SKETCHER.

THE ISLE OF UNREST.—I.

H.M. PENAL ESTABLISHMENT, ST HELENA.

By S. K

Like the side of some mammoth battleship looms the island of St. Helena in the distance as we stand on the deck of the Otter, and each swish of the propeller brings it into greater prominence. Soon the battleship form fades away, and in its stead appears a strangely picturesque islet. What a contrast is here—a low shore of rather forbidding aspect, and above this a cliff-like rise, with a long building perched on its summit; then, just a little bit to one side a cluster of cornfields; gloom and shadow on the one side, on the other a wavy mass of green, and round the whole the ocean, fretting and bubbling in a line of snowy foam. Gloom and shadow—ay, and grandeur, for there is something in that great sweep upwards towards the sky that is strangely fascinating to the spectator.

Such is our first glance at the island into whose secrets we are about to peep. Quietly round to the landing place slips the Otter, with ever slackening speed till a last throb of the screw drives her alongside the wooden wharf. Passing through a file of blue-capped warders we are greeted by a dignified, bearded gentleman in mufti —Mr. Ryan, the superintendent of the prison. He takes us out to the kangaroo, a curious little car running on rails, worked by four Kanakas in a manner almost precisely similar to the railway tricycle, and having seats on the back and front. The Kanakas bend backwards and forwards quickly like so many automatons, and the car spins along the stone breakwater that leads out to the jetty, passing on the way a beautifully finished tramcar designed by a warder and made with prison labour. As the speed increases, the reason for the curious name given to our vehicle soon becomes manifest, for the "kangaroo" has in truth an alarming "hop." However, everything has an end, and we arrive at last on the shore, breathless and thankful. Embarking in an antiquated waggonette, we rattle along a well laid out and broad-gravelled road that leads up to the Stockade. On the left the ocean sweeps in semicircularly, on the right is a grassy upland, and on the front is a gentleman brimming over with fun and good nature. Are we really on the grim prison isle that imagination has so often painted? We have scarcely asked ourselves the ques-

We have scarcely asked ourselves the question before the light is shut out by a lofty stockade, massively built, and beside this appears a sentry-box on stilts, holding inside a watchful warder, who stands close beside his loaded carbine. A little further on is a heavy iron gate leading into the interior of the prison, with three warders looking through the bars. The gate opens, and we pass through into Avernus.

St. Helena is not by any means a modern prison, for instead of being circular and all the passages leading to a common centre, it is oblong, and the different ways converge only on the gate. Mr. Ryan hands us over for the present to the watchful care of the chief warder, Mr. Bowden, a delightful personage in khaki, brisk and keen-witted, and, like the superintendent, quite free from any overbearing or "little tyrant" manner. "What would you like to see first—the cells or the workshops? The workshops? Right, come along this way, please." A second iron gate folds back, and we are ushered into a little courtyard, then turn to the right, and proceeding along a veranda, arrive at a big building, to which the chief points meaningly. It is divided into two long rooms, separated by a wooden partition.

In the first room is a babel of conflicting sounds. There is the banging of hammers, the zir-r-r of flying machinery, and the click of tools. On the left are bootmakers, and on the right saddlers, brushmakers, and bookbinders. Rows of quiet men, in the regulation prison suits stamped with the broad arrow, and numbered one, two, three, or four as the case may be, are busily engaged in sewing and cutting leather, controlling machines, &c. Each has something to do, and a warder stands ready to admonish or instruct. The official comes up and explains the modus operandi of what we see. "This is what we call a pressing machine," he says, showing us a little metal stamper; "it makes an ordinary flap of leather into imitation pigskin. You notice that the leather is placed on a copper plate with a raised surface, then the top jaw comes down, and the leather is covered with tiny holes that make it look just like pigskin with the bristles taken out." Humph! Extremely honest! Another instrument, euphoniously termed the "Devil," is used for teasing out doe hair, to be used in stuffing saddles. The rough coarse hair is put in at one end, number so-and-so turns a handle, and a ball of silky filaments comes out at the other. Close beside this are the finished saddles, and they compare very favourably with the work of Brisbane saddlers. Turning to the bootmakers, we watch for a moment or two the ordered pandemonium before

ing to the bootmakers, we watch for a moment or two the ordered activity before us. Again machinery is very much in evidence—namely, a "stamping" machine, which, operated by a treadle, brings a sharp-edged cutter on to the leather placed upon it, and cuts out innumerable soles and heels, the size varying with the dimensions of the cutter; and a pair of heavy rollers for hardening and levelling the leather required for the boots. Besides the trades already mentioned there are two or three others going on in the same room, such as binding brushes, and making horse rugs and tents. It is a curious experience, and not altogether a pleasant one, to stand for the first time among a score or so of imprisoned men, all armed with sharp-edged tools and hammers. Thirty prisoners are employed in room No. 1, and a score of these find employment in the boot trade. The bookkeeper informs us that work begins at 7 o'clock in the morning, and goes on till 11.30 a.m., when they "knock off" for dinner. At 1 p.m. they resume their labour, and work on till tea time at 4.30 p.m. Tea lasts for an hour, and then they are taken to their sleeping apartments, having done the eight hours' manual labour required. "Do you sell the boots, saddles, &c.?" is the question that very naturally suggests itself. "Oh, no; we supply all our own needs first, and then send the remainder up to the Government Storekeeper. The saddles mostly go to the Mounted Police, the tents to the Defence Force, and the brushes are used in the Government institutions."

It is a pleasant change to move into room No. 2, passing as one does from noise to almost absolute quiet, and we feel more at home in the tailoring department, for only an expert can hope to thoroughly understand the somewhat complex work of the different machines used in the room we have just left behind us. In the cloth room thirty-one men are hard at work converting snowy heaps of material into shirts, trousers, &c. At the end nearest to us nearly all the men are coloured—Chinese, aboriginals, Kanakas, &c. "We make it a rule to keep all the blacks and Chinamen together, if it is at all possible," says the tailoring expert, "for the whites do not like being closely associated all day with men of an alien race." With this timely explanation we start off round the benches, seeing first the novices at work making their own shirts and other garments. Then come the more learned members of the profession, who are sewing away at some rough tweed, making garments for the pensioners at Dunwich and Goodna, and like happy places. Alongside of these are men who have thoroughly learned their trade, and are employed making greatcoats of blue venetian cloth for the warders and police. Once a week each prisoner receives so much work, and he is held directly responsible for its completion within a specified time. "Do you notice these long white slips of cloth?" queries the warder. "They are to be made into slippers for use in this room. The tailors take off their heavy boots when beginning work of a morning, and put on these slippers. In connection with the three steps or grades in clothes making which I have just shown you, the prisoners find it much easier to turn off a good pair of trousers than a well-finished coat. You will be surprised to hear that we turn out about 2000 flannel shirts every year." Flannel shirts are no doubt very interesting, but all our time is taken up watching a new arrival from below—from the tinshop, you understand, on the ground floor—a broad-shouldered Hercules, carrying up hot irons, for cloth-pressing, by means of a hook fitted in where his hand ought to be. Perhaps the chief warder noticed that flannel shirts did not seem attractive, for he suggested an adjournment to the tinshop below, and we followed on the heels of our friend with the hook.

The tinshop is long and most of the available space is filled up with tanks, buckets, tins, &c., in and around which four men are dodging with redhot irons, and formidable hammers. If the gentlemen employed here should decide to "argue" with Mr. Rawlinson, the instructor, they could do it so thoroughly that there wouldn't be enough of him left to solder a bucket with. All the work looks very well; everything will bear inspection, and we are unable to detect any flaws either in the workmanship or the quality. In one corner a smith is lit up by the ruddy glare from a forge, and he looks very fearsome as he bends a dirt-grimed face over the redhot coals. Next inspected are two labour-saving machines, one a curving machine for bending corrugated iron, and the other a guillotine for cutting up tin. Tank-making is a speciality of the instructors, and he points with pardonable pride to the various sorts, ranging in capacity from 400 to 1400 gallons, turned out entirely by prison labour. A waterproof paint, made of pitch and red oxide does away with the chance of lead poisoning.

As a rule if prisoners on admission ask to be put to a particular trade, they are put to it, providing their sentences and qualifications allow; otherwise they are

qualifications allow; otherwise they are placed where required. In fact so cleverly do the prison authorities arrange matters that St. Helena is practically self-supporting.

Leaving the "tinkers" behind, we wander through into an adjoining yard, and visit the premises occupied by the blacksmiths and carpenters. Mr. Smith, the gentleman in charge, is an old identity of the island, and behind his long black beard he conceals a wonderful amount of fun. The workshop of the blacksmiths is made of the island stone, quarried by prisoners. Among the many articles turned out by the two smiths are horseshoes, farm implements, police beds, and a sanitary-cart—truly a motley collection! The carpenters, six in number, have a large and airy building. A really capital tramcar, made from all sorts of odds-and-ends is shown as a specimen of their handicraft. In the encircling yard may be seen a coal shed, and a place for storing up the carpenters' wood, also a long array of moleskins, blue jumpers, and such like dainty garments, strung out on clothes' lines. So much for the workshops

The kitchen, situated near one corner of the stockade, looks like an immense laundry with the thick clouds of steam rising from the boilers placed at one end, and heated by a big fire. In one boiler is "hominy," or maizemeal, thick and white, and very appetising—to those that like it. In another great steam can is meat, and a third holds a plentiful supply of soup for the coming Wednesday. The ordinary prison daily ration consists of 20oz. of bread, 16oz. of meat, 6oz. of maizemeal, 12oz. of vegetables, ½oz. of rice or barley, 3oz. of sugar, and ⅛oz. each of salt, tea, and soap. In addition to this bill of fare soup is served out on Sundays and Wednesdays. Food is issued in mess-tins that hold provisions for five or six men. Next to the kitchen is the bakehouse, and the white-capped and clean-aproned baker in charge is literally between two fires, since he does his work sandwiched in between a pair of huge ovens. Here all the bread for the prison is baked, and the tables are piled up with crisp brown loaves, that look very tempting to a hungry Pressman. Outside is the wood house, up to which a trolly runs, in order to convey bread, wood, &c., to the various prison yards. More interesting still is a tank with cleverly contrived pipes. Into this big receptacle all the waste water and rubbish is thrown, and bubbling along the sewage pipes, shoots out into the waves far below. Right away from the odour of kitchen and sewage tank is the house reserved for meat curing. Though small, the walls are snowy white, and the place reeks of cleanliness. The ventilation is as nearly perfect as human skill can make it.

A wall shuts off the meat-curing establishment from the hospital enclosure; on the top of this wall we notice another sentry, armed like the first one with rifle, bayonet, and revolver. He presses down a rod, and a gap appears in the solid partition in front. Passing through, we examine with some amount of curiosity a kind of triangular roof appearing above the ground. Mr. Bowden lifts off this covering, and we look down into a big underground tank, dome-shaped, 22ft. in depth and 18ft. in diameter. A garden ablaze with colour, with lovely lily sprays, and climbing roses, and a dozen other sorts of flowers, with the smell of the green fields still clinging round it, stands out gem-like in the dark setting around. As we drift, rather than walk, through this fairy bower towards the cottage in the background, our worthy guide informs us that we are now standing in the hospital garden, on the way to the hospital. A prisoner stands at the door, and his hand rises mechanically to the salute. At present the ward is empty, and the twelve beds are folded up neatly, waiting the "visitor" that may be expected at any moment. Everything has a spick and span appearance, and the breeze blows unchecked through the windows and out at the door. We are then shown an enamelled iron bath set on wheels, used to bathe sick prisoners in.

Dr. Wray, the Government Medical Officer, comes down once a week to visit the prisoners and see that everything is as it should be. He is usually accompanied by the visiting justice, Mr. Yaldwyn, who hears any complaints the men may have to make. In Dr. Wray's absence Mr. Henry, one of the warders, looks after the dispensing. This functionary is a born humorist, and his plan of operations may be summarised as follows:—If a convict is sick, give him a dose of "white mixture"—this is quite sure to keep him going. If the sick man happens to be a warder, give him two pills of podophyllin; should he not feel better, give him another two. Unfortunately, however, a warder is mostly born without any sense of humour, and as four pills are nearly as bad as a dose of "white mixture," Mr. Henry has to be an expert dodger. As it is, he looks somewhat scarred and "warder-beaten."

"Come along and see the cells and the prison-yards," says the chief warder; then

prison-yards," says the chief warder; then we plunge from the light into semi-darkness, into the very heart of the prison.

(To be continued.)