

DE PROEUNDiS.

AUT EX EXCELSIS.

Penal Establishment and Health Resort.

High Life and Hell.

BY A PAYING GUEST.)

No. II

In my last contribution on the sub-ject of life at St. Helena, I touched upon the agitation on the part of a section of the public to secure St. Helena as a health resort. I make no bones now about saying that it is a health resort already, and if statistics were available on the subject I venture to think that

the percentage of invalids or infirm per-sons would be less on St. Helena than among any given number of persons picked haphazard from any section of the community. And in saying this, I don't ascribe the good health and the genera absence from sickness, to say nothing of the low death-rate, to the skill and attention of the visiting medi-cal officer. If the medical officer had much to do with the health of those to whom he pays a cursory weekly visit, that should cause him to take his duties more conscientiously, even if his human-ity did not; then I think the good re-sults are in spite of, rather than the

effect of, his practice. The complaints of callousness and indifference to prisoners' ailments that an inmate of the prison hears from his fellows are enough to make the blood run hot with indigna-tion. Why should a doctor say to a man evidently in great physical and mental stress, "You know -, this is a gaol, not a hospital. If we make things too comfortable for you, we'll never see the last of you. You'll al-ways be coming here." What con-ception of his fallen fellow-man must this medico have when he talks like this to a men who is no more a criminal than the doctor him-self, but who is on the verge of a severe bout of the "blue devils" and asks for the medical treatment that is needed to keep them off? As a recent contributor to your columns put it, the man who needs moral stimulation would CONSULT THE CHAPLAIN. With his preaching added to Garland's diatribes, the unfortunate prisoner may well ask, "What have I done to deserve this?" and exclaim against his Judge, who probably never contemplated that the "three stretch" he was passing out so generously would be emphasised with these uncalled-for courtesies, no men-tion of which was made "in the bond." I attribute the health of the inmates to their regular hours, to their regular meals, and to the out-door work which those who are not tradesmen, or gaol apologies for tradesmen, are engaged on. The men who work in the shops are not so healthy. The dead gaol white that gets into the skin — a pallor worse than death — the lack lustre absence of vitality that characterises the eyes, the

languid movements of the body, the often sullen demeanor — these are enough to melt the hearts of the most callous if they would allow themselves time to think about them. But such sights are shunned, and men don't think of them willingly. The man who has most moral right to think of them seems to be the one man who thinks less of them than any other. It was so in my time, and from what I know of the present con-ditions, I iam very much inclined to think it is so now. Prisoners have a nominal right of appeal, and petition to the man who administers the de-partment which includes the prisons in its work. How often does the Home Secretary visit St. Helena? When he does go there, is it on a brief flying visit — like the visit of angels, only in its rarity — accompanied by sight-seeing curiosity mongers whom he has enter-tained for the day on the Lucinda? Or is it at regular intervals, on a mission of mercy, and with an ear open and ready to hear what every man who wishes to see him might have to say to him? It seems to me that there has not yet been in this State a single Home Secretary who has had the slightest con-ception of his duties towards the pris-oners; and if there has been such a one his responsibilities sat so lightly upon his shoulders that he never let anyone else know he realised them. Prisoners are voiceless. They have no pens to write with, and if they had, they have no place or persons

TO WHOM TO WRITE. In a recent article on the subject of prison reform, I made the statement that there are innocent men in gaol. I knew a man— that man's face is as familiar to me as the Post Office clock, for I see him every day I pass through Queen-street — who served four long years in St. Helena for an offence — at-tempted burglary, I think, it was — of which he was as innocent as the Judge who sentenced him. During the long period of his captivity, it was no con-solation to him to know who the guilty party was — and he did know it. The wretch who let him suffer for his crime was not man enough to come forward and own up. Now I am going to make a statement, or, perhaps, I should say assert a personal conviction, that will set tongues wagging wherever "Truth" is read. I would be a proud man if I thought my pen could do more, and set hearts in motion and heads in action as easily as it will set tongues wagging. It is my strong personal belief that James Kenniff is an innocent man. I am thoroughly convinced in my own mind that his unfortunate brother Paddy was unjustly condemned, and that he was innocent of the crime for which he paid the penalty with his life on the scaffold. You've got to live with a man to know him. I lived with Ken-niff in gaol, but not at close quarters. I saw much, however, of one who was his closest friend. And what I saw and heard led me to form the opinion which I now publish for what it is worth. I have discussed the Kenniff case with many men of the Far West, and their opinions on it— the opinions of men who knew the brothers and the petty perse-cutions their father and they were being subjected to at the time — would be a revelation to our boudoir legislators and jejune Judges. Nearly every prisoner who has served a sentence — if he be articulate at all on the subject of needed prison

reforms— has the same story to tell of the necessity for the abolition of trials by Visiting Justice Macdonald, or, for the matter of that, by any other per-sonified representation of the blind Goddess of Justice, in whose power it lies to inflict additional sentences. In this article, I have said little OF MY OWN EXPERIENCES. Let me retail some of them now. One day I was with a gang working in a quarry. Some of the men were up on a shelf, throwing down material, to be wheeled away in barrows. I was — much against my will — doing the "horse act" between the shafts of a cumbrous and capacious vehicle of the wheelbar-row persuasion. There was a fellow working on the shelf who was certainly as mad as any inmate of Woogaroo or Goodna. His pet belief was that he was always about to stumble up against a-shake, and without let or hindrance front the officials this Joe F — always carried a business-like waddy in the bosom of his shirt. Had it at any time occurred to him to see a snake in a fellow-prisoner's head, there is no ques-tion about it that the owner of the head would have got a shock. Now, Joe was on top, shovelling down dirt. The war-der ordered me to wheel in and load up whilst Joe was in action. It did not appeal to me to run the risk of stopping a boulder or any other little thing like that with my head, and I demurred, preferring to wait till the, madman up top was done. Th, warder insisted. I point-blank refused. I was taken before the superintendent and, ordered to the cells for three days on half rations. That three days, without a book or a word from anyone was just hell. Once to while away the time I dipped the end of my finger in the dry whitewash of the cell-wall, and on the back of the door (painted, brown) drew a caricature of the warder who had got me the three days. I got more for that picture than for any work of art I have perpetrated before or since. I was taken before the Visiting Injustice — let me do the, Mac-donald the justice of saying it was not he on this occasion - charged with de-facing the cell-walls — although the de-facement could be wiped off with a cloth — and sentenced to one month's extra imprisonment. There's many an artist to-day who would be more than pleased if they knew that one of their sketches would procure for them a month's board and lodgings. I could have dis-pensed with my reward without a re-gret. In connection with goal punish-ments, some anomalies exist which are a disgrace to the sense of fair play, even, of the officials, and these ought to be wiped out. For instance, when a man is locked up, any privileges he has are at once taken away, and he is placed on half rations UNTIL HE IS TRIED. This is the very acme of injustice, being utterly opposed to every t principle of law and fairness. It may be interesting to some of my readers to know how I fared for grub whilst at St. Helena. There are some six yards within the stockade in which prisoners are placed during the day-time, either according to the work they are doing or to their classification, though I don't think there is any classification worthy of the name. All new-comers spend from three to nine months — according as they are first, second, or third offenders — in the D (probation) yard, and during the time I spent there I met and hobnobbed with some of the most confirmed criminals in this or any other State. That alone is sufficient on the subject of classifica-tion. The "swabs" or colored men have a yard to themselves. These men are the boatmen, shepherds, etc., of the island, and except that they have no gins to quarrel over, are far better off than they ever could have been

in their aboriginal state. During the term in the probation yard, neither tea nor sugar is allowed, but somehow it gets there just the same. The men who get tea get more than they can use. Big brick walls separate the yards. At each end are fences of high iron girders, with about six inches between them, through which a good-sized tin can be passed. These tins are attached to strings, and swing round the end of the brick walls furthest from the watching officials, filled with tea, and swing back again. Likewise sugar finds its way to those who have friends among men on indulgence. The men feed in messes of five or six individuals. One of my mess was employed at the Comptroller's house, and he occasionally came to light with an addition to the fare in the way of jam or treacle. Another worked in the pig-aery, and generally managed to get some milk from the dairy which adjoined his department. Another employed in the garden brought "greens," radishes, etc., and I, who had a job for at the Superintendent's garden, was often able to make some addition to the bill. Then on Wednesdays and Sun-days we had a pudding. Surplus bread from the long-timers' yard, sugar, suet, and whatever ingredients that could be gathered in were mixed up and sent along to the cook-house. There was much pride taken in the pudding manufacture, and the eating of the article it-self, when it was eatable, which did not always happen, was the source of much satisfaction. Men in gaol know more really about GASTRONOMIC DELIGHTS than the most experienced epicures. As a general thing, the warders are not men who try to tyrannise over their charges. A bad prisoner is ten times a greater infliction to his fellows than half a dozen bad "screws." I remember two men, "Wingey G—" and "Long - who were pimps and narks of the worst description. The one-handed creature could fight some, and a jab from his stump was no joke. One day he was having a go with a lesser man, and things looked as if he might have a win. But he got two or three sly pokes, and he was "settled? I saw a big black fellow named Columbus, who used to eat raw shark as King Thakombau of Fiji would revel in fat parson, kicked all over the yard by nearly every man in it. And talking of fights, I saw one worth mentioning. The biggest man in the boob was long Jim M—, who often skited about the pugs he had beaten. Paddy M— was a much lesser man than Jim, and could go some. There

was no love lost between the pair, and it was only a question of time and opportunity when they would get to "holts." Both came one day in the "silo" pit. Looking back on my days in St. Helena, I can recall no job that fitted me less comfortably than tramp-ing down the silo. Fancy in midsummer a chain of men walking round and round in a silo pit to tramp it down. No, you can't fancy it. And it was no wonder that the heat and the nature of the work got on the nerves of the two ene-mies. They were not long in the pit before it was flannels off and bare knuckles. Three good rounds were fought. There wss much thumping, much gore, and no hugging and caressing such as one gets such a surfeit of at the Stadium. After that weight told, and Paddy cried a "go." He was defeated, but by no means dis-graced. The long-sentence men are known as "heads." These who have friends outside who can send to them manage to live fairly well. In my time there was much corruption among the officials. One man was said to have a farm, for which all the harness required was made in the prison workshops and worked away by the aid of prisoners "in the joke," who were paid with to-bacco. I don't like to dwell much on this aspect of the prison business. From my own experience of the uselessness of prison discipline as a reformative, and from my knowledge that the men "in-side the walls" are in the main no dif-ferent from those on the outside, with the exception that they have been found out, I am not surprised at officials being corrupt. I would be surprised if they were not. Of course, this statement does not apply to all the officials, or even a majority of them. But I have been told that on a recent Melbourne Cup a prisoner "bookie" held no less than 700 "figs" in his bag. How did that tobacco get there? Why will the authorities shut their eyes to the abso-lute necessity of supplying prisoners with the soothing narcotic. Here is a chance for you, Mr. Appel, and if you avail yourself of it, it will serve to soften judgment on your many other alleged deficiencies as a responsible Minister with such important functions to discharge us involve the making or marring of human lives.