

## SPARKS FROM THE ANVIL.

*Sparks from the anvil! sunlight gilds the plain!  
Gentles! the Blacksmith is at work again.*

If wellock's shaped in Heaven, with some 't must be  
To make 'em long for Heaven and immortality.

An' you'll believe them, landlords always have in view  
A score applying for the house, as well as you.

Is the large funeral a sign of sorrow? Then  
Dead tavern-keepers are lamented most of men.

*Impromptu* speeches mostly bear the leaven  
Of one week's preparation ere they're given.

Self-evident's the gentleman who rates himself  
As Dresden-ware. The odds are 'tis but common delf.

The long, long winter nights are seldom dull  
When *Baby's* with us—and the coal bin's full.

*Give* unto needy friendship—seldom lend,  
Lest he lose credit, and yourself a friend.

"Go to the ant," King Solomon says;  
"Go! try your Uncle," rakes say nowadays.

Marital wrongs, with *men*, once craved the sword;  
Poor cuckolds! *damages* is now the word.

Theft, as a vice, is an exploded bubble;  
No vice is theft. *Found out's* the modern trouble.

What is tact? 'Tis in leaving the virtues of hemp-seed unsung  
In the presence of people whose parents were hung.

"Short lives and merry ones," translated, means  
Foul, blasted lives, and squalid death-bed scenes.

Would Memory had the dial's happy dower,  
That only marks the pleasant, sunlit hour.

Archaic French-Canadian farmers! Were ye born  
Ere sable Chaos yielded to Time's earliest morn?

Known where men shun Sahara's torrid breath,  
Where Esquimaux the Arctic frosts endure;  
Road where Siberian exiles sigh for death;  
And yet—strange paradox—Browning's *obscure*.

When glints the usurer's gold beneath the borrower's gaze,  
Distant, oh distant! seems the reckoning day;  
Ah! when the latter dawns with undiminished rays,  
Yon gold's fair gleam has long since pass'd away.

Men, who're devout, are mostly won  
In the early morn of life's brief day;  
Complexion, teeth, and lovers gone,  
Then gentle woman's *devotée*.

Courage and grit a man admires,  
All woman-kind adore 'em;  
And yet say I for one  
(Lamenting each dead Nun),  
Less courage at Asylum \* fires,  
More common-sense before 'em.

Easy to read the Sacred Page, which never palls,  
Once read, its story lingers long in Memory's halls;  
Why has it thus Faith, Hope, and human courage stir'd?  
Truth—a Divine Simplicity's the answering word.  
(Note this, ye Scribes, so difficult to scan, and yet  
Thrice read, we mortals find so easy to forget.)

She fill'd, with dignity, a public chair  
(Though vacant her's within her husband's house),  
Foremost for Woman's Rights, to do and dare  
(Yet fainted at the squeaking of a mouse).

Nobly she spake of Woman's mission field  
(Mere household work she left, of course, undone),  
The press her virtuous public work reveal'd  
(Her husband's *typist* sew'd his buttons on).

Oft prayerful men thank'd God for such as she  
(The while her sick child drew a hireling's breast),  
And said, "Our sister will remember'd be,  
When her fair soul has sought immortal rest."

It fell upon a night, her *alien* tread  
Sought home, her brain in one triumphant whirl,  
To find her one, poor ewe-lamb's spirit fled—  
Gone, too, her spouse—gone the type-writer girl!

A French wife loves her Gallic spouse,  
If *beau esprit*, *aussi sans peur*,  
Contented each of Teuton vows  
If Sauerkraut's only faithful to her.  
Your Yankee loves a wedded slave  
(Sweet, glorious triumph of democracy),  
Whilst British dames but husbands crave,  
Who hobnob with the aristocracy.

From his foul attic-floor, in rags array'd,  
The Novel-writer flings his sneer at TRADE;  
Balls, Routs, and Beauty are described by him  
Whose bed and drawing-room's that garret dim;  
Though meanly born, he points his venom'd fang  
Against the humble class from whence he sprang;  
Calmly he writes of riches, and, with much ado,  
Lord! how he scarifies the *parvenu*,  
And heedless whence the next poor meal's to come, he  
Prates glibly on of Montmorency Cholmondeley.

Silent the anvil! Shallows veil the plain.  
Gentles! a fair good night—we meet again.

THE BLACKSMITH.

\* The fire at Longue Pointe Asylum.

## CONTINENTAL PRISONS.

THE proposition that "all prisons are alike" would be accepted without demur by anybody, who has visited many of those institutions out of mere curiosity and without paying close attention to small varieties in penal systems. These varieties, however, though often trifling in appearance, are enough to constitute very great differences so far as the daily conditions and general objects of a prisoner's life are concerned. When the era of Prison Reform set in, about seventy years ago, all countries adopted the same system of model prison, and this has led gradually to the universal erection of gaols almost identical in aspect. Shaped like a fan or like a wheel, according to the number of prisoners who have to be confined, the central rotunda with radiating wards of two or three stories, has become the general type. The iron galleries and staircases, the broad-flagged or asphalted passages, the airing yards and the cells are everywhere the same; nor is there much difference in the dietary, the costume, the hair-cutting and shaving, and the rules about receiving visits and writing letters. But, comparing foreign prisons with those of Britain, there are great differences in the kinds of work which prisoners are set to perform, and in the relaxations, indulgences and remissions of penalty which may be earned by good conduct—great differences also in the punishments inflicted for misconduct within prison.

The British penal system is, though in some respects the most equal, unquestionably the most severe. The misdemeanant sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labour cannot obtain a single day's remission by good conduct, and he is not allowed to spend in prison the smallest fraction of the money which he earns. His choice of work is also limited mostly to mat-making, tailoring, and shoemaking. He may be a skilled mechanic or artist, or a watchmaker, turner, carver, engraver, miniature-painter or draughtsman—he will find no employment for his talents within gaol, and may, in fact, be set to work which will spoil his hand, and for a time cripple his power of earning his living after his discharge. The felon condemned to penal servitude stands in the same case with respect to work. He may earn promotion to second and first class with small improvements in his diet, and eventually a ticket of leave, by good marks; but unfitness for the task allotted to him, or ill-health, may render him incapable of earning the daily maximum of eight marks, and thus place him at disadvantage beside old and cunning prison "hands." In all foreign countries the discretionary powers allowed to prison governors for the treatment of their captives are much greater than with us. This, no doubt, opens the door to a good deal of favouritism; but, where the governor is a man of experience and just mind, the Continental system must operate more humanely than our own hard-and-fast rules can possibly do.

There is no question about which the opinions of prison reforms have been so divided as about the effects of solitary confinement. In England it has been ruled that a prisoner sentenced to penal servitude cannot be safely confined in solitude for more than nine months. In Germany and Austria the term of solitude is two years. In Belgium a prisoner sentenced to *travaux forcés* formerly had the option between solitary confinement and association; and if he chose the former, one-third of his penalty was remitted without reference to other remissions which he might earn by good conduct. As it was found that all prisoners elected for solitary confinement, the right or option has now been withdrawn; but the remission is still granted, so that in Belgium a sentence of fifteen years' penal servitude means practically ten. It must be added that in Belgium the time which a prisoner has spent in custody before sentence is deducted from the term of punishment—a just provision which ought to be adopted in all countries.

In France political changes have produced so much hap-hazard legislation that the whole penal system has been reduced to chaos. In 1872 it was resolved that convicts of the worst kind should be transported to New Caledonia. There they were to be employed in public works or agriculture; and after a probationary period, they were to receive allotments of land, with permission to marry female convicts or sweethearts at home who cared to go out and join them. If already married, their wives and children, supposing the wives to be willing, were to be sent out to them at the State expense. This philanthropical scheme, which made the lot of the murderer, the incendiary, and the thrice-convicted felon much preferable to that of the *reclusionniste*, sentenced to five or ten years' solitary confinement (*reclusion*) for felonies of the second degree, proved the incentive to a number of murders in and out of prison; convicts in the French penitentiaries began to commit murderous assaults upon the warders in order to be sent "over the water," while burglars, when caught, deliberately attacked their captors with knife or revolver, so as to aggravate their crime and qualify themselves for transportation. In many of these cases death resulted from the assaults; but the criminals counted on the sentimental weakness of French juries, who, almost invariably, find "extenuating circumstances" for a murder supposed to have been perpetrated "in sudden passion;"\* and, as a matter of fact, none of the malefactors who killed warders or policemen were ever guillotined. What is more, a considerable number of the convicts sent to New Caledonia used to escape thence to Australia, and this

\* The finding of "extenuating circumstances" by a jury abases the crime by one degree, and in cases of murder saves the prisoner's life.

accounted for the popularity of transportation with the criminal classes. The Legislature had at last to interfere by enacting that no convict should be transported for any offence committed within prison walls, and subsequently an Act was passed compelling convicts sentenced to lengthy term of penal servitude (*travaux forcés*) for murder to undergo the first five years of their punishment in *reclusion*.

But, as a consequence of all this, the French penal system has got completely out of order, and additional confusion has been thrown into it by the arbitrary manner in which mitigations, remissions, and pardons are now granted. There is no system of marks by which a convict may, as in England or Belgium, work out his own freedom without favour. Political influence, exerted through members of the Legislature, holds the keys of the gaol and the power which tempers prison rules; and Cabinet changes are so frequent, that, if a senator or deputy cannot get his petition in a prisoner's behalf entertained by one minister, he makes interest with another and another till he succeeds. It very seldom happens, however, that he does not obtain at least an order granting some indulgence to his prisoner. The latter will be allowed to have his meals sent in to him from a restaurant because the doctor certifies that prison fare disagrees with him, or he will be permitted to serve out his term in the infirmary, or be appointed assistant in the prison library, pharmacy office, or kitchen. Sometimes the minister will with a stroke of the pen reduce a penalty by half, or, on the occasion of some national anniversary, get the President of the Republic's signature to a free pardon. Certain ministers have been known to grant commutations and pardons on the very day of their leaving office, knowing that they were no longer officially responsible for what they did.

These irregularities are made much worse by the fact that French prison governors are themselves, in these days, generally the nominees of members of Parliament; and either out of gratitude, or in expectations of future benefits, they curry favour with their patrons by petting the prisoners whom the latter recommend. It follows that the convicts who have no political friends to care for them spend a very bad time indeed. The governor, by his rigour towards them, makes up for his leniency towards his *protégés*. If sentenced to *reclusion*, they are like men entombed. They never leave their cells, except once for an hour a day, when they are turned into the airing yard; they are employed in making cardboard boxes, match-boxes, paper bags, list shoes, or other small things which can be done with paste or gum, without cutting instruments; and out of the small pittance they earn they are allowed to retain a percentage which they may spend on buying small luxuries at the prison canteen—butter, cheese, coffee, chocolate, sausage, or wine. But these unbefriended ones have scarcely a hope that by the most exemplary conduct they will ever be inscribed on the list which the governor sends twice a year to the Minister of Justice (a list which always procures a number of pardons and commutations); and experience shows that, after three or four years in solitary confinement they become imbecile or consumptive. Sometimes, but not always, some violent "breaks out" precedes the finale collapse of reason; and frequently the *reclusionnistes* grow deaf, or lose the faculty of speech, to a great extent, that is, they can only speak stammering. This is particularly the case with convicts who have lived much in the open air.

The treatment of French female convicts is usually milder than that of men. They live under the supervision of nuns whose rule is gentle though firm, and it is only in cases of persistent insubordination that they are relegated to solitary confinement. If they behave well, they work in associated rooms, in silence, but a great deal of whispering seems to be tolerated, and during two half-hours a day parties of four, or five are allowed to talk (take "tongue practice" as they call it) under the supervision of a wardress. Moreover, certain French female convicts recover their liberty very soon after their sentence by expressing their willingness to marry male convicts. If a woman be young, healthy, and not deformed, she can ask to be put on the list of brides elect who are shipped, twice a year to New Caledonia, and once she marries she is a free woman, but on condition of remaining all her life in the penal colony.

In Belgium the system of solitary confinement has been brought almost to perfection by keeping up the constant stimulus of hope in the prisoner. If he have a trade, he works at it; if he wishes to learn a trade, he is taught by a skilled instructor; if he have no special aptitudes for handicraft, he is employed in work which can be easily learnt in a few lessons. This plan is also followed in the prisons of Switzerland, Germany, and Austria and Hungary. In these countries, as in England, there have been occasional outcries about the competition between prison labour and free labour; but when it is considered how small a proportion the population of prisoners bears to that of freemen, the latter cannot be said to have a grievance.

In Belgian prisons all kinds of work are done. One man, who is a good accountant, may be seen auditing the books of a local tradesman; another, who is a good linguist, is doing translations; a third is cleaning watches. The most delicate sorts of cabinet-making, wood-carving, fan-painting, and manufacturing of artificial flowers, book-binding, gilding, silvering, boot-making, toy-making, chain-making, are all being carried on in the cells, or in the separate workshops. One-third of the prisoner's earnings is retained by the Government; one-third is kept to be handed to him on his discharge; and one-third is his own to spend as he pleases within reason. At the governor's discretion, how-