

## SENATE.....No. 8.

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### Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

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*To His Excellency the Governor, and the Honorable the Council  
of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts:—*

The Agent for Discharged Convicts respectfully submits the following account of his doings for the year ending on the 30th day of September, 1849. Within the year, one hundred and twenty prisoners were discharged from the Massachusetts State Prison in Charlestown; one hundred and four by expiration of sentence, fifteen by remission of sentence, and one by pardon.

Of this number, ninety-six received the advice of the Agent, and assistance in a variety of ways, some of which are specified in the accompanying table. One other, who was discharged during the year, and failed to call upon the Agent at the time of his discharge, has since done so, and received the aid he required. The number and extent of the Agent's duties are quite imperfectly set forth in any table of this kind, which is merely designed to classify the more general and important modes of assistance. Sixty-three of the number aided, so far as it is known to the Agent, are at large, and are doing well; twenty-five are considered as doing but indifferently, although at large. Two were returned to the State Prison within the year, and five since its close. Three others are supposed to be in a bad way.

Nine of those assisted were second comers at the prison, and one was a third comer. The latter and two of the former have

been returned again to the State Prison. One is now believed to be under arrest for horse-stealing in another county, and one for a minor offence in this city.

The Agent has also received, and attended to seventy-eight applications for assistance, beside those above mentioned. These have mostly been from persons who left the Massachusetts State Prison in past years. Some were from other prisons in the State, with occasionally one from another State. These cases required every variety of aid, and were generally more difficult to manage than those that came directly from the prison. Many of these persons have been assisted by the Agent several times, but, for some cause, were thrown out of employment, and again returned for aid.

The instances of thorough and radical reformation of criminal natures, while in prison,—judging from the fruits of nearly three years' experience,—are extremely rare. There are individuals, doubtless, who leave the prison in some respects better than they were before they entered. Such, for instance, are persons who have yielded to temptation for the first time. To such the arrest and the conviction would perhaps operate as checks to any subsequent crime. If they are sent to prison for a short term, they may be able to preserve their integrity; their good resolutions may enable them to withstand the corrupting influences about them; but let the period of their imprisonment be a protracted one, and the result will, in most cases, be disastrous.

It is, undoubtedly, the association of criminals and persons charged with crime, from the moment they come within the grasp of the law, that is the greatest obstacle to their reformation. The bad effects of the acquaintance thus formed continue long after the individuals go forth into the world. Persons who are striving to gain honest livings, are continually beset by temptations to crime, from old associates, whom they cannot avoid. Such things are not only annoying, but are serious hindrances in their struggles upward.

The prohibition of tobacco to prisoners, according to the universal testimony of discharged convicts,—which is corroborated by contractors, officers, and nearly all persons who really know anything of the inside of the prison, or of human nature,—is one of the greatest sources of trouble in the management of the

prison; and it converts prisoners, who may be comparatively free from vicious propensities, but who have a hankering for tobacco, and know that that appetite can be gratified in the prison in spite of the law, into liars, cheats, and thieves.

The laws of the State, in this behalf, are systematically and habitually set at nought. There can be no doubt of this. Discharged prisoners, however widely they differ on other matters relating to the prison, are agreed touching this thing, and speak with earnestness their thoughts on the subject. Notwithstanding the rigid system of surveillance, to prohibit the traffic and use of tobacco, it is always to be found within the walls of the prison, and frequently in large quantities. In fact, the tobacco business is usually the great interest of the prisoners; and he who is the most expert manager of the traffic, is the most important personage in the association of prisoners.

There is a law in existence, with a severe penalty attached, which prohibits the introduction or use of tobacco. This law is, and must be, unavailing. It is not too much to say, that tobacco cannot be excluded from the prison, under any practicable mode of social discipline. In order to obtain it in such quantities, at the exorbitant price which it commands in the prison, an equivalent must go out, and this equivalent is procured by fraud or theft.

It is easy to see how fatally these facts bear upon the reformation of the prisoner; how thoroughly trained he becomes in the violation of law; how accustomed to disregard the rights of others, and how accomplished in all the arts and contrivances of the rogue by profession. It has been observed that prisoners who steal from each other, in prison, to obtain tobacco, are the most confirmed thieves when they get outside.

Under this system, the prison gives no opportunity for the propensity to transgression to rest and fall into disuse, which thing is the first point in a proper discipline.

These topics may be considered as not coming legitimately within the province of this Agency; but they are considerations which affect convicts most seriously, not only as prisoners, but as men who are to be reunited to the great human family, and mingle again with their brethren.

It is in this view that these reflections have pressed upon the mind of the Agent, until they seem to demand a notice.

It is to be understood that these matters are not alluded to with a design to censure any persons charged with the administration of justice; as these evils, so far as they exist, are the result of a system.

There is no reason, however, why the State, or individuals, should relax in their efforts to overcome, as far as possible, the difficulties in the way of restoring the liberated convict to a sound and wholesome standing in the community.

At the last session of the Legislature, an act was passed, making it the duty of the Warden of the State Prison to pay over to the Agent for Discharged Convicts, such sums of money as he was before authorized to give to the convicts themselves, and the agent was to expend this money for their benefit. The letter of the law allows no discretion to the Warden or Agent in any case to give to the convict the money.

The design of this act was undoubtedly good, and in many cases its operation would be favorable; but instances have occurred, and will continue to occur, where the men must receive the money itself, or lose the benefit of the provision.

The Agent has attended to the duties devolved upon him by this act, according to his best judgment in each particular case.

It is to be hoped that, at the approaching session of the Legislature, this matter will receive attention, and be so arranged as to secure the best interests of the discharged convict, and avoid the difficulties which practice has made manifest under the law.

The acquaintance formed between a prisoner, just entering a world of scenes and relations to which he has been long unaccustomed, and the person who first takes him by the hand to introduce him to the busy walks of life again, is of a peculiar nature; and, as a consequence, he is ever afterwards disposed to seek the advice and aid of the Agent, in any trials or difficulties relating to himself, his family, or his business.

It might be desirable to present, in some general statement, an outline of the occupations of the Agency. A volume of details might easily be given from the daily record in which is kept minute particulars of every case, but to generalize is far more difficult. If one can imagine a man standing between the already crowded competitors for all sorts of employment, on the one hand, and the discharged convict on the other, struggling

against the prejudices and opinions which shut up hands, doors, and hearts against him who has once lost his position as an honest man in society ; if he can see him endeavoring to find places suited to each one's capacity and wants, in the fight with unnumbered objections and obstacles, he can understand what it is to put into honest and fit employment this peculiar class of persons.

But the Agent's duties do not end here ; he must keep watch over his charge ; he must stand ready to do over again the same work, if the first attempt shall be a failure ; he must try to give wisdom, and patience, and courage, and conscience, and all the virtues, to men who, having once fallen, are so liable to relapse ; he must try to follow and surround them, where he can, with some good influences, and to make them manly in their efforts to regain their position. To do just what one ought, under the circumstances,—to do good without doing harm,—is often difficult, and, as the Agent feels sometimes, almost impossible. Experience, however, is continually giving him new views, both of the difficulties and opportunities of the office. That it may grow in usefulness and efficiency is his earnest hope.

The sum of six hundred dollars, only, is granted by the State for all the purposes of this Agency. The money formerly given by the Warden to the prisoner, upon his discharge, now going through the Agent's hands, to be expended by him, increases his labors without increasing the available means at his disposal, for the other purposes and duties of his office. The annual deficiency of means, amounting to from four to six hundred dollars, is supplied by the Boston Society for Aiding Discharged Convicts.

A. C. TAFT,

*Agent for Discharged Convicts.*

*Boston, Dec. 31, 1849.*

Cases aided.	Employment.	Tools.	Clothing.	Board.	Passage from city to friends.	Passage from city to employ'm't.	Advice and counsel.
1	-	-	1	1	1	-	1
2	1	-	-	1	-	-	1
3	-	-	1	1	1	-	1
4	-	-	1	-	1	-	1
5	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
6	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
7	1	1	1	1	-	1	1
8	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
9	1	1	1	1	-	1	1
10	1	1	1	1	-	-	1
11	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
12	1	1	-	-	-	-	1
13	1	-	1	1	-	-	1
14	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
15	1	-	1	1	-	-	1
16	-	-	-	1	1	-	1
17	-	-	-	1	-	1	1
18	-	-	1	-	1	-	1
19	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
20	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
21	-	-	-	1	1	-	1
22	-	-	1	-	1	-	1
23	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
24	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
25	1	-	1	-	-	-	1
26	-	-	1	1	1	-	1
27	1	-	1	1	1	-	1
28	1	-	-	1	-	-	1
29	1	-	-	1	-	1	1
30	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
31	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
32	1	-	1	1	-	-	1
33	-	-	1	1	1	-	1
34	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
35	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
36	1	-	-	-	-	1	1
37	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
38	-	-	1	-	1	-	1
39	1	1	1	-	-	1	1
40	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
41	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
42	1	1	1	1	-	-	1
43	1	1	-	-	-	-	1
44	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
45	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
46	1	-	-	1	1	-	1
47	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
48	1	1	1	1	-	1	1
49	-	-	1	1	-	1	1
50	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
51	1	-	-	-	-	1	1
52	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
53	1	-	-	1	-	-	1

Cases aided.	Employment.	Tools.	Board.	Clothing.	Passage from city to friends.	Passage from city to employ'm't.	Advice and counsel.
54	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
55	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
56	1	-	1	-	-	-	1
57	-	-	1	-	1	-	1
58	1	1	-	1	-	-	1
59	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
60	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
61	1	-	1	1	-	-	1
62	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
63	1	1	1	1	-	1	1
64	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
65	1	1	1	1	-	1	1
66	1	-	-	-	1	-	1
67	-	-	1	1	1	-	1
68	-	-	1	1	-	1	1
69	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
70	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
71	-	-	1	1	1	-	1
72	-	-	-	1	1	-	1
73	-	-	1	1	-	1	1
74	1	1	1	1	-	1	1
75	1	-	1	1	-	-	1
76	1	-	-	-	-	1	1
77	-	-	-	1	-	1	1
78	1	-	1	1	-	-	1
79	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
80	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
81	-	-	1	1	-	-	1
82	-	-	1	1	1	-	1
83	-	-	-	1	1	-	1
84	1	-	1	-	-	-	1
85	1	1	1	1	-	1	1
86	1	-	1	1	-	-	1
87	-	-	1	1	-	-	1
88	-	-	1	-	1	-	1
89	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
90	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
91	-	-	1	-	1	-	1
92	1	1	1	1	-	-	1
93	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
94	-	-	-	1	1	-	1
95	-	-	1	1	1	-	1
96	1	1	-	1	-	1	1
97	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
97	46	15	49	51	32	18	97

