

## THE CRIMINAL.

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"The criminal must be condemned to lose his freedom, and to be separated from society, in order to put it out of his power to injure; and be restored, if possible, by means of a rational punishment, to reflection and to better purposes. But society must, with tender sympathy and maternal care, follow even its misled children."

Before the Author of Christianity left our world, he enjoined and illustrated every human duty. Among the duties which he recommended by his high example, was sympathy for the criminal. Looking over the moral history of the world, since he closed his great mission, we soon discover that this class has been sadly neglected. True, in different periods, the world has given birth to a Howard and a Fry; but, alas! how small the number! The time has now fully come, when this duty should be more deeply impressed upon the public mind. "We have," says an English writer, "workhouses for the poor, houses of refuge for the destitute, hospitals for the sick, soup-kitchens for the hungry, clothing societies for the naked. We have schools for ignorant; societies for distributing bibles; associations for the sailor, for the soldier, for broken-down merchants and tradesmen. We have societies for the old, the young, the middle-aged; for providing for foundlings, and those born in lawful wedlock. We have societies to look after the interests of those who are about to enter this world; and societies whose object it is to insure a decent interment in going out from it. There are but few forms of human misery;—indeed scarcely one, of all the numerous 'ills' from the cradle to the grave,

that flesh is heir to,—

no single class of miserable or unfortunate human beings,—that is not, in some shape or other, cared for by some one or other of the associations so prevalent among the Christian communities of these modern times. How comes it about, that, with all this extraordinary expenditure of time and money, it has never yet come into the mind of what is called the 'religious world' to make some efforts at reclaiming our convicted criminals?"

Such are the impressive words of a foreign writer, who judging from his language, must have felt deeply the importance of the subject. The criminal has been too long neglected. When his sentence consigns him to the sufferings and degradation of a prison, all interest dies away in this last, cold inquiry, "Is he safely lodged within those walls from which he cannot escape?" This question being once answered, the multitude turn away; satisfied, if bolts, and bars, and chains, guard the space between them and their brother. Henceforth he is viewed as a ruined man; an outcast from human society and human compassion. Few inquire whether he shall be restored to his family and to the world, a penitent man; or whether he shall come forth from his den, like some malignant fiend, to ravage and destroy. Much of the apathy of the past has arisen from ignorance. Since Howard left the world, few have been found to plunge into the loathsomeness of dungeons and to make report of the secret wickedness of prisons; and the world has been so much absorbed in amassing wealth, that no time has been found to ameliorate the condition of the criminal.

A brighter period is dawning upon the world. Prison Associations are being formed. The press—that "mighty engine for good or evil"—is now exerting an immense influence upon the great heart of the community. To further this end, we shall present some reasons why there should be a warmer, Christian sympathy manifested for the prisoner.

The subject presents a variety of aspects. We may contemplate the criminal, 1. On trial. 2. While suffering his sentence. 3. When discharged. In the first two instances, he is more beyond our reach than in the last. Which is the most painful state, we cannot determine. When the hour of trial arrives, the mind must be keenly alive to the result. Friends are eagerly sought; facts are magnified; every influence is sought to sway the jury or the judge. The whole life is laid open to public gaze. When the trial ends, and sentence is passed, then for a season, hope gives place to despair. The intercourse of friends is withdrawn. The prisoner is conveyed to his cell, and the door is closed. Now he feels that he is a convict. If his cell has a window, he looks out upon the busy, free, and, to him, happy world. He thinks of his wife and children. She is now the wife of a convict. The playmates of his children will say, "Your father is in the State Prison." He feels abandoned by the world. Now is the moment to speak to him of a Saviour's love; to lead him to the Sinner's Friend. "Ah!" said a criminal to an inspector, "it seems to me there never was but one judge on earth who understood the right treatment of criminals." The inspector looked at him with astonishment. "It was the man of Calvary," answered the prisoner, as his eyes filled with tears. The melting moral of Christ, "Go, and sin no more," had sunk deep into the heart of the poor, condemned culprit.

As the term of sentence shortens, hope and fear alternately take possession of the mind; hope, that society may again look kindly; fear, that the slow-moving finger of scorn will be pointed at him, and that he will hear a voice everywhere saying, "He is an old convict; he is a prison-bird." How cruel! Who wonders that he perpetrates a fresh crime, and is recommitted to his narrow cell? The only wonder is, that there are not a thousand outbreaks to one.

That our sympathy may be aroused and quickened, it may be well to state the number annually imprisoned in the United States, and the number annually discharged. The whole number now confined in the various state prisons is about five thousand; about two thousand are annually discharged. Extending our view, we learn that there no less than eight hundred discharged from the House of Correction at South Boston, in a single year. About five hundred need assistance, or a temporary home, that employment may be procured for them; and thus be saved from a relapse into crime. To meet this want, the benevolence of our day has suggested various plans. Among the most successful is that of an INTELLIGENCE OFFICE for discharged convicts in Boston; connecting with it a weekly periodical, bearing the appropriate title of *Prisoner's Friend*. He who shall labor in this department will be

a benefactor to his race. Of all the great moral movements that characterize our day, this stands in the front rank. What can be more noble than to furnish to the degraded and the fallen new incentives to truth and virtue? We believe some one has said, that he who makes two blades of grass grow where only one grew before, has done more than all the statesmen and politicians that ever existed. With how much greater propriety might this be said of him who redeems a human being,—to borrow the language of Professor Upham,—“by planting the seeds of knowledge and virtue, which shall afterwards spring up and incorporate the strength of their branches, and the beauty of their flower and foliage, in the mature life and action of the man! How much greater is it to subdue man, than the earth on which he treads! How noble the conquests which are obtained over the human soul! How much superior to all the victories of a Napoleon or an Alexander! What are all the mighty discoveries of our day, in the physical world, compared to those in the moral world! What are our railroads and our telegraphs, —where we travel thirty miles the hour on the one, and send messages by the lightning on the other,—compared to the great work of leading a human being back to virtue? We live in a wonderful age. Discoveries in heaven and earth, throng upon us, till we are overwhelmed with astonishment. Now a new planet appears! Now some new development in machinery! Now some hidden power in nature! Still science stretches her wings. How immense the physical universe! How much greater the moral universe! The mind can seem to set bounds to the one. Who can bound the other? And, as ages roll on, new discoveries will be made in moral science, till that great day shall finally be ushered in when the last soul shall be redeemed; and a voice be heard, as in the beginning, 'And God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good.'

"The antiquary," says William H. Channing, "expends a fortune to disinter from the ruins of ages the relics of art: some hand or limb of a statue; some urn or vase; some coin or medal, and prizes it as of inestimable value. Unspeakably higher is the skill which can set free from the rubbish of evil habit and association the buried, but not lifeless, energies of goodness."

Let us pause a moment, and contemplate the scene before us. We have said there are about five thousand human beings incarcerated within the walls of our state prisons. Much larger numbers are in jails, and other places of confinement.—Many of them for the first offence; many without parents; many with families; many who once occupied honorable stations; many utterly ignorant of the very laws by which they were condemned; many whose very organization predisposed them to crime; many victims of intemperance; many who never enjoyed parental instruction; and, perhaps, many who never committed the crimes of which they are charged. In fine, who can tell the various influences that lead to the commission of crime? Who can say that, under similar circumstances, he would not have been guilty of the same offence as his brother-man? "Had I been situated as

these men have been," said the excellent Warden of our State Prison, "I, too, might have become equally guilty." Perhaps poverty drew them into crime; perhaps a failure or oppression of some merchant or tradesman involved them. But time would fail to enumerate the various causes of crime. Does not society make its own criminals? "I think pirates should be executed," said a sea-captain to the writer. "Who made the pirates?" we earnestly asked. Society often makes the criminal; then builds the cold, dreary cell for his confinement, or the gibbet for his execution. Society has, indeed, a long account to settle with its members. What a sad picture might be drawn here! Oh that some master-spirit would draw it to the life! Man, for ages, has been considered as a mere appendage to the state. A great truth is yet to be taught. Man is not made for the state, but the state for man. Man's above and before all human institutions. They did not make him; he made them. How few statesmen have dared to utter this great fact! Of those who have, how many have fallen martyrs! And the most melancholy part of their history is, that the faggot has often been lighted by the very class for whom they labored! Alas! the frailty of human nature! How evanescent is all human applause! To-day, a king; to-morrow, a malefactor! To-day, the shouts of the multitude; to-morrow, the reproaches of the world! The life of every true reformer shows, that no dependence can be placed upon popular favor. It is sickle as the wind, evanescent as the passing cloud, fading as the rose, and empty as the bubbles. How close the connection between truth and the cross!

But we are entering a wide field. Let us retrace our steps. We have spoken of the causes of crime, and the number of criminals. Let us now look at the reasons why a deeper interest should be felt in their behalf.

I. Few persons are disposed to plead for the prisoner. "I am aware," said the chaplain of a penitentiary, "that every thing which relates to prisons and their guilty inmates is, to multitudes, revolting; in them such themes create no interest,—they awaken no sympathy. On all this moral desert they can see no verdant spot. Other wastes may be made to bud, and blossom, and bear fruit; but, within the precincts of a prison-house, nothing is found to attract the eye of faith, to enkindle the dawning of hope, or call forth the aspirations of the spirit." Those who enter heartily into this great work are soon denominated "fanatics," "spurious philanthropists," "humanity-mongers," &c.—But let the world deride and persecute.—What stronger evidence can be given of the truthfulness of a cause? What philanthropist, that was true to humanity, ever lived without persecution and reproach? He lives and has his being amid scorn and suffering. His very mission is to stand amid the storm, and say to the contending waves, "Peace! be still." And, as he moves on in his sublime career, he will hear a voice saying, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." He will be reproached, derided, perhaps nailed to the cross. But his Master suffered all this before. "If they call the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call they of his household?" He must be resigned to all this, and calmly meet his fate. We admire the remark of