

REPORT OF SELECT COMMITTEE

APPOINTED TO ENQUIRE INTO THE CONDITION AND WORKING OF
THE VICTORIA GAOL.

MR. SPEAKER :—

The Select Committee appointed to “enquire into the condition and working of the Victoria Gaol, with power to call for persons and papers,” respectfully report :—

That they visited the gaol and found it in a cleanly condition throughout.

That the prisoners awaiting trial complain that they are allowed only $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours exercise in the day of 24 hours ; being locked in their cells $20\frac{1}{2}$ hours each day.

That three prisoners complained that they had been three months in gaol awaiting trial, which would seem to indicate that more frequent Assize Courts are necessary.

That complaint was made by prisoners awaiting trial that the food was insufficient. The Committee examined the cornmeal mush and found it thin and unnutritious. Its value as food would be greatly enhanced by a little thickening and the addition of a tablespoonful of sugar to each dish.

That the soup is meagre and should be improved in strength.

That the clothing, meat, bread, and groceries supplied are of excellent quality, and up to the samples.

That a serious defect is the absence of a hospital. Prisoners when ill have to be treated in their cells or in the Warden's rooms. The discomfort and inconvenience of the first, and the insecurity of the second, are too manifest to need comment.

That youthful prisoners are herded with the older criminals, a system that should be altered, so as to keep the two classes apart.

That R. Glenn, a prisoner, came before the Committee and complained bitterly of the ill-treatment from the late gaoler, whom he described as a great brute. He said that he had frequently requested permission to see the doctor, when ill, and had been refused by the late gaoler ; that the gaoler had retained letters addressed to him (Glenn), and had undertaken to post letters written by Glenn, and had failed to do so ; that he had often asked to be permitted to appeal from the mandates of the gaoler, and had always been told there was no appeal.

That the prisoners all concurred in saying that, except in the matters of food and short hours for exercise, they had no complaint to make against the present management.

Your Committee observed that the oatmeal, cornmeal, brooms, brushes, and several other articles in constant use at the gaol are of foreign make, when similar articles of home manufacture can be had as good and as low priced. Your Committee would therefore respectfully recommend that home-made goods whenever practicable, should, in future, be purchased for use at the gaol.

Your Committee would respectfully recommend that the hours of exercise allowed prisoners awaiting trial should be increased, and that a hospital be attached to the institution.

A debtor's room or prison is urgently needed ; debtors now being either confined in cells or in the chapel.

Your Committee have examined into the complaint of D. Driscoll, a dismissed officer, that he had been wrongfully dealt with, and find no reason to condemn the action of the Government.

The Committee ask to be discharged.

D. W. HIGGINS,
Chairman.

March 23rd, 1888.

EVIDENCE

IN THE CASE OF D. DRISCOLL, A DISCHARGED EMPLOYE.

WM. MULDOON, sworn—Am acting gaoler. Know Driscoll and Hutchison; the last-named is at Seattle. He left here because he was short in his accounts. He was gaoler. Driscoll is not now in the employ at the gaol. He was dismissed in consequence of a report made by Hutchison. The complaint against Driscoll was using abusive language toward Hutchison, and not having certain prisoners locked up. Heard both Hutchison and Driscoll using bad language towards each other. Do not recollect if any oaths were used. Neither were drunk. Never saw Hutchison drunk on duty since we went to the new gaol. Have seen him drunk when off duty. Saw him drunk while on duty at the old gaol, once or twice. When drunk he was abusive. Have known him to be cautioned by Roycraft, Superintendent, for being drunk. Never saw Driscoll drunk, when on or off duty. He was not abusive habitually. He could talk back when he thought his rights were assailed. Never had a dispute with him.

To Mr. McLeese—Did not see the prisoners outside. It was usual for the prisoners to be locked up at six o'clock. Heard Driscoll say he was told by Hutchison to empty slops from the chapel. There were no prisoners there then. There might have been slops there without my knowledge, but there had been no prisoners there for some time. The chapel is sometimes used as a debtor's prison. A woman was incarcerated in the chapel later the same evening on which the trouble occurred.

To D. Driscoll—Mrs. Wright, a debtor, was brought to prison the same night. The books will show that. Was not on duty at four o'clock. There were no slops there at that hour to my knowledge. Heard you and Hutchison quarrelling while I was in my room. Could not hear the exact words. The prisoners are generally locked up at six o'clock. The cooks are not locked up till later. It is the order of the establishment that the prisoners shall be locked up at six o'clock, but it is not always done. The gang may be late in wet weather, and they are allowed time to dry their clothing. There was no rain on the occasion referred to, and the chain-gang, so far as I know, were in their cells.

WM. MULDOON.

D. DRISCOLL, sworn—Was 3rd assistant gaoler. Was dismissed on the 17th August, 1887, on complaint of Hutchison, late gaoler, that I had used abusive language to him, and for not locking prisoners up. Mrs. Wright, the debtor, was brought in between seven and eight o'clock. I found slops in the chapel, and emptied them myself. There were no prisoners out of the cells at the time. I had let two prisoners out to empty these slops, and spread the hose on the floor. I had had orders to do that from Hutchison. When he abused me for letting them out, I put them back in the cells and I did the work myself; he then reported me. He was under the influence of liquor. He swore at me and used nasty language. He said he would lock me up in a cell. Did not call him a liar or swear at him. Mrs. Wright was brought in after the row, which occurred between 6½ and 7½ o'clock. There had been prisoners in the chapel 4 or 5 days before the row. The bucket was right behind the door. The smell from the bucket was very strong. The slops must have been there some days. I was on duty every day, but did not notice the slops.

D. DRISCOLL.

W. MULDOON—Never noticed the slops spoken of by Driscoll. Slops are never left in rooms as described by Driscoll; they are emptied daily. The second of August fell on Tuesday. I can positively say there were no prisoners in the chapel on Monday. Always found Driscoll attentive to his duties. Got the count of the prisoners and the keys correctly from him always.

WM. MULDOON.