

JUSTICE IN CHILE.

Its Model Penitentiary Has Some Good Points and Some Bad.

AWFUL SOLITARY CONFINEMENT.

Victims Known to Be Dead Only When Their Food Is Untouched.

CONFESSIONS BY MEANS OF TORTURE

(CORRESPONDENCE OF THE DISPATCH.)

SANTIAGO DE CHILE, April 15.—One of the institutions of this famous capital to which the citizens point with pride is their model penitentiary. It is an enormous structure of red brick—a rare building material in these parts, the houses being universally of stone or adobe, covered with grayish plaster, surrounded by a massive wall of the same, on top of which soldiers are continually pacing to and fro. The visitor hardly knows whether to be most impressed by the immensity of the concern, it being nearly large enough to hold the entire population, its scrupulous cleanliness, or the dead silence that prevails, as unbroken as if there were not a living creature within a hundred miles, though at present there are about 4,000 human beings inside the walls.

As our little party filed in, between a double row of glittering bayonets, and the great iron gates, closing with a crash of bolts and bars, shut us in among criminals, the usual state jokes common to such occasions were exchanged. First we were conducted into a large, well-furnished reception room, lined on all sides, from floor to ceiling, with thousands of photographs. Every prisoner must have his picture taken on entering this place, and again when he leaves; and these are put in cases on the walls, each labeled with its number. During his prison life, the convict is known by that number only, and never hears his name.

Poverty Led to Awful Suffering. Gazing around this rognos' gallery, my attention was attracted by two fresh and handsome young faces, evidently those of husband and wife, and I asked the superintendent who they were. Taking down one of the big books, he ran his finger down the pages till the number on the photograph was reached. "Oh yes," he continued, "this case, I remember, was a rather interesting one. They were newly married, down in Valdivia; a country where, socially, and of whom everybody thought well. Want of money was their undoing. For a small amount of it the husband murdered his aged relative, and the wife assisted in hiding the corpse. They had funds enough to fight the law in all the courts, but after repeated trials he was sentenced to be shot, she to be compelled to live in prison for life, and then to remain in prison ten years longer."

The sentence was carried into effect, and the story may be clearly read in the photographs. Next to the youthful couple is a picture of the criminal taken on the day of his execution, the wild eyes and haggard face showing that the man had been in prison beyond that in the case of the widow, 10 years later, a prematurely old woman, with the expression of one who has nothing to hope for.

The Face Is Not an Index. Another face was that of an innocent-looking, light-hearted schoolboy, apparently not more than 17 years old. "Certainly this was never a criminal!" said I. "He was one of the worst I ever knew," replied the superintendent. "In a fit of rage he beat his father's brains out, because the latter refused to let him ride a favorite mare; and then deliberately murdered his mother, because she knew of the facts and might tell them. He was condemned to be shot, seven years ago."

Truly, this gruesome art-gallery upsets one's ideas about the face being an index of character, eyes the windows of the soul, and all that sort of thing, for the most hardened wretches of the lot wear looks of baby innocence. There are a great many women in the collection, and we are told that the so-called "gentler" sex of South America commit a large proportion of the murders—jealousy being the moving cause. Then we went to the workshops; through huge iron gates, with ponderous locks and bars, each guarded by soldiers with loaded muskets. There seems to be no possible chance for recreation, and the superintendent said that during the 17 years he has been here not a single attempt has been made. In the shops everybody was working silently and steadily, his eyes bent upon his work, not a whisper being permitted or a moment's pause of the busy fingers. But when we entered, at a signal from the overseer of each department, the workmen made a military salute and remained standing until permission was given to resume work.

A Good Thing to Go to Prison. Certain it is that if the majority of Chilean rognos, (the word literally translated meaning "strong necks," here used to designate the poorer class), were confined for a term of years in the Santiago Penitentiary, their condition would be vastly bettered. They would be free of shelter, sufficient food and clothes enough to cover their nakedness—very uncertain blessings in their present state; besides being compelled to keep tolerably clean for the first time in their lives, and made to work at something useful. All are obliged to learn trades—blacksmithing, carpentering, shoemaking, etc. There is a school, also, where even the oldest and most ignorant are taught to read and write; and a chapel where all receive religious instruction.

Not in this all. Those who never in their palmest days of freedom possessed a dollar that they did not steal, may actually have money laid up, with which to begin life anew. Good conduct may win them here toward shortening one's term, but extra diligence in well-doing is paid for, in money. The men are kept steadily at work; but by exerting themselves they may easily accomplish much more than the amount required, and for every extra bit they are fairly paid. In the shoe department, for example, the contractor who pays the Government so much per annum for working the prisoners, encourage the men to their best efforts by keeping a careful account of exactly how much each accomplishes every day. A stipulated sum is paid for so much work; and if a man doubles or trebles the amount, as many do, it is so much the better for all concerned. A workman easily makes from 20 to 30 cents a day, and the amount is charged to his credit. The money is not put in his hand, but a ticket representing that sum.

Prisoners May Be Freed. If he fails to do a reasonable amount, or with material pecuniary success, carelessness, something is deducted from the money he has already earned, or he may be otherwise punished. Though strongly advised to board his funds until the day of release, he may spend it if he will, and the regular prison food is better and more abundant than most of them have been accustomed to outside; but on certain days market produce are allowed to come in and sell tobacco, fruit, dulces, etc., and there is no law to prevent the men from spending all they earn in this way. Once in three months each prisoner may have visitors, and then his relatives and friends, if he has any, flock to see him. Many of them are glad to have saved up a respectable sum to come to the wife and children, or the aged parents or young sisters, who, perhaps, have sadly missed their support. Said the superintendent, "If a prisoner's term is long, it is not uncommon for him to have credit for from \$200 to \$500, which is paid him in cash on the day of his discharge and is wealth to a Boto. This, with a good trade at his finger ends and the thrifty habits he has acquired, makes a new man of him; and if he gets into mischief again it is due to innate depravity. But when a man has been in prison a long time

and order accustomed to the quiet and calm that reigns here, he has forgotten how to think for himself, and even his former name has become strange to him. When first turned adrift into the world, even with money in his pocket, he feels an overpowering sense of helplessness; and many come back and beg to be taken in again."

Solitary Confinement in Chile. But there is another side to the picture—so dark and terrible that as we contemplated it the bright day seemed suddenly overcast, the sun ceased to shine and the birds to sing. In this splendid "model" building there are slimy, poisonous cells where daylight never enters, in which human beings are literally buried alive. Having heard of them, we requested to be shown one of these cells. The gentlemanly superintendent denied there were any such, and showed us the interior of two or three twilight cells, which he said were the worst in the penitentiary and designed for those condemned to "solitary confinement." But we knew better; and later on the judicious investment of a dollar induced a subordinate to give us a glimpse of what we came to see.

Under the massive arches of the enormously thick walls, where perpetual twilight reigns even in the outside rooms, are inner cells, two feet wide by six feet long, destitute of a single article of furniture. Until recently those confined in them were walled in, the bricks being cemented in over the top and bottom, and a thick iron door, which is securely nailed up, then fastened all around with huge clamps, exactly as vaults are closed in the Santiago Cemetery; and over all the great seal of the Government is placed—not to be removed until the man is dead or his sentence has expired. The tiny grated window is covered by several thicknesses of closely-woven wire netting, making dense darkness inside, so that the prisoner cannot tell darkness from day. There is no ventilation except through this netting, and no opening whatever to the sun, light or air in the iron door, close to the ground, is a tiny sliding panel, a foot long by two or three inches wide, arranged like a double drawer, so that the prisoner may be slipped in on shallow pans and the refuse returned.

The Visit of the Death Angel. Twice in every 24 hours this panel is operated, and if the food remains untouched a certain number of days, it is known the man is dead, and only then can his door be opened unless his time has expired. If the food is not eaten for only two or three days no attention is paid to it, for the prisoner may be shamming; but beyond a given length of time he cannot live without eating. Not the faintest sound nor glimmer of light penetrates these awful walls. In the same clothes he goes in, unwashed, uncombed, without even a blanket or handful of straw to lie on, he languishes in sickness, lives or dies, with no means of making his condition known to those outside. He may count the lagging hours, sleep, rave, curse, pray, long for death, dash his brains out, go mad if he likes—nobody knows it. He is dead to the world, and buried, though living. Six months is the usual sentence, and, until lately, two years has been the limit. They told us that but one man has ever been known to live beyond that, and the majority do not outlast the second month. Those that survive the six months are almost invariably driveling idiots or dangerous maniacs. The door is always opened at night, when the sentence has expired, because in his feeble condition after long darkness, the glare of day would be torture, if not death. They expect to find the wretch stone blind, emaciated to the last degree, unable to stand, hair and beard grown long and white as snow, nails like talons, and garments rotten with mold.

Saved by a Handful of Seeds. One man of education and refinement kept himself in tolerable condition through his half-year of solitary confinement by means of a handful of melon seeds. As he was going in, somebody gave him part of a muskmelon. Strange to say, it was not taken from him, and he carefully guarded the seeds which he put to a variety of ingenious uses. With them and reckoning from the number of times the foodpan slid in and out, he contrived to keep track of the number of days of his incarceration; he invented games of "solitaire," which he played thousands of times in the darkness; and to vary the dreadful monotony he would throw away the precious handful and grope around on his hands and knees until they were all re-collected. He says that to those little seeds alone he is indebted for his almost miraculous escape from insanity, idiocy or death.

On the day of our visit to the Santiago Penitentiary there was one man in solitary confinement, under two years' sentence, whose time had expired within seven weeks. It was the only case on record and a marvel to all who were acquainted with it. A great deal of speculation is rife as to what the poor wretch will be like when the door is opened, if he manages to exist so long—blind no doubt and hopelessly ruined in health and intellect, if he does not die of the shock of liberation.

Tortured Into a Confession. In the common jails people are so treated that one imprisonment is generally sufficient to cure them of most faults. A house servant in the Santiago family where I lived, absconded one day taking several articles of wearing apparel, was soon apprehended, and according to rule, locked up in solitary confinement for 24 hours, without a mouthful to eat or drink. This was done to break his spirit and render him tractable. Then he was called into court, confronted by his late master, and told to confess all he had stolen.

The frightened fellow, knowing well that every article confided to meant months of imprisonment, feigningly owned up to one or two shells only. The master declared there was more, and the Judge, naturally leaning to the stronger side, ordered a Sergeant to take the man out and "refresh his memory." The refreshing process meant a sound flogging, tied to a post in the jail yard, where 31 lashes were well put on. After the first whipping, the servant confessed to one or two more thefts; but his employer still insisted there was more, he was whipped again, and yet again, every day for a week; until the irate master was abundantly satisfied. Then the thief was sent to the penitentiary for three years, though the full value of all the goods stolen did not amount to \$20, and his aged mother begged on her knees to be allowed to refund the money. FANNIE B. WARD.

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An Underrated Race. While the Charleston is tearing toward the South Pole in an endeavor to catch the saucy Chilean ship which stole a march on Uncle Sam and abducted a second-class Republican deputy marshal, the press of the country is making a daring chase after the correct spelling of the fugitive warship's name. Bets are about even as to which accomplishes its task first.

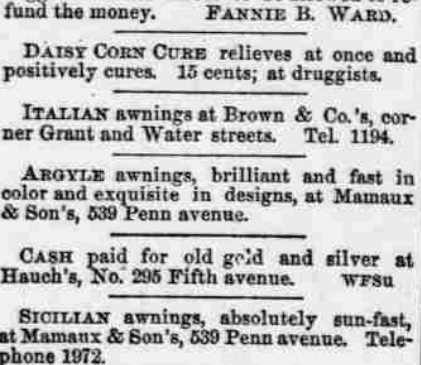
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We think it pays to sell what people will like. One pound is of no account. We think of the pounds that come after.

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Fashionable Suits. About one-half regular prices. These suits are all made up during April and are, therefore, the very latest styles.

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HOUSEHOLD GOODS. Of every description, whether you want to buy for Cash or on Easy Payments

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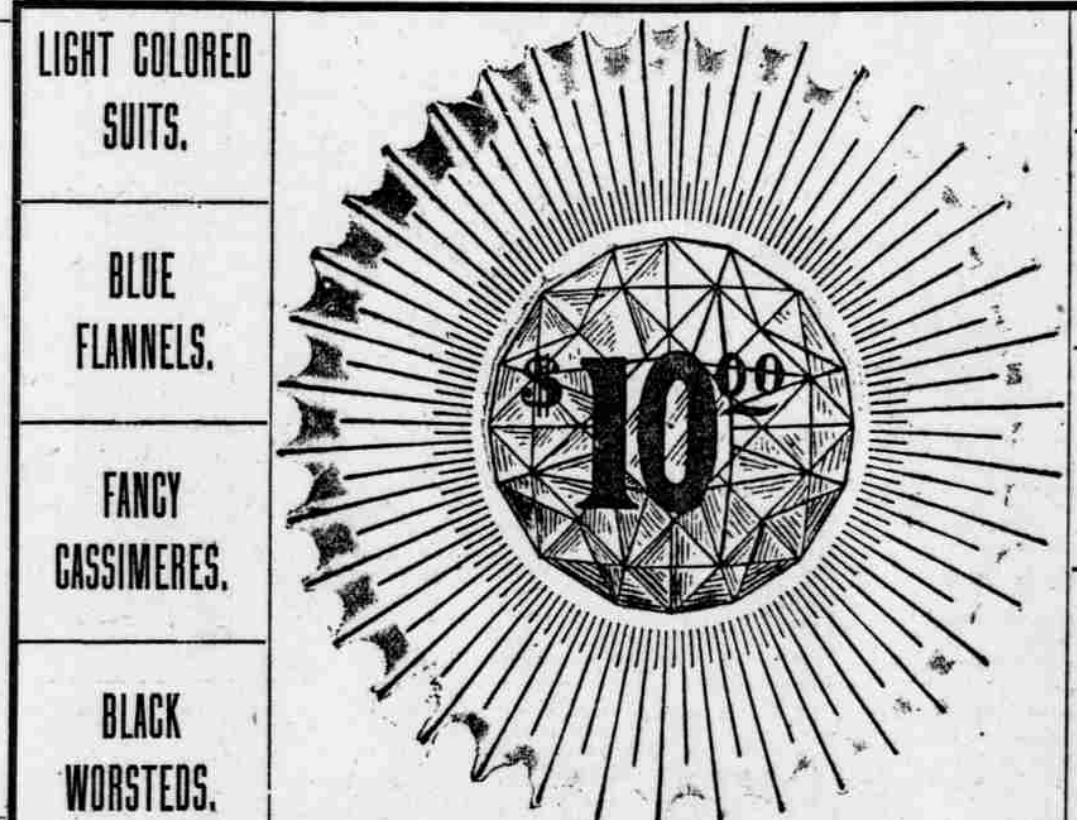
IN LONG-PANT SUITS. Our stock is a full, complete and captivating one. The strong and serviceable is here at \$3 and \$4 a suit; the stylish and dressy in fine grades of cassimeres, worsteds and chevots at \$5, \$6 and \$7.

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