

# John Howard

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## An Appreciation

By

Rev. William E. Hart

### Foreword

It is my privilege to write a few introductory thoughts on this fine tribute to the life and influence of John Howard. I think the Rev. William E. Hart has performed a praiseworthy service to the penal reform movement in Canada. I believe his is the most ambitious project to explain Howard and summarize his finding that has bene attempted in this country. Others have made useful references but none, I think, has assembled so much important material or arranged it in such a useful format. The Honorary Life President of the John Howard Society of Saint John, New Brunswick, has brought out this "Appreciation", as he calls it, at an appropriate time. John Howard Societies have been formed across Canada from Vancouver, BC to St. John's NFLD. Thousands of Canadians have come to know the name possesses limited knowledge and understanding of the man himself. Mr. Hart's treatise will serve as a useful information text book on the John Howard story and tradition.

Perhaps I can add a few notes to those of Mr. Hart and will itemize as follows: -

#### 1. Howard's Religion

R.S.E. Hinde, in his book on the British Penal System (1773-1950), makes this significant evaluation:

*"Howard's religious enthusiasm even extended to his housing programme. This excellent and extraordinary man, wrote an anonymous admirer, constantly builds a cottage every year on his own estate, and puts a poor family in possession of it, on express condition, however, that they attend divine service every Sabbath, at Church, at Mass, at Meeting or Synagogue. If Howard was actively Christian, he was certainly broad-minded and tolerant of the religious beliefs of those who might disagree with him. He was no bigot".*

To have held these views in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was certainly the mark of an enlightened and tolerant individual. The tradition based on Howard's religious tolerance may help explain the present strictly undenominational status of the John Howard movement in Canada.

## 2. Howard's Honors

I have before me Howard's message to the "Gentleman's Magazine" wherein he tried to call off the campaign to erect a John Howard monument. (This project had been inspired by a letter to this influential organ in May, 1786.) Howard became greatly disturbed when he heard that 615 persons had subscribed. In an attempt to discourage the proposal, he wrote... *"Have I not one friend in England that would put a stop to such a proceeding?"*

It should not, however, be thought that Howard met only with honors and approbation in his lifetime. He was assailed with criticism, some of it very much like that encountered by modern prison reformers. For instance, it was alleged, *"that the benevolent Howard is making the jails of the realm so comfortable that felons commit fresh crimes to return to them"*. One writer contended that *"honest laborers envy the better food and greater leisure enjoyed by the John Howard's convicts."* Such critics, old to modern, overlook the more important consideration that loss of liberty is **the** greatest punishment of all.

## 3. Howard's Praise from Edmund Burke

Mr. Hart quotes the tribute made at the Guildhall in Bristol in 1780 by this famous orator. It is very moving. I, however, would like to add its final paragraph which Mr. Hart did not use. This reads as follows: -

*"Howard will receive, not by retail, but in gross, the reward of those who visit the prisoner; and he has so forestalled and monopolized this branch of charity, that there will be, I trust, little room to merit by such acts of benevolence hereafter".*

We know now; from sad experience in England, Canada and elsewhere, that the Hon. Mr. Burke fell into prophetic error here. Every country in every generation needs a John Howard. The penal pattern has been all too clear. Reforms, after much struggle, are brought about. Complacency then sets in and old evils reappear. We want to prevent such regression in the Canada of the future. This we may accomplish – if we can maintain strong John Howard (and Elizabeth Fry) Societies across Canada with people behind them who have something of the compassion and the zeal of John Howard.

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## John Howard



John Howard was a remarkable man and well deserves the honors paid to him in his own lifetime and in ours. He was much provoked when he found that his friends and admirers were setting up a fund to raise a memorial to him. I wonder whether or not it would please him that today people who band themselves together to help prisoners call their organizations "John Howard Societies".

Much has been written about John Howard, including various biographies. But when I tried to buy his biography there was nothing in print. However, in 1958 there was published in England a biography about three times the length of this appreciation, "John Howard Prison Reformer" written by D.L. Howard and published by Christopher Johnson Publishers Ltd., 11-14 Stanhope Mews, West London, Sw7. Alexander Edminson, a Canadian leader in prison reform, who wrote the forward to this story, has lent me a biography written by Hepworth Dixon, and published in 1869. It has been my great good fortune to be able to borrow from the library of my Alma Mater, the University of Kings College, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Howard's own monumental works "That State of the Prisons of England and Wales with Preliminary Observations and an Account of Some Foreign Prisons", published in 1777 with an appendix published in 1780, and "An Account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe with Various Papers Relative to the Plague; together with Further Observations on Some Foreign Prisons and Hospitals; and Additional Remarks on the Present State of Those in Great Britain and Ireland", published in 1789, a year before his death. This biography and these works of Howard are my principal sources. This story should be of particular interest to members of John Howard Societies. To know something about the man whose noble and illustrious name we bear should be an inspiration to us to carry on our efforts for prisoners in his spirit of selfless devotion.

## His Religion

John Howard was a man of religious fervour and often he wrestled in prayer. The following extracts from his diary give a good indication of his character, and of the power that made him so effective:

*"Hague, Sunday Evening, Feb. 11, 1770: I hope for tender conscience, by greater fear of offending God – a temper more abstracted from this world – more resigned, to death or life – a thirsting for union and communion with God... O shout! My soul – grace, grace! Free, sovereign, rich and unbounded grace! Not I, not I, an ill-deserving, hell-deserving creature, but when sin abounds I trust grace suprabounds – even I have still some hope – what joy in that hope! – that nothing shall separate my soul from the love of God in Jesus Christ".*

*"Lyons, April 4, 1770: Repeated instances of the unwearied mercy and goodness of God! Preserved hitherto in health and safety! Blessed by the name of the Lord! Endeavour, O my soul to cultivate and maintain a thankful, serious, humble and resigned frame and temper of mind. May it be the chief desire that the honor of God – the spread of the redeemer's Name and Gospel – may be promoted. O! consider the everlasting worth of*

*Spiritual and Divine enjoyments; then wilt thou see the vanity and nothingness of worldly pleasures.”*

*“Naples, May 27, 1770: My highest ambition the honor and glory of God... Stop; remember thou art a candidate for eternity. Daily, fervently, pray for wisdom. Lift up thine heart and eyes unto the Rock of Ages – and then look down upon the glory of this world. A little while longer and thy journey will be ended. Be thou faithful unto death. Duty is thine, though the power is God’s.”*

*“Rotterdam, Sunday evening, September 2, 1770: Very desirous am I of returning (to England) with a right spirit, not only wiser, but better; with a cheerful humility – a more general love and benevolence to my fellow creatures – watchful of my thoughts, my words, my actions – resigned to the will of God, that I may walk with God, and lead a more useful and honorable life in this world”.*

He was methodical in his habits and lived according to a strict discipline. It was part of his religion to be abstemious in food and drink, disdaining all rich meats and wines. His dress and his manners were unassuming. He cared less than nothing for high society and its pleasures. John Howard was a Christian not at all conformed to this world.

His courage was manifested in a way that he spoke to princes, when the occasion offered, concerning the ill-treatment of prisoners in their dungeons and more in the way in which, with perfect impunity, he entered pest-houses crawling with disease and death.

His labours were tireless. I do not suppose there has ever been anyone, before or since, who has visited so many prisons.

The explanation of his life is religion – it was for him what the main spring is to a watch. Comparing John Howard with St. Paul, it is my conviction that their work was so effective because they believed it was God’s mission for them, one to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and the other to relieve the distress of prisoners. I wonder how often John Howard thought of our Lord’s words – *“I was in prison, and y came to me”*, and what they meant to him.

## **His Wealth**

His father was a merchant and amassed a considerable fortune. John in his youth was apprenticed to a grocer but the business world did not appeal to him. While only a young man and still an apprentice, he and his sister inherited their father’s fortune. He felt that this inheritance was not for his own pleasure and profit but that his money was left to him in trust for the good of mankind. He was never limited in his errands of mercy for lack of funds. He never had to ask himself where is the money coming from. A member of parliament, surprised at the extent of minuteness of his prison inspections, asked the natural and innocent question at whose expense he travelled. But Howard was so indignant that he could hardly reply. He spend a good part of his fortune as well as a good part of his life in his missions of mercy.

## **His Health**

He had a consumptive tendency and until the time he took up his life's work he took very good care of himself. At one time he could almost be described as a valetudinarian, that is a person much preoccupied with his state of health. It is amazing that a man of delicate health who, until middle age, had lived a quiet life as a country squire, could so throw himself into such strenuous and perilous labors. To us in this day of fast and easy travel, 42,000 miles may not seem a great matter. But his travelling was on horseback or by stage-coach. He visited the most noxious cells, where gaolers and physicians were afraid to follow, believing that God who had given him his mission, would overshadow him by his Providence. He did contract various fevers and at the age of 64 died of the plague in Cherson in Southern Russia.

## **His Unfortunate Marriages and Life as a Country Squire**

His two marriages did not last more than ten years. His first marriage is typical of the man. He was boarding with a widow, Mrs. Sarah Loidore. He experienced a severe attack of illness, and his life was almost despaired of. He was so impressed with the kindness of Mrs. Loidore who nursed him, and with her tender care of him, a comparative stranger, that he felt there was no other way for him to express his appreciation and gratitude except to propose marriage. It must have been a curious struggle for she protested that she was too old, being more than twice his age, 52 years to his 25 years, and much below his station in life, but he persisted and prevailed. Neither party had any cause to regret this strange marriage. However, after three years she died.

His second wife, Henrietta Leeds, was of his own age and station and in character and disposition and in every other way she a fitting partner for Howard. This was a true and tender romance. Perhaps it was because of some occasion from his first marriage, but during his courtship he was so straightforward and blunt and ungallant as to stipulate that if after they were married they should have a difference of opinion his will should rule. No doubt Henrietta, like many other good wife, had her own sweet way of getting her own way, without her dear John realizing it.

When they settled down on his patrimonial estate at Cardington in Bedfordshire, they immediately set about building, planting, altering and improving their dwelling and their neighborhood. It is wonderful what changes one man who has the position, the means for it, and the inclination, can effect. Howard on his estate was like a Hebrew patriarch, benevolent and paternal. Many of his tenants lived in dirty, miserable hovels, and he believed that if he gave them homes fit for self-respecting men it would add much to their happiness and also bring an improvement in their morals. For Howard to hold a conviction was to act upon it. He took a personal interest in his tenants and visited them in their homes.

He saw the necessity for schools and at his own expense built them and found good teachers for them. The chief thing that he required of the pupils is that they attended their own church or chapel regularly. He did somewhat fear, for the girls particularly, his schools would make the children discontented with their humble spheres of life.

In these philanthropies his wife was of one mind with him. It was then the custom for women of position to wear expensive jewelry. Henrietta sold nearly all her jewelry and put the proceeds in a fund for the relief of the poor.

Their joy was great when, after nearly seven years of marriage, a son was born to them. But this joy was soon cut short. Henrietta, who seemed to be in good health after her child was born, died very suddenly. Her husband grieved deeply and every year he kept the anniversary of her death in solemn fast. Her miniature he carried with him into the deepest dungeons of Europe. But had she lived, Howard might never have taken up his life work of prison reform and certainly would not have travelled so extensively.

### **His Wayward Son**

Howard took pains to give his son, Jack, the best of tutors and schools. The boy turned out to be a heart breaking disappointment to his father. All the father was, the son was not. He lived a selfish, reckless, dissolute life in the course of which he contracted venereal disease. He went insane, though at times he had lucid periods.

Howard was much concerned for the only child of his beloved Henrietta. He hoped against hope that his son might recover to live a sane, responsible life. The father was in quarantine for the plague at Venice when word came of the serious misconduct of his son. Confined in close and foul quarters, with a burning fever, heartsick over his son and able to do nothing for him, Howard felt, himself, the bitterness of the prisoner's cell. Finally, the son died in an insane asylum at the age of thirty four.

How could such a father have such a son? Howard's relationship with his son has been the subject of much controversy. The conclusion that I have reached is that Howard was anything but wise in the treatment of his son. He expected an instant, complete, unreasoning and unreasonable obedience. So successful did he think his training that he claimed that his son would cut off his left hand if his father ordered him. He did not seem to realize that his son had a strong will of his own, and broke away from giving his father that same kind of obedience that the father gave to God. Howard came to realize that if the boy's mother had lived, his life would have been very different.

### **A Prisoner of War**

John Howard must have liked to travel. As a young man he visited sunny Italy for the benefit of his health. Between his two marriages he planned, in the year 1755, to go by sea to Lisbon. This was the year of the great earth quake, and many in Lisbon were homeless and destitute. It was Howard's purpose to see the relief of their distress from his private funds. But he did not see Lisbon until many years afterwards. England and France were at war and his ship was captured by a French privateer (we would call it licensed piracy), and all on board were made prisoners. They were carried to Brest and treated with barbarity. He was confined with many others in a dungeon, dark, damp, and filthy beyond description. Many died and in one day thirty six were buried in a hole at Dinan. He inspired in his captors confidence in his uprightness and was allowed to reside in lodgings upon giving his promise not to attempt to escape. The authorities gave him permission to return to England the better to negotiate, if possible, an exchange for his release. If he failed in this he promised to return

to captivity. He was able to stay in England and he interested the Commissioners for Sick and Wounded Seamen to bestir themselves on behalf of British prisoners of war.

## Sheriff of Bedford

After the death of his second wife, Howard made for his health, an extended tour on the continent...France, Italy, Germany, and Holland, and then returned home to Cardington. In 1773, when he was forty seven, he was nominated as Sheriff of Bedford and his life's crusade was finally begun. There was danger for him in accepting this office for he was a Dissenter and the Test Act was then in force; the test being that no one unable to take communion in the Established Church could hold public office. The penalty for violating the Test Act was a fine of five hundred pounds and the loss of certain rights as a citizen. But Howard decided to put the Test Act to the test. If his appointment was opposed because of his religion he felt that the resulting publicity would work for the cause of tolerance, and if his appointment stood, it would help abrogate this unjust and unpopular law.

The religious intolerance of those times is further illustrated by the following: *"One of the rooms for Debtors is called the Quaker's Room; because, it is said, when those people were so cruelly persecuted in the last Century, vast numbers of them were confined to it"*.

Bedford Gaol is world famous for two men associated with it. Beginning in 1660, the year of the return of the monarchy, John Bunyan spent twelve years in Bedford Gaol and there wrote Pilgrim's Progress, the greatest religious book, outside the Bible, in the English language. From Bedford Gaol a century later, John Howard began a pilgrim's progress that led him to many gaols in many countries.

## The Beginning of His Crusade

Howard had no interest in the pomp and ceremony that pertained to his sheriff's office. But he did become concerned for the prisoners under his charge. He was shocked to find among them many innocent men. These are his own words setting forth how and why he took up his crusade for the relief of the distress of his prisoners: *"The distress of prisoners, of which there are few who have not some imperfect idea, came more immediately under my notice when I was sheriff of the County of Bedford; and the circumstances which excited me to activity on their behalf, was the seeing some, who, by the verdict of the juries, were declared NOT GUILTY – some on the grand jury did not find such an appearance of guilt as subjected them to a trial – and some whose prosecutors did not appear against them – having been confined for months dragged back to gaol, and locked up again until they should pay **sundry fees** to the gaoler, the clerk of assize, etc. IN order to redress this hardship, I applied to the justices of the county for a salary to the gaoler, in lieu of his fees. The bench was properly affected with the grievance, and willing to grant the relief desired; but they wanted a precedent for charging the county with the expense. I therefore rode into several neighboring counties in search of a precedent; but I soon learned that the same injustice was practised in them; and looking into the prisons, I beheld scenes of calamity, which I grew daily more and more anxious to alleviate!"* (From the introductory remarks on his great work, "The State of the Prisons").

The first of his many prison tours included the county gaols of Cambridge, Huntingdon, Northampton, Leicester, Nottingham, Derby, and Stafford. By a providential circumstance, John Howard soon was able to present his findings to the House of Parliament, the highest tribunal in the land.

## **Two New Good Laws**

For the most part, John Howard worked alone, such was his nature, but in this reform he had a very helpful ally in Mr. Popham, a member of parliament for Taunton in Western England. At Taunton Judge Jeffreys opened the 'Bloody Assize' hanging 134, and transporting 400 of its inhabitants who had accorded 'King' Monmouth an enthusiastic welcome in the year 1685. Independently of Howard, Popham had been trying to get parliament to pass a bill substituting salary for gaoler's fees. A bill to this effect had passed two readings, but the third reading was deferred for certain amendments. Howard, who had by now made a tour of the gaols in the western countries, was asked to present his findings before parliament. He had the facts, a minute personal firsthand knowledge of how prisoners were treated, and he presented his argument with force and clarity. He made a deep impression upon his audience. He was called back by the House to be thanked for the humanity and zeal of his philanthropic efforts. He was very appreciative of the signal honor paid to him and his first volume on *The State of the Prisons* is dedicated to the House of Commons. The highlight of his whole career came almost at the beginning of his crusade for the relief of prisoners. This experience greatly increased his stature and his reputation. Though he was but a private citizen, he carried with him a sense of authority that opened to his inspection of many prisons even in foreign lands.

The first two prison reform bills, based on the original draft of Mr. Popham, passed March 31, 1774, declared that all prisoners against whom no bill of indictment had been found by the grand jury, or who should be discharged by proclamation for want of prosecution, should be immediately set at large in open court, without any payment of any fee or sum of money to the sheriff or gaoler in respect of such discharge; and abolishing all such fees for the future, it directed the payment, in lieu of them, of a sum not exceeding 13s. 4d. out of public funds for every prisoner discharged.

The other bill, which became law on June 2 of the same year, was concerned with health and sanitation in the prisons. It required the Justices to see that all prisons within their respective jurisdictions, be scraped and white-washed once a year at least – that the rooms be regularly washed and ventilated, that infirmaries be provided for the sick, and proper care be taken of them – to order clothes for them when needed – whenever possible to prevent their being kept in underground dungeons – and, generally, to take such measures as shall tend to restore and preserve their health.

Howard realized that in his day considerable time might elapse between the passing of any act at Westminster and its enactment in all corners of the land, and the prolonged suffering of many wretched prisoners, at his own expense had these acts printed, and a copy of them sent to every warden and gaoler in the Kingdom.

## **Renewed Zeal**

Encouraged by this notable success, Howard renewed his exertions on behalf of prisoners. In the introduction to *The State of the Prisons* he wrote, *"There are still many disorders that ought to be*

*rectified: prisoners suffer great hardships, from which I am desirous to set them free: the GAOL FEVER is not, as I am persuaded it may be, totally eradicated. These are my motives for printing this book. I think it will show plainly, that much is yet to be done for the regulation of prisons: and I am not without hope that the present Parliament will finish what has been so laudably begun by the last."*

*"I was called to the first part of my task by my office. To the pursuit of it I was prompted by the sorrows of the sufferers, and love to my country. The work grew upon me insensibly. I could not enjoy my ease and leisure in the neglect of an opportunity offered me by Providence of attempting the relief of the miserable. The attention of Parliament to the subject, led me to conclude that some additional labor would not be lost; and I extended my plan. The difficulty I found in searching out evidence of fraud and cruelty in various articles, together with other sources of distress, obliged me to repeat my visits and travel over the kingdom more than once".*

## **His Thorough Investigation**

Howard was very methodical in his investigations. He wrote, *"I entered every room, cell, and dungeon with a memorandum book in my hand, in which I noted particulars on the spot."* I think he must have carried a tape measure to measure the dimension of cells, windows, etc. In his notes on a prison in Flanders he wrote, *"Three dreary dungeons down nineteen steps: a little window in each; no prisoners. I went down, but my noting the dimensions of windows, etc. so enraged the Keeper, that he would not indulge my curiosity any farther."* I think he was too modest in the first part of the following statement: *"But I did not examine with the accuracy of a Surveyor, and hope I shall not be thought too direct in the style of a Dictator."*

The following statement needs no comment: *"I heard the Justices had viewed the OUTSIDE of this prison (Marlborough in Wiltshire)."* Let us consider some of the conditions inside the prisons that so stirred Howard.

## **Some Prison Abuses**

### **a) Gaol Fever**

The most scandalous condition that he met was the gaol fever, then very prevalent in England, but he did not find it anywhere abroad.

In contrasting the prisons of Europe and England he was "put to the blush for my native country". I do not know whether the gaol fever is one specific disease, or what the medical man would call it or whether it now exists. It was caused by close confinement in foul infected cells. Concerning gaol fever Howard concluded, *"From my own observations in 1773 and 1774, I was fully convinced that many more were destroyed by it than were put to death by all the public executions in the country. This frequent effect of confinement in the prison seems generally understood, and shows how full of emphatical meaning is the curse of a severe creditor, who pronounces his debtor's doom to ROT IN GAOL. I believe the full import of this sentence, from the vast numbers who to my certain knowledge, some of them before my eyes, have perished in the gaols."*

*"In Baker's Chronicle, page 353, that historian mentioning the Assize held in Oxford Castle 1577 (called from its fatal consequence the Black Assize) informs us that 'all who were present died within forty hours; the Lord Chief Baron, the Sheriff and about three hundred more, Lord Chancellor Bacon ascribes this to a disease brought into court by the prisoners, and Doctor Mead is of the same opinion."*

*"Launceton. I once found the prisoners chained two or three together. Their provision is put down to them through a hole in the floor of a room above (used as a chapel); and those who serve them there, often catch the fatal fever. At my first visit I found the Keeper, his assistant and all the prisoners but one sick of it, and heard that a few years before many prisoners had died from it, and the Keeper and his wife in one night."*

Note these short extracts: *"This prison has been fatal to vast numbers. Two or three years ago the Gaol Fever carried off many." When I was there first, I saw one dying on the floor of the Gaol Fever. Mr. Rule, the surgeon told me that he was by contract excused from attending in the dungeons any prisoners that should have the Gaol Fever."*

Howard argued that gaol fever should and could be exterminated not only in compassion to the prisoner, but for the safety of the populace. His remedy was better living quarters, more commodious, dry with more sunlight and air. He particularly advocated the regular use of white-wash to cleanse and to sweeten. Another remedy was vinegar for washing but I would prefer as he did the lime for white-washing.

Another great scourge of that day was smallpox but it does not seem to be more prevalent in gaol than elsewhere.

### ***b) Close, Foul Quarters***

Under the heading of AIR, Howard writes: *"And as to AIR, which is no less necessary than either of the two preceding articles (food and water) and given to us by Providence quite gratis, without any care or labor of our own. Yet, as if the bounteous goodness of Heaven excited our envy, methods are contrived to rob prisoners of this genuine cordial of life, as Dr. Hales very properly calls it: I mean by preventing that circulation and change of the salutiferous fluid, without which animals cannot live and thrive. It is well known that air which as performed its office in the lungs is feculent and noxious. In 1756 at Calcutta in Bengal, out of 170 persons who were confined in a hole there one night, 154 were taken out dead. Air which has been breathed is more poisonous to a more intense degree by the effluvia from the sick, and what else in prison is offensive. I did not wonder that in those journeys many gaolers made excuses; and did not go with me into the felons' wards."*

Howard's conclusion was not that a person can get used to unendurable conditions but that if he found only a few hours in such ill-smelling cells so affected him how much worse must it be for the poor creatures confined in them months and years.

*"Chester Castle. On one side are six cells (stalls) each about seven feet and a half by three and a half, I with a barrack bedstead, and a small aperture over the door. In each of these are locked up at night sometimes three or four felons. No window; not a breath of fresh air; only an aperture with a grate in*

*the ceiling of the passage, into the Pope's kitchen above. They pitch these dungeons three or four times a year; when I was in one of them I ordered the door to be shut, and my situation brought to mind what I had heard of the Black Hole of Calcutta."*

*"Plymouth Town Gaol. One of the two rooms for felons, the clink, seventeen feet by eight, about five feet high, with a wicket in the door seven inches by five to admit light and air. To this, as I was informed, three men who were confined near two months under sentence of Transportation, came in turns for breath. The door had not been opened for five weeks when I, with difficulty, entered to see a pale inhabitant. He had been there ten weeks under sentence of Transportation, and said he had much rather have been hanged than confined in that noisome cell."*

*"York City and County Gaol. The men felons ward is down eleven steps; that adjoining for women, down ten. The two night rooms for men are each five feet and a half by five. The night room for women about six feet square. All the rooms for felons are close and offensive; no amendment since the late Act. I have seen liquors handed to those who seemed to have had enough before. No water, but when there is too much, that is in a very high flood, then it flows into the rooms."*

In a few prisons great relief was afforded by the use of sail ventilators operated by hand, thus changing and refreshing the air.

Some of the cells were underground (Howard had the custom of counting the number of steps he had to go down) and in consequence were dark and damp. Sometimes the floors were of earth. In one dungeon often there was an inch or two of water on the floor.

Concerning sewers, Howard's brief observation very often was no sewers or offensive sewers.

Though the gaols were crowded, the rooms the prisoners should have used for other purposes, rented out, used as lumber rooms, used for farm animals and fowls and the dunghills did not make the air any pleasanter or healthier. Glass windows were then taxed as luxuries. "The Keeper pays window tax £3:7:0, and I saw some windows were stopped up."

"Water. Many prisoners have NO WATER. This defect is frequent in Bridewells, and Town Gaols. In the felons courts of some county gaols, there is not water; in some places where there is no water, prisoners are always locked up within doors, and have no more than the keeper or his servants think fit to bring them; in one place they are limited to three pints a day each – a scanty provision for drink and cleanliness!" Howard would have in every prison a pump or better a stream where all the prisoners could have ready access to it. He would have new prisons built in airy situations, preferably near a stream, and with no underground cells. In the index to his first publication there are 58 entries under the heading "*Water, instances where not accessible.*"

### **c) Bedding, Clothing and Firing**

Straw seems to have been the principal bedding and one of Howard's most frequent observations was no straw. "*In many gaols and in most Bridewells there is no allowance of STRAW for prisoners to sleep on; and if by any means they get a little, it is not changed for months together, so that it is almost*

worn to dust. Some lie upon rags, others upon the bare floors. When I have complained of this to the keepers, their justification has been 'the county allows no straw; the prisoners have none but at my cost'. One time he remarked the straw was not on the floor but on frames or bedsteads. One gaol he praised for having plenty of clean straw, the gaoler having permission to buy as much as was needed and the county paying for it."

Little attention was paid to the prisoners' clothing, but in a few instances clothing was provided for them to appear in court. Howard advocated a hot oven for killing infection and vermin in clothes. He cites the following: "I was informed that an officer, confined here some years since, for only a few days, took in with him a dog to defend him from vermin, but the dog was soon destroyed, and the prisoner's face much disfigured by them."

The following I quote because it is particularly generous provision for prisoners' clothing, and because it makes quaint reading: "When felons come to this prison (county gaol at Reading) they are stripped and washed, and then they put on clothes provided by the county. The men have a Russia-drab coat and breeches, a flannel waistcoat, two check shirts and two pair of yarn hose. The women a linsey woolsey gown and petticoat, a flannel petticoat, two dowlas shifts, two pairs of yarn hose."

#### **d) Food**

In his notes Howard made hardly any mention of food except bread and sometimes it was in very scanty supply. Of the counties he wrote, "It was commendable and exemplary in the Justices of this county to fix the felons allowance by a certain weight of good bread, not variable with the price." and he advocated that this practice be made general.

The following cases are chosen as samples of near starvation: "The common-side debtors, whom I saw eating boiled bread and water, told me that this was the only nourishment some had lived upon for near a twelve month. Two offenders, whom I saw last time, were for fines which they never can pay; they had not the county allowance and were almost starved. Six prisoners, whom I saw there at my first visit, complained of being almost famished. They were sent hither from the Assize a few days before to HARD LABOR (as the sentence usually runs) for months. The Justices had ordered the keeper to supply each of them daily with a two-penny loaf, but he had neglected them. They broke out soon after."

"At some prisons begging was allowed. They hang out a begging box in the front of the house; and attend to it in turn. It brings them only a few pence a day; and of this pittance none partake but those who at entrance have paid the keeper two shillings and six-pence; and treated the prisoners with half a gallon of beer. The last time I was there no more than three had paid for the privilege."

"I have been informed that at Christmas, felons chained together were permitted to go about, one of them carrying a basket for food, another, a box for money."

And at the same prison, "Just outside the prison gate is a round staple fixed in the wall; through it is put a chain, at each end of which a common-side debtor padlocked by the leg, stands offering to those who pass by, nets, laces, purses, etc., made in the prison. The two whom I saw there last were Crown

*debtors not cleared by the Large Insolvent Act."* It was in making such articles that John Bunyan spent many long hours in Bedford Gaol a hundred years before this.

Poor debtors were allowed by law two shillings and four pence per week, which allowance was called groats, but often they did not receive that to which they were entitled. Charitable persons, moved at the distress of prisoners left legacies for their relief, one of them dated back as far as 1555, and also legacies were provided for the release of poor debtors. Howard copied this memorial of a legacy: *"Mrs. Haster Reed gave sixpence a week forever, to this prison to be paid out of a tenement called Ven in the Parish of Culenton, and laid out in middling wheat bread and distributed always to the prisoners in the shew. The shew or shoe is the common word for poor debtors, who beg by letting down a shoe."* But often the record of these legacies was lost and the prisoners did not receive what had been meant for them. Greed as well as negligence no doubt had a part in this misappropriation of funds.

The following extract mentions a very notable person: *"About twenty five were fines; who not having the county allowance, nor any employment, were in September very pitiable objects indeed; half naked, and almost famished. But in December this appearance was much altered. Mr. Raikes and other gentlemen took pity on them, and generously contributed toward the feeding and clothing them."* This is the Robert Raikes who founded the Sunday School movement.

To conclude this section entitled Food is this pitiful story: *"The room for men is full eleven feet square, and six high; window eighteen inches square; no chimney. Earth floor, very damp. The door had not been opened for four weeks when I went in and then the keeper began shovelling away the dirt. There was only one debtor who seemed to have been robust, but was grown pale by ten weeks close confinement, with little food, which he had from a brother, who is poor and has a family. He said, the dampness of the prison, with but little straw, had obliged him (he spoke with sorrow) to send for the bed on which some of children lay. He had a wife and ten children, two of whom died since he came tither, and the rest were almost starving. He has written me a letter since, by which I learn that is distress was not mitigated, and he has a companion, miserable as himself. No allowance. Keeper no salary. Fees 8s 4p every action. No table. A year or two ago five prisoners, I was informed, grew desperate by what they suffered in this wretched prison and broke out."*

#### **e) Irons**

Some prisons were the private property of bishops, lords, and other such personages. This seems to be a survival from the feudal system. (In them the gaolers were not subject to the control of the magistrates and more apt to abuse the prisoners). With the inherited prison the property was not a definite amount set apart for upkeep. It is not surprising that many of these private persons were much out of repair. Howard often tersely described them in ruinous condition; not secure. To make for security irons were loaded on the prisoners rather than the more costly repair of the prisons. The most notorious of such instances Howard describes as follows: *"This gaol, the property of the bishop, who is the lord of the franchise of the Isle of Ely, was in part rebuilt by the late bishop about ten years ago; upon complaint of the cruel method which, for want of a safe gaol, the keeper took to secure his prisoners. This was by chaining them down on their backs upon a floor, across which several iron bars, with an iron collar with spikes about their necks, and a heavy iron over their legs. An excellent*

*magistrate, James Collyer, Esq., presented an account of this case, accompanied with a drawing, to the King, with which his Majesty was much affected and gave immediate orders for a proper inquiry and redress. In an offensive dungeon there were three transports, who upon suspicion of intending an escape were chained to the floor. They have not the King's allowance of 2s 6d a week."*

But loading prisoners with irons was also practiced in gaols which were secure. Avarice had a part in it for some gaolers granted dispensations and gave their prisoners what they called "the choice of irons" if they paid for it. The irons made walking and even lying down to sleep difficult and painful. In some county gaols irons were placed on women, a severity Howard did not find anywhere in Europe. More than once, upon his strong remonstrance women were released from their irons.

Often the place of trial was ten to fifteen miles from the place of incarceration and irons were particularly irksome for the prisoners in walking from one to the other. Howard commended the officials in one county for providing conveyance for the prisoners.

Sometimes gaol delivery was only once a year, which meant an innocent man could languish ten or eleven months in gaol awaiting trial and in Hull gaol delivery was once in three years. There seemed to be very little accommodation for prisoners in some of the places where trials were being held and one of the most shocking things in Howard's account is this, *"Numbers of both sexes are shut up together for many days and nights in one room. This occasions such confusion and distress, and such shrieks and outcries, as can better conceived than described."* That was a general observation based on such specific instances as this: *"Gaol delivery once a year. Assize held at Newcastle, wither prisoners are conveyed, and men and women confined together, commonly a whole week, in a dirty, damp dungeon down six steps I the Old Castle."*

Let us interrupt this catalogue of inhumanity and misery to make

#### SOME EXPLANATIONS:

**Bridewell:** A house of correction for the confinement of disorderly persons; so called from a hospital built in 1553 near St. Bride's or Bridget's well in London which was subsequently turned into a work house.

**Imprisoned Debtors:** In those days and until much later, as in Bible times, persons could be imprisoned for debt. Some gaols were expressly for debtors. In others debtors were supposed to be kept separate from felons but this was not always done. Howard quotes the popular saying *"prisons pay no debts"* and adds *"neither do they mend morals"*. Of the Carlisle City Gaol in Cumberland, Howard wrote, *"I was told that many a poor traveller from the north who had come by some calamity had contracted an unavoidable debt for forty shillings, had been confined at a distance from his friends in the prisons where this is no provision, nor any means of procuring it."* One can read between the lines and think of the Scotsmen going to the south of England to make their fortunes and finding instead that the far pastures were not so green after all.

**Master's Side and Common Side:** Howard took it for granted that his readers would know what this distinction meant. Probably he did not realize that anyone would be reading his book almost two

hundred years after he wrote it. Perhaps the master's side was for the gentry or more probably for those who could afford to pay for a little better accommodation. In the tables of fees at two gaols there was a difference made between Knights, Esquires, Gentlemen, and Yeomen.

**Transports:** Under the harsh laws of those days the punishment for a great number of offences was transportation or execution. Howard regarded both as a great waste of man power. Prisoners awaiting transportation were called Transports. Concerning them and the hulks in which they were confined more later.

## **Other Abuses**

### **f) Garnish**

Howard makes frequent reference to garnish. This word as applied to prisons was not familiar to me and I found in Webster's Dictionary as the third meaning of the noun garnish this: 'An entrance fee demanded by the old prisoners of one just committed to jail.'

Howard's general description of this abuse cannot be improved on: "*A cruel custom obtains in most of our gaols, which is that of the prisoners demanding a newcomer garnish, footing or (as it is called in some London gaols) chummage. 'Pay or strip' are the fatal words. I say fatal, for they are so to some; who, having no money, are obliged to give up some part of their scanty apparel, and if they have no bedding or straw to sleep on, contract diseases, which I have known to prove mortal. In many gaols, to the garnish paid by the newcomer, those were there before make an addition; and a great part of the following night is often spent in drunkenness and rioting. The gaoler or tapster finding his account in the practice generally answers questions concerning it with reluctance.*" This might be translated into a modern vernacular. "*Welcome, chum, to our happy midst; let's have a party.*" In these remarks on individual gaols, Howard notes the amount of garnish exacted, and often it was higher for debtors than for other felons. At one county gaol he found, "*In the tap-room there hung a paper, on which, among other things, was written 'Prisoners pay garnish or run the gauntlet.'*" But often his observation was 'garnish lately cancelled' so perhaps this evil practice was on the way out.

### **g) Drinking**

Again and again, no less than 42 times are noted in the index, Howard observed that the clauses of the Act against spirituous liquors was not hung up. This referred to hard liquors. In many gaols the gaoler had a license for beer, in some both beer and wines, and in these gaols a large part of the gaoler's revenue came from the tap. A similar situation exists where a large part of the government's revenue comes from the sale of spirits. In one prison, "*On Monday night there is a Wine Club; on Thursday a Beer Club, each lasting usually till one or two in the morning. I need not say how much riot these occasions, and how the sober prisoners are annoyed with them.*" In another prison, "*The tap is let to a prisoner... I was incredibly informed that one Sunday in the summer of 1775, about 600 pots of beer were brought in from a public house in the neighborhood (Ashmore's) the prisoners not then liking the tapster's beer.*" In many prisons this sort of thing occurred: "*I saw among the prisoners several butchers and others from the market who are admitted here as at another public house. The same may be seen in many other prisons where the gaoler keeps or lets the tap. Besides the inconvenience to prisoners frequenting a prison lessens the dread of being confined in one.*" The

following inscription over a prison gate tells much by what it permits as by what it specifically prohibits: *"No person admitted into the prison on a Sunday after nine o'clock in the morning until five in the evening."*

#### ***h) Gaming and Idleness***

*"Gaming in various forms is very frequent; cards, dice, skittles, Mississippi and Porto-bello tables, billiards, fives, tennis, etc."* I wonder what the game of Mississippi was and what resemblance the tennis mentioned bears to that played at Wimbledon. I doubt if Howard would view with favour the great amount of leisure which our forty hour (or less) work week now gives us and the way the leisure is used. But he objected to the gaming also because of the cheating, swearing and brawling that went with it.

Howard was a great believer in useful work and he found little opportunity for it in most English gaols. It is surprising that he does not write more about the idleness that was so prevalent. His complaint following well describes the present situation in many of our county gaols. *"Petty offenders who are committed to a Bridewell for a year or two and spend that time, not in hard labor, but in idleness and wicked company, or are sent for that time to County gaols, generally grow desperate, and come out fitted for the perpetuation of any villainy. How directly contrary this is to the intention of our laws with regard to these offenders; which certainly is to correct and reform them! Instead of which, their confinement doth notoriously promote and increase the very vices it was designed to suppress. Multitudes of young creatures, committed for some trifling offence, are totally ruined there. I make no scruple to affirm, that if it were the wish and aim of Magistrates to effect the destruction present and future of young delinquents, they could not devise a more effective method, than to confine them so long in our prisons, those seats and seminaries (as they have been very properly called) of idleness and every vice."* I remember how very similar to this is Judge Bacon Dickson's description of the idleness and vice in the county gaols of New Brunswick, in his Royal Commission Report! *"A few hours spent with the prisoners in the cell corridors of almost any of our county gaols will convince any thinking person that the prisoners, with few exceptions will be turned out weakened physically and morally by their sojourn in prison, and this applies more particularly to the more youthful."*

#### ***i) Women in Prison***

One thing that much impressed me as I read "The State of the Prisons" was the number of women in prison. Today, in all of Canada there are only about 100 women serving penitentiary terms. The women were treated with equal severity. *"Damp rooms, no chimney; small yard; no pump; no sewer. Yet the keeper said a woman with a child at her breast was sent hither for a year and a day; the child died."*

Howard found it necessary to recommend that men and women prisoners be kept altogether separate. A glaring example of failure to do this follows: *"No proper separation of the sexes, or of the Bridewell prisoners from the rest. From the magistrates' inattention to this important point, there is the most licentious intercourse; and all the endeavours of the chaplain to promote reformation must necessarily be defeated, when the most abandoned are daily encouraging the others in vice. Five or six children have late been born in this gaol."*

*“Debtors crowd the gaols (particularly those in London) with their wives and children. There are often by this means ten or twelve people in a middle-sized room; increasing the danger of infection, and corrupting morals of children. This point ought, no doubt, to be treated with tenderness. Man and wife should not be totally separated. Seeing the prison crowded with women and children, I procured an accurate list of them; and found that on (or about) the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1776, when there were on the master’s side 213 prisoners, on the common side, 30. Total 423, their wives (including women of an appellation not so honorable) and children were 475.”*

## **Gaolers, Chaplains, Surgeons**

The reader will probably realise that the passages quoted above were chosen as being the most glaring examples of cruelty and neglect of the prisoners of that day. All was not uniformly evil. The description of the prison at York Castle begins, *“In the spacious area is a noble prison for debtors, which does honor to the county.”* At Newcastle was another good prison. *“In this Newgate, which is the gate at the upper end of the town, all the rooms except the condemned rooms are upstairs, and airy; I always found them remarkably clean, strewed with sand, etc. The corporation allows both debtors and felons firing and candles in plenty; and every prisoner both a chaff-bed, two blankets and a cover lid. Debtors are not thus accommodated in any other prison in England.”*

Howard, in commenting on the better treatment received by prisoners of war, argued that all prisoners were human beings, and all should be treated with humanity. The difference in treatment of prisoners from county to county was one of the reasons why in England in the year 1877, all prisons were taken under national administration. Wherever he could, Howard named certain gaol officials who were compassionate and attentive to duty. *“I was concerned at my last visit that the humane gaoler, Mr. Crafter, was dead. But his successor, Mr. Harle is equally worthy of the trust. Dr. Rotheram, a physician in this town (Newcastle), visits the prisoners very assiduously without fee or reward. This is the only instance of the kind I have met with.”* At Ipswich, *“A neat chapel lately built. Mr. Brome, the chaplain, does not content himself with the regular and punctual performance of his stated duty; he is a friend to the prisoners on all occasions.”*

Sometimes men paid for the office of gaoler of which the following is an instance:

*“County Gaol at Northampton.*

*Gaoler, John Scofield.*

*Salary, none: he pays the county £40 a year.*

*Fees, Debtors            )    £0; 15; 4.*  
*Felons                 )*

*Transports: If two £7 each; if more £6:16:6 each.*

*Licence, for Beer and Wine.”*

It may be taken for granted that this gaoler expected to get back his £40 a year and more with it, in one way or another from the prisoners.

Howard advocated clean and airy infirmaries for the care of sick prisoners. There is an occasional reference to lunatics being locked up in prisons. Sometimes a surgeon is appointed, sometimes not; sometimes he had a salary, sometimes he made a bill.

Howard was a strong believer in the value of the Christian religion for the right conduct of life. He found more provision for religion than we have in our county gaols today. But sometimes the chaplains were very perfunctory in their duties. Concerning chaplains he wrote: *"I had the pleasure to find a chaplain appointed to most of the county gaols; in consequence of the Act made 13 of this present Majesty (George III the year 1773). When this office is vacant it behooves Magistrates not to take the first clergyman who offers his service, without regarding his real character. They should choose one who is in principle a Christian; who will not content himself with officiating in public, but will converse with the prisoners, admonish the profligate, exhort the thoughtless, comfort the sick, and make known to the condemned that MERCY which is revealed in the GOSPEL."*

## **Howard's Growing Purpose**

The conditions that Howard found in his early tours of English prisons has been quite fully set forth in the foregoing sections. He set his heart on the reformation of the prison system of England. *"If this (1777) publication shall have any effect in alleviating the distress of poor debtors and other prisoners – in procuring for them cleanly and wholesome abodes; and thereby exterminating the gaol fever, which has so often spread abroad its dreadful contagion – in abolishing, or at least reducing, the oppressive fees of clerks of assize, and of the peace; and checking the impositions of gaolers, and the extortions of bailiffs – in introducing a habit of industry in our Bridewells; and restraining the shocking debauchery and immortality in our gaols and other prisons – if any of these beneficial consequences shall accrue, the writer will be ready to indulge himself with the pleasing thought of not having lived without doing some good to his fellow creatures; and will think himself abundantly repaid for all the pains he has taken, the time he has spent, and the hazards he has undergone."* Gradually a grand plan was being formed in his mind and he decided to tour the prisons of Europe to observe what was good in them before making his recommendations for the reform of English prisons.

## **Holland**

The prisons of Holland were the best Howard saw anywhere in his travels. *"Prisons in the United Provinces are so quiet, and most of them so clean, that a visitor can hardly believe he is in a gaol. They are commonly (except the rasp houses) white-washed once or twice a year."* The prisoners were well fed and had good, clean clothing and bedding. They were employed. Howard was much impressed with a motto he saw in one of them, *"Make them diligent and they will be honest."* The women were mainly occupied with spinning and the men in rasping logwood (I suppose this was for the making of paper). The tedious laborious work of that day is now done by power machinery. The overseer of a spin house was called a mother and of a rasp house, a father.

*"Great care is taken to give them moral and religious instruction, and reform their manners, for their own and the public good. The chaplain (such there in every House of Correction) does not only perform public worship, but privately instructs the prisoners, catechises them every week etc., and I am well informed that many come out sober and honest. Some have even chosen to continue and work in the house after their discharge."*

Howard describes a church service in one of the prisons and concludes with this sentence: *"The decent behavior and attention of the audience, evidently proved that the service, though of two hours and a half, was not tedious or disagreeable."*

*"I cannot forbear closing this account, without mentioning the ardent wishes it inspired in me, that our prisons also, instead of echoing with profaneness and blasphemy, might hereafter resound with the offices of religious worship; and prove, like these the happy means of awakening many to a sense of their duty to God and man."*

*"I leave this country with regret, as it affords a large field for information on the important subject I have in view. I know not which to admire most, the neatness and cleanliness appearing in the prisons, the industry and regular conduct of the prisoners, or the humanity and attention of the magistrates and governors."*

## **The Bastille**

Rather than recount what Howard found in the prisons of France, I give in his own words his experience at the Bastille. This probably is the most notable prison in all history. Its fall on July 14, 1789, which Howard lived to see, marks the beginning of the French Revolution. It is one prison that he did not inspect.

*"The Bastille may occur to some of my readers, as an object concerning which some information would be acceptable. All that I can give them is that I knocked hard at the outer gate, and immediately went forward through the guard to the draw bridge before the entrance of the castle. I was sometime viewing this building, which is round, and surrounded by a large moat. None of the windows look outwards, but only towards a small area; and if the state prisoners are ever permitted to take the fresh air, it must be on the leads, which have high parapets. But while I was contemplating this gloomy mansion, an officer came out of the castle much surprised; and I was forced to retreat through the mute guard, and thus regained that freedom, which for one locked up within those walls is next to impossible to obtain."*

*"In my last tour, I had the good fortune to procure an extremely scarce pamphlet, published in 1774, written by a person who had been long confined in the Bastille. It is reckoned to contain the best account ever made public of this celebrated structure, and the sale of it forbidden in France, on the severest penalties. I have copied from the most material circumstances of the description, and have added the plate given in the work."*

This has a sequel. The French authorities were much provoked that Howard had published so detailed a critical a description of the Bastille. When he sought permission to traverse France and inspect the lazaretto at Marseilles, he was forbidden on pain of being confined at the Bastille, concerning which he had been so curious. But he did not turn back. Disguised as a doctor, he travelled across France, having a very narrow escape in Paris, and accomplished his mission.

## **Other Countries**

In the course of his crusade for the reform of English prisons, Howard visited every country of Europe except Turkey. But this country and the Levant were centres for his enquiries in a second crusade, begun late in his life, against the plague. The purpose of these foreign travels was to discover good

practices and treatment that he could recommend for use in England. Let us review, at not too great length, the conditions, good and bad, that he found in these other countries.

**Flanders:** (including the French Provinces and the Austrian Netherlands)

More than once he comments on the good care taken of the sick. Another exemplary practice is the careful record of charitable legacies.

At one prison he was very favorably impressed with the order and regularity of the daily routine. *"I was present during the whole time the men criminals were at dinner, and much admired the regularity, decency, and order, with which the whole was conducted. Everything was done at a word given by the Director; no noise or confusion appeared, and this company of near one hundred and ninety stout criminals was governed with as much apparent ease as the most sober and well-disposed assembly in civil society. At night, they have an hour for supper, etc. The bell gives notice of all these successive hours."* No doubt the bell that rung in this prison was more musical than the electric bells clanged in modern penitentiaries. Prisoners today heartily dislike the noise of bells and the regimentation that Howard approved of.

*"Another motive induced me to be very particular in my accounts of foreign houses of correction, especially those of the freest states. It was to counteract a notion prevailing among us that compelling prisoners to work, especially in public, was inconsistent with the principles of English liberty; at the same time that taking away the lives of such numbers, either by executions, or the diseases of our prisons, seems to make little impression upon us. Of such force is custom and prejudice in silencing the voice of good sense and humanity."*

**Germany:** (including Austria)

*"The Germans, well aware of the necessity of cleanliness in prisons, have very judiciously chosen to build them in situations most conducive to it; that is, near rivers."* This, I suppose, was for sewage disposal. *"I saw no underground dungeons in any of the new prisons of Germany. I do not remember any prison in Germany (nor elsewhere abroad) in which felons have not, from the public allowance, or from charities, something more to live on than bread and water. I asked one and another of the Honnettes, who were at work on the road, whether they liked to be thus employed, or would rather choose to be confined in idleness. They answered, 'Much rather to be thus abroad at work'."*

*"Among the various engines of torture, or the question, which I have seen in France and in other places, the most excruciating is kept and used in a deep cellar of this prison. It ought to be buried ten thousand fathoms deeper."* Howard never described the way these instruments of torture were used for there was nothing edifying in his purpose in so doing. In the abolishment of torture, England was in advance of other countries. *"There is no torture room in any of the prisons in the Prussian dominions, for the present King has set the example in Germany of abolishing the cruel practice."*

*"Debtors are not permitted in any German cities that I have seen, to have their wives and children living with them in prison."*

Concerning one very evil prison, Howard added in a foot note the following: *“Here, as usual, I enquired whether they had any putrid fever, and was answered in the negative. But in one of the dark dungeons down twenty four steps, I thought I saw a person with the gaol fever. He was loaded with heavy irons and chained to the wall; anguish and misery appeared with clotted tears on his face. He was not capable of speaking to me; but on examining his breast and feet for spots, and finding he had a strong intermitting pulse, I was convinced that he was not ill of that disorder. A prisoner in the opposite cell told me that the poor creature had desired him to call for assistance, and he had done it, and was not heard. This is one of the bad effects of the dungeons.”*

This further foot note is very revealing concerning Howard’s purpose and faith: *“I have frequently been asked what precautions I use to preserve myself from infection in the prisons and hospitals that I visit. I here answer once and for all, that next to the free goodness and mercy of the Author of my being, temperance and cleanliness are my preservatives. Trusting in Devine Providence and believing myself in the way of my duty, I visit the most noxious cells, and while thus employed, ‘I fear no evil’. I never enter a hospital or prison before breakfast, and in an offensive room I seldom draw my breath deeply.”*

*“In several of the German gaols there are dungeons for those that are guilty of witchcraft, but they seem to have been long disused, and I hope increasing light and good sense will soon entirely banish the fears of witches, and consequently the witches themselves.”*

*“The criminals sent off to Hungary are brought first to this prison. They are clothed in a uniform, and chained in companies, five and five together, with irons around their necks and on their feet, besides a chain about ten inches long between the feet of each of them, and another chain about six feet long for fastening each of them to the person next to him. I was told that the hard work in which they are employed, of drawing boats up the Danube, with their coarse fare, wears them out so fast the few of them live in this state above four years.”*

*“I took the liberty of mentioning several of these remarks on the prisons and hospital at Vienna, to the Emperor when he did me the honor of giving me a private audience, and he has relieved the miseries of many unhappy sufferers.”*

#### **Switzerland:**

*“In those cantons to which I went, felons have each a room to themselves, ‘that they may not’ said the keepers, ‘tutor one another’... none were in irons.”*

*“On conversing with Dr. Tissot, he expressed his surprise at our gaol distemper, said, ‘I should not find it in Switzerland’, and added that ‘he had not heard of its being anywhere but in England’. In some cantons there were no prisoners. The principal reason of it is the great care that is taken to give children, even the poorest, a moral and religious education.”*

#### **Italy:**

*“At Venice, the great prison is near the Doge’s Palace, and it is one of the strongest I ever saw. There between three and four hundred prisoners many of them confined to loathsome and dark cells for life;*

*executions here being rare. There was no fever, or prevailing disorder in this close prison. None of the prisoners had irons. On weighing the bread allowance, I found it fourteen ounces. I asked some who had been confined many years in dark cells, whether they should prefer the galleys. They all answered in the affirmative; so great a blessing is light and air! The chapel is only for the condemned, who continue there a night and a day before execution."*

In Italy, Howard found many galley slaves – they were stout and healthy. The term galley slave was applied to prisoners who did any heavy manual work, as well as those who manned the oars of galleys.

Howard commented on the great number of stabbings in Italy. *"I have heard criminals in prison express with seeming satisfaction of mind 'that though they stabbed, they did not rob'... there are more murders committed in a year in the city of Naples or Rome, than in Great Britain and Ireland. Does this not prove that the English are not naturally cruel? And might not arguments be derived from hence, for the revision and repeal of some of our sanguinary laws? The Marquis Beccaria justly remarks, in his essay on crimes and punishments, chapter 28 'That the punishment of death is pernicious to society, from the example of barbarity it affords'."*

In a prison for boys or young men, Howard noted and wrote down in Latin and English these two inscriptions. Here is the English:

Pope Clement XI  
For the Correction and Instruction  
of profligate Youth  
That they, who when idle were injurious  
When instructed, might be useful  
to the State  
1704

And this: *"In which the grand purpose of all civil policy relative to criminals is expressed:*

*It is of little advantage  
To restrain the bad  
By punishment,  
Unless you render them good  
By discipline."*

Howard did not gain access in Portugal, Spain, or Italy to the prisons of the Inquisition. Happily in his time this form of persuasion was falling into disuse. *"I can give but little information respecting the prison of the Inquisition. It is situated near the great church of St. Peter's. On one side of the court round which it is built, is the inquisitor general's palace. Over the gate is an inscription importing 'that it was erected by Pope Pius Vin the year 1569.' The windows of the prison have wooden blinds and at a small distance is a high wall."* And in a foot note, *"The chambers of this silent and melancholy abode were quite inaccessible to me; and yet I spent near two hours about the court and the priest's apartments, till my continuance there began to raise suspicion."*

## **Malta:**

To me, Howard's notes on Malta were particularly interesting. The rulers of this land, the Knights of St. John, had in his time, declined far from an illustrious past. Their religious intolerance was especially intolerable to him.

*"The slaves have many rooms, and each sect their chapels or mosques, and sick rooms apart. A wooden manufactory is carried on by some of them; but the majority are blacks and unhappy objects. For the religion (the knights so called) being sworn to make perpetual war with the Turks, carry off by piracy many of the peasants, fishermen, or sailors from the Barbary coasts. How dreadful! That those who glory in bearing the sign of the Prince of Peace, should harbour such malignant disposition against their fellow creates, and by their own example encourage piracy in the states of Barbary. Do not these knights by such conduct make themselves the worst enemies to the Cross of Christ, under the pretence of friendship."*

Contrasting the hospitals and stables of Malta, Howard wrote: *"The number of patients in this hospital during the time I was at Malta (March 29 to April 29, 1786) was from five hundred and two, to five hundred and thirty two. They were served by the most dirty, ragged, unfeeling and inhuman persons I ever saw. I once found eight or nine of them highly entertained with a delirious, dying patient. The governor told me there had only twenty two servants, and that many of them were debtors or criminals, who had fled thither for refuge. At the same time I observed that near forty attendants were kept to take care of about twenty six horses and the same number of mules, in the Grand Master's stables; and that there, all was clean. I cannot help adding that in the center of each of these stables, there was a fountain out of which water was constantly running in a stone basis, but that in the hospital, though there was indeed a place for a fountain, there was no water."*

## **The Incessancy of his Travels**

Howard was continually on the road. On one journey, memorable for its speed, he covered by stage coach 500 miles in five days. Even when recovering from a bout of fever and so sick he could hardly hold up his head, he still travelled. In his earlier tours he was only concerned with prisons, but later he came also to visit hospitals, schools and work houses. His mission of mercy took him, as previously noted, to every country of Europe and to every county of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. He was not content to visit once but went back again and again to see what improvements there might be as a result of his recommendations. As an example of this, I note that in *The State of Prisons and following works*, Howard records eight visits to county gaol in Chester Castle. He made a memorandum of miles travelled in five foreign journeys and various tours of the British Isles and the total came to 42,033 miles. This does not include the last three or four years of his life. From time to time he returned to his home at Cardington. Here he did what he could for his son, caught up with the affairs of his estate and renewed old friendships. But rest and leisure were foreign to his nature and soon he was off again on another tour to inspect more gaols and hospitals.

## **His Publications**

During Howard's travels he collected a great mass of valuable notes. It was necessary to set these in order and to make them available to the public... hence his publications. In 1777 he produced the

first edition of *The State of the Prisons*, in 1780 and appendix was added, in 1784 there was another appendix, of which I do not have a copy, and in 1789, the year before his death, his final work, which dealt largely with measures to control the plague, appeared. His books are embellished with many engravings and plans of institutions which he particularly admired. They include tables of fees, regulations, and statistics about prisoners particularly concerning the number executed. Sometimes his notes were too voluminous to be included in his works and then he would write to the effect – *“I have further relevant papers which I will gladly show to any gentleman who wishes to examine them.”*

For his printer, he chose William Eyres of Warrington. It had been suggested that he chose a printer in a provincial centre rather than in London because he felt that he could better supervise the progress of the work. At Warrington, it was his habit to rise at two or three in the morning and put in four or five hours at his papers before he began in day’s work. With the help of literary friends, he proof read his sheets as they came off the press. He gave away many copies to persons he thought would be interested in prison reform and the price charged for the balance barely paid for the printing.

His works were translated into French, German, and Italian. Every man’s library have as number 835 in their series, an abridged edition of *The State of Prisons* by John Howard and this is still in print.

His works bear the stamp of authenticity and authority. Their great value lies largely in the fact that Howard wrote concerning the distressing things he had seen in as unemotional language as possible. He was the conscience of the English people concerning evil conditions in their gaols, of which they had little knowledge or concern. He can be called the father of modern penal reform and penal reformers have not departed from the principles which he first enunciated.

From the editor’s introduction the everyman’s edition of *The State of Prisons*, I copy: *“Howard’s proposals for reform were so sweeping and so sane that they are likely to remain as the standards by which prisons are judged as long as prisons exist. Moreover, the methods in which he conducted his enquiry and presented its results has been a model for similar investigations ever since. Any Royal Commission or Parliamentary Committee appointed today to produce a report to act as a basis for contemplated reforms proceeds exactly on the plan first outlined by Howard – minute investigation, a careful weighing of the evidence, a consideration of current methods in other countries, and a summary of recommendations. That Howard’s should be so infinitely more impressing and inspiring a document than any of its successors is less surprising when we remember that there was no need with him for compromise since he held his commission alone and held it, he devoutly, sincerely believed, from God.”*

## **His Recommendation**

Many of his recommendations have been mentioned in the foregoing narrative – the gaoler not to be dependent on fees but to have an adequate salary – the prisoners in clean, airy quarters, all above ground, scraped and white-washed at least once a year, with access to water – the complete eradication of gaol fever – prisoners to have regular and adequate provision of food – no private prisons and prisons made rather than heavy irons for the prisoners – garnish, the tap and gambling

abolished – useful industry rather than idleness – the proper segregation of prisoners – the value of moral and religious instruction.

Section III of The State of Prisons deals with Proposed Improvements in the Structure and Management of Prisons, and this includes a plan for a model county gaol.

Howard could feel as in his own body, I think the modern word for it is 'empathy', the miseries suffered by the prisoners. He was much distressed by the inhumanity with which one human treated another. This is his recommendation about a gaoler: *"The first care must be to find a good man for a gaoler; one who that is honest, active, and humane. Such was Abel Dagge, who was formerly keeper of Bristol Newgate. I regretted his death, and revere his memory."* Howard often noted that the gaoler lived distant from his gaol and thus not so well supervise it. *"A keeper should be firm and steady, yet mild; and he should visit every day the wards of his prison. Such a man will have more influence and authority than the violent and passionate gaoler, who is profane and inhuman, and often beating and kicking his prisoners."* Howard, himself, once quelled a riot of 200 prisoners who had gotten out of restraint, by his mere presence; they trusted in his integrity and his humanity and believed that any assurances he gave them would be honored. *"Finally, the care of a prison is too important to be left wholly to a gaoler... To every prison there should be an inspector appointed, either by his colleagues in the magistracy, or by Parliament."*

Sometimes Howard found new prisons being built in a poor location or on a bad plan and this grieved him deeply for it meant that the prisoners would suffer needlessly for many years to come.

## **Regarding Punishment**

Due to the unsettled times there was, in Howard's day, a great increase in crimes and a consequent increase in the severity of the laws. Howard contrasts the great number of executions in England with the few in Holland and comments favorably on the awe-inspiring solemnity with which the executions in Holland were performed. But the English haws were not quite so sanguinary, in fact as in theory; Howard gives two tables, one for the Norfolk Circuit for the years 175-1772, and a total of 434 were condemned to death and 117 executed – and in the Midland Circuit for the same years, 518 were condemned to death and 116 were executed. Howard's views on capital punishment were quite different from those of Judge Heath – official dooms man of his day. *"If you imprison at home, the criminal is soon thrown back on you, hardened in guilt. If you transport, you corrupt infant societies, and sow the seeds of atrocious crimes over the habitable world. There is no regenerating a felon in this life. And, for his own sake, as well as for the sake of society, I think it better to hang."* Here are Howard's views: *"I wish that no person might suffer capitally but for murder – for setting houses on fire, and for housebreaking, intended with acts of cruelty. Our present laws are too sanguinary, and are therefore ill executed; which last circumstance, by encouraging offenders to hope that they may escape punishment, even after conviction, greatly tends to increase the number of crimes. Yet, many are brought to a premature end, who might have been made useful to the state."* A barbarous punishment of that day, burnt in the hand, has long been discontinued.

## Howard's Honors

He tried to live according to the Bible and with him was an important principle, *"When thou dost thine alms, let not thy left hand know what the right hand doeth."* The honors that came to him were not of his own seeking. Before he had any thought of being a reformer, he received the high honor of being elected a Fellow of the Royal Society for certain meteorological observations he had made. It has been mentioned however, early in his career as a prison reformer, he was called to the bar of Parliament and thanked for his devoted and painstaking labors on behalf of prisoners. In this story, nothing has yet been written of his journeys to Scotland and Ireland; at Glasgow the magistrates presented him with the freedom of the city (this was also done at other, lesser cities) – the University of Dublin granted him an honorary Doctorate of Civil Law.

While he yet lived, the orator, Edmund Burke, paid him this glowing tribute: *"I cannot name this gentleman without remarking that his labors and writings have done much to open the eyes and hearts of all mankind. He has visited all Europe – not to survey the sumptuousness of palaces, or the stateliness of temples; not to make accurate measurements of the remains of ancient grandeur, not to form a scale of the curiosity of modern art; not to collect medals or complete manuscripts – but to dive into the depths of dungeons and plunge into the infection of hospitals; to survey the mansions of sorrow and pain; to take the gauge and measure of misery, depression and contempt; to remember the forgotten, to attend to the neglected, to visit the forsaken, and compare and collate the miseries of men in all countries. His plan is original; and it is as full of genius as it is of humanity."*

Howard gradually became accepted as an authority on prisons and his opinions were sought by persons in high places. The Emperor Joseph II of Austria asked for an interview and Howard did not at all spare his feelings in detailing to him the deplorable conditions he saw in his dominions. The interview lasted about two hours during which both parties remained standing. No one was allowed to be seated in the Emperor's presence and to put his visitor more at ease the Emperor stood with him. The Emperor Joseph was pleased with Howard's frankness – it was not often that people told him what they thought – and did correct some of the abuses Howard revealed to him.

Earlier when Howard was summoned to appear before Catherine the Great of Russia, he refused stating that he had devoted himself to the task of visiting the dungeon of the captive and the abode of the wretched, not the palaces and courts of kings and empresses – and that the limited time that he had to stay in the capital would not allow for his calling on her Imperial Majesty.

At the request of the reigning Pope Pius VI, Howard waited upon him at the Vatican. *"It was a noble thing to see these two illustrious men – alike remarkable for their public virtues and their private sorrows – casting aside the traditional and religious antipathy which each conscientiously felt towards the creed of the other, and meeting together as men and as Christians on the common ground of human charity. At parting, the pious pontiff laid his hand upon the head of the distinguished heretic, saying good-humoredly, 'I know you Englishmen care nothing for these things, but the blessing of an old man can do you no harm'."*

In Italy, a fellow English traveller, seeing the great honor in which Howard was held, conceived the idea of raising a fund to erect a permanent memorial to him. This Howard found very repugnant.

Over 1,500 pounds had been collected and in answer to his strong protest, one third of this was returned to the donors. But others refused to take back what they had given and fifty five poor debtors were released from gaol and with the remainder was erected in Saint Paul's Cathedral, the noble statue in honor of John Howard.

## **Further Investigations in England**

The passages quoted earlier in this biography, concerning gaol conditions in England with one exception were taken from *The State of the Prisons* published in 1777, describing what he found in the first three or four years of his crusade. In justice to Howard, there should be some reference to what he found in his further investigations.

On one page he mentions 21 impressed men in one prison and 10 in another, so I take it that at this time the press gangs were at work pressing men into service, something which we now regard as altogether violating the laws of liberty and justice.

*"In mentioning the gaol fever I should have added, I was well informed that a prisoner brought out as dead, from one of the dungeons, on being washed under the pump, showed signs of life, and soon after recovered. The gaol was much cleaner; and company was not drinking there, as at my former visits."*

*"The prisoners had each a heavy chain, and the two impressed men had chains and logs. Each prisoner pays a penny a day for straw. No justices have visited this prison for fifteen years."*

*"Five boys between thirteen and fifteen years of age were confined with the most profligate and abandoned."*

*"I found that three men and four women were lodged in one of these rooms."*

*"The tower (of London) is the only prison in England for state delinquents of rank. There has been no prisoner since Mr. Laurens went out December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1781." (i.e. about seven or eight years previous).*

Often in Howard's later publications is the comment 'no alteration'. This he explains: *"It may be proper to inform those readers who are not acquainted with my former publications, that when I say 'no alterations' I speak with reference to the situation which such prison was in when I last visited it; the particulars of which may be found in my former editions of The State of Prisons, etc."*

Here the term master's side is explained: *"Of these 167, ten only were master's side prisoners, that is, prisoners who can pay for a bed, three shillings and sixpence a week."*

*"The prison very dirty; not white-washed these two years. Some of the prisoners almost naked; without shirts, shoes or stockings. Several prisoners died last spring, and probably many more will die the spring ensuing if greater attention be not paid to them."*

*“At night, some men come to a room in the women’s court, and some women go to a room on the men’s side, which is called the chapel, from the use made of it by the late worthy keeper. Several prisoners were drinking in a room used by the turnkey for his shop.”*

*“One morning, on mentioning to the Marshall’s substitute that several prisoners were drinking, he replied, ‘The chief vice among prisoners is drunkenness, and that brings them here; and while they can drink and riot in prison, they disregard the confinement’.”*

Howard’s attitude on drinking was quite tolerant at the beginning but it gradually became more severe. He objected against gaolers having the tap, and even more to spirits being passed into gaols through windows facing the streets. Towards the close of his labors he wrote out a draft of a bill forbidding any drink in a prison other than water or milk. To him, tobacco in any form was a dirty and nasty habit and he did not like the monthly allowance in one prison for the purchase of tobacco and snuff.

*“The late keeper and his wife who succeeded him, both died of the gaol fever. Last year, seven of the felons died in their dungeon of the gaol fever, and the free ward, or county chamber, being directly over it, nine out of thirteen of the poor debtors died.”*

*“I found most women felons were in heavy irons but they were taken off the next day. This indecent, wanton, and cruel custom of putting irons on the weaker sex in prisons is not practiced in any of the most uncivilized countries I have visited.”*

*“No alteration. Prison not secure. The convicts, and prisoners for trial, were severely ironed, by the neck and hands, waist, feet and chained to the floor; and at night to their beds in a horrid dungeon. Here was the first iron glove I have seen in England, which though not yet used, shows the severity of the gaoler’s disposition.”*

*“The gaol was clean, I observed that the irons on the felons were very light, which induces them to use exercise; and I am persuaded that a good gaoler can more easily manage his prisoners by humane attention than by severity and heavy irons.”*

*“Here the acquitted prisoners that are poor are kept in irons till the judge leaves the town, but others are immediately discharged.”*

*“A prisoner, Thomas Plat, lately died in one of the solitary cells, and the verdict of the coroner’s jury was, died by hunger and cold. Since this, the allowance was augmented.”*

*“The late gaoler, a man of remarkably vigorous constitution, destroyed himself by drinking in the prime of life.”*

*“In my various journeys in England and Wales, I have seen many houses defaced on account of the odious tax on windows, and I cannot help repeating my concern for its pernicious effects. I am persuaded it has a very bad influence on the health of the lower classes of people; and this may be one reason of their not having now such a healthy, ruddy complexion as they had formerly. The farmers’ servant having been crowded into unventilated rooms or holes, and our laboring poor having been*

*habituated to close habitations, they dislike, when they come into work houses, or hospitals, the admission of fresh air."*

*"In all my visits to the gaols and prisons, in this, and other kingdoms I never received any insults either from keepers or prisoners, nor have I lost anything in any of them, except, that in one of our prisons, I once lost a large new handkerchief out of my pocket, which I did not miss for some time, but on a subsequent visit, about ten months after, it was immediately presented to me by a prisoner, as he said, he believed that I had dropped it when I was here last."*

### **With all my Worldly Goods I Thee Endow**

The following long curious foot note is all the more interesting to me because I read it first in the K.P. Telescope, the publication of the prisoners in Kingston Penitentiary: *"Here was a prisoner, lately the widow of an old gentleman, who left her an estate of £300 per annum and about £7,000 in mortgages. She was afterwards married in Scotland to a Mr. Milbourne of this city (Carlisle) who soon spent £4,000, but upon some disagreement she refused to give up the mortgages of the other £3,000. By an attachment from the Court of Chancery, her husband sent her to the common gaol, which confinement prevented her compliance with an order for appearance at that court in fifteen days of St. Hilary's term next ensuing. At first, she was on the master's side; but the late gaoler, after cruelly seizing her clothes, etc., for chamber rent, turned her to the common side. She, not having the county allowance, supports herself by spinning and knitting, and the occasional kindness of her late husband's relations, while her present husband is living and rioting on her estate."*

*"By a letter dated the 14<sup>th</sup> of October, 1788, from a respectable gentleman at Carlisle, I am informed that Mrs. Milbourne is still in the gaol, and that for above two years, Mr. Milbourne did not give her one farthing, her sustenance being wholly on occasional charities, and the small earnings of spinning at which employment she could not get more than 4d. but now by practice and extremely close application (when health permits) – can earn 10d. a week. In March last her husband sent her twenty shillings, and in October 1788 (twenty seven weeks after) the same sum. The justices last quarter commiserating her hardships, have allowed the county bounty, the first shilling of which, this modest poor woman received the 11<sup>th</sup> of October, 1788."* My legal friends tell me that under our Married Woman's Property Act, this kind of thing could not happen among us.

### **Hospitals**

Howard extended his interests to include the inspection of hospitals. I was surprised to find so many patients in the day in hospitals, for example 428 in St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Smithfield, London. The accommodation in most of them would not compare favorably with that of a third rate boarding house.

Amputations then were often restored to and Howard has this comment: *"I searched in vain to find (what I often wished were a standing order in all hospitals) that no amputation should ever take place until after a consultation of three medical gentlemen, who shall be of unanimous opinion that it is absolutely necessary, and that there is no probability of effecting a cure without the use of knife and*

saw.” It should be remembered that that was before the time of anaesthetics and that besides the perhaps unnecessary loss of a limb, there was the excruciating pain of the operation.

Howard found a hospital for venereal disease only, and because it gives the religious motivation for his ministry of mercy I quote what he wrote in defense of such an institution: *“The disease which entitles the objects of this hospital to relief, is in itself extremely loathsome, and direful in its effects; and the unhappy sufferers, if poverty be their companion, are doubtless involved in the most deplorable wretchedness. Therefore their having brought on themselves the disease by their own sin and folly is no reason why they should be left to perish. A life lost to the public, from whatever cause, is still a loss. If we speak on the matter in a Christian view, how dare any, who profess to know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, make this an objection? Suppose the Redeemer had urged such a plea against becoming poor for our sakes; suppose he had said of us – ‘Leave those sinners to the consequence of their sin and folly, they are miserable, guilty, lost and undone, but it was their own fault – let them perish eternally – let the law take its vengeance on them – I’ll not become poor for their sakes, to save them from its curse, for they do not deserve what I should’ – had this been the language of our Lord, where had we now been? – we should not now be taking of his mercies, but feeling his righteous vengeance – not invited to an opportunity of showing pity and compassion to others, but ourselves in torment, crying in vain for a drop of water to cool our tongues.”*

Doctors have told me that modern medical science has taken this sting out of sin and that syphilis is not the menace that it used to be.

## **Scotland and Ireland**

In Scotland, persons could not be kept in prison for more than a month. There were few prisoners and Howard attributes this largely to the *“care which parents and ministers take to instruct the rising generation.”* He had great praise for the system of schools in every parish under the superintendence of the presbytery. In the southern parts of Scotland it was *“very rare that you meet with any persons that cannot both read and write. It is scandalous for any person not to be possessed of a Bible, which is always read in the parochial schools.”*

But all was not good in Scotland. *“Several of the transports were removed to a new prison adjoining to a poor-house. Each had a separate room (about six feet and a half by six). The rooms here not being very strong, the prisoners had chains on their feet and necks. The passage only two feet eight inches wide, most of the rooms were very offensive, and some very damp. No endeavors are used to reclaim these unhappy objects; whose long confinement together with the great severity of their chains, and their scanty food (being only two pennyworth of bread in a day) must reduce them to the extremity of misery and desperation.”*

*“The house of correction is under the infirmary for the soldiers. Besides the keeper’s apartment, there is only one room, which neither ceiled nor white-washed. The women are entitled to whatever they can earn by their labor, and there were elven of them spinning. But on Sundays, having no allowance or religious service, as the keeper informed me, they lie in bed.”*

In contrast to what he found in Scotland, Howard found in Ireland many prisoners and little provision for the education of the common people. Also, there was much drunkenness and brawling. In Ireland that act against detaining acquitted prisoners for gaoler's fees was not operative. "Even boys almost naked, and under the age of twelve, are sometimes confined two years for these fees, though amounting to no more than about forty shillings. But as those boys has been associated with the most profligate and abandoned felons for many months, I did not in the least wonder to find that some of them returned to their former habitation in a few days."

"Many of the women lay on flag-stones, with a very little straw worn to dust. On the men's side, several boys, from nine to twelve years of age, were confined with the most daring offenders. There are many instances of persons dying by intoxication and fighting; one lay dead when I was in the infirmary, and another was killed a few days after. I have good authority to assert, that in this prison a puncheon of whiskey has been drunk in a week. Garnish is not abolished; and prisoners will sell their bread at any price to procure spirituous liquors."

In sharp contrast – *"I found the House of Industry, as formerly , very clean and orderly, and the governors, with unabated assiduity and zeal, attending to this useful and humane institution. The bread and other provisions were very good. The governors have wisely adopted the Dutch mode of devoting the whole of Saturday to cleanliness, such as washing all the rooms, tables, forms, children, etc. This is not only conducive to the health of the residents, but it will promote in them habits of cleanliness. The number in this house May 31, 1787 was 1375, and March 24, 1788, was 1627."*

In Ireland there were 38 Charter Schools which were boarding schools for poor Roman Catholic children, 2 similar schools called Ranelagh Schools for Protestant children. Howard describes them one by one and his account mostly reads like pages out of Dickens. Clothes made of the worst materials, and infamously tacked together – dirty, much scald head – drunken masters and mistresses – main employment spinning, little attention to learning. But some of them were much better than the others.

## **Howard on Education**

Early in this story it was related how John Howard built and maintained schools for the children of the tenants of his estate at Cardington. He highly approved of the parish school system of Scotland. *"In Scotland, almost every village has its settled school-master; the beneficial effects of which are evident; for it is principally owing to this, that the numerous emigrants for that country, dispersed over almost all Europe, appear with credit, and advance themselves in their several stations. The Sunday schools lately established by the benevolence of the public in so many parts of England, will doubtless in some degree produce similar good effects; if the benefactors abate not of their zeal and attention."* The functions of Sunday schools then were much more general than they are now. A Sunday school at Londonderry opened December 5, 1785, was attended regularly by about sixty boys, two hours in the morning, and two in the evening.

The following extract from the considerations on the Chester School contains sentiments which I think very just. *"A strange and pernicious prejudice has too generally prevailed, against educating the children of the poor, so as to check the beneficence of the charitable and humane. Some have*

*absurdly maintained that the most ignorant are the most virtuous, happy and useful part of mankind. It is astonishing what injurious influence this doctrine has had, though so contrary to common sense and common observation. Let anyone recollect the character of bricklayers, joiners, shoe makers, and other mechanics, as well as of domestic servants, and he will certainly discover that the most honest, sober, industrious and useful both to their own families and the public are those who have been accustomed to attend divine service, and who were instructed, when young, in moral principles, reading, writing and accompts."*

Howard was very favorably impressed with a Quaker's school at Ackworth in York and copied the general rules of which this is one: *"That in the evening they collect themselves together and take their seats in the dining room and after answering to their names when called over, and attending such parts of the Holy Scriptures and other religious books, which may be read to them, they retire to their bed chambers, and undress with as much stillness as possible, folding up their clothes neatly, and putting them in their proper places, and they are tenderly advised to close, as well as begin the day, with the remembrance of the gracious Creator, whose mercies are over all His works."*

*"I cannot better conclude this subject than in the words of my learned, much respected and honored friend, Dr. Price, 'Seminaries of learning are the springs of society, which, as they flow foul of pure, diffuse through successive generations depravity and misery, or on the contrary, virtue and happiness. On the bent given to our minds as they open and expand, depends their subsequent fate; and on the general management of education depend the honor and dignity of our species'."*

## **Other Countries**

John Howard was an inveterate traveler and he wanted to find out all about prisons all over Europe. His earlier foreign visits were all in the central part of the continent, but later he visited the outlying countries.

### **Portugal:**

It will be remembered that he first started for Portugal in 1755 the year of the great earthquake in Lisbon, but he did not visit that country until 1783, almost thirty years afterwards. Imprisonment for debt was prohibited. Criminals were often kept in confinement for years before being brought to trial. At Lisbon he saw some convicts going from prison to embark for settlement in the Brazils.

### **Spain:**

In Spain certain churches were sanctuaries for criminals and within the sanctuary they could not be taken or punished. Howard thought the effect of this was to encourage crime. In this country through the good offices of an influential friend he entered the tribunal where the inquisition was held. But he was not permitted to enter the prisoner's quarters even though he offered to spend a month there to satisfy his curiosity.

**Denmark:**

*“At the entrance of many towns in Denmark, a whipping post stands conspicuous... gibbets and wheels are also placed on eminences, on which the bodies of malefactors are sometimes left after execution to deter others from their crimes.”*

What was called the Spanish Mantle was much dreaded. It was a kind of heavy vest, something like a tub, secured around the neck with irons, and those subjected to it were paraded through the city. It was a severe punishment and an indelible disgrace.

**Sweden:**

Here the houses were very clean and Howard hoped that the prisons might also be clean but he found them very dirty, even though many of them were near the water. The windows being kept shut, the air was close and foul, and Howard, inured as he was to such sights and smells, was made sick for a considerable time.

**Russia:**

*“In Russia (1781) the peasants and servants are bondmen or slaves, and their lords may inflict on them any corporal punishment, or banish them to Siberia, on giving notice of the offence to the police. But they are not permitted to put them to death. Should they, however, die by the severity of their punishment, the penalty of the law is easily evaded.”* Under Catherine the Great, Russia had been making great progress but not so much as some writers portrayed it. The criminal discipline of the country was much complicated by the universal system of serfdom. Debtors were considered as serfs and could work off their debt at the rate of twelve rouble (about forty eight shillings in English money) a year. All goals were controlled by the military and had no regular governors.

In Russia capital punishment had been abolished except for treason. But the knout was a fearful instrument of torture and could be made fatal on the instruction of the person directing the punishment. Howard witnessed two brutal beatings, a woman receiving twenty five strokes, and a man sixty strokes. The woman he saw a few days after in a very weakened condition but the man could not be found. He sought out the executioner and learned from him that he had been ordered so to wield the knout so that the man would die.

**Prisoners of War**

Howard lived in a time of many wars and consequently there were many prisoners of war. He found many of his countrymen prisoners of war at Dunkirk and Calais. *“Some were almost destitute of clothes, being the crews of vessels ship wrecked in the great storm of December 31, 1778.”* They were crowded and sleeping accommodation was not adequate. Those who could pay for it had better accommodation.

Visiting English prisoners of war in France, Howard received great complaints of the treatment of French prisoners of war in England. These French prisoners of war were certainly much better treated than were debtors and criminals but not so well as the American prisoners of war. However, his observations convinced him: *“That humanity and good policy require that an inspector of the*

*prisoners of war should be appointed, who should be obliged to report quarterly their state as to health, provisions, etc. The common men, besides their allowance, received a penny a day by order of the French court which was regularly paid every month much to the honor of France. The American prisoners then had an allowance from the State, paid by order of Dr. Franklin.”* This was the illustrious Dr. Benjamin Franklin.

At the time of Forton were received over a period of years:

American	1,200	Died	69
French	11,720	“	166
Spanish	3,028	“	167
Dutch	934	“	17

## **Transports and the Hulks**

For a great number of convicted prisoners, the penalty imposed was banishment from the realm and this involved some place to which they were to be transported. For fifty seven years (1718-1775) these convicts were taken to the American seaboard but this outlet was closed just prior to the War of American Independence. No doubt the American people, as did the Australians later, strenuously objected to the dumping of the off-scourings of British gaols in their midst. When there was no place to send them, and the prisons were being filled up with these convicts awaiting transportation, as a temporary expedient only, there were lodged in idle men of war and other ships, which came to be called the hulks. At first conditions were very bad, of which the mortality rate gives an accurate indication.

*“From August 1776, when the convicts were first put on board the vessels, to March 26, 1778, out of six hundred and thirty two prisoners which had been received one hundred and seventy six had died.”*

Public concern was aroused, and a parliamentary committee was appointed before which Howard appeared. Improvements soon followed. The loathsome and fatal stench which he had noticed on his first visits disappeared; better care was given to the sick and their irons were taken off, and the prisoners’ provisions, bedding and clothing were more adequate. Howard objected to the profanity which the guards used on the prisoners. *“Three miserable objects, for attempting to break out, were let down into a dreadful dark and deep hole at the bottom of the ship, where they lay, almost naked, upon a little straw, but, having been thus confined for some weeks, upon their earnest entreaties, I obtained their release.”*

Howard’s interested humanity on behalf of prisoners brought more immediate and direct results for those on the hulks than anywhere else and he could write, *“The situation of these unhappy people is greatly altered for the better.”*

Botany Bay, so called from its great variety of new plant, now a suburb of Sydney, was discovered by Captain Cook in 1770. Beginning in 1788 and continuing for fifty seven years until 1845 convicts were transported from Britain to Botany Bay and other penal settlements in Australia.

## Penitentiaries

When the transportation system broke down because there was no place to take the transports was an opportune time to introduce a better system but Howard missed this golden opportunity because he could not compromise and it was not until seventy years afterwards that the Penitentiaries Act, which had been passed in 1779, was finally put into operation.

This Act was drawn by two of the wisest men in England, Sir William Blackstone, the most eminent figure in English jurisprudence, and a Mr. Eden, who would be the same family as the recent Prime Minister of England. *“The Legislature fully expressed their wise and humane sentiments in the following terms: ‘that if many offenders convicted of crimes for which transportation had been usually inflicted, were ordered to solitary imprisonment, accompanied by well-regulated labor, and religious instruction, it might be the means, under Providence, not only of deterring others from the commission of the like crimes, but also of reforming the individuals, and inuring them to habits of industry.’”* The solitary imprisonment mentioned above does not mean what we call solitary confinement but that each man should have a cell to himself.

It was then a novel idea that some convicts might be reformed, that they were not all invincibly vicious, and to be treated like wild beasts. Howard himself did not at first hold this new idea. *“From greater experience, and longer observation, I am more firm in a remark which I formerly made on the notion, that convicts are ungovernable, which is certainly erroneous. There is a mode of managing some of the most desperate, with ease to yourself, and advantage to them. Many such are shrewd and sensible. Let them be managed with calmness, yet with steadiness; shew them that you have humanity, and that you aim to make them useful members of society; and let them see and hear the rules of the prison, that they be convinced that they are not defrauded in their provisions of clothes, by contractors or gaolers. When they are sick, let them be treated with tenderness. Such conduct will prevent mutinies in prisons, and attempts to escape; which I am fully persuaded are often owing to prisoners being made desperate by the profaneness, inhumanity and ill usage of their keepers.”*

*“Many have been reclaimed and made useful members of society, in foreign house of correction, and have thanked God for their confinement in them; these houses are called in Holland Verberter Huizen, that is, bettering houses; and, the settled objects in all such houses should be, to make men better, at least more useful subjects.”*

The English term Penitentiary is derived from the word penitent. *“The term Penitentiary clearly shows that parliament had chiefly in view the reformation and amendment of those to be committed to such places of confinement.”*

*“What I have been doing in collecting the regulations of some of the best directed houses of correction in Europe, and such as experience has proven practical, but endeavoring to facilitate the execution of this useful design? (i.e. reforming criminals). The decency, regularity and order that I observed in houses of correction in Holland, Hamburg, Bern, Ghent, Florence, etc., I am fully persuaded, proceeded in a great degree from the constant attention that is paid to impress the prisoners with a sense of RELIGION, by plain, serious discourse, catechising and familiar instruction from the chaplains, together with a good example, both in them and the keepers. These circumstances make a greater impression*

*on the minds of criminals when in prison, than they would have done before they came here. We have too much adopted the gothic mode of correction, viz, by rigorous severity, which often hardens the heart; while many foreigners pursue the more rational plan of softening the mind in order to its amendment."*

*"The Act of Parliament for Penitentiary houses was originally founded on the principle regulations of the Dutch rasp houses and spin houses; but has received many alterations and improvements."* There was certainly collaboration between Howard and the framer of this Act. Howard had a great admiration for Blackstone. *"The object I am sensible is great, but it is useful. If I should not be able to accomplish this good work, I would still endeavor to bring materials, and lay the foundation; that others, of more skill may afterwards undertake the benevolent task, and carry to perfection a plan, worthy of the great Sir William Blackstone, with whom I have had much conversation on this subject; a man of such vast extent of capacity as to have comprehended in one enlarged view, the whole fabric of our laws; who was able to reduce them to a regular system; and who further possessed, what is rarely united to great abilities, constancy to execute his immortal work."* Sir William's death was a great blow to Howard's cause.

The Act provided for the building of two penitentiary houses, the second for women, in the vicinity of London. Blackstone had persuaded Howard (who accepted this office with reluctance) to be the chairman of the three commissioners who had the authority to implement the Act. Howard was allowed to choose one of his associates, and he chose his friend, Dr. Fothergill; the third member was Mr. Whatley, treasurer of the Foundling Hospital, appointed by the minister.

The first task was to settle on a site and here the whole grand plan fell to the ground. Howard and Fothergill, after careful scrutiny, chose a place in Islington but Whatley thought it should be in Limehouse. Neither side would give way and after Fothergill died, Howard resigned and the whole project was dropped. Probably there was not too much enthusiasm for it anyway.

Howard gives, at length, ten reasons why the site at Islington was the best possible. He had and Dr. Fothergill been able to compromise, realizing that penitentiary at Limehouse, though the site was not nearly as good as at Islington, was much better than no penitentiary at all, probably the transportation of prisoners to Australia would never have been begun.

Howard thought the Act re Penitentiary Houses was wrong in admitting to them prisoners for one or two years for the reformation he hoped might be wrought in them could not be achieved in so short a time. He would have them built largely by the labor of the prisoners themselves, and many since have followed this practical and economical suggestion. For the Penitentiary Houses that might be built, he gives a plan and proposed regulations under the headings; security, health, diet, clothing, lodging, firing, religious instruction and morals, employment, rewards, punishments, treatment of sick, proceedings on death of prisoners, government of prison, and regulations made known.

### **Howard's Religious Motivation**

*"Those gentlemen who, when they are told of the misery our prisoners suffer, content themselves with saying let them keep out prefaced perhaps with an angry prayer, seem not duly sensible of the favor of*

*Providence which distinguishes them from the sufferers; they do not remember that we are required to imitate our gracious Heavenly Parent, who is kind to the unthankful and to the evil; they also forget the vicissitude of human affairs; the unexpected changes to which all men are liable; and that those whose circumstances are affluent, may in time be reduced to ignorance and become debtors and prisoners. And as to criminality, it is possible that a man who has often shuddered at hearing the account of a murder may, on strong temptation, commit that very crime; let him that thinks he standeth take heed lest he fall; and commiserate those that are fallen."*

*"To reform prisoners... should always be the leading view in every house of correction... as rational and immortal beings we owe this to them; nor can any criminality of theirs justify our neglect in this particular."*

## **The Crusade Against the Plague**

Many people know that John Howard was concerned for prison reform but few realize that he was also a pioneer in the field of public health. He had fought against the gaol fever and he had visited many hospitals and towards the close of his life he began a new crusade directed against the plague. This is the most dreadful and the most feared of all the diseases that has ever afflicted mankind. It was bred in filth and was chronically epidemic in the Levant. From here it spread out from time to time in epidemic waves two of which reached the shores of England. About the year 1300 and again in 1665 it invaded England and a great part of the population died from it. The fear and panic it caused was not the least of its evil effects. The year 1665 was not very long before Howard lived and the fear of the plague was strong in people's minds. To avoid like the plague is an expression easy to understand; but Howard resolved for the sake of humanity that he would, as it were, walk into the lion's mouth.

The great sea ports of the Mediterranean for protection against the plague had built lazarettos in which persons and cargoes were detained in quarantine. Howard thought that there should be a similar institution for the port of London. The principal import then from Egypt was cotton, a cargo in which the germs of the plague could easily lie hidden. This trade was mostly under the control of the Dutch, very largely because they were not so strict about observing quarantine regulations. In addition to the great reason for this lazaretto, the protection of the people of England, there was a secondary business reason, the help that it would give to British shipping. In the last edition of the State of the Prisons Howard expressed a wish, *"That some future traveller would give us plans of the lazarettos at Leghorn, Ancona and other places."* No such person came forward and so, *"At length I determined to procure these plans, and acquire all the necessary information respecting them, myself; and towards the end of the year 1785, I went abroad with the purpose of visiting the principle lazarettos in France and Italy. To the physicians employed in them, I proposed a set of queries respecting the nature and prevention of the plague; but their answers not affording satisfactory instruction, I proceeded to Smyrna and Constantinople."*

To make his findings more constructive, Howard asked his medical friends Dr. Aiken and Dr. Jebb for questions, the set of queries mentioned above, that he could put to medical in the Mediterranean. The first of these questions was, *"Is the infection of the plague frequently communicated by the touch?"* And the eleventh and last was, *"What are the means to prevent the plague, and stop its*

*contagion, and to purify infected places?”* The answers were various, and confusing, and not too helpful. There were then no medical journals, no general consensus of opinion among medical men, and each physician was quite independent in his opinions. But there was agreement that the plague was contagious, and that to cut off communication with the sources of infection was the best way to prevent its spread. Howard was thus confirmed in his opinion that the lazaretto he proposed was necessary for the protection of England.

Howard visited the lazarettos at Marseilles, Genoa, Leghorn, Naples, Valetta, Zante, Corfu and Venice. These he described in his last publication – “An account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe” and the plans of many of these were included. At Venice was the mother of all lazarettos and here the regulations were excellent, if better enforced. In this lazaretto Howard spent forty days quarantine which time he used to his best advantage. The walls of his room were saturated with disease, ill smelling and sickening. He found that his favorite remedy, lime white-wash applied scalding hot afforded great relief. As in his prison enquiries, Howard wanted inside information. The most amazing thing this man ever did was to seek passage in a ship with a foul bill of lading. He did not contract the plague on this voyage at the end of which he served the quarantine mentioned above. Howard seemed to be immune to the plague for he did not take it though he was in the presence of those who died from it.

In Constantinople at the time of Howard’s visit, the plague was raging with some virulence yet he visited the hospitals and fearlessly entered the dwellings of the stricken, the dying and the dead. Howard had never studied to be a doctor, but through his enquiries he had acquired a body of medical knowledge which he sometimes called upon to use. The favorite daughter of a powerful Mussulman was seized with a strange disease which baffled the medical celebrities and Howard was called in. Fortunately, his treatment proved efficacious and the grateful father wanted to press upon Howard a large monetary reward. This Howard refused but chose rather a bunch of grapes from his sumptuous garden.

Nothing much need be said about Howard’s visit to Smyrna, except that here he was at last in what might be called the plague capital of the world.

### **An Encounter with a Pirate Ship**

Our hero did not seek adventure, though perhaps secretly he relished it, but with all his travelling it would have been strange if he did not meet with some stirring adventures. *“A few days after leaving Modon, we had a smart skirmish with a Tunisian privateer. In this skirmish, one of our cannon charged with spike-nails, etc., having accidentally done great execution, the privateer, immediately, to our great joy, hoisted its sails and made off. This interposition of Providence saved us from a dreadful fate; for I understand afterwards, that our captain, expecting that either immediate death, or perpetual slavery at Tunis be the consequence of being taken, had determined to blow up the ship rather than surrender.”* Howard does not mention it in the account above but his biographer says that it was Howard himself who aimed and fired the shot that discomfited and drove off the enemy.

## Farewell and Final Journey

On the return from this voyage to the Mediterranean crusading against the plague, Howard might well have retired to Cardington and there spent the rest of his life in ease and comfort. But he never could have contented himself with slippers and an easy chair. He determined on a journey to Russia, Turkey, and the far East. Just how far east he meant to go will never be known for he died in the midst of his journey. This is his valedictory to his countrymen: "To my country I commit the result of my labors. It is my intention again to quit it for the purpose of visiting Russia, Turkey and some other countries, and extending my tour in the east. I am not insensible of the dangers that must attend such a journey. Travelling however, in the protection of that kind Providence which hitherto has preserved me, I calmly and cheerfully commit myself to the disposal of unerring wisdom. Should it please God to cut off my life in the prosecution of this design, let not my conduct be uncandidly imputed to rashness or enthusiasm, but to a serious deliberate conviction that I am pursuing the path of duty; and to a sincere desire of being made an instrument of more extensive usefulness to my fellow creatures than could be expected in the narrower circle of a retired life."

With these forebodings, his farewells to his friends and tenants before this last journey, were particularly solemn. On July 5, 1789, he left the shores of England for the last time. He landed at Amsterdam and travelled through Germany to Russia. He became involved in the distresses of a Russian soldier. *"In these forced marches of recruits over horrid roads, being ill-clothed and worse fed, he found that thousands fell sick by the way, dropped at the roadside and were either left there to die of starvation, or transferred to miserable hospitals, where fever soon finished what fatigue had begun. This waste of life was quite systematic."* Howard's warfare against man's inhumanity to man begun at Bedford Gaol in southern England, was to end in Cherson in southern Russia at the mouth of the Dnieper River and on the shores of the Black Sea, Russia was then at war with Turkey, and at Cherson was one of the military hospitals that Howard so deplored. *"The primary objects in all hospitals seem here neglected – namely, cleanliness, air, diet, separation and attention. These are such essentials that humanity and good policy equally demand that no expense should be spared to procure them. Care in this respect I am persuaded, would save many more lives than the parade of medicines in the adjoining apothecary's shop."* At Cherson, Howard was called upon to tend a young society lady who had contracted virulent fever. He contracted this same fever and, after a short sickness, died of it.

## Two Tributes

When the news of his death finally reached England, the group that had been interested in a memorial to him became active. Though he was a Dissenter, his was the first statue placed in St. Paul's Cathedral, rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren after the great fire of London in 1666.

Upon its pedestal is the inscription:

THIS EXTRAORDINARY MAN HAD THE FORTUNE TO BE HONOURED  
WHILST LIVING  
IN THE MANNER WHICH HIS VIRTUES DESERVED  
HE RECEIVED THE THANKS  
OF BOTH HOUSES OF THE BRITISH AND IRISH PARLIAMENTS  
FOR HIS EMINENT SERVICES RENDERED TO HIS COUNTRY AND TO MANKIND  
OUR NATIONAL PRISONS AND HOSPITALS  
IMPROVED UPON THE SUGGESTION OF HIS WISDOM  
BEAR TESTIMONY TO THE SOLIDITY OF HIS JUDGEMENT  
AND THE ESTIMATION IN WHICH HE WAS HELD  
IN EVERY PART OF THE CIVILIZED WORLD  
WHICH HE TRAVERSED TO REDUCE THE SUM OF HUMAN MISERY  
FROM THE THRONE TO THE DUNGEON HIS NAME WAS MENTIONED  
WITH RESPECT, GRATITUDE AND ADMIRATION  
HIS MODESTY ALONE  
DEFEATED VARIOUS EFFORTS THAT WERE MADE DURING HIS LIFE  
TO ERECT THIS STATUE  
WHICH THE PUBLIC HAS NOW CONSECRATED IN HIS MEMORY  
HE WAS BORN AT HACKNEY, IN THE COUNTY OF MIDDLESEX  
SEPT. 11th 1616  
THE EARLY PART OF HIS LIFE HE SPENT IN RETIREMENT  
RESIDING PRINCIPALLY UPON HIS PATERNAL ESTATE  
AT CARDINGTON, IN BEDFORDSHIRE  
FOR WHICH COUNTY HE SERVED IN THE OFFICE OF SHERIFF IN THE  
YEAR 1673  
HE EXPIRED AT CHERSON, IN RUSSIAN TARTARY, ON THE  
22th OF JUNE, 1696  
A VICTIM TO THE PERILOUS AND BENEVOLENT ATTEMPT TO ASCERTAIN  
THE CAUSE OF, AND FIND AN EFFECACIOUS REMEDY  
FOR THE PLAGUE  
HE TROD AN OPEN BUT UNFREQUENTED PATH TO IMMORTALITY  
IN THE ARDENT BUT UNINTERMITTED EXERCISE OF  
CHRISTIAN CHARITY  
MAY THIS TRIBUTE TO HIS FAME  
EXCITE AN EMULATION OF HIS TRULY GLORIOUS ACHIEVEMENTS

Much shorter and simpler, perhaps even higher in its praise,  
is the inscription over his tomb at Cherson:

JOHN HOWARD  
WHOEVER THOU ART, THOU STANDEST AT  
THE TOMB OF THY FRIEND

1790