

# Tyrants of St. Helena

## Some Facts & Reflections

### About Queensland's Inferno

Which Cant Describes as a Reformatory Institution !

(BY PROSCRIPTUS.)

"Queensland's Inferno" may sound "strong," but the feature of this exposure will be solid facts and sober argument. It is not the usual growl about the food—not the weak abuse of someone who has discovered a few warders or officials who have, like everyone else, made mistakes, but a revelation of facts which defy contradiction, or even modification—facts which should make decent citizens indignant, and everyone who boasts of this as a Christian community feel ashamed.

When the reader saw the word "Tyrants" in the head-lines, he probably had visions of scenes so ably described in "The Term of His Natural Life," and so weakly aped by dozens of writers since, who had some little personal vendetta to execute. But although the superintendent, Mr. James Ryan, was exceptionally severe on the writer, and kept him at work he knew he heartily detested, and refused to give him hard, active work, only a small-minded bitterness could make anyone blind to the strict sense of duty which distinguished the actions of that responsible official. Never was there a gaol official more conscientious, and no reasonable man would accuse him of wilful injustice. And the warders? Yes; more than one has done the writer a wrong. But the worst one of the three who did is only worth forgetting. And during the whole time, the writer never saw a deliberate, studied act of spiteful tyranny on the part of any official who is employed at the establishment. Unfortunately for the prestige of the medical profession, writer conscientiously can set down no word of approval in connection with Dr. Dods, so will make no comment.

Who, then, are the "tyrants"? Who are those who know neither decency nor humanity? My reply is, "Some of the prisoners themselves." The "heads"—the "professors of the University of Crime"—the distinguished members of

#### THE CLEVER BRIGADE

And while it must be clearly understood that there is sufficient "overseeing" (a warder continuously in sight) to limit their corruption to idle conversation, and the almost continual glorification of law-breaking of every kind, the conditions make it a million to one against any young prisoner coming out of St. Helena with the little good he might have possessed when he entered the establishment. The rule of the Clever Brigade (which is asserted by acts of tyranny whenever a warder's eye is off, and verbal torment nearly always) and their instructions constitute a scandal of such atrocity that it could hardly be exaggerated. No romance could conceive the devilish thoroughness with which this organisation does its work of verbal corruption—and no fiction

with which this organisation does its work of verbal corruption—and no fiction could libel it. The cowardice and meanness of its pugilistic and back-striking tyranny is past defamation. A young man no sooner enters the gaol than he is in its clutches. And if he is not prepared to renounce every better instinct he may possess and bow his neck to the "tyrants"—if, although he has tripped and fallen, he hesitates to descend to the lowest level and wallow in their mire—he is subjected to treatment which must, sooner or later, exterminate every decent impulse. Should he dare to appeal to the superintendent, that official will punish any pugilistic tyrant if proof is given of a breach of the rules. But these wily "professors" are too artful to be caught at their worst acts of verbal corruption, and the novice is immediately branded as a "policeman" for reporting an offence, and soon learns something of the snake-like methods by which this league of incarnated devils carry out their system of retribution.

If Home Secretary Appel were foolhardy enough to state that the victimised prisoners have their remedy—that they should report such things to the superintendent—writer will meet it with detailed illustrations of the hollow absurdity of such an answer. For the present I will declare that the alleged "remedy" which the "first timer" is provided with is a flimsy mockery, and a standing reproach to "law and order." Because the tyranny of the "Clever Brigade" is founded on a low cunning and cowardice which effectually shields it from detection—because its methods are invested with

#### PERVERTED CLEVERNESS

—its veiled and diplomatic anarchy is none the less atrocious.

"But" (one can hear an elector protesting) "I thought that all enlightened communities protected the 'first timer' from the influence of hardened criminals." Then such an elector—especially a supporter of this most virtuous Government—may as well understand that Queensland must be excluded from that class of communities, and that his pretty conceit is merely a vain delusion.

That some pretence at separation is made I will admit. But that it is anything more than expensive farce, and a useless absurdity, I emphatically deny. And when I say that the boasted separation of prisoners at St. Helena is an impudent imposition upon the public who pay for everything, I challenge Mr. Appel (the Home Secretary, who is responsible for the administration of that Department) to contradict the statement.

Besides the fact that the men work all day together, there is this awkward matter to be explained away: When a young man, who is a "first timer," reaches St. Helena, he is put into "D

young man, who is a "first timer," reaches St. Helena, he is put into "D yard" until he has completed a stated portion of his sentence. During that period he spends his nights locked in a cell, and the days (with the exception of the eight hours he may be working) in the company of every class in the gaol, for the men with any number of convictions stay in the same yard. If the "first timer" reaches St. Helena a day, a week, or a fortnight after conviction, he remains with this select company of "professors" for the remainder of his "probation." And after the "Clever Brigade" have thus had time to lay the foundation of his education, he is put in "A" or "F" yards, and the farce of "separation" is continued.

#### WITH VARIATIONS.

Writer saw this in detail through being placed in the shops, although he

tried very hard to induce the superintendent to give him hard, outside work. When at liberty there was no work that writer despised more than needle work, and he never dreamt that he would ever live to wear a thimble. The writer tried very persistently to induce the superintendent to give him outside work—hoeing, digging potatoes, wood cutting, etc.—but, with the exception of less than a week of coal-lumping, he spent the whole of his time on the tailors' bench, doing work that was not exercise. But, although writer's application for tools (which became vacant through the discharge of a prisoner) were never granted the consideration which his capacity to fill them seemed to warrant, writer is quite satisfied that the superintendent had some good and sufficient reason for his constant refusals. And, as a prisoner, if he had to make up his mind to do work that was ever his pet aversion, it gave him an opportunity of studying the workings of a system which hypocrisy lauds as a reformatory one.

The second man from the writer was a "first timer," who is doing a short sentence for manslaughter. It seems that a hulking bully attacked him, and in defending himself (instead of running away as the law requires under such circumstances when it is safe to do so) he struck his assailant a fatal blow. Now this young prisoner was not of the larrikin class, and writer found him very apt to recognise good advice, and he showed no small degree of will-power in keeping to a course when once convinced of its wisdom. Yet this Christian State, with a medieval convict system, forces him to sit all day next to one who (according to his own tales of adventures) had tied bank officials and police all up in knots, and was doing a long term for

#### WRITING BAD CHEQUES.

"Leaving his visiting card with the mugs," as he expressed it. But although his very cleverness in certain directions was in itself a danger to young prisoners, it must be admitted that he was not one of the filthy-minded "tyrants." In fact, writer must even go so far as to acknowledge that he has heard him educating this "first timer" (who cannot read) in a right direction). But that does not detract from the indictment. The fact remains that he is an old and clever offender, and while he has much—very much—that makes one sad to think that a man of education and ability could so turn his talents from their fair use—the total sum of his influence is dangerous. Possibly, it was through having such an one for his guide, companion, and bench mate during his first

having such an one for his guide, companion, and bench mate during his first imprisonment that has made him a thorn in Society's flesh ever since. Anyhow, this "knight of the visiting cards" is between

#### TWO "FIRST TIMERS."

and both these men, and others like them, have enough good left in them to make its cultivation sound business in the eyes of an enlightened Government, and a positive duty to one with but a smattering of Christian sentiment. For the very fact that they are easily led makes them the natural prey of the professional crook, into whose company our "reformatory" system forces him. It is quite useless for Mr. Home Secretary Appel to endeavor to pass the blame for this on to the warders when they are at the extreme ends of the shop, and there is such a clatter of boot-makers, tinamiths, and other tradesmen's tools that men can sing foul parodies without being heard. Whenever the chief trade instructor, Mr. Davis, has heard wrong "language" (the Clever Brigade are too experienced to let him hear the utterly foul expressions) he has always taken action. But it is impossible for him to prevent what he cannot hear, and what no sane prisoner would take the tremendous risk of reporting.

The State owes more to Mr. Davis than it will ever realise, and it is fortunate, indeed, to have such an officer; for the problem of maintaining discipline among the largest body of prisoners at any one class of work, and securing industry and obedience with so very little punishment, requires an amount of wisdom and tact as rare as it is valuable. Even the tyrants of St. Helena—the Clever Brigade who have, with Tammany thoroughness, subjected the better class of prisoners to their rule regarding certain things, such as reporting or bearing voluntary witness of any kind—even these recognise his authority without that questioning attitude they show to some warders, who cannot appear commanding without an unfortunate

#### STYLE OF SPEAKING.

Absolutely impartial, scrupulously just—with dignified courtesy even to a blackfellow or an Asiatic—he rules the shop with a minimum of "locking up" and "half rations." To other warders he is an example, and to prisoners he is a constant inspiration.

But not even this officer, with all his experience, could always fathom the low cunning and black devilry of the Clever Brigade, who sway the moral, or rather the immoral, influences of St. Helena. And this inferno—which, according to the gaudy cant of men in high places, is a reformatory institution—is utterly infested with corruption. Any redeeming features to be found in it are due to the officers—from the Comptroller down to the youngest warders. Mr. Pennefather is rich in experience, and is making the best of the work which the wretched tools provided by the Government will allow. That St. Helena is a breeding-place for crime—a University of Vice—is not his fault; he cannot alter an Act of Parliament. Neither is it fair to blame the superintendent, who also is doing his best with the bad tools provided. And the chief warder, who has grown old in the service, is a strange contrast—with his fatherly discipline and kindly disposition—to the bogey warder of popular imagination. Not there is only one on whom the blame of it can be fairly affixed, and that is the responsible Minister who controls the department, and who could have altered this long ago. And now that I have declared the separation of

have altered this long ago. And now that I have declared the separation of prisoners in Queensland to be an absurd

and expensive farce, I am prepared to back up all I have said—and much more—on my oath. But, if I know aught of the ways of certain politicians, the Home Secretary will find some kind of lame explanation; but, as surely as the charges I have made are genuine and unexaggerated, he cannot hide this shocking state of affairs by covering it up. It is too rotten! And if the public who plume themselves upon their enlightenment and Christianity permit it to pass, then the sooner they tear "For God and the Right" out and put "For the Devil and the Tired Feeling" in its place the better.

There is no door closed to the woman of to-day. The latest field to be invaded is the racetrack, a young girl in Buda Pesth having recently been granted a jockey's license. Anyone with half an eye could see that the time was coming when women would take the reins in her own hands.

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