

Public opinion has become alarmed at the deplorable effects upon society, growing out of the want of properly regulated prisons for punishment and labor. What are the teachings of Maryland's experience on this subject? Before the present advanced state of prison discipline—when brute force was supposed equal to all the results to be anticipated from punishments,—the disgusting spectacle was presented on our highways, and in the very streets of our cities, of men chained, manacled to their daily task. Having lost all respect for themselves, and retaining nothing of public esteem, they had no incentives to reformation while hourly jeered and taunted for their miserable condition. With them punishment was infamy, and the certain forfeiture of all claim to character. Consequently disregarding all restraint they worked infinitely more harm by infusing into the innocent hearts of those continually surrounding them, the poison engendered in their own by their corrupt associations, than their punishment, effected of good, either upon themselves or the community.

Necessity originated this system, must not the same necessity force us to adhere to its prosecution? Are we ready to adopt the former plan—to retrace our steps—and again take our place by the side of those who deny that any good can result from present improvements? If so, mankind must become polluted, and stand beyond the reach of the healing influences which philanthropy and science are now so successfully exerting to restore the moral and social condition of men. Besides we cannot adopt the suggestion of returning to the old plan of highway labor, without giving as much cause of complaint as exists now. What proportion of men have no trades at all, who support themselves and their families by daily labor that requires no previous tuition! It would be quite as unjust to place such men in the same canal or on the same road, by the side of a convict, as to permit that convict to work in the company only of convicts at business in which honest men may also be engaged. Of the two instances, the former is more objectionable; and while we are considering the complaints, and endeavoring to mitigate the supposed hardships of one class of men, we should be mindful of all that is clearly due to the others. Men who are presumed to be corrupt and unworthy of a place in society should not be allowed to associate at all with those whom they might contaminate. None have a deeper concern in the perfection of morals, and the propagation of virtue, than those who most complain of this species of punishment. For the laboring classes we entertain the highest respect, founded upon a liberal estimate of the true and substantial elements of society; and we assign them no mean place, when we respond the sentiment that "they are the bone and sinew of the country." We cannot then be suspected of any unkindness towards them in withholding a recommendation on this subject in accordance with the wishes of the mechanics of Baltimore.

It becomes them more especially to view this subject in all the aspects under which the state of society can be affected by it, because