

**METHODS OF PENAL
ADMINISTRATION IN THE UNITED
STATES: NOTES OF A PERSONAL
ENQUIRY, FEBRUARY AND
MARCH, 1904**

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Methods of Penal Administration in the United States: Notes of a Personal Enquiry, February and March, 1904 by Edward Grubb

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EDWARD GRUBB

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UNITED STATES.

Notes of a Personal Enquiry, February and March, 1904.

BY
EDWARD GRUBB, M.A.

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METHODS of PENAL ADMINISTRATION

IN THE

UNITED STATES.



Notes of a Personal Enquiry, February and March, 1904.



IN the course of eight weeks it is quite impossible to obtain anything like an adequate view of so multifarious a subject as American penal administration. In a vast Union, where each State has its own laws and institutions,—where some States are progressive and others backward; where one will spend money freely in trying to reform its criminals, while another thinks chiefly of their labour as an important source of revenue for the State; where some have experimented largely in trying substitutes for imprisonment, while others adhere to ancient methods,—the conditions vary so greatly that it is impossible in a few sentences to summarise one's impressions of the whole. The best method of conveying to others some of those impressions will be to deal consecutively with the chief classes of institutions visited, and the methods of administration which they illustrate.

PRISONS.

The prisons of the United States are good and bad; there is no such uniformity as is found in England, where all are under one centralised management. I saw many varieties, from the palatial edifice that is being constructed by the Federal Government near Atlanta, Georgia, to the miserable dens that are still thought good enough for petty misdemeanants, and persons awaiting trial, in that and other Southern cities.

The entrance of an enquirer into these institutions is much more easy, as a rule, than with us. I had only to ask to see the Warden (the Governor, as we term him,) to be shown in at once; and mention of the Howard Association generally ensured a cordial welcome and unstinted kindness. The pains taken to facilitate my enquiry, by Wardens and other officials, far exceeded my power of verbal thanks.

It is characteristic of American life that the relations between officers and prisoners are, as a rule, more human than in English prisons. There is, indeed, in many quarters an absence of the outward tokens of respect, and almost a tone of *camaraderie* in the address of a prisoner to an officer, and even to the Warden himself, which with us would be thought to indicate bad discipline. But it is not so there; and these more human relations, if discipline is maintained, appear to me wholly good. There is probably no need for the martinet-like manner assumed by some English Governors, especially when

they are retired military officers. Soldiers are less often appointed to these posts than in England, and, even when the Warden has been in the army, there is less difference between soldier and civilian than with us.

LABOUR LAWS.

One of the difficulties the authorities have to contend with, especially in the Eastern States, is found in Labour Laws, which make it no easy matter to keep the prisoners employed. In New York State the law absolutely forbids the sale of goods made by prison labour. In Pennsylvania, and some other States, it is ordered that not more than a certain small percentage of the labour a Warden has available must be directed to any one industry. Consequently, prisoners are not infrequently kept in compulsory idleness, or the wasteful method is adopted of destroying a good part of what they produce. Manufacture of articles for the use of the State is carried on to a certain extent, but this apparently is not so well organised as it might be, and in Pennsylvania it appears hardly to be attempted.

Such labour difficulties appear to be the logical result of the theory of Protection. These laws are due, of course, to the cry of manufacturers and workmen to be protected, in their own trades, from the competition of prison labour. These claimants tend to overlook the fact that, if the taxpayers' money were not taken from them and wasted by supporting men in idleness or at useless work, the spending of it would add to the demand for

goods, and therefore to the demand for labour; and that the demoralisation of character which ensues from idleness is likely to cause permanent trouble and expense to the community.

I have shown elsewhere* that, if care is taken in regard to prices, so that private firms shall not be undersold, there is no harm or injustice done to free labour by the competition of prison-made goods. If, for political or other reasons, the State authorities think themselves unable to resist the cry for protection, they should at least do all in their power to organise prison labour for State account—a method by which the competition with free labour is made less obvious, and in which there is no fear of glutting the market with unsaleable goods. It is neither just nor expedient that the curse of idleness should be imposed upon those who have gone astray, and for whose support society makes itself responsible.

STATE PRISONS.

The State Prisons visited were those of Massachusetts at Charlestown (Boston), the Pennsylvania Eastern Penitentiary at Philadelphia, the Maryland Penitentiary at Baltimore, and the Indiana State Prison at Michigan City. Of Southern prisons I propose to speak later on.

The prison at *Charlestown* (Boston) is an old one, part

* *Prison Industries*; a Pamphlet issued by the Howard Association in 1903. (Will be sent on application to the Secretary.)