

REPORT.

INTRODUCTION.

It was under a deep feeling of responsibility that the undersigned, commissioners of the Prison Association of New York, undertook the duty assigned them; and it is under a no less solemn sense of responsibility that they now enter upon the task of embodying, in a report to be submitted to the Legislature of the State, the results of their observations and inquiries. Our instructions were, to visit and inspect the penal and correctional institutions of the states of our Union; to examine their prison systems; and to inquire into their administration of criminal justice. To facilitate the objects of our mission, in addition to the commission received from the President of the Association, we were furnished with a circular letter from Gov. Fenton to the governors of the several states; and for the aid thus rendered—for such we found it—our thanks are due and cordially given to his Excellency.

It will be proper here to state the occasion of our appointment. Among its other functions, the Prison Association of New York is charged by law with the duty of seeking to improve the government and discipline of our prisons. To this end, it is charged with the further duty of annually visiting, inspecting and examining these institutions, and reporting their state and condition to the Legislature. In obedience to this injunction of law, all the prisons of the State have been repeatedly visited and reported on. The result of these examinations has been a conviction that our whole prison system needs careful and judicious revision. Under this conviction, a committee was appointed by the Association to consider the present organization of our prisons and to report a plan for their re-organization; that is, to prepare a comprehensive scheme for an improved prison system. It was at the instance of this committee, and because they desired the best lights attainable