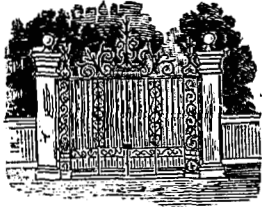


Outside the Gates.

WOMEN.



IN the *Humanitarian* Miss Bremner gives a very interesting account of women convicts at Woking, which she visited before its closure as a convict prison. So little is known as to our prison systems and the subject itself is of such keen

interest and importance that we are grateful for very small side lights which help to show what manner of life this prison life is.

"The peculiarity of Woking Female Prison is that it is the sole female convict establishment in England. It may be deduced from figures already given, that the proportion of women to men in local prisons is rather more than one to four. The proportion of women to men convicts is about one to sixteen."

This one fact alone, of the small proportion of women criminals to men, is one of the most potent arguments in favour of giving women administrative and authoritative positions, and, above all, giving them a very large voice in the making of the laws. The "making for righteousness" inherent in women should be utilised for their country's benefit.

"Some prisoners learn a trade in prison, such as tailoring, shirt-making, twine-making, laundry-work, but it seems to be a difficult matter to conceal where their proficiency was acquired, and when once the murder is out, when fellow-workers realise that a gaol-bird is among them, the game is up, self-respect vanishes. It seems a thousand pities when London is utterly lacking in good laundries either at an expensive or a moderate price, that the labour freed from Woking Prison cannot be utilised. There must be thousands of people who, if their clothes were well washed and finished, care not a farthing that ex-prisoners did the work.

One longs for a woman with organising ability to take up this task, to make a sort of *phalanstère* of these poor waifs, the jetsam and flotsam of our civilisation, who are yet capable of good work, if only genius and patience were willing to demand the tale of bricks which they can yield. Of a truth there is much missionary effort to be made amongst our own people, and it is little wonder that the sums devoted to foreign missions are dwindling when the need for home missions is so crying."

Miss Bremner calls attention to the small number of women who are employed in responsible positions in prisons. We are quite at one with her in her desire that women prisoners should have the advantages which would undoubtedly accrue were women to have the representation they should have in prison administration. Women's labour and the rates they pay, go to the maintenance of our Government, and it is monstrous that all these well-paid positions, which would be much better filled by women, should go to men. This principle of annexation by man of all

positions worth having has been going on for so many centuries that it will take much "hammering away" to bring them to a sense of its injustice. But the "constant dropping wears away a stone," and if we cannot roll away the stone of sex jealousy and prejudice we must wear it away by constant "dropping" and appeals to the sense of justice inherent in humanity.

Miss Bremner says in this relation:—"Glancing over the columns of Whitaker prior to my visit to Woking, I was astonished to find that only one of the chief officials, the Assistant-Superintendent, is a woman. When we remember that women's talents are administrative, that this is the day of women doctors, it is truly astonishing, unless one recognises the general unfairness of Government departments to women, to find that the governor is a man, so is the chaplain, the Roman Catholic priest, the assistant-surgeon, and the store-keeper. Every one of them of course receives a larger salary than the lady who acts as Assistant-Superintendent. It seems simply monstrous that the chaplain and Roman Catholic priest should receive £750 annually for their services, when in all probability, £250 spent among the clergy at Woking would obtain all the prisoners desire or require."

With regard to the work done by the prisoners it is very interesting to hear that some of the mosaic of the Courts of South Kensington Museum were made by the women prisoners at Woking. The crypt of St. Paul's, the Duke of Connaught's summer house, and some of the floors at Sandringham, owe their existence to prison labour.

"Several women doing life-sentences had taken up glass work and did some capital windows to beguile the time. The tailoring department was at one time quite an important Woking industry, only given up about a year ago. The workers made army and police clothing, clothing for the children at Greenwich Hospital and so on. Of course Woking has a laundry, now employing eighteen women. I commented upon the whiteness and excellent finish of some collars, taking one from a woman's basket as I spoke; she dropped quite a fine curtsey in return."

And the fare for those who behave themselves is very little worse than the fare which some ten years back was provided for the Nurses in some of our leading Hospitals.

"Prison fare is very plain. It is well cooked, but luxuries are at a premium. Tea had just been made for the evening meal when I entered the great kitchen, shining with cleanliness. A cup was brought for me to sample and I found it very fair. The bread, too, was good, and looked well, piled up in great stacks. Three times a week meat is given; on other days, soup and suet pudding replace it. Tea for the evening meal is the best diet; you may be reduced to skilly, a mixture of oatmeal and maize, boiled for a long time in a huge cauldron. I felt no inclination to sample it, and we passed on to the bare-looking chapel. No service was being held at the moment, but I was told that there is an excellent choir, able to take the different parts with accuracy. As there is a weekly practice, doubtless a heavenly break in the deadly monotony, to be a member of the choir is a great privilege, and must be lived up to, in the way of good marks."

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