

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL.

AN INTERESTING IF NOT INVITING PLACE

How the Criminals Are Employed—The Barriers to Liberty—Different Classes of Inmates—The Chapel and Religious Devotions in the Penitentiary.

In our series of articles on the institutions of Montreal, we come to the penitentiary at St. Vincent de Paul, not a very pleasant place to think of for a length of time, but a very interesting one to visit.

Prisons are an unfortunate necessity in every large community, and when managed in the style of St. Vincent de Paul should lead to reformation in all characters not wholly incorrigible.

Many persons think of a prison as a dismal, dark, damp habitation, lacking in sanitary appliances, a place where criminals are huddled promiscuously together, so that those not wholly bad may become as low as their most vicious fellows by daily unguarded communion. This idea conceived of St. Vincent de Paul would be entirely erroneous.

A squat heavy building, on a hill surrounded by a solid blank stone wall, is the uninviting appearance of St. Vincent de Paul to the stranger as he alights from the train at the village of St. Vincent de Paul, 15 or 16 miles from Montreal. Entering into the outer enclosure of the prison the visitor is accosted at the door of the Warden's house by two tall sturdy guards, and after necessary questions is passed into a hall or corridor and the massive barred door closed behind him. To us it seemed somewhat like being cooped behind the bars of a menagerie caravan. After a few minutes a guard was deputed to show us over the various buildings. The two rows of closely-fitted heavy iron bars with about 50 inches between each row, which took up the end of the corridor, were, we were told, to prevent the visitors who came to see their friends, from passing anything in or from holding any secret conversations.

Passing through several doorways whose barred (apparently impregnable) doors flew noiselessly open as we approached, we came to the hospital, the only room in the prisoners' quarters which presented any appearance of comfort. Here four or five prisoners suffering from slight indisposition were under care of the doctor. There is a special kitchen attached to the hospital, so that any special food that may be required can be provided. The kitchen which supplies the cooking for the whole of the penitentiary contains four enormous coppers and a pot nearly as big as a water cask. The work is performed by the convicts. "There are convicts," said our guide, "of almost every trade and profession at present confined here. Doctors are about the only ones that we lack."

The strongest part of the building is that which contains the cells; in the large space under the dome of this building, which is as high as a church, is a register, where all the names of the inmates are written up in full view. The cells are ranged along corridors, which radiate from the dome, and each corridor has an outlet towards the dome, and for additional security this outlet is barred and protected by a ponderous gate, so that if a prisoner were by chance to escape from his cell he could go no farther than the corridor gate, even if he were not observed, which it is not very likely would happen.

The prisoners' cells are small but very clean, and the doors are not solid but are fashioned of heavy bars so that the guard may see in each cell easily as he passes. The dungeons are in the basement. In the dungeons the doors are solid iron and very little light is admitted into the cell, which is small, without an atom of furniture, nothing but the stone floor and massive walls of masonry nearly a yard thick, and the ceiling, for the prisoner to look upon. None but prisoners who are almost incorrigible are sent to solitary confinement in the dungeon.

Some time ago a man was condemned to solitary confinement, out of which it would seem nothing less than a miracle could release him within his allotted time; and he escaped merely by the use of a common table knife which he had stolen and secreted upon his person. He

must have been hours and hours cutting his way out through the solid wall, but he succeeded at last, and breathed the air of liberty for three days, when he was caught again, as generally happens; so all his perseverance was in vain, worse than in vain, in fact, for he had something added to his original sentence.

Leaving the cells we visit the various shops,—the carpenters, stonemasons, tailors and bakery; in the court yard men who had no trade were breaking stones. Said our guide: The worst class of prisoners we have here are the product of the slums of Liverpool and London. These men are absolutely incorrigible; nearly 50 per cent of the 360 inmates at present here are men who have been convicted on previous occasions.

The prisoners are at present engaged building a new wall immediately inside the old one, and at each angle there is a watch turret, and along the top of the wall, near each corner, silhouetted against the sky, patrols a guard with a loaded repeating rifle on his arm.

The prisoners take their meals in their own cells, and are marshalled into the corridors, where the meals are placed, in gangs of twenty men; they walk in single file, and as each man comes within reach of the cca that contains his meal, he takes it up and walks silently along to his cell, where he is locked up.

The locks on the cells are of a patent kind, and are all opened or closed by turning a handle at one end of the corridor. A register of cell numbers is affixed to a brass plate and by the assistance of this mechanism any cell may be opened at will by the warders in charge.

The religion of the Catholic prisoners is attended to in a pretty chapel, and it is to be hoped that the prayers there offered will bring about the reformation of a good many who have erred against the laws of the country, and who would, perhaps, otherwise never be reclaimed.

A GRAND CONCERT.

FATHER MATHEW ANNIVERSARY.

The committee of management of the St. Patrick's T.A. and B. society are sparing no pains to make the anniversary of Father Mathew a notable one. All the arrangements for their entertainment to be held at the Victoria Armory hall on October 10th are now nearly complete.

An excellent programme of vocal and instrumental music is being arranged by Professor J. A. Fowler. Hon. Senator Murphy, lay president and senior member of the society, will preside. Rev. J. A. McCallen, S.S., the eloquent rev. president of the society, will deliver a short address, as will also Mr. Frank J. Curran, B.C.L., son of the Hon. J. J. Curran, Solicitor General.

In addition to the above the dramatic section will present a pleasing sketch, entitled "Dr. Killreure." A meeting of the committee of management was held last evening in connection with the event, Mr. John Walsh in the chair, and judging from the reports presented by the various sub-committees the affair promises to be a great success.

HOCHELAGA CHURCH.

During the Forty Hours devotion last week at the Church of the Nativity at Hochelaga, there were more than 3,000 communicants, or more than half the members of the parish. A beautiful new statue of Mary Magdalen added to the adornments of the church recently was solemnly blessed on Sunday last.

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