

ST. HELENA SCANDALS.

Tricks, Traffic, and Trade A clever, Cloacal Clique in Clover The Ways and Wiles of Warders

'Truth's' articles a month or so ago on St. Helena maladministration called forth a lengthy screed from one who writes as one having authority on matters not touched by "Truth" previously, but owing to pressure on our space we have been unable to give publicity to the matter. But

better late than never. He draws attention more particularly to illicit trafficking in articles made by prisoners out of Government stores - trafficking in which the prisoners are assisted by the warders - also to obscene conversations carried on with the connivance of, or winked at by, the warders, and the initiation of youthful criminals into deeper degrees of vice by past ministers in the art. Very rightly he claims that a convict establishment should partake of the NATURE OF A REFORMATORY, but so far from this being the case at St. Helena, he alleges that from 6 p.m. to 11 and 12 midnight every night, those who are unfortunate enough to be confined in the wards have no option but to listen to filthy discourses on the most loathsome of prostitutes, the most depraved and pugilists, and the most incorrigible of criminals, and even worse. The older criminals seem to seek to out-rival their compeers, and the warders give tacit sanction, if not encouragement, to what goes on. As "Truth's" correspondent puts it, "it is HARD TO BELIEVE that the warders can be so destitute of and inaccessible to morality as to listen to a herd of sexual manias penned up in sties of vice and revelling in their revolting filth." This is pretty hot coffee, but if the half of what our correspondent tells us is true, it is amply justified. In support of what he alleges, he mentions that some time ago a certain section of the warders represented to the Home Secretary the internal rottenness of the institution, and petitioned for the removal of those who by their apathy, or worse, consented to such a state of things. If this is correct, what was the result of such a petition? Why was it never made public, and what STEPS WERE TAKEN to remedy the abuses complained of? Before leaving this particularly unsavory portion of "Truth's" correspondent's communication, it may be as well to point out that far worse than mere filthy talk among the prisoners is said to happen. Definite allegations are made as to hideous abominations committed in the stables and elsewhere. The names of those concerned are given, and all is, or should be, open to the light of day if anyone cared to delve so far into iniquity, and all is said to have been committed with the connivance, or at any rate the tacit sanction of the warders. Is it a fact in the absence of the local dispenser (Mr. Henry), the Chief Warder is in charge of the dispensary, and that he knows just as much of dispensing medicine AS A BULL KNOWS of dispensing lacteal fluid when called upon to do so? Also, is it a fact that a Frenchman whose sentence was nearly completed applied to the Chief Warder for treatment, and was told that he was shamming, and ordered to return to duty, which he attempted to do, but fell down in a fit, was locked up in his cell, and died before he could be carried to the hospital after his groans attracted attention, not from the Chief Warder, but from others. Now, as to illicit trafficking - first of all with regard to letters from the convicts to their friends. It is well known that such letters are not permitted to be written except by the authority OF THE SUPERINTENDENT, and that then such letters are most carefully censored. How is it, then, that innumerable letters do find their way from convicts to their friends and to be the authorities? How is it that convicts are constantly being tried for writing such letters? Is it a fact that the warders see to the posting of them for a consideration? The actual consideration is openly mentioned - 5s. in the pound for money sent by the friends of the prisoners. Warders are openly stated to be "fences." Of one man in particular it is said that he has been given letters ad-

dressed by prisoners to their friends, and that the money SENT IN REPLY he has stuck to, and only disgorged when forced to do so; also that tobacco and other small luxuries sent for the use of the convicts, and which he has been paid to deliver, he has converted to his own use. Again, the cooks are stated to openly rob the invalids and hospital inmates of the comforts allowed them, and to sell them, producing them if by chance their defalcations are discovered as proof that they are doing good work and saving the Government stores for the Government. There was a prisoner in St. Helena who was employed as chief cook. He robbed the invalids in the hospital of their food, and stole the prisoners' tea and sold it to th

warders. He also MIXED FLOUR WITH THE OATMEAL which the doctor had ordered for some of the prisoners in the yards. One morning the prisoners complained to the chief warder that flour was mixed with their oat-meal. The chief warder immediately sent for the chief cook prisoner and told him

he had mixed flour with the prisoners' oatmeal. Of course the prisoner denied it, and told the chief warder that he would prove that the oatmeal was not adulterated, by showing some raw oatmeal which was in the kitchen. "All right," said the chief warder, "and then I will believe you." The prisoner then proceeded to the kitchen and shortly afterwards returned with a bag half full of oatmeal. "Give it to me," said the chief warder, and, continuing, "now I am certain that you mixed flour with the oatmeal, because you should not have any oatmeal before the rations are issued for the day. The very fact of your having oatmeal before the issue of the rations is proof positive that the prisoners did not receive for tea and breakfast what the doctor had ordered them." The chief warder then passed a remark about the foolish way in which the prisoner revealed his theft, but all the same the latter was not punished. A suite of furniture is said to have been made by the prisoners for the island officials from the Government stores, and A CONCRETE INSTANCE is mentioned of one such case which was nearly discovered owing to the unexpected visit of the Home Secretary, when the goods were covered with bags of shavings and left in the carpenter's yard, with the full connivance of the officials implicated. 'Truth's' correspondent pertinently asks how it is if no "crook" work of this sort is carried on, that the prisoners are con-

stantly being punished for having tobacco in their possession. Where does the tobacco come from? It is an open secret that it comes from the warders, and can they afford to supply it except for a certain quid pro quo? full information is given as to the way in which, goods — BOOTS FOR INSTANCE — are made in the shops and disposed of outside. When the warder-in-charge turns his back for a moment the different parts are "shaken," then put together, and the 'finished articles concealed, afterwards to be deposited in the scrap bucket until the warder "in the know" has opportunity to remove and sell them. The reward to the prisoners is tobacco or a percentage of the price obtained. Most of the crook work is done by a clique of long sentence criminals, men who have done time in most of the jails of the States, and who are intimately acquainted with ALL THE ROPES. Men who boast that there is no point with which they are unacquainted, and who look on their juniors in vice as "mugs." The members of the clique are said to be kept supplied by the warders and others in authority with milk and other luxuries which are concealed in the convenient scrap bucket mentioned above until they find their way to those for whom they are intended. Some of the clique send their dinner meat regularly to the kitchen to be fried for their supper. Their potatoes are baked for them, and their plates are half filled with gravy. I heard a prisoner ask a warder, who is boss over the kitchen, could get his dinner meat fried for tea. The request was ignored. On another occasion I heard the warder say that he would not allow any more dinner meat TO BE FRIED FOR TEA. This amounted to an indirect refusal, because the clique got theirs done every day. They had tobacco, and could pay the prisoners in the kitchen. If you are not installed in their good graces, you cannot obtain the tobacco to get these things done. If any man runs counter to this clique, his life is made a misery to him. He is hounded down and maltreated, called vile names, and generally has his life made a misery to him, his complaints being treated with contumely by those to whom he makes them, if, that is, he is ILL-ADVISED ENOUGH to make any complaints. Another villainous habit prevalent in St. Helena is that of members of the clique congregating in the closets and there settling the details of any particular villainy they may have in hand. Any of the younger hands initiates, so to speak, in vice who may put in an appearance in these sties being looked upon as interlopers and very quickly being given to understand that their room is wanted and not their company. There is a prisoner at the island who used to buy up all the socks, braces, towels, etc., that he could. For a quarter stick of tobacco, the value of which is about twopence, he used to purchase SOCKS WORTH A SHILLING a pair. For braces which cost 2s, 6d. he would give three-quarters of a plug. A warder used to supply him with tobacco. He gave the things which he had bought to the warder after he had removed the brands which are put on them when they arrive at St. Helena. The warder allowed him a commission on all he bought. Our correspondent says he firmly believes that the authorities knew that this most despicable form of collusion was being carried on, because he had been assured that a prisoner had reported it. On one occasion a box was discovered on the trolley, just ready to be popped aboard the steamer. Inquiries were made as to whom it belonged, and no answer forthcoming, it was confiscated and on being opened was found to contain boots, clothes, saddlery, etc, all gaol products, and all stolen. This alone will give some faint notion of the extraordinary

laxity pervading the establishment owing to the connivance between the warders and prisoners. Enough has been said to give a fair idea of the pernicious, peculiar practices perpetrated at St. Helena under the present system. "Truth" recommends the matter to the earnest consideration of Home Secretary Peter Airey when he can find time to make an enquiry into the abuses existing in the chief penal establishment of Queens-land.