



VERMONT STATE PRISON.

**Visit to the Vermont State Prison.**

The above engraving is a very good representation of this prison. I visited it in the autumn of 1844, and the following is taken from my diary:

THE BLIND PRISONER.

In visiting the State prison here, I was peculiarly struck in passing in among the cells to meet with one very tastefully fitted up. The convict had whitewashed the walls, and prepared curtains for his bed, and adorned his cell with pictures. I have seen many prisons, and entered many a cell to converse with the poor prisoner, but never have I seen one so tastefully arranged before. 'This cell,' said the keeper, 'belongs to a blind man.' How singular! that a poor blind convict should have such a taste for beauty and order. I soon left his cell, and went among the convicts, and I saw him groping his way among the prisoners. I thought of the cruelty of society, in confining a poor blind convict. I found that he was put in for murder. A man was found dead near where he was with some others, and as society is usually determined to wreak vengeance upon some one, he was apprehended, and confined some time, as though the community had any thing to fear from the machinations of a blind man! My heart sickened as I contemplated the unfortunate man, and I turned away to witness other scenes.

VISIT TO THE CELL OF A MURDERER.

During my stay in Windsor, I availed myself of the privilege of seeing a prisoner under sentence of death for the murder of his wife and child. The circumstances connected with the murder were revolting indeed. They were obliged to cross a river. While in the act of going over, he turned out of the usual course, and went into an unfrequented part of the river, and threw her and the child overboard. This man was condemned in 1842. Many have supposed capital punishment to be abolished in Vermont. The law is in the very worst state. To show that the death-penalty still remains, we present the sentence of this murderer, whose name is Eugene Clifford:—It is the judgment of this Court, that for this offence you suffer death by hanging, to be executed upon you as soon as may be, *in due course of law, after the expiration of one year*

*from this 21st day of April, 1843; and, in the mean time, and until the punishment of death shall be inflicted upon you, you will be forthwith committed to solitary confinement in the State prison at Windsor, in the county of Windsor. The law of Vermont is, that no criminal shall be hung under fifteen months after his sentence. It was for a time one year. Then the Governor must issue his warrant for that purpose. It is thought that no Governor will ever do this; but surely no human life should be put in such jeopardy. The law then stands so that the criminal after fifteen months is liable every day to be executed. From night to morning, and from morning to night, then, the gallows is before him. At any moment, the sheriff may receive an order for his execution! However, we think Vermont is ahead of Massachusetts in the Anti-Capital Punishment Reform. Here, in the case of Barrett, who was hung in Worcester, the Governor and Council would not delay the execution one single hour! Shame on such rulers! Shame on a people who will tolerate them for a single moment! But, to continue our narrative:*

Here the unfortunate man has been in solitary confinement till he has nearly lost all sense of his horrid condition. We were kindly permitted to converse with him through his grate, and we give the conversation in the form of a dialogue:

- Q. What are your religious views?
- A. I am a Catholic.
- Q. Have you any brothers and sisters?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Should you prefer to be executed to remain here in confinement?
- A. Yes. I had rather be hung than stay here six months, or one month. I have written to the Governor to hang me.

This answer was given in the strongest language, so that I had no doubt of its sincerity. What a horrid state of mind must this man be in to prefer an execution to his present confinement! In fact, the criminal had made an effort to hang himself. It is somewhat singular that this happened while Samuel E. Coues, President of the American Peace Society, was on a visit to the prison. On inquiring of the physician who attended this criminal, he informed me that the man must evidently lose his mind entirely! What a comment upon our prison discipline! Some of the friends of the abolition of capital

punishment may be disposed to relax in their efforts when they learn that one under sentence of death prefers that penalty to confinement. But no true understanding friend of the abolition of the penalty will form such an opinion. The advocates of the abolition of capital punishment will remember that they have only begun their work when they have demolished the gallows. There is but little, if any difference, between the execution of a man and placing him in a solitary cell, where he will linger out a miserable existence for life. There is, however, one decided advantage in the sentencing a criminal for life, which should never be forgotten. He may be an innocent man. So many cases have occurred that we cannot be too careful. Indeed this is one of the strongest arguments against the death-penalty. It has been ascertained that no less than one hundred innocent persons have been put to death in England upon the gallows. Lord Nugent estimated that it would average one in every three years. We regret exceedingly to find that very many who go against the death-penalty are for solitary confinement for life, without the least hope of pardon. Were such persons to go with me in some of my visits to the prisons of our country, they would soon go against such inhuman treatment.

On leaving the cell of the murderer, I proceeded to visit the various workshops of the prison. I was glad to find things in a much better condition than in most prisons. There was an air of cheerfulness unusual in prisons. I was allowed to converse with some of the convicts. I inquired, as usual, first for the murderers. One was pointed out to me, and he was permitted to leave his work to converse with me. His story was short. He had associated with the intemperate, and had been led into crime. As he related his story, he was very much affected. I spoke kindly to him. I told him that we did not come to see him, as many would go to see a wild beast, but to sympathise with him, and to pity him; that I felt deeply for prisoners. When he heard this, the tears flowed fast and thick down his cheeks. So much was he affected that he could not give utterance to his feelings. I told him he need not rehearse his story if it was unpleasant to him, and he turned away.

On our way, the keeper remarked as we passed along, 'there is a professional man, the only one in the prison.' We approached him, and asked him about the effect of confinement. He said he 'got used to it; he did not care much about it now. Formerly, said he, 'we had very intemperate keepers, but now they are sober men. They were incapable of governing themselves; of course, they could not govern others.' He was cultivating a little garden; he said he wanted to save the seeds of the flowers. He seemed pleased to see me.

From here I went to examine the various cells, and I inquired eagerly for the solitary ones. The keeper very politely showed us two or three of them. The following questions were immediately proposed:

- Q. Is there any light there?
- A. Go in and see.
- Q. We entered the cell, and soon found that it was dark as midnight.
- Q. Is there any chair or bed?
- A. No.
- Q. But have you no straw for the prisoner to lie on?
- A. No, nothing. The convict takes in a piggion of water with him, and we hand him bread.
- Q. How long do you keep him here?
- A. Sometimes a fortnight.

Such is the treatment received by the poor prisoner. We trust that the efforts that are now making to ameliorate his condition, will result greatly to his good, by abolishing those cruel barbarities which are now practised upon him, and which make him worse instead of better.—c. s.