



NOTES ON A VISIT
MADE TO SOME OF THE PRISONS
IN SCOTLAND AND THE NORTH OF
ENGLAND, IN COMPANY WITH
ELIZABETH FRY

Joseph John Gurney



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THE STATE OF PRISONS IN BRITAIN,
1775-1905

Volume 3

Edited and Introduced by
W. J. Forsythe
University of Exeter

N O T E S
ON A VISIT MADE TO SOME OF
THE PRISONS
IN
Scotland
AND
The North of England,
IN COMPANY WITH
ELIZABETH FRY;
WITH SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE
SUBJECT OF PRISON DISCIPLINE.

By JOSEPH JOHN GURNEY.

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1819.

PREFACE.

THE journey, which afforded me the opportunity of visiting, in company with my sister Elizabeth Fry, the prisons, to which the following little work relates, was taken during the eighth and ninth months (August and September) of the last year. We travelled along the great north road through York to Edinburgh; from Edinburgh, by the eastern coast of Scotland, to Aberdeen; from Aberdeen, by the inland route through Forfar and Perth, back again to Edinburgh; thence, after a few days spent in that city, to Glasgow; from Glasgow to Carlisle, from Carlisle to Kendal, Lancaster, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield; from Sheffield, by Wakefield, again to York; from York, lastly, to our respective homes, one in the neigh-

bourhood of Norwich, the other in that of London.

The principal object of our journey was connected with the concerns of our own religious Society, that of Friends; but we also made a point of inspecting the prisons in the several towns, through which we passed. In the course of this engagement, we observed a variety of particulars, which interested and affected us; and I think it right to communicate to the public the information which we collected, in the hope that it may afford some fresh stimulus, to the zeal already prevalent for improving our system of prison discipline.

It appears the more desirable to take this step, because incorrect statements respecting some of these prisons have found their way, in connexion with our visit, into the provincial newspapers; and it is evidently a

matter of importance, that the Public should be made acquainted with the *real* condition of these places of confinement.

The better the actual state of our prisons is known and understood, the more clearly will all men see the necessity of those arrangements, by which they may be rendered schools of industry and virtue, instead of the very nurseries of crime.

In a late interesting publication, the inquiry has been ably instituted, “whether crime and misery are produced or prevented by our present system of prison discipline.” To that inquiry, the author alluded to, by his description of several ill regulated prisons, has given but too plain an answer: he has at the same time presented to us some prominent instances of a favourable kind; and, on the whole view of his case, has established the following important proposition—

that by those jails on the one hand, which are conducted on bad principles, crime and misery are produced and multiplied : and on the other hand, that prisons, in which the prisoners are classified, inspected, instructed, and employed, have a powerful tendency to that, by which crime and misery will certainly be lessened, viz. the reformation of criminals.

To strengthen and confirm this proposition, by a variety of additional facts, is the chief object of the present work.

My Notes on all the more important prisons which we visited, have been read to the respective jailers, and have been carefully corrected since the date of our visit, by gentlemen on the spot. They may therefore, I trust, be considered accurate : they will not, however, be found to enter minutely into all the various details of each prison, but

body the sentiments entertained by my sister Elizabeth Fry, whose experience with respect to prisons is much greater than my own. As I am persuaded of the truth and importance of those sentiments, and as they have been fully confirmed by my own observation, I hope I shall be excused, if I have been inadvertent enough, in any part of the work, to press them upon the reader a little too confidently.

EARLHAM near NORWICH,

First month 14th, 1819.

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N O T E S.

Doncaster Jail.*

THIS jail consists of a small court-yard, two rooms on the ground floor, and two others above them; the rooms severally furnished with a small bed, and measuring thirteen feet square. Of the lower rooms, one is for male criminals of all descriptions, the other for male vagrants: of the upper rooms, one for females, whether debtors, vagrants, or criminals; the other for male debtors.

Fifteen persons have at times been locked up together for the night in the apartment allotted to male criminals, that apartment measuring as before stated thirteen feet square. The state of these poor wretches, when thus situated, must have been in a very high degree miserable and unhealthy. In the male vagrants' room there is no light when the door is shut, except through a hole in the door, and of course no ventilation. The criminals in this jail are ironed; they are allowed eightpence per day and firing,

* Visited eighth month (Aug) 20th, 1818, in company with several members of the Society of Friends, and two magistrates of the town.

but neither clothing nor soap. They are totally unemployed, and receive no instruction whatever. Forty persons have been confined in this jail at once; but at this time there were only five prisoners here. The doors of the four rooms being necessarily kept open during the day, *the prisoners of all descriptions, debtors and criminals, male and female, associate freely together.* Who can wonder that crimes increase? Who does not perceive the tendency of such an association to convert into felons, the vagrant, the misdemeanant, the debtor? One of the vagrants at this time in the prison was a Scotch woman, who having lost her husband, and having herself just recovered from a serious illness, was travelling homewards in company with her little child. She complained bitterly of her situation. "What could I do?" she said—"I dared not steal; I liked not to beg: destitute and afflicted, what could I do, but apply to the magistrates for a pass? The consequence is, that I am shut up for a week in prison, and exposed, perhaps, to the worst and most vicious of men."* The case speaks for itself.

* By 17 Geo. II. cap. 5, it is enacted, that rogues, vagabonds, and beggars, who are found in any parish to which they do not legally belong, should be apprehended, and committed to the house of correction for any term not exceeding a month, and should afterwards receive a pass from a magistrate. This pass obliges the constable to convey them to the next parish, and entitles the travellers to support from the officers of the parishes, which lie on the direct way in succession, until they arrive at their homes. By 32 Geo. III. ch. 45, it is further enacted, that such

We were much gratified by observing that the intelligent magistrates of Doncaster are anxious to correct these lamentable abuses. We were informed of their intention to erect a new prison. May they be encouraged to do this justice to themselves and to the public!

passes shall not be given, until the parties for whom they are required have been either privately whipped, or imprisoned in the house of correction for not less than seven days.

It often happens that innocent but distressed persons, journeying homeward, are under the necessity of applying for passes. These they cannot receive, except on the ground of being considered rogues and vagabonds, nor until they have suffered a punishment always disgraceful, and sometimes, in consequence of the bad state of our prisons, not a little terrible. This is a manifest injustice, and ought to be remedied. There is, however, a still greater abuse, which prevails in connection with these Acts of Parliament.

When poor persons, residing in a parish to which they do not belong, become chargeable to that parish, they are to be conveyed by the officers of the parish, under 13 and 14 Car. II. ch. 12, or an order signed by two justices of the peace, *to the place of their legal settlement*. In order to avoid the expense of this removal—an expense which in most cases devolves on the removing parish—it is a very common practice to entice such distressed persons into an act of public begging; and after punishing them as rogues and vagabonds, to send them home to their parishes on a common vagrant's pass.

This flagrant but prevalent abuse demands the early attention of the British legislature; for it is not only totally at variance from the principles of common justice, but it strikes at the root of those moral and independent feelings in the minds of the lower orders of the people, which are the best security to society at large.

—Vid. Nolan on the Poor Laws.

Pork Castle,—the County Jail.*

ON your entry into this handsome and extensive building, you are introduced to a very spacious court-yard, in which the debtors walk and expose various articles for sale, and into which the public are admitted with little or no reserve. On the right hand as you enter, are the court-houses; on the left, the several buildings in which are imprisoned the misdemeanants and others confined for a limited term, part of the debtors, and the women; in front, the governor's house, apartments over it for most of the debtors, and the prison for male felons, both before and after conviction—the tried being kept apart from the untried. There is no inspection from the governor's house over any part of the castle, except the great court and one of the felons' yards.

The chaplain attends this prison three times in the week to read prayers, and preaches twice. The prisoners are allowed one pound and a half of wheaten bread daily, and one shilling per week; but there is one particular class of them who have one shilling and sixpence per week. From

* Visited eighth month (August) 22d, in company with Benjamin Hornor of the Grange, near York.

the squalid appearance of some of the men, it seemed to us questionable whether the allowance of food was sufficient to maintain them in health: the apothecary of the prison, whom we saw, expressed an opinion that it was not. Firing is now allowed to the prisoners, and soap; but no clothing, except in cases of emergency. Several of them were extremely ill clad; two men without shirts. The felons, whether tried or untried, are heavily ironed.

That part of the prison in which the women are confined, is kept in a state of cleanliness and order. The women,—of whom one was for trial, and the others convicts, about seven in number,—appeared very decent; and some of them were busily employed in washing for the debtors. Their day-room does not admit sufficient light, but is otherwise comfortable; so are their sleeping-cells, and the bedding quite sufficient. The rest of the prison, except the debtors' rooms, which we did not see, but more especially the felons' day-room, appeared to us very far from cleanly. Every yard, however, is supplied with water; the means of warm and cold bathing are provided in the felons' prison; and we were informed that the whole jail is white-washed twice in the year. The men who are sentenced to a temporary confinement are kept apart from the other prisoners, and are employed in making laces, caps, garters, &c. which are sold in the great court. By this means they earn

from threepence to sixpence per day, the whole of which they are allowed to take for themselves. The male felons, whether tried or untried, are totally without employment. There were at this time about forty of them in the prison. Of these, the greater number were walking up and down a small yard, separated from the great court by a double iron palisade, or grating, the outer being divided from the inner grate by a space measuring ten feet in breadth. Through this grating they keep up a free and easy communication not only with the debtors but with the public. At this very time a great number of persons were standing at the outside, holding conversation with the prisoners. Men and women, grown-up persons and children, have an equal access to this scene of depravity and distress. It is evident, that so free a communication must give every facility to the introduction of improper articles into the prison, and probably to the pawning of the prisoners' clothes, which we understood to be a prevalent custom here : it must also afford an easy opportunity of corruption to the inhabitants of York and its neighbourhood. The day-room for these felons, opens into the yard in which they walk, and measures twenty-four feet by fifteen. The turnkey remembers the time, when there were eighty felons confined in it. The night-cells connected with this part of the prison are ill ventilated ; three or four of them are totally dark, and admit no ex-