Eastern Penitentiary

Prison reform is one of the many evidences of the advancement of the standards of thought and action, which are present in all Christian nations. The very advance guard of this great reform was begun in Philadelphia. It led to the foundation of the Eastern Penitentiary, which has attracted the attention of influential men and influenced the prison administration of many of the nations of Europe.

Richard Wistar might be designated as the originator of prison reform. Residing in the vicinity of the old prison, which stood on the South-west corner of Market and Third streets, his attention was attracted by the wretched condition of the prisoners.

His heart was touched. He formed a
habit to have good, wholesome soup pre-
pared at his house, conveyed to the
prison and distributed among its in-
mates. An association of such
men was formed under the name
of "The Philadelphia Society for Assisting
Distressed Prisoners." Its work was cut
short by the British soldiers in 1777.
In 1787 a meeting of a number of the
citizens was held in an old German
School House on Cherry Street. Practically,
the old society was revived under
the new name of "The Philadelphia
Society for Alleviating Miseries of Public
Prisoners." A constitution was adopted
and officers elected. The annual fee
was ten shillings (reduced in 1792 to
eighty nine cents). These actions were not idle pastime.
Criminals, irrespective of sex, color or
previous record in crime, were all
associated in one room. The young man who had committed his first crime was cast into this school of thieves and murderers, to come forth at the end of his term more deeply set and thoroughly informed in his art. accused persons, whether innocent or guilty, awaited their trials in this place. Prisoners were often made to work on the streets, where they were subject to all sorts of taunts and insults. The opportunity for reform was entirely absent. The society, aware of the true condition of affairs, prepared a memorial to the Legislature, which called forth a reply from that body, inquiring further into the matter. In the response reforms were proposed that would seem to supply the needs. They recom
mended that "more private or even solitary labor would more successfully tend to redeem the unhappy subjects. Just here appears the first idea of solitary confinement, on which principle the Eastern Penitentiary was built, and to the Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisoners" is due the acknowledgment for this reform, which has been so wide-spread. These documents to the legislature were signed by Wm. White, Richard Welle, B. Wynkoop, Thomas Quistar, S. P. Griffith, John Kaine, William Rogers, G. Marshall, John Connelly, James Cooper, Caleb Lowers, Benj. Shaw, T. Harrison, Wm. Lippincott, George Duffield; and was dated September 15th, 1788.

In 1792 the propositions were en-
acted into law. The prison commenced in 1773 at the South East corner of Walnut and Eighth Streets, was put in order to test the reforms. But the society was not satisfied with this small measure of success. In 1801 they memorialized the Legislature. In this memorial, they called attention to the fact that the proposed measure of solitary confinement had passed beyond the confines of an experiment, and besides their example in the way of reform had been followed in many of the sister states. They said: "Being ourselves fully convinced of the propriety of these principles and this practice we now wish briefly to solicit your attention to a most essential part
of this humane and rational plan for preventing crimes and reforming criminals. Ever since the present establishment of the prisons, we have wished to make the fair experiment of solitude and labor on the convicts.” In 1803 and 1821 other memorials were presented, setting forth claims for a new building. In 1821 the last attempt for the new structure was made and was successful. The Legislature of the state by an act of March 20, 1821, authorized the construction of a state penitentiary for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. The act, in section one, read: “Be it enacted (etc) that a State Penitentiary, capable of holding two hundred and fifty prisoners on
the principle of solitary confinement of the convicts shall be created.
A number of persons, prominent among whom were members of
the prison society, were appointed to purchase a site and
make the contracts for constructing the prison. A Board of Inspectors consisting of five citizens were appointed by the judge of the
district, and the officers of Ward, Overseers, and Physician of the
Penitentiary were created. Thomas
Anstair, Dr. A. P. Griffiths, Peter Murrell,
Geo. A. Baker, Thomas Bradford, John
Bacon, Sam. R. Wood, Thomas Sparks,
James Thackeray, Daniel Miller and
Caleb Carmalt, were appointed on
the building committee. The present
site of the Penitentiary was bought
for $115.00. Among the plans submitted, the one by John Haviland of Philadelphia was selected and the erection of the building was begun. The public had been educated to this advance step.

The men who had done this were principally Friends. The Eastern Penitentiary, as it now stands, is the full development of the movement of Friends, first managed by Robert Vaux, and later, his son Richard Vaux.

The work was pushed thus far, Thomas Uzit and Dr. S. P. Griffeth resigned and Robert Vaux and Coleman Sellers were appointed in their places.

The cornerstone of the front building of the Penitentiary was
laid on the 22nd day of May 1823, but it was not until October 25, 1829 that it was opened for the reception of prisoners. In the absence of the President of the Board of Inspectors, at the laying of the corner stone, Roberts Vanity remarked that the occasion was calculated to awaken reflections at once painful and gratifying. Painful, because such was the evil character of man, so ungovernable were his passions and so numerous his propensities to evil, that it was necessary society should provide for the punishment of offenders to laws. Gratifying, because a correct view of human nature, coupled with the indispensable exercise of
Christian benevolence had led to the melioration of punishments. Justice was mixed with mercy and whilst the community designed to teach offenders that the way of the transgressor is hard, it wisely and compassionately sought to secure and reform the prisoner by the most strict solitary confinement.

At the opening of the Penitentiary, Samuel Wood was appointed Warden and Franklin Bache, Physician. For some years the administration of discipline was experimental. When the first prisoners were received, four blocks of cells had not yet been completed, and the architect and friends of the separate system, as well as
Inspectors, were engaged in ascertaining what improvements could be made in the general plan. The State Penitentiary at Pittsburgh had been erected before the one at Philadelphia, and, like the one at Philadelphia, had been devised and constructed without much practical experience in its adaptation to the objects for which it was to be occupied. The defects that appeared in the plan of the Pittsburgh Penitentiary were remedied in the plan of the Eastern Penitentiary.

After the year 1849 experimentation ceased. Experience had suggested various improvements, which were made. Development and progress began.
is as perfect (if not the most perfect) as any prison in the world.

If the development of this system is due to any one person more than another, that person is Richard Vanw. He was appointed Inspector in 1842. At first he served as secretary of the Board, but later was elected president, a position which he held until his death, on the 2nd day of March 1895. The lifework of Mr. Vanw is unparalleled in penology. The present perfect condition of the Eastern Penitentiary is due to careful management along the same lines for so many years. He has stamped it with his own individuality. For Mr. Vanw to serve for fifty-three years in uplifting unfortunate human beings, and
without pay, is such a noble self-sacrifice as should place his name among the benefactors of the human race.

Another faithful servant in this work was John Halloway, who was elected Warden in 1851 and with the exception of two or three years held the position until death. It was while Halloway was Warden that Michael J. Cassidy served as an Overseer. Mr. Cassidy is now Warden, and an authority on penology. At a Conference of Officers of Prisons and Reformatories of the United States held at Chicago, and at other meetings he has taken the most prominent part.

Mr. Cassidy has at the Eastern Penitentiary what he calls the one-
man government. The Warden has complete control. Beside the Warden the other officials are a resident Physician, a Moral Instructor and Librarian, a Matron, Overseers, two Gate-Keepers and guards who patrol the space between the buildings and the wall which encloses the grounds.

The prisoners are often confined two in a cell. At this time there are 1141 prisoners and only 756 cells, so solitary confinement is not universally practiced in the prison. The system consists in a separate and individual treatment of prisoners. Everyone, when he is brought to the prison, is made to bathe himself and change his entire clothing, in a room pro-
vided for that purpose. Then the interview with the Warden comes. The prisoners name, his parentage, personal marks and characteristics, etc. are recorded in a book, required by law, to be kept by the Warden. A man is treated in accord with his disposition. Individual treatment characterizes his imprisonment, throughout. There is no collecting in workshops—no intercourse with fellow prisoners. Different ones are engaged—in their cells—in making shoes, knitting bosiery, weaving the cloth, of which their clothes are made, etc. Some are employed in baking and cooking; still others do carpenter work. A prisoner is allowed half of what he makes over a certain required task.
The other half goes to the county from which he comes. Men, on a five year's sentence have often made $250 to $300. Some work early and late, laying by a sum to start life anew. Meals are served at the cell doors. The prisoners are seldom out except for a half hour each day for sunshine and air; their masks are worn. A person may serve a term here, without showing his face to his fellow prisoners. A few of the trusty ones are allowed out a specified distance from their cells, and those in the cooking and baking department are allowed still greater privileges. If a prisoner is obedient and trusty his time is shortened by
The cells are eleven feet and nine inches long and seven feet and six inches wide. The walls are plastered and whitewashed. Hot air is conveyed through the cells by means of pipes. Light is admitted by openings in the roof. The glass cover to these may be raised or lowered by the prisoners at will.

Each cell is furnished with a bedstead of wood, clothes rail, seat, shelf, tin cup, wash basin, victuals pan, looking glass, comb, scrubbing brush and towel, one sheet, one blanket and coverlet. Water is furnished, by the city water works, in each cell and the prisoners are required to keep
Their apartments looking clean.

Many all of them have whittled fancy little frames for pictures that may happen to fall into their hands and have covered the walls of their cells with these ornaments. They are allowed to bring in any little things to make their rooms fillow with attraction. One tall, dark-haired and black-eyed showed me two complete locomotives, he had carved with his knife. Another had bought paint and was decorating his cell. On an easel to one side was a painting of the Nissahickon Drive. Other paintings of fruit and landscape hung on the walls. Upon being congratulated concerning the attractiveness of his cell, he
simply put the question, "Had you rather live in here than out"? The manner, in which he said this was enough to convince one that prison life is by no means desirable, even when some inquiries are allowed. Another, when asked what was the trouble, plainly confessed that he was serving a term for murder. As he spoke of liberty and freedom, his eyes filled with tears. He remarked that, "No matter how well you are treated, life in prison is not like being out." This man had been in for six years and had three more to serve.

Books and bound volumes of magazines are for use by
the prisoners. The Library is under the management of the moral instructor and contains about 3000 volumes. Besides English books there are German, Italian, French, Spanish and Latin books here. If a man is willing, he goes out a better man intellectually than when he came. If he does not know how to read, he is taught to read. A teacher spends his entire time in instructing the prisoners. County papers may be brought in, but all daily papers are excluded. The letters and papers are looked over by the Warden and his assistants before they are delivered. Only two letters a month are allowed.
even then the authorities must
know something of the person
with whom the prisoner is
corresponding.

There are thirty seven women
in the Eastern Penitentiary, under
the care of the Matron. Many
of the good women of the city
go regularly to pay these de-
graded creatures visits of
comfort and hope.

Besides the regular visits by
the Moral Instructor many
ministers call on these fellow
men and women. On Sunday
morning services are held
in each of the corridors. The
prisoners remain in their cells,
listening to anthems of praise
and messages of love, perhaps
for the first time in their lives, as they come ringing down those long corridors. Sometimes it is effectual, but the records show that a great many of the discharged convicts are returned. A 8136, (prisoners always go by number), has been convicted fifteen times. He is serving his eighth sentence to the Eastern Penitentiary, has served two terms in New Jersey State Prison and five terms in Philadelphia County Jail. Beginning the career of a burglar when a farmer, at the age of twenty he is now sixty two, having spent forty six and four months in prison. Many cases of this sort, except not too such an extreme, can be found in
the last report of the Inspectors
The table of statistics show
that if a prisoner's ancestors
had been in prison for burglary,
the person in question is, very
likely, a burglar. If the ancestor
was a murderer the prisoner
in confinement is a murderer.
This is not true in absolutely
every case; but the number of
cases, in which there were an-
cestors, who were criminals is
enough to convince the student
of penology that crime is
hereditary. Any one who has in
any way come in contact with
the crime class, can not help
but wish that the number of
ethical institutions were greatly
increased and especially that
every civilized commonwealth would adopt a system of dealing with her criminals as well even as they do at the Eastern Penitentiary.

The prison is situated on one of the most elevated sites anywhere in or around Philadelphia — at the corner of Katherine Street and Fairmount Avenue. The ground occupied is ten acres, inclosed by a wall of grayish granite, thirty five feet high and twelve feet thick at the bottom, diminishing to two and three fourths feet at the top. On Fairmount Avenue, about the middle of the long wall is the entrance, sixteen feet wide and forty in length. It has
two gates, an outer one and one inside, opening into the interior grounds. These are never allowed to be opened at the same time. A vehicle or person passing in or out has to wait for the gate through which he has just passed to be closed and locked before the second one is opened. Two gate keepers are on duty.

Over the big entrance are the apartments of the Warden's family. He is required by law to reside there. The Inspector and the resident Physician have offices at this place. Just after coming into the grounds, one finds, to the left, the bath-rooms, into which prisoners
are taken when they first come. In the centre of the grounds is an octagonal rotunda from which the corridors extend. On each side of these corridors are the cells. Some are two stories high so that the number of cells are doubled in them. The cells below have each a little exercise yard, the width and length of the cell, in which the prisoner is allowed to cultivate any flowers that he may choose and refresh himself in the open air. Those who are kept in second story cells are taken out, when the weather permits for their exercise.

There are at present eight of
These corridors running out from the rotunda; two more extend from the passage leading from the rotunda towards the entrance.

In the second story of the rotunda is the library and printing office. On top is a large electric light, which lights up every part of the grounds.

The Bakery stands out to the North of the main building. It contains four or five large ovens. About 2,000 loaves of bread are consumed daily.

In connection with the Bakery is the place where soup is prepared and also the grist mill. Still farther out is the carpenter's shop, which is held in readiness in case of an
emergency or if some contagious disease should manifest itself, as a hospital.

The total amount appropriated by the Legislature for the construction of the Institution up to 1835 was $772,600.69. Since then two new blocks of cells have been added.

The counties sending prisoners to the Eastern Penitentiary are: Adams, Bradford, Bucks, Carbon, Cumberland, Dauphin, Delaware, Franklin, Lebanon, Luzerne, Lycoming, Montgomery, Montour, Northampton, Northumberland, Perry, Philadelphia, Pike, Snyder, Susquehanna, Tioga, Union, Wayne, Wyoming, and York. When a prisoner's term has
expired, the expense necessary for him to get to his home is given him by the Warden. Nor is the old prison society, which was so active in bringing about the Eastern Penitentiary, unmindful of discharged prisoners. If his necessity requires it, new clothing is given him and he goes to join his family with a neat appearance and a new determination.

The Pennsylvania System has been defended by such men as De Toqueville, Joseph R. Chandler and is universally recognized as the most advanced system of prison discipline.

What Charles Dickens said in
his 'American Notes' Vol IV p246, has caused much prejudice against the Eastern Penitentiary. A comparison of the facts as stated by Mr Cassedy is both amusing and convincing. Mr. Dickens wrote: 'In the outskirts, stands a great prison called the Eastern Penitentiary, conducted on a plan peculiar to the State of Pennsylvania.

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In its intentions, I am well convinced that it is kind, humane and meant for reformation; but I am persuaded that those who devised this system of prison discipline, and those lenient gentlemen who carry it into execution do
not know what it is they are doing. — — — — In another cell there was a German, sentenced for five years imprisonment for larceny, two of which had just expired. With colors procured in the same manner he had painted every inch of the walls and ceiling. He had laid out a few feet of ground behind with exquisite neatness and had made a little bed in the center that looked, bye the bye, like a grave. — — — — I never saw such a picture of forlorn affliction and distress of mind. My heart bled for him and when the tears ran down
his cheeks, and he took one of the visitors aside to ask with trembling hands nervously clutching at his coat to detain him, whether there was any hope of his sentence being commuted; the spectacle was really too painful to witness."

Mr Cassidy says: "He (Dickens) wrote a pathetic story about a Dutchman who had been sentenced for five years, and who had asked him, with tears in his eyes if he could live the sentence out. That was forty-two years ago, and yet it was only last year that Charles Laugheimer, Dickens's Dutchman died; and he
had been fourteen times in prison since Dickens saw him, and did not die but once — and that was the last time. He died in prison. He came there a sick, broken down old man. He would not go to the workhouse and asked me to take him in. I took him in and he remained until he died."

The system of discipline is mild and in most points is desirable. While punishment for past acts is administered, the ultimate aim is reform; in this point the Eastern Penitentiary is ahead
of the majority of prisons.

The prison discipline that fails to try to send back better men and women than it took from society, falls short of its purpose and should be remodelled. What is the purpose of punishment? Is it to prevent crime? Then every prison should have some mode of reforming as well as punishing its inmates. It should endeavor to bring all good influences to bear. If a man is ignorant, he should be taught, and when he is able to read have placed in his hands the books, which are expressions of a higher and a more hopeful
life and which will arouse his soul within him to a new and better determination to combat that tendency to crime which he has, perhaps, inherited.

A defense of the Pennsylvania System might be out of place here, but it is hoped that from the plains statement of the condition of the Eastern Penitentiary, as I saw it, the reader may know that the reform practiced here is in the right direction and should have his hearty support.