

convicts are scattered over the State on farms, having no one to administer to their physical, moral or spiritual needs but a host of inhuman, brutal convict guards. When a fresh convict is carried to the farms, he is taken down by the other convicts and beaten, at the command of the guard, and that, too, with a large piece of cowhide. The guard takes this method of taming the newcomer. Of course this lays him up, but in a few days he is hauled out of his sick quarters and put to work, whether he is physically able to do it or not. The law provides that a convict physically unable to work shall not be required to do so, such inability to be ascertained by the examination of the penitentiary physician. But, convicts on farms, who are mostly colored, have no physician to determine such inability, and even when sick and dying have none, unless the hiring planter, who has no particular interest in saving his life, sees fit to employ one. In many cases sick convicts are made to toil until they drop dead in their tracks. Many again, driven to desperation by inhuman treatment, seek to relieve themselves by attempting to escape when the chances are against them, thus inducing the guards to shoot them, which they are ready to do on the slightest pretext. Others are maltreated by being placed in the pillory or stocks until they are dead or nearly so. When convicts are brutally murdered, nothing is done with their slayers unless the indignant citizens are prompt in insisting upon their punishment. In nine cases out of ten, parties sent to investigate these occurrences report the killing justifiable, because guards and their friends find it convenient to make it appear so. When legislative committees visit one of these convict camps, they always find the convicts ready to report that they are well treated, because all of them, both white and black, are previously warned by their guards to report thus or accept the consequences which will surely follow. Again we will state, although the law justifies the killing of a convict escaping from the penitentiary, when his escape can be prevented in no other way, still we fail to see wherein it can be justified when the convict is carried on a farm, away from the penitentiary, and given a chance to escape only to be deliberately shot down in attempting to do so. We believe such to be deliberate murder, and should be punished as such. Believing that most of the evils can be remedied by the appointment of a colored inspector who is a humane man, having power to investigate the affairs of convict camps and the management of convict labor on private farms, therefore, we recommend to the Governor and Board such an appointment at the earliest possible moment. We recommend also, that as most of the State convicts are colored, that there be appointed at least one colored commissioner of penitentiaries. Though our men and youths are sent to the penitentiary to be reformed, in most cases they are made worse by the inhumanities and immoral habits of their guards, who, in many cases, are worse morally than the convicts themselves. We think that this Convention should pass a resolution condemning, in strongest terms, the practice of yoking or chaining male and female convicts together. This is an act of officials,