

Special Article.

ST. HELENA IN 1868.

Prison Regulations.

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WRITTEN FOR "THE TELEGRAPH"

I am anxiously yet assuredly awaiting the day when ever-busy Mayor Jolly will accept the offered freedom of the Isle of St. Helena, and receive that compact area of Nature's beauty spot as a recreation ground and pleasure resort for the people and children of sunny Queensland. The desire to free the island has been made by the Home Secretary, and the Mayor, so I am informed, is willing to take over, on behalf of all citizens, the maintenance and control, awaiting only a favourable opportunity when more leisure time will permit. Let me, however, assure rate and other taxation payers that the island need never be a source of expenditure loss, but that, with care and judgment, it can be made revenue profit producing almost from the very moment it comes under municipal government.

I could write and say much in regard to this, and could tell interesting stories of the little, yet extensive and beautiful island and its 528 acres at high water mark boundary, of which in 1914 and since but three acres were occupied by officers' quarters, and only 14 acres used for prison purposes. The time is neither ripe nor opportune, for I know Mr. Stopford is in possession of a far back informative history of the place, which history, I trust, he will partially unveil when he and the Mayor stand together, with other citizens, on its soil on the epoch of its enfranchisement. I may, then, be permitted to refer to some conditions of its earlier government, awaiting the Home Secretary's better right and privilege to speak with other and better detail at the function to take place in the very near future.

On July 22, 1868, T. M. Eden, 50th Regiment, commanding troops in Queensland, issued "orders for the non-commissioned officer in command of the military guard station at H.M. penal establishment at St. Helena," the original document bearing "Approved, M. C. O'Connell." These rules, when taken full and by, are almost

when taken full and by, are almost akin to the tales of the convict system, but not quite. The non-commissioned officer in charge was to attend to any instructions given by the superintendent so long as they did not interfere with the command of the military. He had to attend to all postings of sentries, and to see that they were vigilant in the performance of their duties, and had to visit them frequently during the day, and not less than twice during the night. The orders do not state the number of soldiers to be employed on the island. No more than two individuals of the guard—when off duty—were to be absent from the immediate vicinity of the military barracks, and, above all, no soldier was to sleep anywhere but in these barracks. The officer in charge of the guard had to see every sentry mounted on his duty with his rifle loaded, and with nine rounds of ammunition ready. The sentries on Nos. 1, 2, and 3 posts also had to watch with fixed bayonets. Before the prisoners were released from their cells in the morning, No. 3 post had its sentry, and one had always to be there when the "all tight" signal was hoisted at night.

Soldiers were not allowed to convey communications or parcels either to or from any of those employed on the island, whether officials or not; even although they were required to do so by the superintendent or any other local authority, and if so desired to do, they had to report to the commanding officer who, in turn, had to make a written statement to the commanding officers of troops in Queensland.

Soldiers likewise had to make an immediate report of any vessel or craft or any floating material in the neighbourhood of the island, and a sentry could only leave his post for the purpose of preventing a prisoner's escape. Among other duties of marching prisoners to work in gangs of two deep, he had to be careful that he gave the prisoners no chance of seizing his rifle, and, therefore, was required to keep at a safe distance.

A sentry was to allow no person to pass him after dark without challenge, and was to make a prisoner of anyone not able to give a satisfactory account for his presence there.

There were many more rules or regulations, instructions, or orders, such that you may care to name them, space not permitting me to quote them. They were truly harsh, and must have been effective. Signals were to be hoisted whenever a boat, yacht, or vessel hove in sight near the island, a red and white flag going aloft if assistance was wanted. In case of alarm the whole detachment was to be immediately under arms.

Orders were issued for day posts and night posts, for both soldiers and sentries, the fronts and ends of prison buildings had to be watched at night time, fences were to be strictly guarded, sentries were to see that no

time, fences were to be strictly guarded, sentries were to see that no prisoner left the island by means of any boat, raft, buoy, or by swimming or otherwise.

Have I not written enough? These are a few of the prison regulations for soldiers on the island in the year 1868, long after the convict days had ceased in Queensland in the year 1839. There is more humanity in prison life control nowadays than in the dark times of the "Sirius" and "Supply," and in the cruel days of Norfolk Island.

St. Helena could, no doubt, tell many a curious tale, but not like the tales of 1788 and onwards for many years. So let us hope that when the free flag is unfurled by Mayor Jolly no north-east, or south-east, wind will sound and sing a threnody, but rather a song, one of satisfaction and content.