, as I have said, if half as much attention were paid to the moral and spiritual oversight of the detained. During my chaplaincy at Clerkenwell there were on an average 20,000 arrivals per annum; the daily average being over seventy. It was a physical impossibility for me to see them all. The chaplain ought, therefore, certainly to be allowed a staff of paid assistants, in addition to as many volunteer workers as he deems fit. The Royal Commission on Reformatories and Industrial Schools has borne witness to the great services which benevolent individuals have rendered, adding further that "without their personal labour and aid, the State would have been unable to accomplish the work." Let us have in prisons also more light and air from outside. There are many among us with the courage and devotion of Elizabeth Fry, though happily now we have a public opinion not indifferent to the condition of our prisons. Let the chaplain admit moral teachers and lecturers; and allow letters to be read more frequently. Neither visits nor letters may be received more than once in three months, save in very exceptional circumstances. A letter containing good advice from a reformed "pal," leading to higher things, may do more good than all the labours of a chaplain. At Clerkenwell there was but one lady admitted—a remarkable contrast this to America, and many Continental countries, where volunteer workers of the various religious denominations are welcomed to reclaim and instruct.

"Another point on which I would strongly insist is the necessity for classification. It is obvious that the harm done by the present system must be very great. Now the first offender, of hitherto blameless character, convicted of embezzlement in an office, has to herd with regular jail-birds, and the worst of the criminal classes. I should like to see prisons established where none but first offenders should be sent. The same remark applies, by the way, to our reformatories,

where it is extremely undesirable that a youngster of eleven years of age should be sent to associate with hardened lads of eighteen or nineteen. It would be an excellent thing could the former be sent to a separate home where kindly and judicious treatment would render the chances of a relapse into crime far less likely. As it is, boys too often learn in our reformatory lessons in the art of burglary which they will hasten to apply on their release.

"Have the efforts of the School Board,' I asked, 'proved of much avail towards the lessening of crime?'

"It is a well-known fact,' replied Mr. Horsley, 'that the number of young clerks who forge letters and cheques, and commit similar crimes, has of late years much increased; but there can be no doubt that the gradual spread of education amongst the so-called lower classes has a beneficial effect as regards criminal statistics. Last year there were no less than 47,000 prisoners who could neither read nor write. Of these a large number were of such an age as to show that they must have succeeded in escaping the vigilance of the School Board officers and the compulsory bye-laws. Whilst on this branch of the subject, it may be of interest to mention that of

78,416 persons arrested in the metropolis in a recent year, as many as 4,677 females, and 8,426 males, were unable to read or write. It is a very sad fact that on examining prison statistics we find that the great crime - incentive is drink, and that this intemperance, a national disgrace, seems to be yearly on the increase. Within five years, for example, it is found that cases termed "drunk and disorderly" have increased by 26,000.'

"The last topic dealt with in our conversation was the work of the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society. Mr. Horsley spoke much and earnestly of the need for more money and more helpers. 'Were funds forthcoming,' he said, 'more homes and refuges could be established for the benefit of men and women, to which they might go directly after leaving prison. One society of Christian workers does much excellent service in this direction. The 400 members endeavour to obtain employment and homes for discharged prisoners, and generally interest themselves in and help such. But it and other similar associations are sadly hampered for want of funds, and I would, in conclusion, urge on all to consider the duty that is laid upon them by their Master to help the weak and afflicted, and those who are in trouble.'

LOCOMOTIVES ON THE LINE.



HERE were locomotives before the line—as we know it—was begun. Trevethick and Blenkinsop had completed their locomotive engines between seventy and eighty years ago; and Hedley's "Puffing Billy," the oldest engine in existence, did duty three-score years and ten ago. But it was not until the year 1825 that the first public railway in the world was opened, and thus it is that locomotives on the line date from that year. On the 16th of September, 1824, an order was given to the then young firm of Robert Stephenson and Co., to construct two locomotive engines "for the sum of £500 each." The earliest delivered of these is now placed on a pedestal near Darlington Station, and it is the parent of "locomotives on the line." It differed widely from the engines we know; its weight was about a tenth of the heavy engines of to-day; it drew a gross load of forty tons, at a speed not exceeding twelve miles per hour, and its cylinders were perpendicularly placed. The story of this early locomotive, of its completion in the old factory on Tyneside, of its being sent by the great road to the south, drawn by horses, and raised on the line near the village of Great Aycliffe—that story is well known. After this came, in due time and order, "Hope," "Black Diamond," "Diligence," and the "Royal George"—the first four were Stephenson's engines,

and the latter was Timothy Hackworth's. Not alone in dimensions, but in mode of construction and in powers of endurance, these old travellers on the line differed from those of to-day. In the workshops there were no tools except hand-lathes; there were no turn-tables, only ropes and pulleys for the lifting of the engines, and the "screw-jack" was the sole means of raising the locomotive, so that the work of construction was slow. One of the oldest engineers told the writer that the wheels were metal with iron tyres, and for repairs they were hammered on and off, as the one way of removing and refitting them. At one time, out of twenty-two locomotives on the primal line, fifteen were off work for repairs. The story is told of how the engine-drivers dealt with the refractory or worked-out engines: in "slippery weather or on some long greasy incline the speed would flag rapidly; the engineman, first lavishing oil on the rods and bearings, and then forcing the wheels round with a crowbar, would cry out to the fireman, 'Give it to her, Bill, man; give it to her,' as Bill with his shovel strode alongside, frantically scraping up small ballast, and dashing it before the wheels to make them bite," vainly. Then the fire was roused up, and the engineman and fireman sat down on the side of the bank until "steam rose, and off she went."

There are local stories told as to the esteem and the mystery that surrounded these early locomotives in the popular estimation. On the occasion of the