

OUR PRISON PROBLEM

BY ALFRED E. LAVELL, B.A.*



THE poet has sung,
"Stone walls do not a prison
make,
Nor iron bars a cage."

Properly understood, that statement is, we suppose, correct enough; but no one who has ever stood within the high stone walls of a prison, and, more than that, within the convict's cell, with the thick walls on either hand, and before him the steel bars of his prison door, will look lightly upon the fact that, bodily speaking, stone and iron afford a tolerably good means of putting limitations upon one's liberty. Sad to say, in all the history of the race, the use of stone and iron for this purpose has been found necessary to the safety of the state and the rights of the citizen. Even in such an enlightened and favoured land as ours, though nineteen centuries have passed since the Master preached "liberty to the captive," there seems to be as much need as ever for material, enforced restraint to be put upon man by man. Penitentiaries, prisons, and gaols, scattered through province and county from Atlantic to Pacific, tell the stern tale that we are yet far from the long-sung Golden Year of the poets. Crime and prison bars are an uncomfortable, nettling, and grim reality.

Speaking generally, we have the same essential principles in force in all our prisons throughout the Dominion. A glance into one of these, therefore, will give us some idea of the nature of at least our larger penal institutions. Perhaps the penitentiary at Kingston is the best type to take, for it is much the largest we have, and its population



A GUARD AS SENTINEL ON THE WALL,
KINGSTON PENITENTIARY.

is gathered from points more widely scattered than is that of any of the others.

(a) *The Shell.*

As the accompanying illustration shows, the main prison lies upon the lake shore, and, viewed from the south, as one floats out in the western end of Kingston harbour, lies, like a heavy mass of grey, streaked at the top with the dash of the dark red of the roofs, and capped in the centre by the great, bulging, silvery dome. To the north of this stretches the couple of hundred acres of the prison farm and quarry land, where work all day, in prison though outside the walls, a hundred or more convicts, watched by the men in the blue uniform of the prison guard.

*Reprinted from *Methodist Magazine and Review*, June, 1901.