

ST. HELENA : GAOL GRIEVANCES.

A CONVICT'S CHRONICLES.

No. 1.

How many of those who go down to the Bay to take their pleasures ever think as they pass the pretty island of St. Helena of those confined in this the chief penal establishment of Queensland—of the dreary monotony of their daily existence, of the hearts fretting for liberty, of the characters slowly but surely deteriorating in the almost moral atmosphere in which they have for a time to mature? Here is the daily round on the island for the 170 or more prisoners confined there. At this time of year all rise at the sound of a bell at 8 a.m. except the dairymen, cooks, and some few others who have to rise much earlier. The 24 hours of the day are apportioned as follows: 8 hours work, 13½ hours in cells or wards, and 2½ hours in the yards.

AFTER THE BELL RINGS,

five minutes are allowed within which hammocks must be rolled up and the night-buckets brought out and emptied into a hole in the yard, which hole is flushed with water through a drain into the sea and scrubbed daily by the black convicts who live in that particular yard. At the present time there are four blacks confined there and one white man, a lamp-trimmer. It may be interesting to know that these men have their food in this yard, and the blacks make a bath of the hole. Each man as he empties his bucket into the hole has to salute the warden, and the idea of a man with a hammock over his shoulder and a night-bucket in his hand saluting a warden is worthy of—well, St. Helena. Breakfast

CONSISTS OF HOMINY

which is brought into the yards in "kits" (tin dishes 4 inches deep and about 14 inches in diameter.) Each kit contains the portions of five or six men who mess together, and five or six kits are brought into each yard. Hominy is described as simply vile and is never touched by men on indulgence allowance, (sugar and full ration of bread) unless it is to spread on some bread saved from dinner the day before. Indulgence allowance is only granted after the probationary period is over, and this probationary period depends on previous convictions. If there are two previous convictions the period is six months, if three, nine months and so on. Tea and sugar are served out with full indulgence allowance.

Work commences about 7 a.m. Some go to their trades—saddlery, boot making, tailoring and so on, while the others go

TO OUTSIDE WORK,

driving, cart driving, and so on. All are clad in the one garb—molesters, cabbage-tree hat, underfannel, and twill cotton over-shirt. One change of these clothes is allowed per week, except to men in billets who never get any dirty work to do—they get two changes. Every suit is branded with the warden's number and "St. Helena Penal Establishment." If by chance a man gets his clothes worn or torn, he goes to the store and gets what is known as a suit of "duck egg" clothes to wear while his own are being washed or repaired. These "duck eggs" are suits which have been condemned. They are all branded with the broad arrow. As the men go out to work they have to

SALUTE THE WARDEN

at the gate—St. Helena is all salutation. The dinner bell rings at 11.50—2½ of meat, about the same of bread, and ½ lb. of sweet potatoes, which are always stringy and generally more wood than potato. After dinner, the kits, knives, forks, and so on, have to be washed up and put in the indulgence box. Then the billeted men are

on, have to be washed up and put in the indulgence box. Then the billeted men are called out, and quarter of an hour afterwards, the general and gangmen go to work, saluting the warden at the gate as they pass out. At 3.40, a flag goes up to recall the outside workers into the stockade. Five minutes afterwards a bell is rung, and the men are counted in by the warders, each man saluting the chief warden or the comptroller. Anyone not in when the bell rings or who fails to salute is liable to punishment. Supper consists of

HOMINY AND WATER,

except for the indulgence men who also have tea and sugar. Then, after washing-up, three-quarters of an hour's recreation (save the mark) in the yards is allowed. After which, the bell rings for roll-call. The men

are ranked up in silence, answer their names, and salute the warden. They are then searched before the superintendent, and must not forget to salute, after which they go to their wards or cells, are locked up, sing out, "Right, sir," salute again, and have to keep silence until the superintendent goes his round with the chief warden on duty for the "dog watch," who presently sings out "Right, men," when talking is allowed for one hour. Then "Silence" is ordered, after which any talking or noise up to the time of the morning bell is punishable. The hour's talk is a privilege

VERY HIGHLY ESTEEMED,

but it means more to men in the wards than to those in the cells. The former can have free communication with their fellow unfortunates, the latter can only talk through the walls of their cells. Some cells are 4ft. x 9ft., others 5ft. x 9ft., and the furniture consists of a hammock, bedding, and a night-bucket. A pint of water is also supplied. The bedding consists of three half-blankets. Except in the observation cells, once locked up, a man is entirely private and cannot be spied on from the outside. Cells and wards are arranged on either side of a brightly-lit passage, along which the warders patrol at night. In each ward are twelve men, six on each side, three above and three below, a narrow passage running up the centre, and an oldrum for a night-bucket stands at the head of the passage. The hammocks are slung from the walls and

TWO IRON BARS.

These bars, from the passage-way, are the only convenience the men have and it can be imagined what a fearful stretch those whose hammocks are over or near this bucket have to endure all night. While on this repulsive subject, it may be as well to mention that the emptying of the bucket is a fruitful source of complaint. The men arrange among themselves who shall do so and constantly complaints are being made to the Superintendent about the matter. Prisoners are allowed books, and those in cells can read as long as the daylight lasts. Those in the wards are better off, if their hammocks happen to be near the doors, which are made of upright battens, six inches apart, for the light in the passage

BURNS ALL NIGHT

and they can read as long as they like. Even with this advantage, however, most men far prefer the cells to the wards, and it is no wonder when one considers the talk likely to be carried on between 12 desperate men deprived of their liberty, and reflects on the filthy crimes which it is openly said are, at times, committed by them. As has been said, the men in the cells cannot be spied on from the outside except in the observation cells. These are used for the confinement of

men who are sick or suspected of an inclination to suicide or masturbation and so on. These can be watched, unknown to themselves at any time.

Confinement to cells (for dark cells) is the chief form punishment takes on St. Helena. Seven days light cells means that a man is kept that number of days

IN A SMALL CELL.

for 24 hours out of the 24, and, is only allowed half-rations. He is allowed one hour's exercise in the probation yard, which is about 25 yards long by six or seven yards wide. Only one man is allowed to exercise at a time, and the warders on probation duty take it week about to look after them. Most warders' duties are taken for a week at a time, Frimston, the warden who counts in and out at the gate is on duty for a week. If seven days confinement to cells is given by a magistrate the prisoner loses three weeks' indulgence; if it is given by the superintendent he loses 15 days for every seven off his remission (two months in every 12). On completion of his punishment the man is returned to his yard. Confinement

IN THE DARK CELLS

is for the same number of hours as in the ordinary cells—23 out of 24, and the loss of indulgence is at the same rate. In this connection days on remand before punishment count as punishment.

The sick are not too well treated at St. Helena. If a man goes sick he is placed in

a small cell on sick ration, that is, about half the full ration. He is allowed no tea, and—greatest deprivation of all—no book. An old warden does him with oil (the only medicine) if he considers he requires a dose. If the patient's temperature rises above a certain point he is sent to the hospital for treatment, otherwise he may remain in the cells for months. Not so long ago, Joe Friaby, who was sick in his cell, hung himself there, and was only discovered by chance before

LIFE WAS EXTINGUISHED.

He was at once cut down and sent to the hospital. Men suffering, not from their own illness, have been known to be kept three months in their cells, simply because apparently the old warden aforesaid did not think they were fit subjects for hospital. The doctor visits the island once a week, unless in a case of urgency, when he is wired for. The sick in cells are supposed to carry out and empty their own buckets, but if they are obviously unable to do so a black-fellow is employed for the purpose. Can anything more barbarous be conceived—men suffering from or sickening for perhaps a serious disorder, left in solitude entirely to their own resources except for the tender mercies of an ignorant old warden. Can any treatment more calculated to drive a man to despair

AND SELF-DESTRUCTION

be imagined? The commissariat department at St. Helena causes much complaining. Until two months ago, when three supply boats were put on, the meat was constantly rotten, so rotten that it could be noticed as soon as the men entered the yard. Complaints to the superintendent were frequent, but productive of nothing; he would say the meat was good, and the men could get no redress. The meat is taken from the boat to the butchers, weighed, and the best of it is taken for the superintendent, the comptroller, and the chief warden. Then what is to go to the prisoners is chopped up for the messes according to scale, under the supervision of the warden in charge and chief cook. It is put into nets,

TROWN INTO A BARROW

and wheeled to the kitchen, where seven convict cooks are employed. There it is generally boiled, and the cooks can take

convict cooks are employed. There it is generally boiled, and the cooks can take what they want for themselves and their pals, as the warden in charge never sees the meat cooked. When cooked, the warden in charge sees it put on the trolleys for the yards. The men constantly complain of short weight. They take the meat up, and it is weighed, and a ration has been found to scale only 8 oz., bones included, instead of 1 lb. This reduction in weight is said to be due to cooking, that is all the satisfaction the men get. If the meat is bad—that is, so bad as to be notifiable, charcoal is thrown into the boiler. This has the effect of taking the smell away, but of course does not affect the

QUALITY OF THE MEAT.

If, however, the men take the meat to the superintendent with a complaint, he simply sniffs it, says "there's no smell," and the men are sent away without any redress. If matters go so far that the cook and butchers are called up, they, of course, side with the superintendent. The stereotyped answer is always returned to the complainants, "It's as good as you'd get outside." On one occasion lately, tainted meat was taken by the prisoners before the doctor, who admitted it was not good, but nothing was done. The trouble seems to lie in the fact that the warden who supervises the kitchen has also charge of the bakery. He is a baker by trade, and it is easy to see where he would be likely to put in most of his time. In many cases he cannot

SATISFACTORILY SUPERVISE

both departments. It has been suggested that the cooks should be placed on the same scale as the other prisoners, and the cooking carried out under the eye of a warden specially detailed for that duty, also that the cooks should feed with the other prisoners. The scale laid down is acknowledged to be ample, if only it is properly cooked and served out, and no skimming occurs. The wardens, of whom there are 40 on the island are, take them all round, a good body of men, who perform a very obnoxious duty firmly and impartially. Of course, there are black sheep among them, and the prisoners' chief complaint against them is that they are too apt to make favorites. This, of course, is an indictment which could be levelled against the bulk of humanity, but if there are men

WHO SHOULD BE CAREFUL,

more than others that they should never be liable to a suspicion of favouring one more than another, they are prison wardens—men

who are responsible for the care, well-being, and safe custody of those who have broken society's laws. It is openly said on the island that if a prisoner, perhaps inadvertently, makes himself objectionable to the warden, he is blackballed and is constantly "brought up." A case is cited of a prisoner who requested to be transferred to Hogg's road on account of the way he was persecuted at St. Helena. The most coveted positions among the prisoners are billets—vauman, buggyman, hospital man, clerk, and so on. These men are allowed to go about practically unwatched, though most of them have to attend the roll call, some do not even

HAVE TO DO THAT.

In the making of these appointments, it is said the greatest favoritism is shown, and the men, knowing this, plot, mine, and countermine. "Informing" to curry favor is resorted to, and all sorts of underhand work indulged in. A striking example of the extent to which favoritism is carried is afforded by the "pet crowd." These men do simply as they like. They have two good meat meals a day, butter, milk, and so on.

(To be continued.)