

Here's a Prison Where Prisoner Is Not a Prisoner; A Remarkable Experiment in Penitentiary Reform

Convicts of Great Meadows Prison, in New York State, Absent for Days Without Reporting, Being Placed On Their Honor Not To Run Away---How One Warden Is Making Men of Those Placed in His Charge.

The following article describing a remarkable experiment of New York State in prisons is taken from the Outlook:

One of the most serene and peaceful railway stations, ordinarily, in the State of New York, is that at Comstock, in Washington County, 75 miles north of Albany, where trains stop at the mandate of a red flag. The only occasions on which more than three or four people come into the village by the same train are at intervals, sometimes of weeks, sometimes of months, when gangs of 20 and 30 men in prison uniform and chains, escorted by heavily armed guards, are conducted, sullen and scowling, from the station to Great Meadows Prison, half a mile. There are three hundred convicts in Comstock, whose domiciles are scattered over square miles of territory, while six hundred convicts, who are serving terms for every crime in the calendar—from murder in the first degree downward—are housed at night in the big prison building, and during the day cultivate the 1,000-acre farm upon which it is located.

A motor truck, manned by two young men with bronzed faces under broad-brimmed straw hats, was starting with a load of freight from the Comstock railway station, one day last August, just as a train put down some passengers. The wife of the village storekeeper was on the platform with a tow-headed boy about 12 years of age. The youngster, catching sight of the men on the truck, hailed them gleefully. The vehicle came to a stop, and the man at the wheel called to the boy's mother:

"Can we take him with us?"

"If you'll be sure to bring him back in time for dinner," she replied readily.

"All right; we'll have him back in time," said the wheelman.

His companion got down from the truck and lifted the tow-headed boy to his seat, and the vehicle started away with the youngster between the two men.

"I should scarcely think that a mother would dare allow her child to go far away from home in the neighborhood of the prison farm, where all the convicts are at work," remarked one of the new arrivals to the station agent.

The railway official laughed. "Those two men running the truck are convicts," he said. "They often take the village children for rides with them when they are hauling freight from the station."

That incident was the writer's introduction to the Great Meadows paradox—a prison the basis of whose administration is the sense of honor of convicted criminals. The conception is one that, in spite of the fact that the system has proved successful during a two-year trial, suggests comic opera; but it is, after all, only a logical outcome of the new penology that deals and saves.

Another surprise was in store for me, after which I took all surprising conditions at Great Meadows as a matter of fact. I was talking soon after my arrival at Comstock with Warden Wm. J. Homer, on the veranda of

his house, when a good-looking young man of about 30, wearing a glib cap, with gray trousers belted to his shirt, came up the steps to hand him a letter.

"Here's somebody who can tell you a good deal about the place," said Mr. Homer.

Sitting beside the good-looking young man on the bench on the veranda, I remarked, after he had described some of the features of the honor system:

"I hope that the warden will allow me to talk to the prisoners. I want to get their own ideas about Great Meadows."

"I am a prisoner myself," said my new acquaintance, with some embarrassment. "I'm finishing the last eight months of a five-year term."

A Prison Band.

He proved to be a former Broadway musical director, who had, since his wife, without seriously injuring her, come up to the wind-up of a protracted spree. He had been transferred to Great Meadows from Sing Sing a year before, and, by direction of the warden, was devoting his time and energies to the nation of other prisoners with musical talent. A military band and an orchestra, each with its full complement of players selected from the inmates, most of whom had never handled a musical instrument before they were sentenced to prison, are evidence of the director's capacity. The orchestra gave a concert in the prison chapel that morning in honor of several visitors to the institution, among them the wife of one of the inmates. She and her husband sat with the other guests of the warden during the concert, the numbers of which included a very creditably played violin solo by a man who had learned the instrument on the Comstock farm, and songs by a young Jew with a voice of unusual purity and strength. While the warden and his guests were at dinner that evening a piano and violin played by prisoners made agreeable music in the next room, and the young Jew sang sentimental ditties.

Also Baseball.

We heard the band at the ball game that afternoon. Yes, there is a baseball game at Great Meadows every Saturday during the summer, the competing nines being formed from among the prisoners, who are allowed an hour's practice on each of the other working days of the week. The rest of the inmates attend the game in a body, and conduct themselves exactly like any other baseball enthusiasts.

The Great Meadows experimental station is merely an 1,000-acre farm, on which is a big house with six hundred comfortable rooms in which the farmhands are locked up each night. The house is called a prison, and the rooms are known as cells. However, the cell block is as light, bright and cheerful as a sun-parlor. The walls facing the cells are more than half in glass, and the occupants look right out into the open country, with a fine view of the Adirondacks in one direction and of the Green Mountains of Vermont in another. The cells are the size of some hall bedrooms, but they

are better furnished and more sanitary than most hall bedrooms that are rented in the big cities. The beds are of polished steel, and there are an electric light, sanitary plumbing, and running water in each cell. Everything that modern sanitation has taught has been employed in the construction of the cell block. All the corners have been rounded off, and dirt and dust, the generating places of disease germs, find no place for lodgment. Incidentally, there is no hospital at Great Meadows, although space has been left for one. The only subjects for hospital treatment since Warden Homer has been in charge of the prison were one man with a broken leg and one with pneumonia, both of whom are all right now.

Unusual Privileges.

The Great Meadows idea goes back to the time of Prison Superintendent Cornelius V. Collins (who preceded Joseph S. Scott in that office), and was the conception of Frederick H. Mills, former sales agent of the prison department, to whom Mr. Collins many prison reforms are due. Mr. Mills' plan was the erection of a prison to be made the apex of New York's system, in which unusual privileges were to be granted, and transference to which was to be a reward for good conduct on the part of the inmates. The other state prisons, and also a measure providing for their leaving prison in good health after work in the open. The carrying out of this scheme to an extreme degree was the most hopeful advocates of prison humanizing is the work of William J. Homer.

These are the physical conditions at Great Meadows. The warden, his wife, and their daughter, a girl of 17 or 18 years, occupy the large and handsome residence on the prison grounds, a quarter of a mile from the cell block. During the summer Mr. and Mrs. Homer generally have a number of visitors; not only family friends but many penologists and prison officials from other States who come to see with their own eyes the wonders wrought among men under punishment for crime, who, under different prison conditions, might be raving wolves. A Miss Homer, and a family comprising husband and wife and a boy of ten, were visitors at the warden's home at the time of my visit; and the Rev. Jacob Goldstein, pastor of Temple Beth Shalom in Brooklyn, who is also Jewish chaplain of the Tombs and Sing Sing prisons and a well-known penologist, was spending a part of his summer holiday as a guest of Mr. Homer in a study of the honor system. All the work of the Homer household—cooking, housework, waiting on table, and the rest—is done (and remarkably well done) by convicted criminals, who are not even under the surveillance of guards.

No Weapons For Guards.

There is approximately one keeper to every fourteen prisoners at Great Meadows, as in the other prisons of the state, but the guards carry no weapons—not even canes. The six hundred

prisoners, so far as forcible restraint or opposition is concerned, might at any time during the day overcome their guards and do as they would with the warden and his family and guests. In a body they might sack Comstock and other villages adjacent before they could be brought under restraint. It is safe to say that the most modern penologists would not have dared, before Warden Homer's accomplishment, to predict the possibility of allowing so great a degree of liberty to six hundred men who had been living unnatural lives in confinement for years. Yet Warden Homer and his household are as safe from concerted attack as any other residents of the state. So jealous are the prisoners of Great Meadows of the reputation of the institution—and the element of selfishness enters into the question, for anything calculated to demonstrate weakness in the honor system would endanger their privileges—that it is probable that they would lynch that one among them who might be guilty of conduct prejudicial to the continued success of Warden Homer's experiment; I obtained that impression at least from talks with the men. Rabbi Goldstein, who has had many years of experience in prisons in this and other countries, was as amazed as myself at the Great Meadows conditions. Secretary Orlando F. Lewis, of the Prison Association of New York, who has inspected many of the penal institutions of the civilized world, and who visited Comstock a week before Rabbi Goldstein, expressed as great astonishment as he at the extraordinary control of the warden over his charges. At Mr. Homer, at the Convention of the American Prison Association in Baltimore last summer, read a paper on the honor system at Great Meadows, many prison officials in the audience fully refused to credit his statements as to the liberty he allowed the inmates. To-day every warden and prison official at all interested in his work throughout the country is taking advantage of the first opportunity to visit the institution at Comstock and see things for himself; for while there are a number of prisons in the United States and elsewhere in which the honor system is in vogue, Warden Homer, while carrying it to as great lengths as any of his contemporaries, has found an unparalleled responsiveness on the part of the men.

Among the inmates of Great Meadows at the time of my visit was the draft of sixty men from Sing Sing who had been foremost among the multitudes that set fire to that institution in July. These men had been sent to Comstock to relieve the congestion in Sing Sing, and are not all merit men, as is usually the case. Nevertheless, they had been thoroughly assimilated by the others, and if there was one among them who did not appreciate the change in conditions and was not emphatic in his praise of Warden Homer, Rabbi Goldstein and I—who were turned in among the men in the prison yard with permission to ask them any questions on the part of the men.

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Mexico! A Vision of Its Former Self—or Present and Past



RISKS LIFE TO GET WHILLY ANIMALS INTO THE MOVIES

Do you ever stop to consider the many difficulties that assail a motion picture photographer? As this is being written a story appears in the newspapers telling of a photographer in Montana who braved the murderous cross-fire of some strikers that he might obtain pictures to show the world what a battle between strikers and constables is like.

Not one whit less of a hero is the man who goes into the heart of Africa, or the wildernesses of South America,

and with a camera for a weapon stalks big game that the world may see them in their own haunts and in a natural position. This last is the hardest thing to do. To take a picture of a tiger, depicting his every action and not to let the beast know that it is being done, this is as much for the photographer's own sake as for the picture's future. It is no easy task.

As may be imagined, there are many methods in vogue among photographers to obtain truthful pictures of

animals. It is entirely a case of strategy on the man's part. He must wait in the jungle sometimes for days until his odor becomes familiar to the animal. He builds himself a home, sometimes inside a hollow tree trunk, sometimes in the tree itself and bides his time. But this is not enough, for under ordinary circumstances the moment he started to turn the handle of the camera the noise would be such that the beast would either fight or run away, and the picture would be lost. So again resorting to strategy he invents a machine, small and compact, that will exactly imitate the clicking of the camera. This is turned by the action of the wind and it is set long before the animal becomes accustomed to the noise. Sometimes, though, it is necessary to bribe the animal with a wounded deer or a lame goat.

Probably the hardest picture of the kind to obtain is that of a fish under the water. Much patience is necessary and much skill. The first step is the manufacturing of a glass caisson, which is semi-submerged and contains the man and his machine. The top is open to the sky and there the operator must receive his meals from an associate. It is compulsory that the man shall stay there, for an abrupt movement might scare the subject beyond recovery.

A fish is noted for its curiosity and it is upon this fact that the camera operator relies. A shot fired in the water will bring fish from all over to the spot to investigate. Likewise with the cage. They want to see what it is, and it is not long before they will be close to it. Then for the pictures.

The camera snaring of birds is an undertaking that requires much skill and greater patience. To get a good picture of a bird on the nest actually hatching eggs, without frightening her, is very hard. Prof. Frank Newman, a well-known English photographer, tells many interesting stories of his adventures in this work.

He cites one in particular in which he had lain in wait for a week with his imitation camera going full speed, grabbing a meal when he could, only to have the bird take flight and leave her nest forever, thus wasting all his time. He has, however, been able to catch near pictures of the moor hen, probably the most timid of birds.

Newman has also been very successful in his pictures of large birds, such as the South American condor, the American eagle and the buzzard and vultures of the south. As may be surmised a different sort of skill is re-

quired to get such pictures as these.

As may be seen by the accompanying illustration the feat requires daring and nerve. The photographer is lowered over the side of a mountain in a boatswain chair and with a camera between his knees gets his pictures. G. Blake Garrison, a photographer of animals, was badly hurt in his initial attempt of this nature in South America. He was attacked by one of the birds while in this precarious position and severely clawed before his picture was able to draw him up. In defending himself he lost his machine, necessitating the retaking of the picture under more auspicious conditions.

The smaller quadrupeds, those semi-domesticated animals which we meet in our everyday life, such as the rabbit and squirrel, are not a simple quarry by any means. Mr. Garrison in his experience has found the best way to get these animals is with a papier mache cow, or other large animal, which, like the horse of Troy, will conceal men. This, together with the mechanism for imitating the camera's noise, will usually serve to deceive even a wily fox. The cow is life size and has a number of small holes in the sides, which serve to allow the camera to centre on the subject, and also are used for peep holes.

Because of their lack of fear replies become very easy subjects, and if not molested will pose for any length of time. If they are touched, or thrown into intimate contact with man, they will either fight or fly according to the species.

Prof. Newman recently had an experience which on the screen is very humorous, but which for him nearly became a tragedy. One day, with a helper he was tracking a baby bear with a camera, and had followed him to a tree when the bear commenced to climb.

"Fine," thought the professor, "here's where I get a fine picture."

Focusing the camera he commenced to grind out film by the yard before he saw what the bear was really up to. Later when he heard a buzzing he began to think that discretion might be the better part of valor and before he had entirely finished he was sure a pond would be the safest haven. The bear was after honey, and with the instinct of the animal followed Newman to the water. He was fortunate enough, however, to have to deal with a baby bear and was unharmed except for some bee stings.

Gilbert Chesterton Says, Santa Clause Tells Old Old Story

By G. K. Chesterton.

Suppose somebody tried to persuade you or me that there had been no such thing as a Christmas festival, and excitement in the time of our grandfathers or great-grandfathers. It would be totally useless for them to tell us that letters had come to light showing that a non-existent ceremony had been invented as a practical joke on Washington Irving, as an American; that in the original manuscript in the British Museum Dickens wrote "A Candelmas Carol," that it is altered in a later hand to "A Christmas Carol"; that Sir Roger de Coverly and his Christmas is a forgery written a short time ago by Bernard Shaw; that Grimaldi with his dying breath had declared that he acted in pantomimes toward the end of December solely out of respect for the stoning of St. Stephen, or any number of such detailed alterations. We should not think these disposed of all the evidences of Christmas, for the simple reason that we could not so much as remember all the evidences of Christmas. If a thousand more memories of it were thus explained we should know there were a million more not explained. This is the first thing about Santa Claus. He is a tradition; that is, he is a fact. We may not know where he came from, but we know what he is. And if anybody says that he is heathen, I answer, with authority, that he is not.

Parents Do Not Know.

Some complain that parents will not tell their children whether Santa Claus exists or not. The parents do not tell them for the excellent reason that they do not know. Those who have thought their way deepest into the mysteries of man's life in nature have generally tended to the idea that there were principles, and very probably personal principles, behind the energies in places, seasons, occupations, and periods of life. These speculations have generally, and perhaps wisely, been left indefinite and separated from the clear religious doctrines needed for the conduct of life. But they are in Greek architecture and Turkish ar-

quite sufficiently suggestive to make agnosticism, but, as I have said, both ways, and make a philosophical father at least as doubtful of rationalist explanations as of supernatural tales. He knows precious little more than the child knows. Parents sleep all night, and generally more heavily than children. And rationalistic parents sleep all day as well.

The third point is more obvious, but even more neglected; here it need only be mentioned to correct what has gone before. It should always be remembered that dogmatic and authoritative religions spend much of their time rather in restraining superstitions than in encouraging them, and that such enthusiasts as that which Protestants call "Mariolatry" generally display all the merits and defects of widespread democratic movements. If saints, such as St. Nicholas of the Children, do not exist, they were not a priestly deception, but an erroneous public opinion.

May Happen Constantly.

The fourth act it is necessary to realize is that when the faithful in any real religion say that a certain thing historically happened once, they do not feel it as inconsistent with the idea that it actually happens constantly.

If there is anything in the ingenious suggestion that Santa Claus bringing presents has a trace of the wise men bringing gifts to Bethlehem, there is no inconsistency in the Christian mind between his historically and literally having brought gifts on that occasion and his really and truly bringing gifts every 25th of December. The heathen mind, now ruling our society, must accept it as paradox.

The last point to remember is that, in these things form is everything. You can "re-state" doctrine, though it is not being done very intelligently, because one clear logical meaning can be put in many verbal forms. You cannot "re-state" a vision. You can express the same thought in Greek, or in Turkish, or in Norman-French. But you cannot express the same thought in the clear architecture and Turkish ar-

chitecture and Norman architecture. Hence all attempts to clothe Santa Claus in the symbols of other religions or older civilizations, sin against the first principles of poetry. Santa Claus may have brought his present from the east to his reindeers from the north; but he has brought them to our house. And the only test of whether he is genuine is whether he is recognized.

Lord Ballyrot In Slangland



I met a man of family on a business thoroughfare. His arms were loaded with packages, and instantly I surmised, old chap, that he was performing his Christmas buying duties early. He urged me to begin also, as follows:

"Don't bum on the job, but hurry up and scrape in your Kris Kringle junk. Gather up the Christmas tree swag for your loved ones. If you put off swarming on the bundle bazaars, you'll get your ear stepped on in the last centre rush. Splurge on your holiday junk and sidestep the Battle of Floorwalkers' Alley. Do it now, kid!"

MY WORD!

Perils in Getting the Pictures for the Movies



Film photo man "taking" a condor's nest in the Andes. He hangs above the abyss and is in danger from great mother bird.