

ST. HELENA PENAL ESTABLISHMENT.

PRISONERS FED ON. SOUR. PROG, CGNFINEE'S COMPLAINTS.' THE LETTER BOX.

Sir, - St. Helena is the Queensland penal establishment where prisoners are sent from various parts of the State to complete their term of imprisonment. There they are put to work — some on the field, and some to

learn a trade, either tinsmithing, car-pentering, tailoring, bootmaking, or saddlery. If a man served a life sentence, he would not become a competent tradesman. A prisoner is put into the shops. Here he is given out some work to do. He may be put at a bench to work. Unless, however, the prisoner he is next to shows him what to do, he would be a long time learning what there is to learn. The trade instructors do not come and show a man as they are supposed to do. Yet, if a mistake is made, resulting in a piece of material being spoiled, the prisoner is threatened with close confinement in the cells. If a prisoner tries to explain that there is nobody to show him anything, he is told not to be insolent by the warder-trade instructor. The instructors are supposed to be tradesmen when they are appointed, yet there is the warder-baker instructor, who came to St. Helena in April, 1913, and was appointed a few weeks after on probation. He has since been appointed warder baker at St. Helena. There was a prisoner in the bakehouse as assistant before this instructor came to the island. The prisoner in the bakehouse was told by the superintendent and the Comptroller-General of Prisons that he must teach the new warder how to bake, the convict being assured that he would not be forgotten when he petitioned at the end of his sentence for special remission. The prisoner got 14 weeks' special remission. As soon as the baker instructor— he is better known inside the stockade as "Gentle Annie"— got to know a little about the baking, he took the yeast-making and everything over. He told the prisoner (who had taught him what he knew) that he would have to do as he (the warder) told him. So he did. Then the sour bread started, and since last year there has been more sour and raw bread than ever has been known in the history of St. Helena. When prisoners take their bread up and complain to the superintendent or the chief warder, they are often threatened with the cells for making frivolous complaints. I have seen bread made at St. Helena that the pigs would not eat, and I have seen batches of bread burnt in order that it would not be seen. It is surprising to see the amount of bread and dough which has been burnt in the firebox or dumped up on top of the oven. Of course, all this is unknown to the superintendent. On one occasion the bread was very raw. The superintendent, on his round at 10 o'clock the next day, told the warder baker to cook the bread better. He was, however, ready with an excuse, saying that he had omitted to close a slide on the door of the oven. About three days later, the bread was worse than ever. This warder baker is in charge of the kitchen, having under his charge nine prisoners. The way he abuses these men is a disgrace to the establishment. This warder has locked up more men during the 12 months he has been on St. Helena than all the rest of the warders at St. Helena. I have known him to lock a prisoner up and put a charge against him for absolutely nothing. Thanks, however, to the superintendent they were not punished. I can name from memory nearly 30 prisoners this warder has had punished within the space of 12 months. No doubt surprise will be expressed why this warder is allowed to go on like this. Well, I may state that within the last two years there have been no less than three baker trade instructors on St. Helena, but they left on account of the small pay. As the baker warder takes the tucker down the back of the yards, he is responsible for all prisoners' food, and in seeing that it is cooked, and that every man gets his allowance. His chief hobby, however, is to see that everything is polished before 10 o'clock in the morning, when the superintendent goes his rounds. All the kitchen utensils are polished outside, but inside they are dirty. Tucker is always cold when it reaches the yards, and unless a man has the constitution of a pig he can not eat the tucker. The rations are issued from the store every morning for the stockade kitchen, but the prisoners do not get their full allowance of tea. There are, of course, some good warders on St. Helena— men who know how to manage prisoners. Their opportunities are marred by pimps telling tales, mostly a pack of lies. Another thing on St. Helena is the letter-box. Now, prisoners are allowed to write to their friends every two months. They write every Sunday, and a small box is put on a veranda which runs along the front of the yards. This box is the short cut to the office. A prisoner writes his letter, and very often he drops a note in with it to the superintendent.

The writer has often seen these notes be-ing written. Here is the starting of a note that was dropped to the super-intendent. The man who wrote it was a clerk. He printed his note so that he would not be known, only, of course, to the superintendent. The note started: "The crook agent trading with - and taking stuff outside." This note was dropped to the super-intendcnt through the letter-box. Sooner or later this letter box will

cause a riot on St. Helena, because, if a man gets a set on his fellow pris-oner, he has only to drop a note, and then the person or persons they men-tion in these notes are watched and perhaps locked up for absolutely nothing. These notes and other secret information go against prisoners when they are petitioning for special remis-sion of sentence, for, although their conduct may be good, they will get a very small remission. The sooner that letter-box is sent to the piggery the better for everybody concerned. There is a scale of rations drawn up by the Government for prisoners at St. Helena, yet Dr. Dods reduced the allowance of rice from 4oz. to 2oz. on or about March 22, 1911. Surely, if a scale is drawn up by the Government, the doctor should not have the power to reduce it. — Yours, etc.,

OUT OF BOND.

Brisbane, July 22, 1914.