

and they observe that the Warden bears willing and well-merited testimony to the great value of her services as Matron.

#### THE CONTRACT SYSTEM.

Ever since the first establishment of the Penitentiary, it has been the practice to let out the labor of the male convicts to contractors, who were ready to employ them in carrying on various branches of industry, as shoemaking, cabinet-making, or the like, within the walls of the Penitentiary. Under this system, all male convicts (not incapacitated for labor by old age, or physical infirmity), are hired out to contractors, with the exception of those only required for the necessary daily routine work connected with the institution itself, or of those employed in making such additions and alterations as may from time to time be found necessary in the buildings.

"Under the contract system," to quote the words used in the Third Annual Report of the Board of State Charities of Massachusetts, "the prison authorities find, lodge, clothe and discipline the convicts, while the contractors furnish men to instruct them in trades, and oversee their work."\*

During the last few years, indeed, a large number of convicts have been employed by the Government, in the erection of the Rockwood Lunatic Asylum, a building in the immediate neighborhood of the Penitentiary. This, however, is altogether an exceptional case, especially provided for in the Penitentiary Act itself.

The system, commonly known as the Contract System, is a very simple, and in some respects a convenient method of utilizing the labor of the convicts. It relieves, too, the executive officers of the institution of some part of their responsibility, by withdrawing the convicts, during the hours of labour at least, to some extent from their control, and placing them under the charge of the contractors and their agents. This system is also very generally (though it is believed erroneously) supposed to be the one which brings to the State the largest pecuniary returns from the labour of the convicts, and for this reason it commends itself to those short-sighted economists, who gauge the value of all prison systems solely by the balance sheet which the institution presents at the close of the year. Notwithstanding these apparent advantages connected with the contract system, it is noteworthy that it has never (it is believed) prevailed in Europe; on this continent indeed it was adopted almost universally in all the large Penitentiaries and State Prisons, on their first organization.

During the last few years, however, the merits of the contract system have been very much canvassed in the United States, and the result has been, that it has been condemned by the most intelligent Wardens of those Prisons, already abandoned in several of them, and lastly that it has been denounced in very strong terms by their ablest State Inspectors and Prison Commissioners. The subject of the "contract system" has been especially considered in all its details by the able Commissioners appointed very recently by the Prison Association of New York. The results of their enquiry are given, by anticipation, in the Third Annual Report of the Board of State Charities of Massachusetts. It is needless to add that the system is condemned on every ground,—reformatory, disciplinary, and pecuniary. The evidence taken by these Commissioners appears to establish, incontrovertibly, that the contract system is objectionable on the following grounds:—

- 1st. That it is necessarily injurious to discipline.
- 2nd. That it is unfavorable, if not actually hostile, to the reformation of the convicts.
- 3rd. That it interferes with the secular and religious instruction of the convicts.
- 4th. That under it a very small proportion only of the convicts can possibly learn a trade while in prison.
- 5th. That the pecuniary returns from the labor of the convicts are not so large as they would be were the convicts employed for the benefit of the State under an efficient system of administration.

The Inspectors do not consider it necessary to encumber their Report with extracts from the evidence given in the Reports of the Boards of State Charities already referred to,† which goes to establish the preceding heads of indictment against the contract system;

\* See p. 79.

† See Third Annual Report of Board of State Charities of Mass., page 86, seq. 9.