

Behind Prison Bars

BY THE EDITOR.

PASSENGERS on the Hamilton line of the Grand Trunk Railway have often noticed the massive walls of the Central Prison, as their train whirled through the western part of Toronto. What specially attracts attention is the officer who parades back and forth on the top of the wall, with a rifle in his hand, to prevent the inmates from escaping. This indicates that the institution is different

from the factories by which it is surrounded.

Most people are glad enough to keep away from the Central Prison, and yet a short visit to this place is an exceedingly interesting experience. It is located just off Strachan Avenue, within a few minutes' walk of the street cars, and comprises a substantial group of buildings, without very much architectural pretensions. It is intended for criminals sentenced to comparatively short terms, the maximum being two years, and the average about seven months.



DR. GILMOUR,
Warden of Central Prison.

There are at present 325 prisoners, which is much below the number of a few years ago. This is an institution in which a decrease of attendance is an encouraging sign. Fully one thousand men pass through the prison during each year. Some return again and again, while others are satisfied with one experience.

The prison is a hive of industry, as every man who selects "The Central" as his boarding house is expected to earn as much as possible of his living.

First we enter a large building where wood work is being extensively carried on. Here the men are making children's sleighs, wagons, baseball bats, crokinole boards, dumb-bells, etc. The rope and twine factory employs a large number of hands. The work is not heavy, as the swiftly moving machinery quickly transforms the hemp into rolls of twine and rope, about four tons being turned out each day. The broom factory makes two thousand brooms every day. In the machine shop the iron work for the sleighs and wagons is done, and iron bedsteads and springs manufactured, which are of the very best quality, commanding the highest prices. The tailor shop and shoe shop are also places where good work is done, preparing supplies for the prison and other jails and public institutions throughout the Province.

All these industries are purely educational in their purpose, and are intended to fit the men to make a honest living when their term of imprisonment expires.

The occupations are of a decidedly humanizing character. In some prisons criminals are kept day after day breaking stone, or some other very menial drudgery, in which there is nothing elevating or inspiring. The Warden of The Central believes in making the daily employment of the men a means of improving them morally.

The cost of keeping a man in the Central Prison for one year is \$145, which includes all expenses, such as officials, salaries, etc. This is reduced to about \$100 by the profits

of the factories. There are fifteen instructors in the various trades and thirty officers.

"Do you have any good mechanics among the men?" was a question I asked of the Warden.

"Very seldom indeed," was the reply. "Good mechanics do not come to prison, except through whiskey."

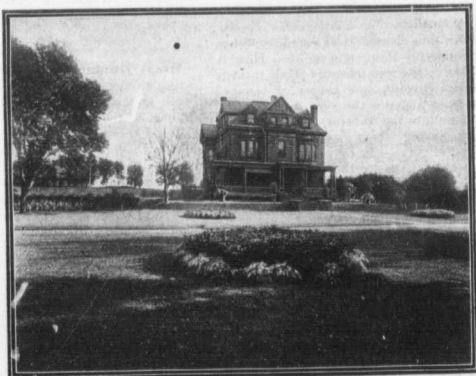
By the way, Warden Gilmour is death on whiskey. Knowing, as he does, how much crime and misery it causes, he is a strong advocate of total abstinence. Sometimes men come into the prison thoroughly soaked with strong drink, and fairly begging for a little whiskey, but they beg in vain. Not long ago, a man arrived who had scarcely passed a sober day for a year. When he learned that his whiskey supply was to be completely cut off, he pleaded piteously for a little indulgence.

"O, Warden," said he, "I shall die if you don't give me a drop or two."

"All right," replied Doctor Gilmour, "die if you want to, and I will hold an inquest on you." The man made the important discovery that it was possible for him to live without intoxicating liquor, and, of course, was greatly benefited by his compulsory abstinence.

The discipline of the Central Prison is strict, and yet kindly. Everything is done by rule, and strict observance to the regulations is expected of both officers and criminals. The men spend all their time in either one of two places, the cell or the workshop. The cells are arranged in tiers, one above the other, and the pushing of one bolt locks them all at the same time. They are not quite as luxuriously fitted up as the rooms in the King Edward Hotel, and are not particularly spacious, but they answer the purpose very well, and the occupants make no complaints.

The inmates of the Central all observe the rule of "Early to bed and early to rise." Every morning at five o'clock the rising bell rings, and at seven o'clock the shops are running in full blast. Twelve o'clock is the dinner hour. About fifteen minutes before noon a couple of large kettles of soup are brought into the corridor, from the kitchen, and ladled out into dishes which are placed side by side upon a large table. Then the men file past, and each one receives a bowl of soup and a good sized piece of bread. They carry these to



WARDEN'S RESIDENCE, CENTRAL PRISON GROUNDS.

their cells, and enjoy the meal at their leisure. After the prisoners have been locked in, an officer walks along in front of each row of cells and counts the inmates, after which these officers are lined up to give their report, so that the Warden may be absolutely sure that no one has taken his departure without observing the formality of saying "good bye."