FRANCE'S "DRY GUILLOTINE"

Devil's Island, a Prison Dreaded by Criminals—Disease and Death Haunt the Prison Colony—Marriage, at One Time Permitted, Now Forbidden.

The island guillotine, shown at left, takes the heads of several of the unfortunate—or fortunate—prisoners every year. The biggest and strongest convicts are used as galley slaves, as shown above. These photos were taken by Richard Halliburton, who lived as a prisoner to obtain this story.

By RICHARD HALLIBURTON
Author of "The Royal Road to Romance," etc.

"TEN prisoners escape from Devil's Island — land at Trinidad."

"Fugitives from Devil's Island arrested in British Guiana; returned to French authorities."

"Devil's Island escape revealed when bodies of six French convicts drift ashore in Brazil."

Scarcely a month passes without its press story of an escape from Devil's island. Having spent a summer in the famous prison, I am particularly interested in these reports—even though I know that none of them are true.

There has never in history been an escape from Devil's island!

Lives as Convict.

To find out why deportes never come back, I went to Devil's island of my own accord. I put on the convict stripes, and lived where the prisoners lived and as they lived, except that with the connivance of the guards I was able to move about wherever I chose. Nor could I, being a free man, ever feel even a small part of the degradation and despair that I observed.

Landing on the mainland at Cayenne, the capital of the colony and the headquarters of some eleven hundred deportes, I lost no time in finding a convict uniform, a very simple little costume consisting of faded cotton trousers and a straw hat. Wearing it, I walked into a barrack unchallenged, and was locked up for the night with 77 convicts.

The barrack, a hundred and twenty feet long by twenty wide, was more like an army dormitory than a prison. Down the center ran an aisle, on each side of which stretched a row of canvas beds. On the beds the convicts ate, sprawled, and slept. They had no lockers, no possessions, no privacy. Eight small barred windows near the ceiling let in a faint breeze, and many, many mosquitoes.

Of the 77 men in this barrack, 49 were serving life sentences for murder. Only 44 were French. The others were Germans, Poles, negroes and Arabs. Among the French, more than half were from the Marseilles district—the Chicago of France. Lyons had the next best representation. Only two came from Paris. This division was fairly typical of the 40 other barracks in the colony. The French prisoners, with all their misery and hopelessness, talked animatedly, as Frenchmen will (the subject is usually escape); or they played cards for the francs that they had earned as servants or laborers.

How do they guard their winnings in this community of thieves? There are no banks. The uniforms have no pockets. Money hidden would be found and stolen. Nevertheless, money is accumulated against the day of escape, and guarded in the safest place a convict has—his own body. Each prisoner carries within his body an aluminum capsule, three inches long and an inch thick, called a plan, in which he secretes his hoardings. Because of his plan, many a convict has lost his life—garroted by his fellows and carved open for a profit of five francs.

Meeting the Prisoners.

Looking at the men in the barrack, I could believe them capable of murdering for less. They were a tough and stupid lot, for generally speaking, those with refinement or intellect are the first to die off—or be killed. It is a sad fact that under such conditions, the sub-normal live longer and thrive better. Some of them, having become immune to the prevailing diseases, actually grow strong on the meager rations and hard work. A few in the barrack were physically magnificent, with hard muscles and skin burned black by the sun. These were the "strong-arms," the dictators, tyrannizing over the weak and dispirited who make up the mass. More than half my fellow prisoners were under twenty-five, several hardly more than adolescent. But nearly all, of whatever age or color, came from the off-scourings of the earth. A decent and appealing face was a rarity indeed.

I found an empty bed (which was really just one of 80 canvas strips stretched taut from the wall to an iron bar), and made the acquaintance of my neighbors. On my right was a tattooed plug-ugly about thirty, who said he had murdered his sweetheart.

The tattooed gentleman had been in "the box" seven years. He had come from France with 700 others on the convict ship. Of that shipment, less than a hundred were left alive. From him I learned that there were about 5,000 prisoners in Guiana (4,400 on the mainland, 600 on the islands), and about 3,000 libereres, freed prisoners not permitted to leave the colony.

No More Marriage.

I asked him if there were any women convicts with whom the prisoners could marry. He laughed cynically. Once, yes, but no longer. In former times, if a convict wanted a wife, he went to the women's barracks and announced the fact to the matron, who lined up all the women and asked, "Who wants this man?" The hands would go up. He'd look over the willing ones—"No, not you; you're too old. And you're too evil-looking. And you have no teeth." The matron would hurry him. Rushed for time, he'd pick out the most acceptable one, and she would be marched to the office. Their names would be put in the book. That constituted a marriage, and they could set about rearing a new, unfortunate generation for whom environment was sure to accomplish whatever heredity had left undone. These offspring, as lawless as the very prison rats, became such a problem that France was forced to ban prison marriages and, in time, discontinued completely the practice of sending female offenders to Guiana.

However, if they have money, the prisoners can still find women—usually the daughters of convicts and bush-negresses. Moral standards scarcely exist at Cayenne. The heat, the monotony, the debased class from which guards and prisoners alike are recruited, all combine to encourage depravity. The population is a melange of convicts, libéres, negroes, Chinese and prostitutes, scrambled recklessly together. Not one child in four knows who or what color his father is.

Even for a convict who cannot afford women, they are still his chief preoccupation. Each prisoner in my barrack had a few pictures of actresses, society beauties, bathing girls, cut from magazines and pasted on the wall behind his bed; and each cherished a few photographs of his wife or sweetheart—the only personal property he is allowed.

It was nine o'clock when the central oil lamp was extinguished. The card games ended. Seventy-seven half-naked bodies, and mine, relaxed on the creaking canvas beds. But I didn't sleep much. The stench was nauseating, the vermin and mosquitoes swarmed forth for their nightly feast; and the rain, beginning to rattle on the rusted tin roof, streamed through in a score of places. The largest stream was right over my bed. I paced the aisle all night between the rows of snoring murderers and scratching bandits, and by sunup looked as bedraggled as the rest.

Up Early and to Work.

At six the barrack door was unlocked. We all filed out to the kitchen, where we seized tin cups, plates and spoons, and received our breakfast of coffee and bread, which we ate seated on our canvas beds. Then the whistle blew and the prisoners, still hungry, scattered to their various daytime jobs.

The jobs are not exactly select—houseboy, scavengers, water-carriers, beasts of burden in the lumber yards. The prison tries to occupy every well-behaved convict in some way. But there would not be enough work to go around (for Cayenne has less than 10,000 people and is commercially dead) were it not for the fact that a good quarter of the prisoners are always incapacitated from sickness, and another quarter locked up in special cells as punishment for trying to escape.

Funeral in French Guiana.

As I walked on through the shabby town, it was rousing itself sluggishly, indifferently, for another day—a day which would bring nothing new to break the monotonous routine which Cayenne has long since accepted as inevitable. No one but myself looked up to notice a two-wheeled cart, drawn by four convicts, which was bearing a crude new coffin along the street. But I decided to follow this informal funeral to see where it would lead.

It led straight to one of the most terrible features of Guiana—"the bamboos"—a few square rods of ground surrounded by thickets of tall cane, the convicts' burial place. I call it "most terrible," not because it is as sickening as the barbarous conditions from which death releases the convicts, but because in one shocking scene it sums up and symbolizes the whole inhuman system.

In this small plot, probably 10,000 men have been buried since 1860, though the area is not sufficient to contain 200 graves. Space is unlimited in Guiana, but even so, the same ground is used over and over again. Methodically and grimly, the furrows of fresh earth, turned up beside the old graves, move back and forth across the cemetery, the bones of previous burials being dug up and burned to make room for the newcomers. One hundred and forty times in 70 years this ghoulish eviction has been repeated.

© Bell Syndicate.—WNU Service.

Convicts sentenced to hard labor in the lumber yards, underfed and exposed to the equatorial sun.

GOOD TASTE TODAY by EMILY POST

World's Foremost Authority on Etiquette
© Emily Post.

Must She Wear His "Ex's" Discarded Ring?

DEAR Mrs. Post: I am really worried about how I am going to handle a situation which I feel coming on. I mean that I am engaged to a man who was married, and when he became divorced, his wife gave him back both engagement and wedding ring. I believe from something he has said to me that he expects to give me this same engagement ring. I don't believe it possible that he would consider giving me the wedding ring although I don't know definitely, but we'll cross that bridge later. The complicating point is the fact that his first wife used to live here and went with the same people I do now, and they would of course recognize either or both of these rings. It is beside the question, but I want to make clear that I had nothing to do with the divorce; and marrying him was far from my mind until just recently. But how can I make it plain to him that I must not be expected to wear her rings?

Answer: I can't imagine that he would expect you to wear a stone that was hers without having it reset so as to be unrecognizable. If you have reason to suspect that he intends giving you this same ring, tell him frankly—and now—that it would make you very unhappy to wear anything so closely associated with someone else. As to the wedding ring, he would certainly buy you a new one.

• • •

If Garnish Is Edible, Go Ahead and Eat It

DEAR Mrs. Post: I am a teacher of home economics and recently one of my students called attention to the fact that one does not eat the slice of tomato or the radish or whatever may be used to garnish a platter. We would like to have your opinion.

Answer: You may help yourself to whatever is your portion of the dish proffered, even to the decoration, if it is edible. Most people would not consider a trimming made of raw beet or turnip edible, but if you like one of these vegetables, there is no reason in the world why you should not eat even such garnishing if you want to.

• • •

First-Names for Step-Parents.

DEAR Mrs. Post: A friend of mine is to be married to a widower who has a grown son, almost thirty. His mother died several years ago. My friend is wondering whether the son should be asked to call her "Mother" or whether it is a modern custom for children to call step-parents by their first names. She is almost twice his age.

Answer: If they are strangers he will probably call her "Mrs.," at least in the beginning. Later when they know each other, what he calls her will depend upon their affection for each other. In any case I think she must let him decide this for himself. While it is true that many grown sons and daughters call step-parents by their first names, this familiarity seems less unsuitable to others when the step-parent is younger than your friend.

• • •

Making a "Fourth."

DEAR Mrs. Post: Two years ago I began substituting for a friend in her bridge club, the idea at the time being that I was to take her place just for a few meetings. She has been ill and away but is now ready to come back. They are all insisting that I must stay in the club, too, each one taking turns at sitting out during the games. I would rather discontinue this bridge club altogether, but how can I do this diplomatically without having anyone feel that I am dissatisfied with the arrangement?

Answer: Why not tell them that you would be perfectly delighted to be put down as a supernumerary and that you would come any time in anyone's place?

• • •

Telling the Newspapers.

DEAR Mrs. Post: May I announce my engagement in the newspapers, as I have no parents and am not especially attached to any relative whom I would like to have announce it for me?

Answer: According to best taste, you should write notes to all your friends, and that is all. At least it is not considered proper that a girl send an announcement to the newspapers in her own name. It would be quite proper, however, to have your nearest relative send a notice for you saying the engagement of Miss Mary Smith, daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. John Smith, has been announced.

• • •

Informal Lace Cover.

DEAR Mrs. Post: Is a lace table cover at a six o'clock informal dinner proper table covering?

Answer: Yes, entirely so, if it is becoming to your room and to the things with which you set your table.

WNU Service.

Brother of General Sherman

John Sherman, brother of Gen. W. L. Sherman and author of the Sherman anti-trust law, served as national representative, senator, secretary of the treasury under President Hayes and as secretary of state under McKinley.

Earliest Stamp Collector

J. B. Moens, of Belgium, who was a stamp editor and author of note many years ago, is the earliest known stamp collector. He began collecting stamps as a boy in 1848.

Ask Me Another?

A Quiz With Answers Offering Information on Various Subjects

1. Has the population of the United States increased or decreased in the last ten years and how much?
2. What is the world's longest airline?
3. How many people have lived since the beginning of recorded history?
4. For what countries did the United States coin money last year?
5. What was the beginning of the motion picture industry in Hollywood?
6. Do the cold waters of the temperate and frigid zones contain more plant and animal life than do the warm waters of the tropics?
7. How does the Maxim silencer work?
8. Why do sharks fight back down?
9. What is meant by "letters patent"?
10. Why are lighthouses round?

Answers

1. A census of population was taken in this country in 1930 and the next will be taken in 1940. Any other figures that may be given are simply estimates. The United States had a population of 122,775,046 in 1930; the estimated population on July 1, 1935, was 127,521,000, showing an increase of nearly five millions in five years.

2. The world's longest air line is that between Amsterdam, Holland, and the Dutch East Indies, 9,000 miles away. There are two departures weekly at each end of it.

3. The eugenics department of the Carnegie institution estimates that 30,000,000,000 people have lived since the beginning of recorded history, some 6,000 or 7,000 years ago.

4. For Cuba, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Colombia and San Salvador. This coinage totaled 72,180,449 pieces.

5. In 1907 Selig opened the first California studio in Los Angeles. The first picture was the "Count of Monte Cristo" in 1,000 feet. Soon after that time other motion picture studios in New York opened California studios.

6. More plant and animal life per square mile is found in the cold waters of the temperate and frigid zones than in the ocean waters of the tropics.

7. The Maxim silencer is a tubular device attached to the muzzle of a firearm that renders the discharge practically noiseless. The device has an interior spiral which, permitting the ejection of the bullet, retards the explosion of the gases by causing them to rotate before escaping.

8. Because of the peculiar conformation of the shark's mouth, it is necessary for it to turn on its back when attacking an object at the surface of the water. A shark's mouth opens below its snout on the under side of its body and it is, therefore, unable to bite anything directly above it without turning over.

9. In English law, a document executed and sealed granting power and authority to a person to perform some act, or enjoy some right.

10. Lighthouses are built round in order to offer less resistance to the waves and wind. Incidentally, the old style lighthouses will gradually disappear and their places will be taken by open steel towers, for the reason that they offer even less resistance.

WNU Service.

A Refreshing Drink

IN THE summertime, cool drinks are so grateful to parched young throats. Here is a cold cereal drink you can mix in a jiffy. It is very refreshing and nourishing to boot.

Quick Cooler.

2 level teaspoons Instant Postum
1 cup cold milk

Combine ingredients in beverage shaker or in glass jar with tight top. Shake thoroughly until all cereal is dissolved. Sweeten to taste and serve. Serves one.—Adv.

Greatest Salvage Feat

The greatest feat in salvage history was the raising of the Bayern, the 28,000-ton German dreadnaught, from the ocean bed of Scapa Flow on September, 1, 1934. When the air locks went into action, after nine months of arduous preparation, they lifted the giant battleship from a depth of 120 feet in only 30 seconds.—Collier's Weekly.

Uncle Phil Says:

Praiseworthy Spirit

What we call public spirit is a moral quality, a particular and highly specialized form of unselfishness.

It was Dean Inge who said there was such a thing as fatty degeneration of the conscience.

A man allows himself to become "slouchy" because he feels he has something more important to think about than beauty.

A foolish man pursues a course that he knows will make him drunk and then is disappointed in the result.

Move or Be Mastered

Most people master their environment, if they ever do, by moving away from it. Perhaps, in their case, that's the best way.

A man of few words may convince you of his wisdom; but for companionship he is a flop.

Better to be afraid of the dark than to be afraid of the light.

With all its drawbacks, life is still a splendid adventure.

It is usually somebody else's work that is the grindstone to which one's nose is applied.

Analysis Might Kill It

People love without reason, and they are averse to analyzing the emotion.

Don't drive anyone into a corner where he has to tell the truth if you value his friendship.

A "rugged individualist" is one who hurts your feelings and doesn't care if he does.

"Humanitarian" is a modern word coined to express a modern idea.

Past the Prime

WHEN Dean Inge entered his seventh decade he quoted the following maxims for old people:

The good man feels old age more by the strength of his soul than by the weakness of his body.—Sir Thomas Overbury.

But go thou thy way till the end be; for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.—Daniel.

But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
—Andrew Marvell.

Why MORE FARM TRACTORS ARE EQUIPPED WITH FIRESTONE TRACTOR TIRES THAN ALL OTHER MAKES OF TIRES COMBINED

Farmers KNOW Ground Grip Tires
PROVIDE GREATER TRACTION
INCREASED DRAWBAR PULL
SAVE MORE TIME AND MONEY

NOW THE Amazing New
Firestone GROUND GRIP TIRE
THAT PROVIDES STILL GREATER TRACTION AND SAVINGS

FIRESTONE has done it again! All you have to do is to examine the amazing new Firestone Ground Grip Tractor Tire and you will quickly understand why it provides still greater traction, greater drawbar pull, and makes greater savings in time and fuel. The basic Firestone patented Ground Grip tread design has been retained, but the extra heavy bars of rubber are spaced wider and built higher. The tire cleans itself still better, providing much greater traction.

Farmers everywhere are welcoming this new tire, for tests show that tractors equipped with it consume up to 50% less fuel, as compared with tractors equipped with steel lugged wheels. With this amazing new tire you get up to 30% more available drawbar pull on dry sod — up to 40% more on stubble — and up to 50% more on wet plowed ground, than with any other tire made.

Only Firestone can build all this extra traction into a tractor tire because only Firestone has the patented extra construction features of Gum-Dipped cords which are stronger to resist the strain of heavy pulling, and two extra layers of Gum-Dipped cords under the tread which bind the tread and cord body into one inseparable unit. The tread is made of specially compounded rubber which resists the action of sun, rain, and snow. See this amazing new tire at your Firestone Implement Dealer, Tire Dealer or Auto Supply & Service Store today. You will want a set on your tractor so you can make the savings that only Firestone Ground Grip Tractor Tires provide.

Listen to the Voice of Firestone, Monday evenings over Nationwide N. B. C. Red Network

If you have not received a copy of the new Firestone Farm Tire Catalog, please send your name and address to The Firestone Tire & Rubber Company, Akron, Ohio, or Los Angeles, California, and a copy will be mailed to you promptly.

FOR CARS • TRUCKS • TRACTORS AND ALL WHEELED FARM IMPLEMENTS

Copyright 1937, Firestone Tire & Rubber Co.