

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, JULY 8, 1899.

LIFE PRISONERS HAPPY.

THEY ARE BUOYED UP WITH THE HOPE OF PARDON.

Model Prisoners, and not Subject to the Nervousness of men who Will get out of Jail Some day—Some Life Men at Sing Sing and Their Record.

The composure of the life prisoner is one of the many mysteries of prison life. It is difficult to understand how such men can go through the routine of life smiling and happy, and apparently at peace with the world. Nothing seems more horrible to the observant visitor to a large prison than the life of its inmates. For the first time he realizes not only how long a year is, but how long a day is, especially a day unbroken by anything unusual. Yet a more placid apparently contented lot of men than the life prisoners in large prisons it would be difficult to find.

The effect of prison life on the life man is in such contrast to that on the convict with whom the law has dealt more mercifully that one becomes more and more amazed as he observes it. Sing Sing prison furnishes as many, if not more illustrations of these peculiarities as any prison in the country. The man who comes there with a five, ten or fifteen year sentence to serve, be he a man experienced in prison life or new to it, enters on his enforced stay within four walls in a ferment of nervousness. It takes many weeks, sometimes months, to whip him into shape, and then his agitation is only suppressed, and he is a man who must be constantly watched, not because he is likely to make trouble—for long term men rarely take a chance of losing their commutation—but because he is likely to make a mental or physical wreck of himself.

From the day that a limited sentence man dons his suit of stripes he begins to look forward to the day of his release. It may be twelve, it may be fifteen years away, but he knows the very day of the week on which it will come, and know almost to the minute when he will be summoned to the Warden's office to receive his civilian's clothing and the few dollars his years of toil have earned for him, and to be told that he is free. He doesn't have a happy moment until the day rolls around.

The way the convict figures out his time is one of the interesting things about a prison. Few of them have calendars on which to mark off the days; they carry it in their heads, and there isn't a case known at Sing Sing prison where a man lost track of his account. A keeper at Sing Sing prison recently explained this peculiarity of the prisoners to a distinguished visitor. The visitor was incredulous.

"Ask any man in this room how long he has got to serve," said the keeper.

The visitor was in the shoe shop. He put the question to a convict.

"Three years and thirteen days," said the prisoner without looking up.

"Seven years and twenty-seven days," said another.

A dozen other convicts answered with equal promptness. They knew to the very day when they would be released.

It is the last year of a man's term that is the hardest for him to bear. Toward the end he becomes unusually nervous. He fears that he may involuntarily commit some infraction that will lose him the three or four years he has shaved off of his term by exemplary conduct. Then again, the end so near, but yet a year off, makes that year almost unbearable. There is to-day in Sing Sing prison a young man who has served all but one year of a ten years' sentence for arson. He is a handsome chap and is the Beau Brummel of the prison. He keeps his striped coat and trousers neatly pressed, wears silk shirts and calf shoes, which his family—said to be well to do—send to him, and does his daily work in the principal keeper's office. He went through all the drudgery of the common convict's life up to a short time ago, when a man was needed who could attend to books. Now that his long sentence is nearing an end his condition is pitiful. Every evening as the sun goes down he goes out of the principal keeper's office into the courtyard and stands watching the day disappear. As the sun goes out of sight over the horizon he goes back to the principal keeper's room, puts on his hat, selects a book from the small library and with a pleasant good night goes to his cell, where he reads until 10 o'clock, when lights go out. There is little danger of this young man ever

finding his way into prison again, once he regains his freedom.

With the life men all is different. Whether it's because most of them have just managed to escape death or from some other reason, they are a remarkably philosophical lot. They came to the jail despondent over the future, as is natural, but they become more and more resigned to their fates as the days roll by. In Sing Sing prison, where to-day some twenty men are serving life sentences they are the best prisoners in the place. They have no commutation to earn by good behavior, yet they give little or no trouble. They rarely get downcast and cry out against their fate. On the contrary, they are good natured about it. The only explanation of their failure to pine away from the very hopelessness of their condition is that they all hope to be pardoned sooner or later. According to Principal Keeper Connaughton, whose twenty-five years of service at Sing Sing has given him a rare knowledge of criminals and their peculiarities, the belief that he will ultimately be pardoned is deep rooted in the mind of every life prisoner. There is a man in Sing Sing prison today who began his term of life imprisonment there on Oct. 18 1867. During all this time there hasn't been an incident on which this man could reasonably base the hope of a pardon. Yet there hasn't been a minute in all these thirty-two years when this man has lost hope. He believes to day that he will be freed some day, and it is this belief that has buoyed him up all these years and made a model prisoner of him. If you told this man that there was no hope for him that he would die in the prison—as he probably will—and succeeded in convincing him that you spoke the truth, it would probably kill him. If it didn't it would make him insane.

All the other life men are like that man firm in the belief that one day they will walk out of the prison free men. The chances of the majority of them ever realizing their hopes are small. It isn't because it would menace society to turn them loose, for most of them are men broken in spirit and more likely to be come charges on society than enemies of it, it freed; and it isn't because they haven't been punished sufficiently for their crimes for there is no such thing as punishment if twenty or thirty years in prison doesn't constitute it. It is because they have been forgotten in all these years and the very people who threw up their hands in horror at the time of their crimes would be unable to remember anything about them now.

It is to these long term and life men that the invention of the mysterious system of communication between prisoners in large prisons is credited. No one has ever been able to penetrate this mystery. Even men like Connaughton, whose experience and knowledge of prisons and prisoners is greater than that of any living man, have never been able to understand it. A piece of news can travel from one end of Sing Sing prison to the other, in from fifteen minutes to half an hour, and that two at night when the men are locked in their cells and cannot even see one another. With watchful keepers all around them, on the alert for the slightest signs of communication, a piece of news, can go the rounds. How it is done no body knows but the prisoners themselves, and they'd cut out their tongues before they'd tell.

Newspapers do not reach the prisoners, visitors can only speak to them in the presence of keepers and by special permission and the keepers themselves give them no news. Yet the morning after the last Presidential election in 1896 every prisoner in Sing Sing prison knew that William McKinley had been elected. Every prisoner knew almost as soon as the outside world when Fitzsimmons whipped Co-bett, and even the result of so recent an event as the Jeffries-Fitzsimmons fight was known all over the prison the day following the fight. There are many ways of course, in which the news might get into the prison but the means employed by the convict who first hears it in transmitting it to his companions is the things that has never been explained. That the system was devised by a long-term or life man, and has been steadily improved by others, is the general belief of the keepers.

Vincent Cody, a life prisoner, has been in Sing Sing longer than any other convict now there. He was a good-looking, athletic young man of 28 years when he first

donned stripes; he is 60 now, pale, gray, and rather thin, but with a healthy, happy, contented man. He has marched out to breakfast and work, to the lockstep, every morning for thirty two years, and in again, to supper and bed at night. When one gets permission to talk to him he is found to be a courteous, mild-mannered man. He has worked at every thing in the prison in his time, incidentally learning half a dozen trades. He is a bellman now, which means that he patrols the prison corridors by day, keeping them clean, and doing such odd jobs as the keepers direct. It is almost impossible to look at Cody to-day and imagine such an inoffensive old man as the central figure in one of the most brutal and unprovoked murders that ever took place in this city. Yet it was for such a crime that Cody was sent to Sing Sing Prison for life.

In 1867 he was one of the wildest young men in the lower east side of the city. He led a crowd of young ruffians who frequented a saloon at 17 Jefferson street, and weren't particular how they treated strangers who dropped in. Sober, Cody was a pretty decent man of his grade, although inclined to believe that the world owed him a living Drunk, he was dangerous and even his associates were careful not to cross him. It was in a drunken fight that he killed his man.

A young man named John R. Livingston, known as 'Prof.' Livingston had a slight acquaintance with Cody and his crowd. He went into the Jefferson street saloon with Cody and some others on the night of April 18, 1867. After several rounds of drinks Cody suggested that they throw dice to see who should pay for the next. Livingstone won but Cody was ugly and accused Livingstone of cheating. Livingstone, wishing to avoid trouble, left the table and walked over to the bar. Cody repeated his assertion, whereupon Livingstone turned round and called him a liar. He started to leave the saloon, but Allen and Cody headed him off. Cody struck him and Allen grabbed him by the throat and backed him into a corner between a wall and an icebox where he was powerless to move. One of Cody's friends called out:

"Lock out, Vin, he's got a gun."

"Oh, he, has eh?" said Cody; "well here's another," and whipping out his revolver he put it against Livingston's head and pulled the trigger, sending a ball through Livingston's brain, killing him instantly. The murder was one of the most cowardly that ever took place in this city, for not only was the victim wedged in where he couldn't move, but Allen had him by the throat when the fatal shot was fired.

It is hard to look at Cody now and believe that this mild-mannered old man is the same man who committed such a brutal murder. He has no friends anxious to try to get a pardon for him.

Out in the Sing Sing bucket house going quietly about his duties day by day, one may find a life prisoner who is even older than Cody, although he didn't get into prison until Cody had been there for four years. William Kelly was sent to Sing Sing on May 10, 1871, for a crime inspired by a desire for revenge, as well as by hope of profit. Kelly is a confident of a pardon to-day as he ever was, and often talks with his keepers about the day when he will be free.

Kelly is the murderer of the wealthy Long Island farmer, Garret Wort Nostrand, who was killed one night in April, 1871. A man named Levine was involved in the crime with him, but got off with a lighter sentence. Nostrand lived at Syosset, L. I., and Kelly, who was a track-walker on the Long Island Railroad, had a home near the Nostrand farm. Kelly lost his job through complaints made about him by Nostrand, and, although he never had any words with the farmer over the matter, he had a scheme of revenge.

Nostrand was in a Syosset saloon on the night of the murder when Kelly and Levine came in. Kelly and the farmer shook hands and Kelly and his friend sat down at the same table with Nostrand and some of his friends. The party had several drinks and in paying for some of them Nostrand took out a well-filled wallet, the prosperous appearance of which did not escape Kelly's eye. At 8 o'clock Nostrand started for home taking a lonely path through some woods. Three minutes after he left Kelly slipped out of a rear door and five later Levine left the saloon the same way. At midnight Mrs. Nostrand came to the hotel to inquire for her hus-

band. She was told that he had left three hours before. The next morning, Sunday, Nostrand's body was found beside the road. He had been struck from behind with an axe and his head had been split in two. The man who struck that blow is the same old man who works in the Sing Sing bucket shop, who seems so tender hearted that he wouldn't kill a fly and whose reputation in the jail is that of a model prisoner.

Kelly, like Cody sometimes talks of his crime. His memory is a little hazy as to the details of it, but he recalls a bitter hatred of Nostrand which he cherished in his heart for many days and a keen delight in his revenge when he struck the fatal blow. Twenty-seven years in prison have eliminated all the bitterness which incited him to the murder of Nostrand from his heart and, like Cody, he scarcely knows now how he came to commit murder. Both he and Cody attribute their crimes to the influence of liquor. Both men are repentant, and take a good deal of comfort out of their talks with the prison chaplain. In their old age the only explanation they can offer of their crimes is that they don't understand why they committed them.

Working as an orderly in the hospital at Sing Sing is a prisoner who has already served twenty five years of a life sentence for one of the most inexcusable murders ever committed in New York. This is Martin Gill, who deliberately killed his friend Mortimer Sullivan, in a saloon in 1874 because Sullivan laughed at him. Gill is a model prisoner and one of the most popular men in the prison. From a dissipated young tough he has been converted into a tender hearted old man who delights in ministering to the wants of the prison hospital. Freed to day and with any kind of a chance Gill would make an excellent citizen, but his chances of freedom are small, for he is one of the forgotten ones. Like the others, though he is constantly looking forward to the day of his pardon.

It was on the night of June 19, 1874, that Gill and Sullivan got drunk in a saloon at 258 Greenwich street. They wrestled with each other in a drunken frolic, and Gill was thrown to the floor with more violence than he thought necessary. Securing a cheese knife from the free lunch counter, he made several slashes at Sullivan which the latter easily warded off. The proprietor ejected both men, and they then went to a saloon at 269 Greenwich street, apparently the best of friends again.

Gill wanted to make a bet on a race and Sullivan laughed at him. Gill struck Sullivan and Sullivan called him a baby and said he couldn't hurt anybody. In a spirit of drunken bravado, Gill got a pistol and fired and shot into the floor at Sullivan's feet. Sullivan laughed again, folded his arms and said:

"I don't believe you'd shoot anybody. Here's your chance; I won't move."

Without a second's hesitation Gill put a bullet through Sullivan's heart, killing him instantly. The result of Gill's trial was one of the most remarkable on record. With a clean case of murder made out the jury disagreed. Recorder Hackett was so disgusted that he discharged the jury, adjudged Gill guilty himself, and sent him to Sing Sing for life on a plea of guilty of murder in the second degree.

Two other life men at Sing Sing who have already spent over twenty years inside those gloomy walls are John G. Baldwin, who was sent there on March 7, 1878, and John S. Downing, who donned his stripes on Jan. 16, 1880. Downing was a shoemaker at 454 West Nineteenth street and came back from the civil war with a rare record for bravery in action. He was an excellent citizen until poor business set him drinking. Then he began abusing his wife, and one night in September, 1879, he kicked her to death. Baldwin killed a man in Orange county, and was sentenced to be hanged, but his sentence was afterward commuted to life imprisonment. Baldwin is now 61 years old and works in the prison wash house. Downing is 66 and works in the bucket shop. The men are model prisoners and neither one has a black mark against him.

The only life men in the prison who are in really bad health as a result of their confinement are Patrick Casey, who entered the prison on June 21 1884, and Samuel B. Goode, who entered on December 8 1885. Casey is the policeman who shot sergt. Comiskey in a Long Island station house, on March 11, 1883. An effort was made to show that he was insane, and he got three trials, but was finally sent away for life. He is a general utility man around a prison, but he is so weak that he is unable

to do much work. He cannot live long unless he is pardoned. Goode, who is colored, was the janitor of a downtown office building, when in April, 1885, he shot and killed Policeman James North, with whom he had quarreled, at Broadway and Wall street. Goode is so doubled up with rheumatism and other ailments that he has to use crutches.

One of Sing Sing's star cooks is an extremely affable man, who is doing a life term for cutting his wife into small pieces, placing the parts in a bag and then starting for the river to throw them in the water. A policeman held him up while he was on his way to the river. This man is Louis Francier, and has been in the jail since October, 1885. He is a good cook and a well behaved prisoner.

Of the other life prisoners at Sing Sing all but two or three, who are in for arson, are homicides. All of these men are good prisoners and enjoy more privileges than the ordinary convicts. Despite the fact that they all hope for ultimate pardon there is only one man of them who stands much chance of getting it. That one is the man Downing, who killed his wife. He was convicted of manslaughter in the first degree. That was a life offence in the 70's but at present the limit of punishment is twenty years. As Downing has already 'done' over twenty he feels as though he is entitled to a pardon.

ENGLISH PLUCK.

It is Known and Acknowledged all Over the World.

Prof. Moses Coit Tyler, in his readable book, 'Glimpses of England,' comments upon the fact that 'English pluck' is renowned in all the four quarters of the earth. 'The English are brave,' he says, 'but so are many other peoples,—the French, the Spanish, the Austrians, for example,—yet who ever learns of French pluck or Spanish pluck, or Austrian pluck? There is in Englishmen, he suggests, a predominance of physical fortitude, which justifies the celebrity attained by the phrase all over the world.

The boys' schools in England manifest every day this cardinal English virtue. Every boy does homage to pluck, and scorns sneaks and cowards. 'Not long ago,' writes Professor Tyler, under date of 1864, 'I happened to be as a boy's school near London during the play-hour. A little fellow was brought in with a severe contusion of the forehead, from a stone. The blood was running freely down his face, but not one tear. He disdained even to appear personally concerned in the affair.

The boys in the schools 'put into Coventry' the boy who, while holling the bat, flinches at the approach of the cricket-ball. He is ignored; no one speaks to him walks with him, sits with him—he is sent into exile. Few boys get 'into Coventry' a second time; they prefer a broken limb to dodging. If the Duke of Wellington ever did say, 'Waterloo was won on the Eton cricket-field,' that 'Coventry' business explains it.

In a school near Bath a boy got a deep gash in his arm from the spike of an iron fence; he fainted away and had to be carried into the house. Presently the surgeon began to operate on the boy, who neither winced nor groaned.

'I never saw such a stoic,' whispered the doctor; 'I'm hurting him awfully! The master replied in a whisper, 'It's owing to the other boys being here.' As soon as the other boys went out, the little patient began to roar with pain.

'I'll stop this,' said the master, and he called back some of the boys to hold the wounded arm while the operation continued. The moment they appeared the sufferer brushed off his tears with his other arm, and was grimly silent. The taunt of cowardice from the lips of the other boys—for that he cared more than for the hurt of the surgeon's knife.

It is a Spartan training; but it begets the grimness which, having done all, stands, endures, and flinches not, even under intense bodily pain.

One of the Napier's, that fighting family, while directing the troops in a Peninsular battle, had his jaw smashed. He went to the rear, to the surgeon, had it bandaged, and returned to the fighting line. A shot made his right arm useless; a surgeon in the field hospital bound it up, and Napier was soon in front, giving orders as if nothing had happened.

That is the quality of physical fortitude which has emphasized 'English pluck' in every civilized language, and in not a few barbarous tongues. 'Blood will tell.' Two thousand years ago the Germanic stock, from which the English grew was noted, so Tacitus says, for cherishing physical hardihood as one of the cardinal virtues. English boys in the nineteenth century unconsciously obey the racial, hereditary impulse.