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# A PENITENTIARY VISIT

## Many Erroneous Ideas About the Big Institution.

### Its Cleanliness and Neatness Surprise the Visitor —The Staff Aims to Make the Prisoners Better.

To outsiders, it is not generally known that the penitentiary for the province of Ontario is situated in the village of Portsmouth. Most desirably located, it rises from the slope of a great hill, its counterpart, the provincial asylum for the insane crowning the opposing eminence. Deep in the valley slumbers the chief portion of the village. The abiding place of the law breakers could not possible have been better chosen. It lies to the south of the speedway and extends to the waterfront where ample wharfage accommodates shipping. This in itself is an advantage which cannot be overestimated for on the west is the peaceful anchorage of the bay and to the south extend the wide waters of Lake Ontario. Often has it been the refuge of storm-tossed vessels and many a weary mariner has made the port with thankful heart for having escaped the perils of the deep. Here coal, stone, supplies, etc., are received direct when shipped by water, while on the other hand connection can be made with steamers to load any export the inmates may turn out. As for rail communication this is provided when necessary by a sidetrack from the electric car line which runs directly to the several great railway sidings.

To the north of the public highway is situated the warden's residence, a handsome edifice surmounting rows of terraces and ideally surrounded with lawns, shade trees, and flowers. Still beyond as far as the eye can reach extends the prison property comprising a fine limestone quarry and magnificent tracts of farm land producing all the fruits of the soil in due season. Here and there it is broken by the little wooden sheds perched on high—a shelter from which the guards may overlook the prisoners while they are at work in the fields. A huge stone water-tower is a monument of prison labor and ejects a supply of the purest of lake waters for the inmates of the settlement.

#### The Object Of Attack.

During the past few years or more, especially since the present regime came into power the prison has been made every little while the object of attack on the part of some recent inmate. Not only this but like all other large institutions it has been subjected to severe criticisms from time to time in the public press and the internal government of the penitentiary condemned. It had occurred to the writer that a visit unexpectedly and without his identity being known would be a good means of gleaning first hand an idea of the inner workings of the big buildings on the hill and that an account of the same would interest readers of the Whig in that they might be given an idea of what daily passes on within the four great stone walls and how the convict spends from day to day when once he has passed the gates and is no longer allowed communication with the outer world. Much might be written on the subject, but space will not permit that more than the bare facts be given and from them the outsider may draw his own conclusions. In this article we propose to treat merely of the little beehive of industry carried on at the penitentiary. Next week we hope to deal with another phase of the subject, and trust before we have concluded the articles the reader may be the wiser by many interesting facts and figures supplied through the courtesy of the authorities of this great penal institution in part and gleaned through channels with which only a reporter can become conversant.

#### The Walled Enclosure.

As the observer approaches the "pen" his attention is first attracted by the four great walls broken only by occasional guard houses and the main gate of entrance and exit, surmounted by its huge bell—the prison bell—used at morning, noon hour, and night. Occasionally it breaks the silent stillness of the night, startling the residents of nearby homes in the midst of their slumbers. Then it is an alarm. A convict has broken the bonds which separated him from freedom and the whole countryside must be scoured till he is brought back dead or alive. Within the walled enclosure, imposing structures of the same white limestone are noticeable, the huge dome of the central building setting off the surroundings and giving the one glimpse of architectural beauty, evidenced from without, to structures of unmistakeable purpose and built with the one motive always in view. And now one passes beneath the portals of the massive gate and stands gazing expectantly upon the sight within. It is safe to say his preconceived ideas are shattered and new ideals wrought in their stead. The one forcible thought which strikes the visitor is the neatness, the cleanliness, the precision of everything and withal the beauty accompanying such an order of things—a beauty having as its basis the regularity which must be the very life and mainstay of such an institution. A handsome driveway sweeps towards the central edifice wherein the warden and other officials have their offices. On either side thereof are neatly cut and immaculately trimmed lawns, while occasional flower beds break the green and add picturesqueness to the view. As the drive circles about the fountain of flowing water and passes to either side of the main building it loses none of its tidiness. Before one stretches the convicts' home with its barred windows, while to one side are the hospital and the prison asylum, the only existing one in the dominion. Directly in rear of all this are the shops and of these we will now treat leaving other interesting subjects to a future article.

Here, if anywhere, one would expect to find signs of untidiness. But no, the same surprising cleanliness is everywhere apparent. Things are carried on with neatness and despatch, which might well be imitated by the management of institutions employing free labour, and healthier and more moral characters. Up more massive stone steps one climbs to enter a large central dome. It appears older than the other structures and darker in color, possibly due to the smoke and fumes from the furnaces and machinery within. About this dome run two galleries, one on the ground floor, the other on an elevation corresponding to the second storey. From these galleries are entrances to the shops which all branch out from the central dome. Let us take them in some order.

#### Inside The Shops.

The first we visit is the shoemaking and tailoring establishments, for they are both located in the one room. Typical of prison life as imagined by a visitor are they. The room is of considerable length when compared with its width. For the full stretch thereof and directly in the centre runs an elevated platform along which patrols an armed guard. To the right is the shoemaking department, in charge of Robert Paynter and employing about thirty prisoners. To the left is the tailoring establishment, where all prison clothing is manufactured. This is in charge of James Tweddell, who has under him about thirty-six inmates of the penal institution. In both these branches of trade the very latest methods are used and the prisoners taught what will be of practical use to them when they start life anew once more. The rooms were bright and airy, ventilation of the best, and flowers bloomed about the windows. As little as possible seemed to be in evidence that would remind the convict of his disgrace, but the idea everywhere seemed to prevail to raise him out of the surroundings and conditions which had been the cause of his downfall, and give him newer and better ideals with strength to carry them out.

"Did any of these men know the trade before they came here?" was asked an instructor.

"Scarcely one," was the reply, "we teach them everything from the very beginning."

"And do you find them hard to manage?"

"Very, very seldom," was the rejoinder; "it's all in the way you handle men."

#### Binder Twine Department.

The next place we visited is possibly the most interesting in many respects in the institution. It is the binder twine establishment, and is presided over by Frederick W. Dickenson, who has been in charge for the past four years, previously to which he was allied to the same industry at Central Prison, Toronto. The binder twine factory is run solely in the interests of the farmers and the product sold to them at cost price, but not through any middle man. It must be bought direct by the farmer, so no profits are made in handling of the output. The plant is what is known as a two-ton plant—that is it is capable of turning out two tons of binder twine per day. It employs about forty men when running at its full capacity. Nothing but the finest material is used and the best 600-foot manilla twine manufactured in the dominion is thereby produced. In the past two years, nothing but absolutely pure manilla twine has been turned out. The hemp is bought in New York, where it has been imported from the Philippines, and is personally inspected before the purchase. The hemp first passes through the "scrutcher," which is a sort of revolving drum and thereby all dirt and foreign particles are removed from it. Then the "breaker" takes it in hand and straightens out all the shreds. In this machine one chain holds the hemp back while the other works the straightener. It receives eight workings before being spun into twine. The spinner revolves at rate of 1,800 revolutions per minute. All the twine manufactured is weighed at stated intervals, ten or twelve tests being made daily, that "Joe" Haycock may be escaped, for in his capacity as the government binder twine inspector, he is as liable to sell the government's goods as anyone else's if they are not up to the standard. The entire plant is operated by steam, situated on the ground floor, just below and used exclusively in this department.

The output of the factory when running at its full capacity is about 500 tons per year of the highest standard 600 foot twine. More of an inferior quality, and only measuring 550 feet, could be manufactured, but the management prefer to turn out only the best article available. Several tests of the strength of the twine were made in the writer's presence, and while only forty-five pounds pressure is considered necessary to be withstood by the twine, that it may be used for binding sheafs, yet not one sample snapped, at under 120 pounds, some withstanding as high as 145 pounds' strain.

#### Other Work Places.

The blacksmith and machine shops, with their rows of forges and lathes, etc., was an interesting place to visit and as in the other departments everything was kept ship-shape. This bee-hive of industry needs little or no description as everyone is familiar with its character. It is sufficient to say that H. Walker is kept busy drilling his recruits and doing the repair work necessary about such a big institution, and the results attained reflect much credit upon his stewardship.

The steam laundry, in charge of Guard, Moore is well worth a visit. "A bath to-day, did you say, sir?" asks Mr. Moore, as you enter. "Yes, sir, we can accommodate you with anything from a makeshift to the real Turkish article." And so he could. But to speak of the laundry first. This department is model and up-to-date in every respect. The washer, the boiler, the wringer, etc., are all machines of the latest design and propelled by steam. But the climax is found in the drying apartment. From a metal cabinet huge, tall, narrow drawers run out on overhead sliding wheels. On these drawers are hung the clothes to be dried. They are then swung back into position and hot steam passed through until the materials are completely dried. The baths are also situated in this wing of the building, and under Mr. Moore's care. They are surprisingly neat and clean. Each prisoner is forced to visit them at least once a week, and each has his own shower bath, towels, etc. Everything is systematized throughout.

The stone-cutting department is a busy one, as would naturally be expected, with building and repairs being constantly carried on, is in charge of Instructor James Lawlor, and all the stone hewn from the penitentiary quarry is here transformed into building blocks. The long shop looks quite cheery as the men ply their chisels and hammers. To see long rows of them at work, and hear the bling-klong music is quite fascinating.

Of the engineer's department and of the electrician's department, under the care of Messrs. W. Derry and Bailey respectively, little need be said, save that everything, from the smallest machine to the immense switch-board from which the lights of the institution are controlled, was immaculate and shining.

Not a sign of dust or oil on any part of the machinery, which worked without the slightest jar. Every brass rail, etc., brilliantly polished. To the lay mind, no flaws were visible and as in the other shops visited, nothing but good words remained to be spoken of these departments.

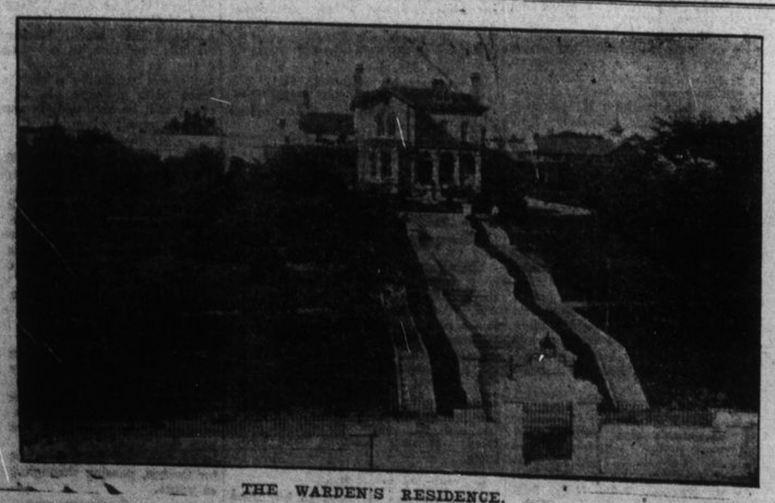
Before leaving the building which encloses this busy little world, let us take a little peep into the change room. One wonders what they do in this funny room. The walls are lined with tiers of numbered boxes and their counterparts arise in rows from the floor. It is the change room, which every convict knows so well. Here he is provided with his change of attire and with regularity he marches to his allotted number and receives the same. It is one of those workings of prison life where regularity and rule must necessarily be the keynote to all things and Guard Marsh sees that the department under his guidance suffers nothing in comparison with the others. Of the farm it is useless to say anything. This vast expanse of land speaks for itself and for John McCaugherty, who superintends its working.

#### The Prisoners' Cells.

And now we pass on through the next building, which is none other than the home of the convict. Tier upon tier of narrow cells run off from another central dome, which is the pivotal point of the edifice. Here is much that would interest the visitor, but it will serve as material for future writing. On we pass through the offices, meeting the warden, Dr. Platt, Chief Keeper Atkins and other officials. One and all were most cordial and courteous in their greetings, and willingly spared a few moments from their tedious round of duty. What was gleaned in the manner of interesting details from our stay there will, we hope, appear at a later date.

And now, bidding good-bye to all, we pass once more without the gates and wonder at all we have seen. We try to sum up the most vital points and what are they. First and foremost, we notice there is a desire on the part of almost every official to make the prisoner better for his life within the "pen." He is not crushed and trodden underfoot, but treated with all the consideration possible under existing circumstances. If he gets into trouble it must result from his own insubordination in nearly all cases. Secondly, the cleanliness of the institution is borne deep into the visitor's mind, and he marvels. Clean whitewashed walls, nicely kept floors, the latest sanitary arrangements, etc., everything is the acme of neatness and order. The effect of all this cannot help but become apparent in the inmate's daily life, and the warden should receive due praise for its existence. These are the two outstanding features that struck the writer, and he was much impressed thereby. The outsider has much to learn by a visit to Kingston's great penal institution. Many erroneous ideas will be corrected and a feeling of criticism will give way to one of amazement. If the chance ever comes your way, reader, don't fail to visit and inspect the "pen."

VIEW OF PRISON FROM PORTSMOUTH.



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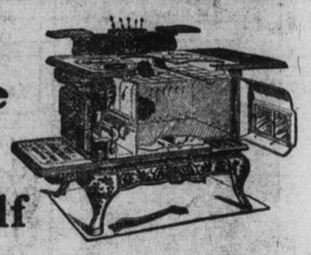

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