

**The true state of the House of Correction for the County of Middlesex,
fairly and candidly set forth / By a visiting magistrate.**

Contributors

Visiting magistrate.

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L. J.

SECRETS of the English
Bastille

THE

TRUE STATE

OF THE

HOUSE OF CORRECTION

FOR THE

COUNTY OF MIDDLESEX,

FAIRLY AND CANDIDLY SET FORTH.

BY

A VISITING MAGISTRATE.

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THE
SECRETS
OF THE
ENGLISH BASTILLE, &c.

THE author of the following pages is not aware, that it is usual to *request* any man, to lend his cane for the purpose of having it laid across his shoulders: but to what lengths will not a laudable spirit of investigation carry men? An order of admission within the walls of the *Bastille* (the hackney-coachman's name for it) it seems, was applied for. And it having been granted by some Magistrate, the House of Correction is visited, for the purpose of taking the dimensions of the cells, and reporting the

miserics of their inhabitants: it was not conceived that any use could be made of this order, which candour and a fair representation would not fully justify; and any report from the prison that was fair and candid, the Magistrates had no reason to wish should be withholden from the public eye. They were vain enough to hope, that the system established in that place of confinement would abide the most minute investigation: and they were supported in this hope by the favourable report of many philanthropic visitors, who left the prison-gate with the most favourable impressions of the whole system on which it is conducted; and were agreeably surprized with the order, the diligence, the * tranquillity, and decorum prevalent in every part of the prison. Nay, the Magistrates have reason to believe, that some visitors who came full of the ideas of a *Bastille* in their minds, could not suppress their astonishment at find-

* I wish to observe, that this favourable opinion of the prison was received, *previously* to the commitment of certain persons accused of treason, or treasonable practices; *ten* of whom have created more trouble, disorder, and confusion in the prison, than *an hundred* convicted felons.

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ing the prison in a state of such perfect health, so few invalids in the Infirmary, and the place for their reception so perfectly inoffensive, so clean and so full of comfort. Where then shall the ground of accusation be found? And what discovery has been made, to justify the charge brought against the Committee for inspecting the management of this prison, as having encouraged such a system of cruelty and coercion, as neither the laws of the country, nor the dictates of humanity can justify? Such a system, as *Clergymen* especially could not suffer to be established for a moment, except on the principle of “commutation of temporal for eternal punishment; and giving up the poor sufferer to as great a degree of torment as he is capable of in this life, by way of *set-off* against the portion which his crimes might expect in the next.”

This conjecture, which is more nearly allied to profaneness than wit, may perhaps have excited a smile at the moment, but deserves not a word of serious reply: except by positively affirming, that no such severity of punishment as is complained of does exist in any part of the prison; that the whole of the charge

is unfounded ; and that it is to be considered only as an *ignis fatuus*, calculated to mislead the public mind, and to confirm the said hackney-coachman and his brethren in their rooted opinion, that a prison, * without spirituous liquors—without habitual idleness—without promiscuous intercourse of the sexes—without connection with felons, and other offenders not in confinement—cannot deserve a better name than that of a *Bastille*.

The public, however, will, in spite of any witticisms, take the liberty to judge for themselves ; but as they may not wish for the trouble of a personal enquiry, they may perhaps go a shorter way to obtain satisfaction, by bestowing a few leisure-minutes on the following detail of FACTS ; upon the truth of which they may safely rely, although they should look in vain for a signature at the conclusion of these Memoirs.

* I wish I could flatter myself, or my readers, that the same care was taken in other prisons, which have not been so narrowly inspected for the purposes of *information* as that before us.

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The narrative shall be as short as the nature of the subject will admit; but as it will be necessary to go as far back as to the very commencement of this *System of Terror*, it cannot be dispatched so briefly as we could wish.

At the Michaelmas Quarter-Sessions, in the year 1794, the House of Correction in Cold-Bath-Fields, (the hackney-coachman's, carman's, chimney-sweeper's, and coal-heaver's BASTILLE) was declared to be in a proper condition to receive the prisoners then confined in the Old Bridewell, in another part of the parish of St. James, Clerkenwell: and so far were the Magistrates from intending to render the condition of the prisoners *less* comfortable than it was before, that on their first introduction to the Chapel, the * person who was appointed to address them, ventures to con-

* The Discourse then delivered, and here alluded to, is in the Press, for the further satisfaction of the public, who will there find, that the tendency of the whole system, *ab initio*, was entirely different from what it is conceived to be by the hackney-coachman and his friends.

gratulate (not by way of *insulting*) his hearers, on their change of situation so much *for the better*.

This building was erected at a very great expence to the county, under the directions of the late Sir Robert Taylor, on a plan very similar to that of Mr. Blackburn, for the county of Gloucester. The grand desideratum in other places of confinement, viz. the separation and classing of prisoners, was here supplied, as well in compliance with the laws respecting * Penitentiary Houses and Houses of Correction, as in full conformity with the ideas of two of the most benevolent writers on the subject, Mr. *Howard*, and the no less celebrated philanthropist Mr. *Jonas Hanway*. Not fewer than 300 cells were provided for the reception of as many individuals ; and these (we are sorry to have reason to apprehend) will not be sufficient ; when the termination of the war shall have discharged upon the metropolis its usual number of inhabitants, in the inferior classes of men. At this period, there was a vacancy in the office of Governor of the Middlesex House of Correction ; and the

* 19 G. 3. 22 G. 3. and 31 G. 3.

Justices assembled in Session were not a little anxious to supply the place of their deceased Officer, with a person as well qualified as could any where be found, for a very arduous and important situation. It was their care to steer clear of every thing like a job, in the appointment; and * *detur digniori* was most certainly their rule of conduct: the public testimony borne recently in his favour by the very worthy Chairman, who best knows his merit, was strictly just; and a more fit person could not easily have been met with, as well for the service of the public, as for the proper management of the prison, and the discreet controul of its inhabitants.

It will naturally be supposed, that a compilation of Rules and Orders, collected from the experience of others, with the addition of such, as the peculiar situation of this prison in the heart of the metropolis required, engaged the first and earliest attention of the Magistrates: and, as a still farther vindication of their conduct, against the charge of inhumanity in the outset of this business, and

* Let the fittest person be appointed.

for the entire satisfaction of all orders of men, from the Member of Parliament to the hackney-coachman, (if perchance he should be able to read) a copy of the said Rules and Orders will be here subjoined, by way of Appendix ; together with Observations on *every particular Regulation* ; declaring the principle on which it was founded ; as perfectly agreeable to the Acts of Parliament, in conformity to which the Rule was laid down.

Under the care and direction of *Visiting Justices* the management of the prison was at first conducted, and Reports were regularly made to the Sessions every quarter, in a strict adherence to the Laws respecting Houses of Correction. This arrangement continued through the year 1795 ; but in the Epiphany Session of 1796, it was proposed and ordered by the Court, that a *Prison-Committee*, consisting of near twenty Magistrates, should be appointed, to inspect from time to time the concerns of the prisons, and make their report thereon to the Court on the County Day. In consequence of this appointment FIFTY Meetings have been held ; and at every one of these, enquiries have been made, agreeably

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to the Statutes, concerning the due Regulation of the Prison, the Health, the Maintenance, the Behaviour, and Treatment of the Prisoners ; and information has been sought after on every point, wherein the interference of the Magistrates was required. The days of meeting being fixed, they were generally known by the prisoners ; and whenever any complaint has been made, either by letter or otherwise, it has been the constant practice of the Committee to call the party before them, and to listen to all that he had to say ; and where his complaint was well founded, to redress the grievance. On all these occasions, the attendance of the Chaplain and the Surgeon, together with that of the Governor, was invariably expected : their several reports were taken into consideration ; and as perfect a knowledge of every thing respecting the *interior* of this *Bastille* was obtained, as the pious humanity of the Chaplain, and the eminent skilfulness of the * Surgeon,

* An offender, who on his entrance into this prison was found afflicted with an ulcerated leg, which for some time was judged necessary to be taken off, was, by incessant care, entirely cured, and is now fully capable of following his trade, with nearly as free use of one leg as of the other.

could

could enable them to communicate : from the former the Committee received frequent and very pleasing information of a manifest amendment in the character and behaviour of the prisoners, especially of young offenders ; and from the latter, they seldom had a report of more than three or four persons (when there were two hundred in the prison) seriously ill at the same time : and the fact is, (and let the hackney-coachman produce, if he can, a similar Bill of Health in an equal number of his associates, throughout the metropolis) that from the 1st of January, 1796, to the 18th of December, 1798, not fewer than THREE THOUSAND SIX HUNDRED AND NINE prisoners have been committed, and that of this number only SIXTEEN in the two years have died ; making an average of about ONE prisoner in TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FOUR : a fact which affords the fullest answer to every imputation brought against the state and condition of this prison, as destructive of, or even injurious to, the health of its inhabitants. The reader will recollect, if a further vindication of the healthiness of the prison be necessary, in what an ill state of health, in consequence of their vicious irregularities, and under what unfavour-

favourable circumstances, many of those unhappy persons are received within these walls; and then his only ground of astonishment will be, that so very few deaths should have happened in the course of two years *.

The Magistrates, who are able to bring forward such testimonies in favour of this miserable *Bastille*, now represented as destructive of the lives of the persons confined in it, are enabled, at the same time, to smile with contempt at the random-charges levelled against

* On referring to the Minutes of the Prison-Committee, I find that, on a report from without the prison, that *Smith's* health was suffering from his confinement, he was sent for more than once, and examined as to his state of health; when it appeared, as well from his own declaration, as from ocular demonstration, that he was in perfect health; and *himself*, the Governor and Surgeon all declared, that he was then a much stouter man than he was at the time of his commitment.

It is also observable, that two prisoners were brought before the Committee, previously to their discharge, one of whom had been confined two years and a half, and for a considerable time in a more than ordinary state of coercion, for refractory behaviour; and the other for two years; and it would have been difficult to find two more healthy countenances than were exhibited on that occasion.

them;

them ; although they cannot flatter the poor prisoners with any hope of alleviation of their punishment for their sins in a future world, from any sufferings to which, under the proper administration of the laws, they are subjected here. But they *do* direct them to *another* source of hope ; by rendering their imprisonment in a state of solitude, so favourable to serious reflection, so promotive of useful industry, so introductory to habitual sobriety, and above all so instrumental to proper impressions of duty towards God and Man, as to become subservient to the future reformation of their hearts and lives. Of this reformation the Magistrates have received many very flattering assurances ; not merely within the prison, wherein it might readily be suspected, that the prisoner would (for selfish purposes) profess more than he really felt ; but long after their dismissal. They have had the satisfaction of hearing it said by reformed delinquents, that they never had a serious thought in their lives till they came thither—that they account it to be the happiest event that ever befel them, that they came within the discipline of that house : these are the persons to which a reference must be had, if we would

know

know the true name of this *Bastille*. They would tell us, that it is what it calls itself, *an House of Correction* in its best and fullest signification: an house, in which their stubborn tempers have been subdued—their hardened hearts have been softened—their ignorant minds have been instructed—their vicious habits have been overcome—new habits of diligence and sobriety have been established—and in which they have learnt the lesson which is in every one's mouth, but far from being admitted into general practice; viz. that “Honesty is the best policy;” and that there is neither security, nor peace, nor comfort, in any course of life, which is not lawful, virtuous, and honest.

This then is the general history of the prison, and this the *real* condition of the forlorn inhabitants of the *Bastille*: they have a bed * with proper coverings, in every respect better than many of them have been accustomed to sleep on; four days in every week they have a large well-prepared mess of broth, with half

* A very great Personage was particularly struck with the accommodation of the prisoners in this respect, when his Royal Highness was pleased to honour this prison with a visit.

a pound of * coarse but wholesome meat in it, and plenty of vegetables, the produce of a large garden which surrounds the prison; and in which prisoners for slight offences are permitted to labour: the work, which they are required to perform, is adapted to their strength † and ability: they are not indeed compelled to that sort of *hard labour*, which is only calculated to give them a detestation of the name of labour; but are required to be constantly industrious; and are given to understand, that no man is to expect any favour within those walls, who does not exert himself according to his ability to deserve it: and thus it is found by experience, that habits of industry have been there established, which continue with them to this moment, on their restoration to society. Youths have been dismissed well instructed in religious truths, who literally knew nothing, that they ought to know, when they were committed: and some adults have actually learned and required a proficiency in trades within the prison, which have fur-

* This is in a strict conformity to the Statute, in which this very expression is made use of.

† This also is agreeable to, and in the very terms of, the Act of Parliament.

nished them with better means of subsistence on their discharge, than ever they would have had in their whole lives.

In short, if the Magistrates have erred, it is on the side which is opposite to that, for which their conduct has been so unjustly reprobated; and they are more open to the charge of having done too much, than too little, for the benefit and comfort of the prisoners: they seem to have felt, that it was a sufficient punishment for most crimes, that they should be separated from their families, abridged of their liberty, compelled to labour (which, though ultimately beneficial to them, is supposed to be not very pleasant to persons habituated to vicious idleness) and to have no other subsistence than bread and water for three days out of the seven: the Magistrates supposed, that few persons in their senses would ever be indifferent about, much less would wantonly expose themselves to, a sentence of imprisonment in this place, under all its advantages: but they had no idea, nor can all the rhetoric which has been displayed on the occasion convince them, that it is in any degree a place of torture; but a place in

the very constitution of which, the fundamental principle is punishment inflicted with discretion, and tempered with mercy.

The Magistrates, who have been honoured with the most public declaration of Lord Chief Justice Kenyon's approbation of their conduct in the management of this prison, would regard the censures of casual inspectors for particular purposes, as utterly unworthy of refutation, were it not incumbent on them, for their own sakes as well as others, to give every degree of satisfaction to the public on a subject, wherein the peace of mind of so many individuals is immediately concerned.

I should here take my leave, did I not feel myself impelled to contribute my share of vindication, respecting the conduct of Government towards the most dangerous description of prisoners, I mean those committed on suspicion of treason, and for seditious practices.

The Magistrates have too much respect for that authority, by which prisoners of this denomination stand committed to the House of Correction, in any degree to arraign their conduct; although they cannot suppress the declaration of

their wish, that any other place of confinement had been preferred ; as it is most certain, that they have proved the most turbulent, refractory, and ungovernable, of any persons within those walls. They have uniformly retained, and on all occasions shewn, when it has been in their power, the same spirit which brought them thither ; and as they shew no disposition to relent, they will, beyond a doubt, manifest it, as opportunity shall offer, whenever they are discharged.

The Royal Personage above alluded to, had a specimen of ingenuity produced to him, as delineated on the whited wall of one of these prisoner's cells ; which decency and profound respect for our most amiable and most gracious Sovereign forbid me particularly to describe : but it was an effort of genius, demonstrative of the utmost depravity of heart, and of a disaffected propensity of mind, which no loyal subject, nor any true friend to his country, could behold without abhorrence. The artist, being interrogated on the subject, said with a sneer, that it was merely for his amusement, and with no evil intention whatsoever :—believe him, who will.

The complaint against the * severities exercised in this prison having been chiefly brought forward, as they respect these suspected traitors, and convicted libellers, (for thieves and felons are exposed to equal sufferings unnoticed and unpitied) it is necessary, that it should be shewn, in what manner Government has contributed to their comfort and support. They have been under an allowance of 13s. 4d. per week, besides the prison-allowance of bread, since April last; which is so faithfully expended, that the writer has seen plates of meat dressed and prepared in the most decent manner, of the first † quality, and amply suffi-

* The complaint which has been made of the misstatement of what is said in the course of Parliamentary Debates is, I believe, but too well founded: but who can have more just ground of complaint than the person, whom the Papers have so erroneously reported to have stated, that Colonel Despard could *only* converse with his wife through the grating of the prison gate, when he knows, that on his visit at the prison he left the Colonel and his wife sitting together in a room, and conversing with each other, near a comfortable fire!!

† Complaint having been made by these mal-contents, that their meat was of an inferior sort, and bought at a cheap rate, the writer of these pages examined the Butcher's bills, and saw that the first price was given for every article with which these prisoners were supplied.

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cient in quantity, served up in a way, he ventures to say, as proper in every respect as most of them have ever seen prepared at their own tables. In addition to this, an indulgence has lately been granted them, which, so far as it extends, is utterly subversive of the discipline of the prison, and which liberty they have most indecently abused; they are suffered to dwell together in a way, which, if they are such as they are suspected to be, will render them probably much more mischievous to society, than if they had been continued in their state of separation: they have now full leisure for a free communication of their ideas, their plans, and future projects, if they should have the same good fortune, which others have met with under similar circumstances. Whatever may have been the offence of the Magistrates respecting the other prisoners, the Members of Administration are chargeable with nothing but a degree of indulgence bordering on indiscretion in the case before us: and all we have to hope for is, that they will not reap any corrupt fruits from their well intended humanity.

To the question, Whether a man convicted of a libel ought to be treated like a convicted felon, which seems to be considered as a most unreasonable and disproportionate punishment, we have no hesitation in answering, that whether the libel be directed against an individual, or against a body of men ; whether against the constitution, or the persons engaged in the administration of public affairs, or in any other case, wherein the characters of men are materially concerned, from the Prime Minister to the least considerable Magistrate, the observation will hold good, to the full conviction of the LIBELLER, as a far more mischievous member of society than the THIEF :

That he who steals my purse, steals trash —
 But he who filches from me my good name,
 Robs me of that which not enricheth him,
 And makes me poor indeed.

I will only add, that the Magistrates, with whom I have the honour to act, will ever feel themselves indebted to those Gentlemen who stood forth in their defence ; perfectly secure, when their cause is so ably supported by persons, who have made strict enquiries into the
 real

real state of the prison, and into the treatment of the prisoners ; and who are able from their own personal knowledge to declare, that the House of Correction for the county of Middlesex is most grossly *libelled* by the hackney-coachman, whenever he reports, that he set down his fare at the BASTILLE.

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