

PENAL DISCIPLINE

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Penal discipline by Mary Gordon

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MARY GORDON

**PENAL
DISCIPLINE**

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

PENAL DISCIPLINE

BY

MARY GORDON

L.R.C.P., L.R.C.S., Edin.; L.F.P. & S., Glas.

*Late H.M. Inspector of Prisons, and Assistant Inspector of
State and Certified Inebriate Reformatories.*

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1922

TO VIMU
AIRBORNE

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To
B. M.
K. D.
M. S.

and all other prisoners and captives—
this book



PREFACE

This book is not an autobiography. But I am a sufficiently obscure individual to be obliged to explain to my readers how, and why, I come to be writing it.

Although I was once an official, this book is entirely unofficial. It is about things which, when I was at work, I had the opportunity of observing, and which my medical training enabled me to study farther in the light of modern teaching on the make-up of the human being.

I have written nothing of my official work. People who feel curious about departmental doings, or on any other matters on which it would not be for me to comment, need not look here.

My personal experiences appear only in so far as they are explanatory of my theme. I have drawn a few life-pictures to give colour to what might be a less attractive book without them. I have, of course, used no real name or initials, nor description that could ever be recognised.

My allusions to existing conditions in prisons are very few, and only such as the public may gather for itself from official reports, prison rules, or other public papers.

I may remind my readers that the Prison System, with its principle of penal discipline, was not made by the administrative body. It is not always realised that the prison system was made by the people of this country, and that, if anything

is amiss with it, we citizens and voters are accountable, not those who bear the burden of putting our laws into operation. This is also true of punishment at the hands of the law.

An offender is sent to prison by the judge or magistrate that he may undergo penal discipline, which, with loss of liberty, is his punishment. Once in prison, if he attempts to do his own will, to offend against the prescribed order, to disobey, resist, or assault his gaolers, he can be punished again by the Governor or the Justices. He can be coerced or punished in various ways, by forfeiture of remission, loss of privilege, by dietary deprivations, by separate or close confinement. His body may be restrained, day and night, in irons, or tied up and flogged. He can be forcibly fed, according to what he can endure (a treatment called medical, but in reality disciplinary), in order to prevent his determining his imprisonment.

In short, we are not afraid to hurt, or injure, or cause him to run risks, in order to master him. So much does the idea of punishment stand in the forefront of our minds, that it is difficult for us to think of a criminal without thinking of his recompense. We are afraid of him, as some of us are of wasps. It is as hard for society as for the individual not to believe, when it has suffered injury, that its first duty is retaliation. It is possible that we, in our desire to punish, have got as badly on the nerves of our habitual criminals, as they, by ignoring our punishments and repeating their offences, have got on ours. There are times, I know, when I, too, (*mea culpa*) desire, in my wrath, to punish, when I should be thinking how to cure the sick man or woman before me.

In my earlier chapters I try to show, by the aid of illustrations and figures, what manner of woman (not *type of criminal*) the prison system has to work upon, and how it proceeds to work upon her from the time she is a young girl, until the time when she is an old woman. I look at its effect upon her and at her attitude towards it, and at the results. It is hardly possible to show these, in full, in the first half of this book, for life in a local prison, even under much the same penal discipline, bears no comparison to life in a Borstal Institution or Convict Prison. In any of our lives the difference between three days, three months, and three years is not to be measured in time only.

Although I write in detail of women prisoners, whom I knew the best, in all general matters what I say applies to men and women alike. In particular anything I say as to hysteria, or prison or degenerative psychoses in girls or women, applies equally to men and boys.

My language is unofficial in one respect. I do not employ the biological terms "male" and "female" to distinguish men and women. This use is very old-fashioned, and liable to be misunderstood in other countries. *Homo sapiens* is something much more than male or female, and I have called the persons to whom we apply penal discipline men and women.

During my service I found nothing in the prison system to interest me, except as a gigantic irrelevance—a social curiosity. If the system had a good effect on any prisoner, I failed to mark it. I have no shadow of doubt of its power to demoralise, or of its cruelty. It appears to me not to belong to this time or civilisation at all.