

Report of Prison Work.

I have searched in vain for the "Report of Friends Prison Work" written by my sister, Rachel P. Matthews, but will try to recall some of the facts concerning it.

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As nearly as the date can be fixed, it was about 1850 that a committee of Friends consisting of Hannah Ann Tyson, Mary H. Brooks, Hannah Lytle and others, felt it right to investigate the condition of the women's ward of the Penitentiary. They found many things there in a very bad condition, and concluded to establish a Sabbath School on First Day afternoons, by which the women could be brought under good influences, instructed, and otherwise cared for.

As previously the prisoners had been locked in their cells at that time, they gladly welcomed the Friends that thus visited them, and we may believe that much good was accomplished by the school.

One of the many abuses that the Friends were able to rectify, was the fact that an old Maryland law exacted that each woman should receive a weekly allowance of snuff, and, as it was one of their privileges, even the young girls who came in thus became confirmed snuff takers. The committee submitted the matter to the prisoners themselves, promising that hot coffee after the Sabbath School to those who were willing to dispense with the snuff. Many of them consented at once to the arrangement, and as time passed on the fumes of the coffee converted the rest, as a huge cauldron of it was provided every week, and much enjoyed by them.

One incident connected with the School I remember hearing of as a child, showing the good influence exerted.---- Among the prisoners was one whose temper, when aroused, amounted to almost insanity, and she had been committed to prison for murder in the second degree. Taking offense at some imaginary slight, she denounced the Meeting one afternoon, and rushed from the room, declaring that she would never enter it again. The heart of my mother, Mary Brooks, was touched by the poor creature's desperate condition, and despite the remonstrances of her friends, she followed her to her cell. The interview there must have been a touching one, for in a little while she returned with the woman, both of them in tears. Ever afterwards the culprit was submissive and respectful.

My sister, Rachel P. Matthews, as a very young girl, had a class in the school, and that the women appreciated her interest in them was shown by little gifts of pin cushions and needle books, some of which she preserved all through her life.

Richard Janney and Dr. James Carey Thomas also carried on a very successful work among the men, and much good was undoubtedly accomplished. Among the convicts was one who, later on, came under our personal supervision, as he was the husband of one of the women belonging to the Mothers Meeting. After leaving the jail he lived a consistent Christian life, and with his last breath bore witness to the redeeming power of the blood of Christ.

The Friends upon whom the concern for the welfare of the prisoners rested, have most of them, passed from earth, but we