

San Francisco Daily Morning Call
July 17, 1864

The County Prison

A visit to the County Prison, in Broadway above Kearny street, will satisfy almost any reasonable person that there are worse hardships in life than being immured in those walls. It is a substantial-looking place, but not a particularly dreary one, being as neat and clean as a parlor in its every department. There are two long rows of cells on the main floor—thirty-one, altogether—disposed on each side of an alley-way, built of the best quality of brick, imported from Boston, and laid in cement, which is so hard that a nail could not be driven into it; each cell has a thick iron door with a wicket in its centre for the admission of air and light, and a narrow aperture in the opposite wall for the same purpose; these cells are just about the size and have the general appearance of a gentleman's state room on a steamboat, but are rather more comfortable than those dens are sometimes; a two-story bunk, a slop-bucket and a sort of table are the principal furniture; the walls inside are white-washed, and the floors kept neat and clean by frequent scrubbing; on Wednesdays and Saturdays the prisoners are provided with buckets of water for general bathing and clothes-washing purposes, and they are required to keep themselves and their premises clean at all times; on Tuesdays and Fridays they clean up their cells and scrub the floors thereof. In one of these rows of cells it is pitch dark when the doors are shut, but in the other row it is very light when the wickets are open. From the number of books and newspapers lying on the bunks, it is easy to believe that a vast amount of reading is done in the County Prison; and smoking too, we presume, because, although the rules forbid the introduction of spirituous liquors, wine, or beer into the jail, nothing is said about tobacco. Most of the occupants of the light cells were lying on the bunks reading, and some of those in the dark ones were standing up at the wickets similarly employed. "Sick Jimmy," or James Rodgers, who was found guilty of manslaughter a day or two ago, in killing Foster, has been permitted by Sheriff Davis to occupy one of the light cells, on account of his ill health. He says his quarters would be immensely comfortable if one didn't mind the irksomeness of the confinement. We could hear the prisoners laughing and talking in the cells, but they are prohibited from making much noise or talking from one cell to another. There are three iron cells standing isolated in the yard, in which a batch of Chinamen wear the time away in smoking opium two hours a day and sleeping the other twenty-two. The kitchen department is roomy and neat, and the heavy tragedy work in it is done by "trusties," or prisoners detailed from time to time for that duty. Upstairs are the cells for women; two of these are dark, iron cells, for females confined for high crimes. The others are simply well lighted and ventilated wooden rooms, such as the better class of citizens over in Washoe used to occupy a few years ago, when the common people lived in tents. There is nothing gorgeous about these wooden cells, but plenty of light and whitewashing make them look altogether cheerful. Mesdames O'Reefe, McCarty, Mary Holt and "Gentle Julia," (Julia Jennings) are the most noted ladies in this department. Prison-keeper Clark says the quiet, smiling, pious looking Mrs. McCarty is just the boss thief of San Francisco, and the misnamed

“Gentle Julia” is harder to manage, and gives him more trouble than all the balance of the tribe put together. She uses “awful” language, and a good deal of it, the same being against the rule. Mrs. McCarty dresses neatly, reclines languidly on a striped mattress, smiles sweetly at vacancy, and labors at her “crochet-work” with the serene indifference of a princess. The four ladies we have mentioned are unquestionably stuck after the County Prison; they reside there most of the time, coming out occasionally for a week to steal something, or get on a bender, and going back again as soon as they can prove that they have accomplished their mission. A lady warden will shortly be placed in charge of the women’s department here, in accordance with an act of the last Legislature, and we feel able to predict that Gentle Julia will make it mighty warm for her. Most of the cells, above and below, are occupied, and it is proposed to put another story on the jail at no distant day. We have no suggestions to report concerning the County Jail. We are of the opinion that it is all right, and doing well.

Independent Candidate for Stockton

Officer Forner arrested and brought into the City Prison, at noon yesterday, a wanderer named Patrick O’Hara, who had been sleeping in the sand-hills all night and tramping dreamily about the wharves all day, with a bag containing nearly seven hundred dollars in gold sticking suggestively out of his coat pocket. He looked a little wild out of his eyes, and did not talk or act as if he knew exactly what he was about. He objected to staying in the Jail, and he was averse to leaving it without his money, and so he was locked up for the present safety and well-being of both. He begged hard for his worshipped treasure, and there were pathos and moving eloquence in the poor fellow’s story of the weary months of toil and privation it had cost him to gather it together. He said he had been working for a Mr. Woodworth on a ranch near Petaluma, and they set two men to watching him, and when he found it out he wouldn’t stay there any longer, but packed up and came down here on the boat night before last. He also said they had given him an order on Mr. Woodworth here for forty dollars, for a month’s work, but when he got on the boat he found it was dated “1833,” and he threw it overboard. He brought a carpet-sack with him, and left it at some hotel, but he can’t find the place again. He says he wants to go and stay a while with some priest—and if he can get a chance of that kind, he had better take it and keep away from the wharves and the sand-hills; otherwise somebody will “go through him” the first thing he knows.

Juvenile Criminals

Two children, a boy fourteen years old, and his sister, aged sixteen, were brought before the Police Court yesterday, charged with stealing, but the hearing of the case, although begun, was not finished. Judge Shepheard, whose official dealing with ancient criminals has not yet hardened his heart against the promptings of pity for misguided youth, said he would examine the prisoners at his chambers, to the end that he might only sentence them to the Industrial School if it were possible, and thus save them from the shame and the lasting stigma of imprisonment in a felon’s cell for their crime. He said there was crime enough in the land, without driving children to its commission by heaping infamy and disgrace upon them for their first transgression of the law. He was right: it is better to save than to destroy, and that justice is most ri

ghteous which is tempered by mercy.

More Cigar Smoking

The tariffs on cigars are pretty high, and some of our importers of the article have found the seizure and condemnation of their goods, on account of false invoices, a still more onerous tax upon the honest industry of smugglers. But the seventh vial of revenue wrath was poured out on Friday—unlucky day—in the form of suits in the United States District Court, against several importers of cigars, who are charged with having, for years past, been in the habit of entering their goods by invoices sworn to as true, while the value of the goods was much above the amount stated in said invoices. Some of the invoices date back three years. Suits are brought for the full value of the goods. Each invoice furnishes grounds for a separate complaint. Some thirty odd complaints are filed against each of the firms named below, viz: R. E. Auger, \$58,619.12; L. Wertheimer, \$62,459.95; J. Frank & Co., \$148,386.13; L. Weil & Co., \$163,370.35; James Patrick & Co., \$234,609.67; A. S. Rosenbaum, \$524,039.27. Total, 1,196,484.49. Should these suits, or any considerable portion of them, hold, some folks will smoke, very decidedly.

Progress of the Camanche—The Libel

The work on the *Camanche* progresses steadily, and already the immense proportions of the vessel begin to show themselves. The keel is laid, the stem and stern post up, the floor timbers (iron) on, and the iron plates that form the garboard streak of the steamer in place. The labor performed is surprising, considering the few days the contractors have been at work. A large and well-regulated body of mechanics and laborers are kept exceedingly busy, and apparently no one having a berth of the *Camanche* eats any idle bread. On Friday evening, an attachment issued from the United States District Court, sued out by the agent of the New York and other underwriters, this gentleman being also agent for the Coast Wrecking Company, of which Captain Merritt, the wrecker, is principal. The serving of this libel did not then stay the work, but on Saturday morning the contractors were prohibited from going on, and seventy men, ready to open another day in building the boat upon which so much depends for the safety of our harbor, were left to sit round and look at each other, and, still more disagreeable to look at ample labor before them suffering for their exertions. Nothing daunted, the contractors bid all hands hold on and await the issue. In a brief period this unnecessary stopping of labor was set aside by an order from the proper authorities, and all hands sprung to work; the result being that nothing was gained by the suspension, and much lost, for, besides the loss of time on the *Camanche*, a worthy and hardy set of operatives went home with a fourth of a day docked from their earnings. It is much to be regretted that the public interests should be interfered with by law proceedings; and we trust that all concerned will so conduct their differences hereafter as to avoid all further sacrifice of great public interests. The spirit and zeal of the contractors, now that they have set to work, is worthy of all praise.

Too Infernally Accommodating

Some people are too infernally accommodating, altogether. There was an instance of this kind brought to light in the Police Court, yesterday. According to the story of Thomas McGuinne, he was going to be absent from the city for some time, and having every confidence in the trustworthiness of Mrs. Tierney, he asked her, as an accommodation, to take his money,

amounting to one hundred and five dollars and fifty cents, “and keep it for him.” She did it—but in her accommodating enthusiasm, she insists upon going on keeping it till the crack of doom. Kindness is a good thing, but then it is possible to overdo it; or do it too much. The suit of McGuinne, now, is to make Mrs. Tierney disgorge that cash.

(Source: Twainquotes.com, <http://www.twainquotes.com/callindex.html>)