THE MIRROR

"IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND."

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MISCELLANY

IS SOCIETY RESPONSIBLE FOR CRIME.

Its Duty Toward the Discharged Prisoner.

(*Sixth Paper.*)

"Man-like it is to fall into sin,
Friend-like is it to dwell therein,
Christ-like is it for sin to grieve,
God-like is it all sin to leave."
—LONGFELLOW.

"Men are lead by strange ways. One should have tolerance for a man: leave him to try yet what he will do."

"May we not again say, that in the huge mass of evil, as it rolls and swells, there is ever some good working imprisoned; working towards deliverance and triumph."
—CARLYLE.

I will suppose the prisoner to have completed the sentence imposed upon him, less the time allowed by law for good conduct, and he is provided with a certificate signed by the warden, of such good conduct while undergoing sentence; which, on presentation to the Governor, entitles him to a restoration of all his rights and privileges as a citizen. He is once more free—a new man filled with hope and trust in his fellow-man; determined that

"Each deed
That carried shame and wrong shall be the sting
That drives me higher up the steep of honor
In deeds of duteous service."

During his long confinement within these walls, he has learned many things; he has pondered over his past, and come to the conclusion that wrong doing does not pay, that it yields no true happiness, that it lowers, and degrades, and eventually brutalizes the man who will persist in it. He has seen many of his fellow prisoners go out, and persisting in crime, again return to imprisonment. He has seen and heard of others who have gone forth, and by honest toil, and manly endeavors, have made, or are making, a position in the world for themselves. He has studied and done all in his power while here, to fit himself, to take a man's place in the world; and he goes forth fully resolved to labor honestly, live soberly, and conscientiously strive to redeem his past, and build up a future for himself, and it may be for those depending on him. He has been taught here, that the state, that is society, does care for him; that it does interest itself in his well being, and in his reformation; and is anxious to see him do what is right. And he believes this, because while here, he has proved it to be a fact.

Society does care for the prisoner while in confinement. When he is free and again resturned to citizenship, What will society do for him then? Will it do for him, as it has done with others in the past, dog him with its police, pursue him by detectives, drive him from the honest work he has obtained, and is willing to do, by proclaiming the fact that he is an ex-convict; "not to be trusted," etc., etc, and the thousand and one other methods by which in the past they have driven men again into crime? Without crime, the necessity of detectives and police would cease, therefore it is policy for them to keep up the force of criminals, and in fact, they have not scrupled to employ any means to deprive the ex-prisoner of the chance of earning his living by honest effort, and so again drive him back to his old associates, his old way of existing, and living, and so back to crime, and a prison.

This system, both in the past and at the present time, is doing more to counteract all the good that the state is striving to do here, than all other influences combined. I ask society to look into this matter, to see that the work done by the right hand, is not undone by the left.

Look for a moment at the family life of our people. Here is a family with five young children, aged from 10 to 15 years, a boy of 12 years, does wrong, steals apples from his neighbor's orchard, or takes the key of the pantry, and pilfers the jam pots; he is found out, and we punish him for it. Do we separate him from his brother and sister? Do we banish him from all his young playmates, and make an out-cast and pariah of him? No, we punish him for the fault, admonish him and there ends the matter. Now, men are but children of larger growth. Why punish them more severely because it is so? Is it not enough that he is so punished? After he has paid the penalty is he still to be punished? Is his punishment never to cease? After paying the penalty of the law, is the still greater penalty to be his, the penalty of loneliness, banishment from all good influences, deprivation of the means of honest labor, denial of his rights as a man, and of every good thing that a man prays, hopes, works, and lives for?

I say to society, this man has paid the penalty, let that penalty end, when the prison gates close behind him, and he once more enters into the active life of the great human family whose father is God. If we acknowledge the universal fatherhood of our God, then we must also acknowledge the universal brotherhood of man. I say to society this man is your brother, and however mistaken his past life has proven to be, you have still a duty to perform for your brother, if you acknowledge the universal fatherhood of God.

If you only acknowledge self, and do not believe in the brotherhood of man, and care nothing as to what becomes of your fellow-man, then I say this paper is not written for you. Class judgment, and sweeping condemnation are your ways of dealing with fallen man, and though this way of dealing is neither good for the condemners nor condemned, it still suits the purpose of those who wish to shirk the duty that is laid upon them. But I believe that there are many who have courage enough to defy the world's opinions, and to set at naught the world's ways, and because they acknowledge the universal fatherhood of God, and brotherhood of man, they are ready and willing to aid and assist their brother, who, through ignorance and sin, has gone astray, and served a sentence behind the bars, however much they may hate the ignorance and sin that led him astray.

I ask society to remember that "It is the human character of developed humanity, that conducts us to our notions of the character divine. In proportion as the mysteries of man's goodness unfold themselves to us, in that proportion do we obtain an insight into God's." Your brother goes out among you with hope in his heart, believing that in you he has friends; friends willing and ready to assist and protect him in his upward and onward way. It is seemingly little that he asks, but to him it is everything.

First, he requires work, and then to be let alone to do that work. He has paid the penalty of his former wrong-doing, let the dead past be buried and let the present alone be counted against him. Trust him in his work, believe in the sincerity of his desire and craving for a new and better future, aid him by counsel and advise when needed, and put before him some better place than the saloon and music hall, to pass away his leisure hours. Stop all interference with him by either police or detectives, except for just cause, and you will have fewer men here for second and third terms. Regarding work, I say to society, work should be provided for the discharged prisoner from the hour he leaves the prison.

Another duty of society is to see that some such law as that which they have in Canada, be passed and put in force here. In that country, to call a man an ex-convict, or to proclaim to his fellow workmen that he has served a term in a provincial prison, or in any manner injure him in his trade or business, renders the person so doing liable to an action for libel. The courts in Ontario having held that when a man serves a sentence, and is discharged from prison, he has paid the penalty which the law imposes and he is forever free from molestation in any way, on account of the crime for which he was convicted. The courts of Canada have further held, that in one case, and one case only can the fact that a man who has served a sentence in prison and been properly discharged therefrom, be ever brought up against him, and that case is when he again relapses into crime, and is convicted thereof, then only can his former conviction be urged against him legally. Let society pass such a law as this, and it will have done more to protect the man who desires to retrace his steps and lead an honest life, than any other means in its power.

I would also urge upon society, the need of reading and recreation rooms, in various sections of our great cities, and one in each smaller town throughout the state. These could be established on a paying basis, as I have already described in THE MIRROR. They are a nesessity, not only for the discharged prisoner, who "Homeless amid a thousand homes," needs a place where he may cultivate his mind and spend his spare hours, but, they are also needed for every stranger, every young man, for the youths growing up to manhood, aye, and also for our girls, where good influences may be brought to bear, innocent amusement, physical and mental culture would tend to lift up and elevate, instead of the miserable, low dive saloon, with its cards, or the equally miserable concert saloon with its vice and debauchery which degrades, brutalizes, ruins and destroys every human soul who enters therein. Such are some of the duties which society owes toward the discharged prisoner, duties the more incumbent on them inasmuch that seven-tenths of the occupants of our prison cells never, probably, would have fallen had it not been for the causes I have stated. Causes which society, for their own ends, permit to exist or tolerate, and which they have in their power to remove.

I will now speak of duty from a higher point of view. In this sense we all stand on the same footing—we all acknowledge the Fatherhood of God, He is over all. Then—Universal Fatherhood causes universal brotherhood, and the one is as truly unalterable as the other. That we do not see it to be so is surely our own fault. As a rule, though, it is only those who believe that God gives up souls, who treat men as outcasts; they are quite logical in doing so. But once believe that lost means, not found yet; that the Good Shepherd seeks the lost sheep until He finds it, that the Fatherhood is forever and ever—and then the fact that your brother has fallen, that he has been mistaken in his past, that he has done very wrong against society, and is now striving to regain a character, to build anew, and, so far as in him, redeem the past, will only make you to love him the more and try to show your love for him the more. Many of the colored race have long believed that the Christ was only for the white people and they called Him the White Christ. Do not, by your actions, make this brother believe that Christ is only the church member's Christ and not for all the human race.

I will close this series of papers with a quotation from a man whom all who loves his fellowman, must love, Judge Albert Tourgee of North Carolina:

"Will the rich, the strong and the brave who profess the name of Christ never learn to put themselves in the place of the poor, the weak and the fallen? Must His very name be a thing of naught to them for whom He died? It is hard enough to have been classed among criminals, without having the curse of eternal hopelessness added to it. It must be difficult to reconcile such an apparent curse with the idea of Divine Mercy. And then to think, to feel, to see that society who profess His name, is but the cult of the wrongdoer, the oppressor. God help us! How little we know of each other's burdens, and how our own acts make heavier the load our neighdors bear." I heve made a small transition in the above, but the text is emphatically his.

I have completed the task I set out to do. I have shown you the four great causes which fill our prisons. I have shown you, somewhat, of that which is in your power to do. I now leave our brother with you. I also, am one of these brothers, a prisoner behind the bars. I leave him now with you, asking society what will you do with him? Help him, assist him, on the lines I have shown or some others equally good? Will you protect him in his efforts to win in the onward and upward race? Or will you suffer your servants to goad and drive him out from his fellows, from all honest employment, from all good influences, to his old companions, the saloon, the gambling hell, to crime and again to prison? Your brother is in your hands, do with him as one day you will ask our God to do with you.

H.

(THE END.)

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