

they all spend their lives in the service of outcast women and their neglected children.

We spent some time in the laundry last week, where we found as many as sixty women and girls, all discharged prisoners, working quietly and industriously; and in another room, those who were not strong enough for laundry work were occupied in making felt slippers, rugs and dusting-brushes. For a day's work each receives one shilling and two good meals. I hope one day to tell you all I saw here and at Princess Mary's Village Homes, where the children of prisoners are cared for by Mrs. Meredith—there is not room in this sketch.

One of her great desires is to detach prisoners from their friends when they come out of prison, for unless this is secured, they almost invariably fall into the old grooves and habits of crime.

There is no limit to Mrs. Meredith's sympathies where women prisoners are concerned. I think it is a beautiful thought of hers that every woman in prison, not only in England but in other countries as well, should receive a letter on Christmas morning, prettily illustrated and in her own language—not printed but written—to remind her of the season, and to show her that she is not forgotten by friends outside. Think what this is to each individual shut away from all life's joys?

If Mrs. Meredith did nothing else her name would be held in reverence and love. God grant her life and strength to continue her works of loving service to the criminal class.

The appointment of lady visitors to female convict prisons was not decided on until 1895, when the first to be nominated were Adeline, Duchess of Bedford and Lady Battersea, the first for long sentence prisons and the latter for short sentence prisons; Miss Cadbury and Miss Bartlett were also visitors in the latter.

By long sentence is understood from three years to five, ten, fifteen, and reaching to life sentences; short sentence from a week to three years.

Strictly speaking the only long sentence prison for women in this country is that at Aylesbury, lately removed from Woking, where about two hundred women and girls are working out their sentences; many for very grave offences, and several for life. The years of imprisonment may be reduced to two-thirds by good conduct, and many succeed in getting this reduction.

The work for these ladies was new and might have been very difficult had not the authorities done all in their power to render it possible. The appointment of lady visitors to the various prisons is a most merciful deed. Think what their presence means inside those walls; the kind words spoken, the interest displayed in the prisoners' past, the mention of husband and child, the pleasure of being called by their name instead of by a number, and to feel that they may look forward to these glimpses of happiness at stated times during the long years of imprisonment. Why, it makes all the difference in the world to the poor women shut away from outside life and hope.

Of course, the success of this new departure in prison life must depend in a great measure on the character and capability of the visitors appointed. It is essential that they possess the power of real, true, human fellowship and sympathy without indulging in sentimentalism; it is equally necessary that their compassion be bracing and their sympathy have moral force.

These qualifications are possessed largely by the ladies appointed in 1895; they are gaining influence over the prisoners who trust them, and the governors, matrons and chaplains look upon them as fellow-workers.

Any break in the fearful monotony of

prison life is a boon; this was seen last year at the re-opening of the chapel at the Aylesbury convict prison. It had a cheering influence upon the prisoners, and as the Duchess went through the workshops and twine rooms and among the women gardeners after the service, she noticed that they looked happier and brighter, and some of them said, "The church will be like home to us," while others remarked, "We feel out of prison on Sundays."

Any reasonable suggestions made by the visitors for the benefit of the prisoners are listened to by the authorities and granted if they do not interfere with the prison discipline.

Adeline Duchess of Bedford, speaking from her own experience, says that "To be of use the visits should be frequent and regular, that visitors should each keep a diary recording all dealings with each individual case, that it is better to know a few prisoners well than many superficially, that promises once made by lady-visitors to prisoners must be strictly kept and confidences respected, and that hope must be the keynote of their work."

The help given by these ladies to prisoners before their discharge is very important, and in many cases influences the whole of their after-life for good. We cannot give details of this lady's visits to the Aylesbury Prison, as they must be held sacred between her and those whom she comforts and strengthens. It is enough for us to know that she is working, and that she is exactly the one to cheer and brighten and build up the characters of those among whom she ministers.

Short terms are those varying from a week to three years. Lady Battersea, Miss Cadbury, and Miss Bartlett are all visitors in short-term prisons.

Short-sentence prisoners are under great disadvantages. The time they spend in prison is not sufficient for visitors to gain a hold on their hearts or consciences, nor have they the opportunity of lessening the term by good conduct.

Many of the prisoners have been dragged down by bad companions, drink, or evil inheritance, and the value of lady-visitors is often very great.

The quiet of the cells is sometimes salutary, and they will occasionally turn to the visitor voluntarily, and as Miss Cadbury says, when such an opportunity arises the visitor must answer to it by showing at once that she is a friend and not a judge.

I have been astonished to find that long-term prisoners look down upon short-term prisoners, and consider themselves greatly superior to them. When I asked for an explanation the answer was "short terms" go in and out of prison for dirty, mean actions or for drunkenness, while the "long term" are in for some great intellectual failure, or for the commission of some crime through accident."

One of the great difficulties in dealing with short-term prisoners is the impossibility of believing them. They love to baffle the visitor by false statements, and are quite pleased if they succeed.

A lady, after listening to a woman who is constantly in and out of prison, said—

"But is it not a very dreadful state to be in, that of being obliged to tell lies for your living?"

"Not at all, ma'am; we like it."

"Like it?" said the lady. "Do you never think of the end of those who tell lies?"

"It never troubles me, ma'am; but I have heard of some afraid to die when the time comes."

"Suppose your time was come, wouldn't you be afraid, too?"

"I don't know about being afraid, but I shouldn't be surprised if I told the truth then."

"It may be too late in a dying moment to

get out of the grasp of the father of lies," said the lady.

"There, ma'am, you'll never terrify me. I don't mind and I don't care nothing about the fire and brimstone. I'm not a criminal; I'm only a poor beggar, and that's the truth."

"I thought you were often committed for drunkenness?"

"Not I, ma'am; I daren't drink lest I should tell the truth." * I give this as a specimen of the difficulties met with by lady-visitors.

"No work is harder," says Miss Cadbury, of Birmingham, "than that among inebriates, for whom short sentences are useless. The far larger number of our short-sentence prisoners come in through drink, many of whom belong by right to what is called good society."

Miss Bartlett's experience is that if a visitor wishes to gain the confidence of the prisoners she must not be the least official either in manner or dress, but be as natural and sincere as possible. In illustration of this she says that a very refractory girl had been placed in the punishment cell, and for many days she was not allowed to see her. At length permission was granted, and Miss Bartlett waited in the matron's room, trembling secretly, and wondering what she should say to the culprit.

Presently the girl entered and, as she did so, burst into a laugh so natural and infectious that she could not help joining in. This broke the ice, and they became fast friends. The girl improved wonderfully, and when she came out married a steady, good man, and last year sent Miss Bartlett a photograph of her first baby.

A visitor must deal with the prisoner as woman to woman, not as woman to criminal, if she is to be of real service.

All lady visitors speaking from their experience say that short sentences are a mistake. They harden the girls, whereas long sentences are better for the women and better for society generally.

Lady Battersea tells a pathetic story. During her visits to the Protestant prisoners the Roman Catholic priest asked her if she would be so good as to visit his women as well. One of these was taken so ill that when her sentence expired she was dying and could not be removed. It was very bitter to her to die after all in prison, but Lady Battersea in her own infinitely tender way, soothed her by promising to send flowers to be put on her grave, so that it should not look like a common prisoner's grave. This removed the sting, and cheered her greatly, and she told all who came near her of the good news.

It is by such little acts of womanliness the hearts of these poor people are reached and taught to hope.

The work being done both for women and girls to prevent them drifting into crime, and being criminals, to lift them out of the condition, would fill the whole number of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER. Quite an army of gentlewomen are devoting their lives and means to this end. Not the least Christ-like work is taking the little children of the criminal class right away from their surroundings, caring for them and training them to be good useful members of society. An account of this special work I hope to give some other time, if I am allowed by the Editor to do so.

The whole work in connection with prisons which has been growing all through our dear Queen's reign is one that will do it honour, and be the means of making good citizens and loyal subjects out of those who might have been a terror in our midst.

"I was in prison and ye visited me."

* This is part of a conversation between one of Mrs. Meredith's helpers and a woman always in and out of prison.