

The Dominion Government and Prison Reform.

We are glad to make room for the following reference to prison reform in the very able Report of the Inspector of Penitentiaries for the year 1891. We trust the important reforms therein advocated will be speedily acted upon by the Dominion Government.

Dominion Reformatory for First Offenders.—"It is one of the recommendations of the Ontario commissioners to establish an industrial reformatory, where "young men between the ages of 16 and 30, who have been convicted, for the first time, of a felony or serious misdemeanour, and who, in the opinion of the judges imposing sentence, are proper cases for reformatory treatment," should be sent and "committed for an indeterminate period." This recommendation is a good one and must commend itself to general approval. Its taking practical shape would be, for first offenders, the realization of what has been urged in these reports so frequently, for convicts well-disposed and who give promise of reform. They should be separated from the habitual and hardened criminals. It requires no argument to show the paramount importance, the crying necessity there is to make some fit provision by which so great a number of young men may be saved from being thoroughly corrupted and ruined by constant association with the depraved and vicious, who, by their tact and cunning, will escape being committed to the prison of isolation. Allow me to bespeak your best consideration in behalf of this large array of human beings, on the threshold of manhood, who are standing, perhaps, on the very brink of destruction by becoming confirmed criminals. They may be saved from this fate, if timely steps be taken to rescue them from further contact with vice, and from the contaminating influence of wicked associates. The architectural construction of our penitentiaries does not permit the complete separation and classification required to prevent the baneful effect arising from the co-mingling of the neophytes in crime with those who are seasoned in guilt. I beg leave, therefore, earnestly, to recommend the establishment of a prison, wholly reformatory in its character and management, wherein persons, between the ages of 16 and 30, convicted of their first known crime, entailing upon them a sentence of two years and more, would be confined, in view of being subjected to such discipline and treatment as their previous habits and training, disposition and age may render necessary. For this class of offenders, it is reasonable to suppose that the indeterminate period of imprisonment would have good results. In connection with this recommendation, the question may arise, will one such prison meet the requirement, or should it be a supplement to each penitentiary? No good reason appears in support of multiplying the number of these reformatory prisons. A central one, say at Ottawa, should suffice. The cost of the transfer of prisoners from the several provinces might be considerable; but, it would be a trifle compared with the building, equipping and maintaining of five separate institutions."

The Ontario Prison Reform Commission.—"The Ontario Government has taken the initiative and done a great deal in the direction of prison reform, by having appointed a commission 'to collect information regarding prisons, houses of correction, reformatories and the like, with the view of ascertaining any practical improvements which may be made in the methods of dealing with the criminal classes in the province, so far as the subject is within the jurisdiction of the Provincial Legislature and Government.' The commissioners spent many months at the work

mapped out for them, visited several penal and reformatory institutions in Canada and in the United States, and gathered a large mass of useful information from persons officially connected with such institutions, and from the sheriffs, gaolers and others, in the various counties of the Province of Ontario. The expense of the commission and for the publication of the report, has been, it may be concluded, considerable. These facts are referred to with a view of showing what is being done by the Legislature of one of our provinces to keep pace with the spirit of the times, and be in touch with the progress made in other countries for the reform of prisons and criminals."

A Fearful Warning.—"In the penitentiaries, on 30th June last, 744 young men under 30 were confined, viz., 342 at Kingston, 207 at St. Vincent de Paul, 118 at Dorchester, 47 at Manitoba and 30 at New Westminster. It would be safe to say that one-third of these are under 21. This is very sad and suggestive, and calls for remedial measures, not only by the Dominion Government, but, also, by the Legislatures of the provinces. It is deplorable that so large a number—more than half of the whole convict population—of mere boys and young men should find their way to the penitentiaries. There must have been something dreadfully and radically wrong in their early training, either at home or at school, or in both. The disregard for parental authority, in fact for any and all authority, manifested by the greater number of boys now-a-days, the culpable neglect of parents in not correcting their children when they do wrong, the improper and evil-working restraint imposed upon the teacher by preventing the infliction of well-deserved and wholesome punishment in the school—realizing to the full, the truth of the old proverb, "Spare the rod spoil the child"—these causes combined with the latitude allowed to young people to form bad acquaintances, to cultivate bad habits and frequent questionable resorts, lead with inevitable certainty to the commission of crime and to the convict cell.

Cellular Confinement.—"The prison of isolation—an adjunct to the penitentiary at Kingston, of which mention has been made in former annual reports—is approaching completion. It is quite likely the building will be ready for occupation towards the close of next summer. Meanwhile, inquiry is being made as to the best and most suitable modes of employment for the convicts in isolation, who must necessarily work in their cells. Light industries, which would not injure health by being carried on in the cells, by vitiating the air, such as mat making, willow and rattan work, broom and cane chair-making, etc., would be suitable, and the very limited output from each kind of such handiwork would not interfere, to any appreciable extent, with outside manufacturers. The necessity of providing the convicts, not only in the prison of isolation, but in all the departments of the penitentiaries, with work calculated to elevate and reform, instead of lowering and degrading them, is evident and is of the first importance.

"In view of the completion of the prison of isolation, at no distant day, the time has arrived when it is indispensably necessary to devise a system of management and frame suitable rules and regulations for the guidance of the convicts, who will be placed in separate confinement, as well as for the officers who will be appointed to take charge of the discipline and the industries to be carried into operation.

"Under the circumstances, it may not be amiss—as it certainly appears necessary—to appoint some one properly qualified, or a commission to visit and examine the prisons in Belgium and Ireland, especially, where the separate plan is in vogue, and such other countries, on the continent, as would supply such information and experience as would prove useful and advanta-

geous in improving our own rather defective system. It is very evident that a thorough acquaintance with those various modes of treatment, and their adaptation to our own system, would be most advantageous.

"It is not necessary to look for Christian work, soul-saving work, in distant 'Boorioboola Gha.' There is plenty of it within the walls of our penitentiaries. It rests with the Government to decide whether, with the 'prison of isolation' at Kingston, a new and healthy system of penitentiary régime shall be inaugurated, all over, or whether we shall be content to let things take their course, *quies non movere*, following the *laissez faire*, 'rest and be thankful' policy of the past."

A Representative Conference.

The Prison Reform Conference held in Toronto, in 1891, was preëminently a representative one. It was composed of delegates duly appointed by and representing seven church courts, and thirty-two other public bodies. We trust the Conference of 1892 will be equally representative. While we desire the attendance of all who are in sympathy with this Prison Reform movement, we specially desire the attendance of all duly appointed delegates. For the sake of our children, and for the sake of our country come to the rescue. Remember the date, Tuesday, December 13th, at the Educational Buildings, Toronto, commencing at 10.30 a.m.

The Prison Night School.

The secular night school at the Central Prison, is increasing in interest and efficiency from year to year. Last year there was an average attendance of about 90. Two evenings a week, Mr. Boddy conducts the senior class, and two evenings a week, Mr. Madden conducts the junior class. 39 of those entering the junior class last year could neither read nor write. The teachers are God-fearing men, and are able incidentally to very materially strengthen the hands of the clergy and Sunday School teachers, who so faithfully minister to the spiritual wants of the prisoners from week to week.

The Work of our Agent.

The following extract from the diary of Mr. Taylor, our agent, for one day (Oct. 12th), will give some idea of the work done by him in aid of discharged prisoners:

"Visited Mrs. M——, C—— St., husband in jail, found family in great need of assistance, gave them some provisions.

Received a note from Mrs. M—— G——, late of the A. Mercer Reformatory, visited her, found her ill of consumption, and very short of bed covering, her blankets being in pawn, which I have redeemed and made the poor creature comfortable.

Went to S—— St. and obtained work in Mr. A——'s wood yard for J—— W—— from the jail, to commence in the morning.

Spent some time in Central Prison, visiting and advising the men who are shortly to leave that institution; had a very interesting conversation with W—— C——, who will be discharged on the 17th. This man professes conversion and wishes to remain in the city, he promises to come to the office to me on the morning that he is discharged.

Received a letter from E. F. D., known in the prison as E. C. M. He is still in the situation to which I sent him on being discharged from the C. P., where he professes to have been converted, he says, "I am so glad that I came here. The farmer I am working for is an old gentleman, he is not well, and so I have to look after the stock myself. He told me that he was well satisfied with my work. There is a methodist church quite close to where I am living, so I am able to attend meeting on Sunday and prayer meeting week nights. The Lord has been indeed good to me for giving me a place like this."