

THE VERMONT PRISON.

THE DISCIPLINE AND ROUTINE.

Phair, the Alleged Murderer— Other Noted Criminals.

The Vermont State Prison, in the ancient and historic town of Windsor, was established in 1809, or eight years later than the old one soon to be vacated here in Massachusetts. When first erected it was a huge stone building containing only forty-six cells, and many of the rude features of the institution in those days are still retained. That the prison is an exception to many in security is evident from the fact that during the seventy years it has been in use not a single prisoner has ever escaped. At first the cells were made large enough for several persons to occupy, were dark and dismal, and into them the light of day never entered, the third story only having windows. This served the purpose until 1830, when another wing was added, containing 104 cells, a chapel, cook-room and other buildings, but crime increased so fast in Vermont that it was necessary to enlarge the accommodations, and in 1875 the old prison was taken down and a new wing added, containing fifty-six cells, eight of which were designed for females, and three used as "solitary," making in all 160 cells available. The hospital, which is convenient, is in this new wing.

In respect to the Vermont prison as a reformatory institution it has, of late years, made little progress; yet by a comparison with twenty-five years ago it shows a rapid advancement in the condition of its affairs, in a pecuniary as well as humane view. The management, under Superintendent Spencer, is admirable in every respect. The utmost diligence of the men at their labor, and the alacrity with which every duty is performed, at once strike the visitor as remarkable. Many of the prisoners when received are unable to either read or write, and the Superintendent has started an evening school, where all who wish it can attend two evenings each week. It is under the charge of one of the keepers, Mr. Hull. There are some eight classes, all the way from A, B, C to those in arithmetic and grammar. The classes are taught by the more advanced convicts, some of whom give evidence of culture and refinement. The attendance averages about sixty. The quiet order and deep interest taken by the men in their lessons is remarkable. Here are men in the prime of life learning their alphabet, one man, the father of eight children, about sixty years old, has just learned to read, and is making rapid progress. A young man, formerly from Massachusetts, but sentenced from Windham County, acts as the principal of the school; he takes the last twenty minutes in giving instruction on the black board in punctuation and some of the rules in spelling, writing, etc., holding the close attention of the men. Mr. Spencer spares neither time nor labor to promote the good of the prisoners; he is a Christian man, and feels that in his position a great responsibility is resting on him. The change within the past six months in the discipline and general aspect of the whole institution is very perceptible; neatness, order and quietness everywhere prevail; the discipline is strict, without being severe or cruel, and the men are made to feel that every order is inflexible, and must be obeyed. Punishment, when necessary, is meted out in such a manner that it is seldom repeated to the same man. They all "have a good opinion of the law," and some will, in time, "feel the halter draw."

Probably the most noted criminal in the institution is John P. Phair, the alleged murderer of a woman near Rutland, and whose reprieve was secured through the efforts of THE GLOBE only about an hour before the time set for his execution. It will be remembered that on the morning of the day on which Phair was to have been hanged THE GLOBE contained an exclusive account of the condemned man's statement, and that some of his declarations were corroborated by a reputable gentleman, who claimed to have met and conversed with him on the cars between Boston and Providence. Subsequent investigations on the part of THE GLOBE resulted in developing sufficient circumstances to warrant a reasonable belief that Phair was innocent, and this question is to be legally determined by the Vermont Legislature next October.

The other prisoners confined in Windsor charged with capital crimes are Gravelin, the Weatherfield murderer, Hayden, the Derby Lane murderer, and Magoon, the Barre murderer. Of the other noted criminals in the institution is Miles, the Barre bank robber, who is in for a fourteen years' sentence.