

The Penal Establishment at St. Helena.

THE commencement of another sugar-making season took us to St. Helena. The island is but three hours by steamer from Brisbane. A passage is secured by permit obtainable at the Colonial Secretary's office, and is a privilege seldom refused to visitors or those who have business motives in visiting the island. We come within the latter category; business and pleasure for the time is our motto while meditating a trip to St. Helena, and realisation in this case seldom falls short of anticipation. Even in the prisoners, with the freedom of action and the general sense of usefulness that surrounds them, there is a feeling of relief in comparison with general impressions regarding prison discipline and penal servitude.

The prisoners at present on the island number ninety in all; the majority of them—as many as can be spared—are engaged in the field cutting cane, and in the boiling-house converting the cane juice into sugar. Others are engaged driving cane waggon and carting water; some half-dozen are building a school house; others in the bake-house, wash-house, blacksmith's shop, and the many *et cetera* that go to make up a large establishment depending upon its own resources for labor. Some twenty-five officers and warders keep the establishment in order. The whole are under the care of Mr. John McDonald, who has superintended St. Helena since its first occupation as a penal settlement.

All the land suitable for cultivation, some seventy acres, is now under sugar cane. A portion—perhaps a third—of this land is good; the remainder agrees tolerably well with the result of Dr. Voelcker's estimate of the soil sent to England for analysis. It is not rich in the materials necessary for profitable farming. It will require manure in addition to the good treatment it has along received in order to secure fair returns of cane or even, or any other crop.

During the cold, raw winter—now happily coming to an end—St. Helena has suffered severely from the cold winds. The island has been stripped of timber: a few trees only of the dense growth that formerly covered it are now standing. They are close to the garden of the Superintendent. A few mangrove bushes still occupy a portion of the low wet land with which the island is surrounded. The high and dry land is covered with cane; and some seven or eight acres of mulberry trees have been planted on steep banks. This total clearing of the island was adopted that there might be no cover for prisoners who attempted to escape. So far, this is an advantage; the warders can now see clear over the whole place. But this free exposure is bad for the cane. The winds come in unbroken gusts upon it, and have during the past winter converted fully one-half of the entire crop into a tangled mass of damaged and broken cane. All the varieties—Bourbon, Diarl, Chigacca, Selangore, and Guigham—have suffered from the winds. The ribbon cane alone has withstood the storms, and promises a fair return in sugar. The works are now being pushed ahead to get off the damaged cane before warm weather and consequent fermentation attacks it.

Crushing was commenced about two months since; but the density was then found to be very low (between 4° and 5°), so the works were stopped. The density has now risen to 8° and 9°. The liquor from the damaged cane is very dirty, but with careful treatment it is yielding a fine bright colored yellow sugar, at the rate of about one ton per acre. As the cutting goes on, the land is being replanted with ribbon cane. We were sorry to see the megass used for firing. The soil of St. Helena is poor in vegetable mat-

ter. The soil of St. Helena is poor in vegetable matter; it is a pity to burn the megass, although wood is scarce. It must all be made up some day by manuring.

The work in the boiling-house is done by prisoners; only two warders being present. The cutting, carting, &c., is also done by prisoners, and with so little apparent supervision that the men differed in no respect from ordinary field hands. The whole process is educational and reformatory in a high degree, and we are glad to find from the records of the establishment that the great majority of the men discharged from it go into regular employment. Few of them return to St. Helena. Since the formation of the settlement, some 700 prisoners have been discharged. It is no ordinary satisfaction to the country to know that not three per cent. of these men have relapsed into crime. This is highly creditable to the system followed at St. Helena, which at once tends to reform the men, and learn them a useful occupation, at which they find employment as soon as they leave the island. The reconvicted are of the usual "prison bird" type, and, to a large extent, have come to Queensland from the other colonies.

In reading the reports, and comparing them with those of similar institutions in and out of the colony, the conviction is forced upon us that St. Helena is one of the most suitable establishments in the colonies for the reception of prisoners, and their preparation for again becoming useful members of society. At the present time the number of prisoners is below the average; there is work and accommodation for double the number—a good omen in itself, but we are at a loss to conceive why this should be the case while some of the goals of the colony have more prisoners than can be properly accommodated. These men should be drafted to St. Helena, where the opportunities for becoming useful and industrious are greater than in any other prison in the country.