



Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.



+

AN APPEAL

FOR

The Formation

OF

A CHURCH PENITENTIARY.

BY

THE REV. JOHN ARMSTRONG, B.A.

VICAR OF TIDENHAM,

AUTHOR OF "SERMONS ON THE FESTIVALS," AND "THE PASTOR IN HIS CLOSET."

LONDON :

JOHN HENRY PARKER, 377 STRAND,
AND BROAD STREET, OXFORD.

MDCCCXLIX.

24729. r 14 (16)

LONDON.
GEORGE BARCLAY, Castle Street, Leicester Square.



AN APPEAL,

&c.

IN the Name of God, I earnestly pray you to read and weigh these few words! I ask you to help me in saving souls—souls which are dying and spreading death, which hitherto have had but a scant measure of human pity, and but faint exertions of Christian charity on their behalf, though so forcibly commended to the Church by the words and example of our Lord. I speak of the fallen daughters of the Church—of that vast body of guilty wanderers who are perishing themselves and causing others to err; and who, amid all the increasing efforts of increasing mercy, are still left to perish.

The world has succeeded so well in surrounding the subject with false shame that the Church, acted on by the sickly maxims of the world, has shrunk from touching it, as though it were an impure thing, a breach of delicacy, to use means for the decrease of impurity and for the reformation of the impure.

No longer, however, must our hearts be withheld from such a cause by that spurious bashfulness which practically fosters the very sins it affects to abhor. The Church has a work to do which has almost slipped from her hands. It is time that the world's wretched prudery should be spurned, and that the words, the still more striking example, of our Lord, should have their sway ; we must no longer be too delicate to save souls. While warmer notions of mercy are taking root, and deeper views of Gospel repentance are set forth, *one* class of sinners must no longer be thrust beyond the reach of mercy or the preaching of repentance. Fallen women must no longer be the only class of sinners left to drift to destruction.

And do you think that the exercise of mercy and the preaching of repentance, with all its after doctrines, would be altogether wasted on hardened hearts ? Or do you think that these fallen women—I might rather say these girls and children—who are to be counted by thousands in London alone, who have been drawn into sin, often by hunger or over-work, or ill-usage at home and in service, or evil examples of parents, or utter want of religious training, or perilous mixture of sexes in shops and factories,—do you think that of these thousands none abhor themselves and their present life ;—that none hate the guilty course, mocked with the bitter title of a “ life of pleasure ; ”—that none long for some kindly shelter where they may hide their heads

and repent? Do you think that the eyes of none fill with tears as they think of home, and sisters and brothers, and their own empty seats, where there is a kind home to be remembered? Do you think that in these mere girls conscience has been quenched in a moment, the whole soul darkened, and that no repentant thoughts visit them, as they see and feel themselves to be the outcasts of the world and offenders against their God? Do they all hurry to an early grave, stone-blind, stone-deaf, recklessly dancing on to the frightful precipice?

We have proofs enough that they are not all at once deserted by God's grace, or given over to a reprobate mind, and that the desire to escape their guilty trade is strong and widely felt. The Reports of the existing Penitentiaries reveal to us the striking fact that hundreds are yearly driven back into their sins who seek a refuge from them; hundreds are unwillingly refused when they have so far taken a step in the way of penitence as to ask for admittance into a Penitentiary, in which petition is involved the confession of their shame and guilt. It is for these I plead; I ask you to help me in sheltering these multitudes of women who do shew signs of repentance, and whom, for want of room, existing Penitentiaries are compelled to turn from their doors. We must not sit still while these things happen. Such facts, when told and known, bring instantly a duty to all whose ears they reach. We know that

the Church hitherto has not met, as it deserves, the case of female penitents, nor offered them the provision, the shelter, the means of repentance, which it is her part to yield. We now, then, should hasten to wipe off the reproach of this great and terrible neglect. Instantly, let one more Penitentiary be formed—a Penitentiary, not raised in rivalry with those that already occupy the field, but to take their overflowings, their repulsed, their rejected supplicants! It is time for the Church to bestir herself in this work, because what has been done in receiving and instructing female penitents has been done chiefly by good Samaritans, or by that portion of the Church which does not warmly hold her real principles.

Hence, not only is a Penitentiary required, but one in which the fulness of true Church teaching and discipline, in which the truths concerning holy baptism, sin after baptism, repentance, and forgiveness of sins, shall be asserted with all warmth and faithfulness. Not only, too, is there need of sounder and more systematic doctrine, but of fuller and more fervent aids to devotion. In many Penitentiaries there are neither chaplains nor chapels, and in none do I know of a chapel rightly or fully used. Where there is the benefit of a House of Prayer, it is opened but once a-week, and a mixed congregation floods in to admire fine preaching, and to occupy a place which should be reserved for the penitents alone. In the proposed “House of Mercy,” a chapel must of course

be reared, and this chapel used by none but the inmates of the house ; while every day of the week it should be opened for frequent services, proportioned in length according to the progress of the penitents, some being extremely short and thus best fitted to the state of those who have been unused to pray. If we suppose the house formed to hold a hundred inmates, two chaplains will be required.

In addition, however, to these great advantages, which no existing institutions yet possess, (though some, I am glad to say, seem disposed to introduce improvements,) I come now to speak of a mode of internal management from which we may reasonably hope the greatest benefit. Instead of one matron over the whole with her assistants—the usual staff of the largest Penitentiaries—I would urge the introduction of a very different class of guides and managers—different as regards religious training, strictness, tact, delicacy, judgment, and tenderness. If there are to be a hundred inmates, I desire to obtain the aid of, at least, ten devoted gentlewomen as matrons,—a little band of self-denying daughters of the Church, of the upper ranks, who should be formed into a holy fellowship ; and then, separating the penitents into little groups or families, act as heads over the various families, live as mothers with their children ; or as guardians with their wards. What a change would such a body of such matrons be from the rule of a single matron, a woman taken

from the middling ranks, and, however full of religious feeling and seriousness, little qualified to discipline souls, and, of course, while single-handed, utterly unequal to the task! If such "Sisters of Mercy" could be found to rise up in the English Church—and may God raise them up!—the penitents might in some sort regain what they have lost—I mean a *home*, with something approaching the kindness and strictness of good parental rule, though, of course, it would be a home of a penitential character. May we not hope that there are those ready to undertake such a labour of love, and to devote their lives to the salvation of the souls of the erring of their sex? May we not, also, believe that such a sisterhood, to act as matrons to these wanderers, is far from incompatible with the real spirit and principles of the English Church; nay, that the time is come for the English Church to shew herself equal to the formation of such sisterhoods without swerving from her genuine character? The purifying influence of earnest-minded women undertaking the task from no mercenary motives, for no temporal reward, could not but be in the highest degree good and great; while the division of the penitents into little companies, apart from each other during the greater part of the day, and under strict and unceasing, and yet affectionate surveillance, is of all measures the most likely to break down evil tempers, to suppress evil habits, to check mutual contamination, to infuse a

love of what is good and pure, and to teach by "visible rhetoric" the "beauty of holiness." Such a sisterhood, living all the day as the elders of a family with the penitents, seems the fittest instrument for effecting solid and permanent reformation, a constant atmosphere of purity being diffused throughout the house, and sweetening it by its constant presence.

If, indeed, women of pure and earnest minds should be disposed to cast themselves into such a cause, and yet should shrink from the task lest they should in any degree be harmed or pained by knowledge of evil, let it at once be understood that the very strictest rules of silence must be enforced as regards the particular sin; not the faintest allusion to former life must be allowed to pass between the matrons and the penitents: such silence would at once prevent the former being pained or harmed by acquaintance with evil, and would serve to heighten in the penitents the sense of their sin, by representing it as something too dark to be spoken of, except in the most solemn way to the chaplains, the pastors of the guilty flock.

Let me speak, also, of another feature which it is important to introduce, and which might be the means of saving many souls. Instead of hurrying out the inmates to make quick way for a fresh crowd of supplicants, I would propose not only to use all means to keep them till the fruits of repentance have developed themselves in something like habitual seriousness, but

to have a ward of *permanent* inmates. Thus, those who dread again facing the perils of the world might be allowed to remain within the house for life, leading, of course, a life of active industry, and largely contributing to their own support. Though such a system might seem to diminish the extent of benefit to be derived from such an institution, let us not forget the depth and permanency that might thus be given to the repentance of many who might otherwise be either too soon set free, or prove too unstable to preserve themselves in the slippery places of the world. Let us also remember the fearful shortness of the lives of these poor women. Alas ! it would not be for long that this ward would be filled with the same inmates. It would be a changing scene !

Such, then, is the kind of Penitentiary which I desire to form, and for the guidance of which I am prepared to offer myself, unless others should rise up more plainly marked for the work. It is in my heart to plead this cause and carry it out. As I must speak of myself in thus asking for your confidence, I will only say, that the whole subject has been for years in my thoughts. I have studied it in every possible light ; I have gathered information from every quarter, and digested it, and have at last worked my way to the plan I now propose, not unassisted by the warm and wise counsel of some of the wisest and warmest minds which our Church possesses. The fruit of these my thoughts and labours has been

embodied in contributions which I recently made to the *Quarterly Review* on "Female Penitentiaries," and to the *Christian Remembrancer* on "The Church and her Female Penitents." Indeed, to these articles I merely refer, as the subject is there treated of more at length, and as they are a sort of credentials to those who ask for grounds of confidence.

These, then, are my grounds for offering my services in forming a new Penitentiary. I am prepared to take charge of your alms, and to form, with your help, this proposed House of Mercy; if need be, I am prepared to superintend it when formed. In such a case it will be reared in my own parish, and its inmates can be supplied from the cities of Bristol, Gloucester, Bath, and Newport; while contributors will have certain privileges of recommending for admission women from their own neighbourhood, wherever that may be. In all cases, the private recommendation of supporters who have some knowledge of the case, and can send those who are less hardened in a life of sin, will be preferred; should these not be numerous, then the vacancies can be filled from the towns I have mentioned, supposing not only the formation, but the superintendence, of the house is intrusted to my care. I do not, however, venture to fix the site. It is impossible to foresee, in these days, who may offer themselves or what may be offered. Some may rise, whose minds, like my own, have been for years secretly at work, and who could give themselves to it wherever

it might be placed ; while, perhaps, as with St. Augustine's at Canterbury, some old ruined religious house might be offered in an eligible situation, and might thus be regained to the service of the Church. I will only add, that wherever the site may finally be fixed, it should be in some retired country place, some few miles from any large town, out of the reach of observation, and removed from those scenes in which its inmates have been wont to move. All that is around them must tend to sever them from their old ways.

Having thus given you some ground for trusting me, at least with the formation of the house, I ask your help,—I ask earnestly and solemnly. In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ I come to you. It is now a call to you from an ambassador of Christ, not altogether guided by his own mind—if I may dare so to speak—to this peculiar work. The question is now before you ; you cannot turn from it, as though it had never been positively and personally brought home. I ask you to trust me,—I ask the Church's trust ; I want it altogether to be a work of faith ; I cast the cause upon the Church, and pray God to prosper it.

And what do I ask ? I ask for alms—for persons—for prayers. First, for alms, which I would divide into donations and subscriptions, the one for the formation, the other for the sustenance, of the proposed Penitentiary. These alms I ask from all. From the pure of both sexes as thank-offerings to God, due for their preservation in the ways of a

chaste and holy life; especially do I appeal to the pity of the women of the higher ranks, whose hearts should swell at once with the deepest thankfulness for their exemption from so many of those strong temptations beneath which the needy or ill-nurtured women of lower rank so often fall, and with compassion for the fallen of their sex, who, from the depths of sin and wretchedness, cry out to them for help. I ask you by the mercies of your Lord to cast bountifully, with the true heart of pity, into this treasury, whereby your erring sisters may be reclaimed—those sisters who have sinned like Mary Magdalene, and, like her, desire to wash their Saviour's feet with their repentant tears.

From the pure I turn to those of the stronger sex, who may now themselves be counted among penitents—to that large number who stained their youth with this very sin, and now, raised up to better things by the undeserved mercies of their Lord, bitterly bewail those wasted years. Now you see your sin; now you are seeking as penitents to conform yourselves to the once despised will of Christ; now you are enjoying the richest privileges of the Church; now you have a fair name, honour among your friends, homes which you endeavour to adorn with Christian tempers and Christian deeds; now, it may be, you are largely giving, in token of penitence, to many objects worthy of Christian care. But where are your *acts*

of restitution?—where your penitential endeavours to lessen that very evil which you once helped to swell, to lessen that class of sinners which you once fostered and increased? Restitution is a part of penitence, and though you cannot perhaps aid the persons with whom you sinned, you can aid the *class*. Large and constant alms offered to institutions formed for the reformation of female penitents make the nearest approach to restitution which is within your reach. Most thankfully, therefore, should you receive this invitation to shew forth fruits of repentance, by reducing that same sin in others of which you repent yourselves. This appeal it is in your case a privilege to receive; a neglected part of penitence can, through this channel, be fulfilled; the neglect is told and the remedy offered you at once.

But not only do I ask for alms—there is another gift which the daughters of the Church alone can bestow. I ask some among you to give even yourselves—to lose this life for the love of Christ—to spend and be spent in saving and guarding the lost sheep of your sex. Are there none freed from social ties and social duties, whether among the younger widows, who are widows indeed, or the unmarried, who desire to devote themselves, in the strictest sense, to a religious and self-denying life? May God give some the strength and heart to rise up and offer themselves to this work! The moment

that even two offer themselves, the work, by God's help, shall be begun.

Lastly, I ask the prayers of all whose hearts turn towards this cause, that it may please God to prosper this work upon us, to His glory, the good of the Church into which by His grace we have been baptized, and to the salvation of the souls for whom especially it is designed. I ask you to pray the Giver of all good gifts to send means and instruments for the commencement and sustenance of a House of Mercy for wandering souls, that it may be begun and carried out upon pure motives, sound and holy principles, and with good success.

*Tidenham Vicarage, Chepstow,
1st February, 1849.*