

the evils of the old system. On the 25th of December, 1821, a portion of the Auburn prison having been built for this purpose, eighty prisoners were placed in it and confined in separate cells.— They were not allowed to leave their cells day or night, and all labor was denied to them in their solitude. The experiment was made in pursuance of a law of the Legislature of New York, at its session in 1821, which required the Directors of the Auburn prison “to select a class of criminals, the most hardened, and to lock them up in solitary cells, day and night, without interruption and without labor.”

We regret that our time would not allow us to visit the New York prisons, where we should have learned every particular of this experiment, at this period so important, as that system has many advocates in this State, and is supported by them in opposition to any other where labor is permitted.

The experiment, however, we are assured, failed most disastrously. In the work published by Messrs. De Beaumont and De Toqueville, Commissioners appointed by the French government to visit and examine the Penitentiaries in this country, we find the following account of this experiment:

“This trial, from which so happy a result had been anticipated, was fatal to the greater part of the convicts: in order to reform them, they had been submitted to complete isolation; but this absolute solitude, if nothing interrupt it, is beyond the strength of man; it destroys the criminal without intermission and without pity; it does not reform, it kills.

“The unfortunates, on whom this experiment was made, fell into a state of depression, so manifest that their keepers were struck with it; their lives seemed in danger, if they remained longer in this situation; five of them had already succumbed during a single year;— their moral state was not less alarming; one of them had become insane—another, in a fit of despair, had embraced the opportunity, when the keeper brought him something, to precipitate himself from his cell, running the almost certain chance of a mortal fall.

“Upon similar effects the system was finally judged. The Governor of the State of New York pardoned twenty-six of those in solitary confinement; the others, to whom this favor was not extended, were allowed to leave their cells during the day, and to work in the common work shops of the prison. From this period, (1823,) the system of unmodified isolation ceased to be entirely practised at Auburn: proofs were soon afforded that this system, so fatal to the health of the criminals, was likewise inefficient in producing their reform. Of twenty six convicts pardoned by the Governor, fourteen returned in a short time after into prison, in consequence of new offences.”

The failure of this experiment was followed by an even more disastrous one at Pittsburg, and it was feared the entire abandonment of