

Thirty Years of Solitary Confinement

HOW JESSE POMEROY, BOY MURDERER, HAS FAMILIARIZED HIMSELF WITH THE SCIENCES AND LANGUAGES DURING HIS LONG INCARCERATION

(New York Herald.)

IN A SMALL STONE CELL, ever since the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia there has been locked up in the Massachusetts State Prison in Charlestown a life prisoner whose name is familiar to all New England, perhaps to a large portion of the reading public. Since he has been there the United States has added 30,000,000 inhabitants to its population. He is the only prisoner in Massachusetts undergoing continuous solitary confinement.

The warm and cheering sun never shines upon him. For thirty years his face has never been seen to brighten with a smile.

Regarding this extraordinary character New England knows more fully than on almost any other subject. Persistent publicity regarding him has contained fewer actual facts than ever before kept life in so prolonged a discussion. Against no prisoner—at least in Massachusetts—has public indignation been so continuously bitter.

Here will be presented for the first time many facts hitherto unpublished regarding Jesse Pomeroy.

It is against a fiendish newsboy and his crimes that the public memory still aches with intense indignation. But in Pomeroy's cell it is neither boy nor fiend. Behind his grating door sits reading hour after hour to-day a man arrived at his maturity, a patient, sobered and tempered with the passing of forty seven long years of an unusual life.

In years to come Massachusetts will be no more proud of the way the State handled the case of this dangerous defective than Massachusetts is now proud that it once burned witches in Salem.

The case will some day—after the story of the crimes is forgotten—serve to illustrate the relations between vigorous public opinion and the execution of justice. Thinking so strongly of Pomeroy's crime, the public little care that he was a mere boy, fourteen years old, and was satisfied when a jury brought upon him the verdict to be hanged by the neck until dead. But the public did not know the whole story. With the pictures of reeking outrages in their eyes, the individuals who made up that public cared not for causes and psychological explanations. The Governor and the Governor's Council, however, knew these details and spared the State the spectacle of hanging the child. Yet it was an unusual case and the public demanded unusual vengeance. From this fact may be explained why the prisoner is now in the cell and not in the State House, that officials who have this case thrust upon them discourage any publicity that will keep the subject ranking in public opinion.

Pomeroy is a survival. The judges who tried him, the Attorney General and the District Attorney who prosecuted him, the lawyer who defended him and the Governor who spared his life—all have been dead many years. New Governors, new keepers, year after year, have come and gone, but the case has remained the same. It is a custom, almost a secret compact, that so far as the public is concerned Pomeroy died thirty years ago. That from him and the public is protected from the public where he is protected from the public is to official thinking a professional matter, a legal formality and a detail of prison routine exclusively the business of proper officials.

Inaccurate Stories.

Such officials, with the exception of Pomeroy's heartless relatives, monopolize the personal facts of his existence. The relatives also bitterly oppose any publicity. In a recent petition to the Governor asking for a pardon the following statement was on his head; he cannot go to chapel; he is denied association with human beings. The prisoner has had no opportunity here, and has been handicapped by the unfounded but persistent newspaper notoriety in the case.

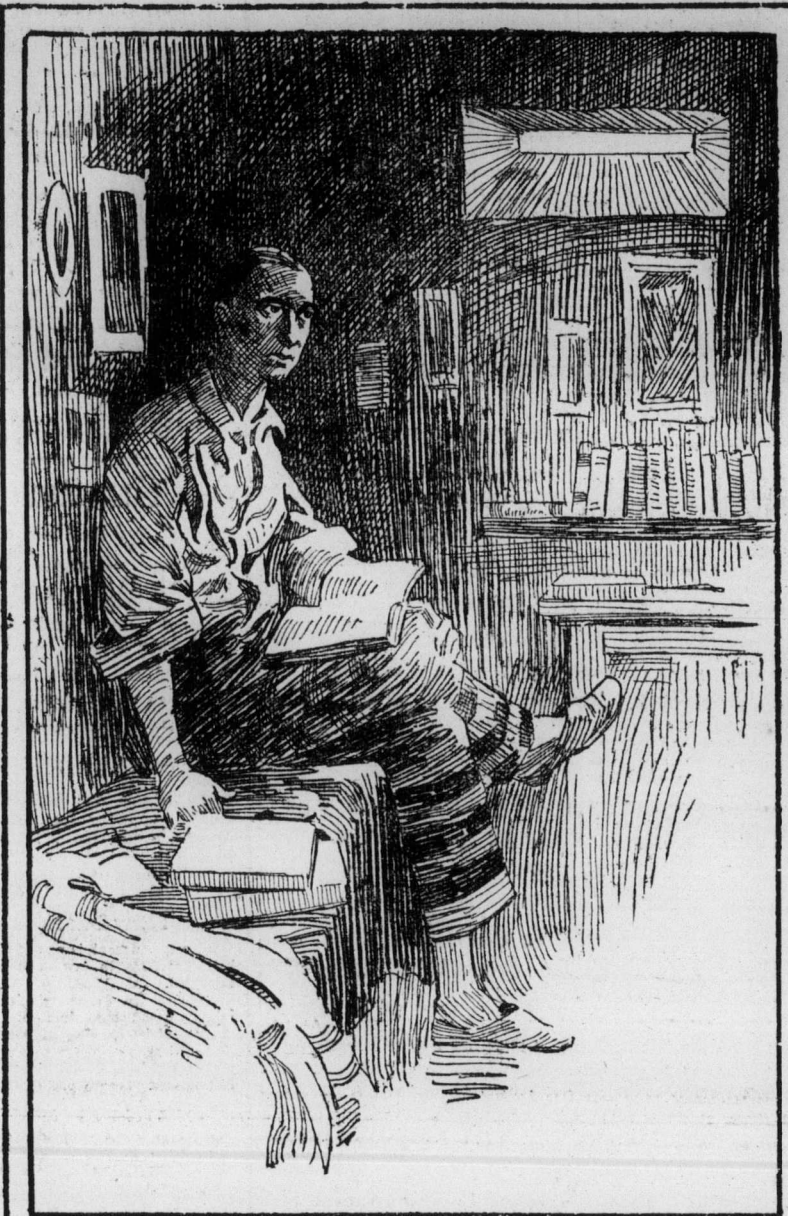
To explain what he is to-day it is necessary first to rehearse briefly the backgrounds of his life. Since Sept. 7, 1876, when he was seventeen years old, he had been denied the association even of other prisoners. He will be forty-seven years old on next November 29. He was not yet thirteen years old when he was first taken into custody. Upon his confession of torturing and mutilating boys of four to six years of age he was sent to the Reform School in Westboro, September 20, 1872. He was pardoned and released from this school on February 6, 1874. Very soon after he killed and buried a little girl five years old.

On the following April 22, the blackest day in his history, he was arrested, charged with the atrocious slaughter of a five-year-old boy in South Boston. In September he was convicted and sentenced to be hanged. He was not yet fifteen years old. The Supreme Court, without avail reviewed his defence of insanity. On August 31, 1876, after the Governor's Council had listened to a review of extenuating circumstances in his behalf, Governor Rice commuted the sentence. The document under which Pomeroy is held reads:

"We do, by and with the advice of our Council, grant to him, the said Jesse Harding Pomeroy, a commutation of the punishment which he is liable to endure by the aforesaid sentence to that of solitary imprisonment at hard labor in the State Prison during his natural life."

Where He Exists.

His cell is the most sequestered in that isolated fortress within the prison yard known as Cherry Hill. It is in a wing built on the east of the main building, doorless except from the interior of the main building and conspicuous because its only windows are small square holes along its eaves, which look like ventilators in a cold storage house. In the main building are about sixty cells, two tiers of them at each side, facing a central corridor. From these well lighted cells, which get light not only from the big corridor, but from a pair of outside windows in each cell, a prisoner may



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look out upon the long row of opposite cells. This part of the building is practically a dormitory, as most of its occupants during the day work in the prison shops. It is a building nearly always silent, empty by day and filled with sleeping men by night. Through an open doorway at the eastern end stretches a narrower and darker corridor. To the left of this rises an austere dead wall, with its small windows high overhead. To the right as one enters is a row of dark stone vaults, without furniture except for a low bench at the back wall of each. Each cell has double doors, a square grating one and a solid iron one, like a bank vault door, with an air hole at the top about the size of a cigar box. These tombs are known as the "punishment cells" and are used only for the temporary chastening of violent and unruly prisoners.

The furthest cell of the row, in the back corner of the wing, is supposed to be Pomeroy's world. It need never be passed by anybody in the prison except for express purpose. Prison officials do not identify it to the visitor; they only lure you away from it. Although remote from the activities of prison life and in such an austere corner of a sombre world, the cell is said to be fitted up for permanent solitude and to be as materially comfortable as any in the prison. That such a place must be wholesome is evidenced by Pomeroy's ordinary health and by the fact that his brown hair has not yet turned to gray. His pale and sallow face, however, shows that he lives in perpetual shadow. That his light must be better than might be expected is shown by the amount of reading he accomplishes with the use of only one eye. Vision with the other eye is obstructed by a white film, which with years has become almost opaque.

Customarily every day he sees nobody except the deputy in charge of Cherry Hill. This alert watchman constantly patrols the corridors and at frequent intervals noisily and suddenly peers at Pomeroy through the grating without engaging in needless conversation.

To the lone prisoner one day is like another. From morning till night, season after season, he reads and plans and studies. In pleasant weather his keeper can relieve his monotony somewhat by an hour of exercise in a small brick-walled yard, the solitary's private garden. His meals are the regular prison fare, but he must eat them without knife or fork. Once a week he has the regulation bath. Once a month his aged mother—she is now nearing seventy years of age—is permitted to make him a brief visit. The Governor, the Governor's Council and the Prison Commission see him on their yearly or sometimes more frequent visits to the prison. He rarely sees prison officials, except his keeper and the chaplain. The venerable chaplain provides him with reading.

Despite his sentence, Pomeroy has not labored for years. This is one rare subject upon which he can exercise his will, and he refuses to work. As this demonstration of will power is not known to other prisoners, he is not compelled. It

would be unprofitable trouble to force him.

He has practised penmanship until his handwriting is beautifully perfect. It looks like Spencerian cursive, carefully shaded, firm, regular, and small lettered. He has the call of 8,000 books in the prison library and of about 500 from the chaplain's private collection. For thirty years he has read from them. Of late years he has outgrown a fondness for fiction, and has spent most of his time with history and in the acquiring of foreign languages. He has a reading knowledge of Latin, German, French, Spanish, Italian and Arabic. Of his proficiency he alone knows; but with his lexicons he translates from the foreign books.

His favorite novelists are Balzac and Dumas. At times he has read a German newspaper, presumably for practice in German, as he has practised reading French newspapers. Ironical as it seems, although his life is bounded by narrow walls, he finds a surprising interest in a magazine of outdoor pastimes and princely country estates. He has said that if he were ever permitted his liberty he would get a farm in some isolated portion of Maine, where he would raise poultry for the rest of his days.

From necessary articles of cell equipment he has in times past fashioned crude implements which he has used in vain efforts toward freedom. Except as samples of what may be done with a minimum of material, when desperation rather than necessity is the mother of invention, these implements have been practically useless. The most desperate attempt Pomeroy ever made was in 1887, when he used the illuminating gas of his cell to create an explosion which not only wrecked the cell but nearly killed him. Of this escape even contemporary prisoners in Cherry Hill tell conflicting details. An account written by a convict who was recently pardoned is denied by the authorities. This related how one of Pomeroy's eyes had to be removed because of his injuries. This is said officially to be untrue, but is based on the fact that the vision of one eye has always been impaired.

More potent than these physical difficulties, however, a mental suggestion given to him has made him resigned to his fate unless he should gain leave to make his exit by the front doors. The following conversation once took place in his cell:

"If you ever did succeed in getting up on the streets, Jesse, the people feel so bitter against your deeds that they would hang you to the nearest telegraph pole."

This sentence nearly crushed him. There welled up in his mind the one topic that has been his constant contemplation—the years—that of justice.

"Do you really think they would?" he responded.

"Yes, Jesse, I actually think that is what would happen."

"Would that be justice?" was his only comment.

Pomeroy's harping on the subject of justice is the keynote to his whole present mental state to his philosophy, his religion, his attitude toward the world.

It was argued in his defence thirty years ago that his brain was abnormal; that he had no power of inhibition; no moral sense. Eminent physiologists of thirty years ago agreed that he had mental deficiencies.

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dominancy of his body. Such a being as he is to-day, Pomeroy cannot accept his fate as justice. Unconscious of the wellspring of his deeds, he has become a lifeless being.

Unable to believe that the deeds of the boy were the deeds of his will, Pomeroy feels convinced that he was not responsible for what he did. The mature man, unwilling to accept responsibility for the boy of long ago, has thought out for himself a philosophy of fatalism. Powers over which he had no control, he argues, urged the helpless boy in the unfortunate course. He cannot see the ethics or the justice of a society that punishes him now. More than that, he cannot believe that there is a God that would allow injustice to be heaped upon him. For this reason Pomeroy refuses to tolerate the teachings of religion. He has no religious belief, no faith. He senses that if there were a God, this superior force would not permit society to punish him.

In such a predicament, feeling himself a victim of fate, it is not remarkable that he has never been known to smile in thirty years. His mind all the years has been imbued with the plot of an almost classic tragedy in which he has been a part—an old Greek drama theme where a mortal is the helpless prey of superhuman fate.

WATCH THE BAROMETER.

It is Known as the Weather Prophet's Sheet Anchor.

1. Wind is air set in motion. The barometer is almost always affected before the wind actually begins to blow or to change. The length of time which passes between the first appearance of a change of weather and the actual setting in is not always the same.

2. When the barometer is steady there is no great likelihood of a storm being near us, while, when it is unsteady, there is danger of the wind freshening to a gale. This unsteadiness may be due to mere local causes, so that it is at times very hard to say whether it shows that a serious storm or only a slight squall is coming on.

3. A sudden rise of the barometer is very nearly as dangerous as a sudden fall because it shows that the level is unsteady. In an ordinary gale the wind often blows hardest when the barometer is just beginning to rise, directly after having been very low.

4. When the barometer at any place rises very high and continues so for some days, it is because there is too much air at the place, and the wind will be light. A gale can only set in when the wind flows away, and it will not at first be severe at that place.

5. When the barometer is very low and continues so, there may be calm and even dry weather for a short time, what is called a "pet day" of a "weather breeder," but there is great danger of a serious storm, because the air will try to force its way into the districts which the barometer is low and increase the pressure there. The storm will probably be the worst where the barometer has been the lowest.

6. The barometer rises for northerly winds (including from northwest, by the north to the eastward), for dry or less wet weather, for less wind, or for more than one of these changes.

7. The barometer falls for southerly winds (including from southeast, by the south to the westward), for wet weather, for stronger wind, or for more than one of these changes.

8. Besides these rules for the barometer, there is one about the way in which the wind changes, which is very important. It is well known to every seaman, and is contained in the following couplet:

When the wind veers against the sun, Trust it not, for back it will run.

9. The wind almost always shifts with the sun, that is, from left to right in front of you. A change in this direction is called veering.

10. If the wind shifts the opposite way, that is, against the sun, the change is called backing, and it seldom occurs except when the weather is unsettled.

—From the Launch.

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TO MAKE BREAD.

Different housekeepers have their own special recipes; but now and then one is found who does not know how to make good bread, and who wishes for a good recipe. If the weather should be cold, do not be too late at night before setting the dough, a six takes longer to rise in cold weather. Also, in cold weather heat the flour slightly but thoroughly in the oven before commencing. This ting the dough, as it takes longer to rise quicker. While the flour is being broken up, take a cake of first-class compressed yeast in a cup of warm water. If the setting is to be for four or five loaves, put into the flour as much salt as you can grasp in the hand with the fingers closing down over it, two tablespoonsful of sugar, and three tablespoonsful of lard. Make a hole in the middle of the flour and pour in the yeast, adding as much warm water as will make a dough which you can mould out. Mix thoroughly, then turn it out on a bake-board and knead till quite flexible. In kneading do not add any more flour than will keep the dough from sticking. Cover the pan well with a thick cloth, and set in some warm spot, apart from draught of doors or windows. If all works well, in the morning the dough will have risen to the top of the pan. Do not knead it again, nor plunge the hand into it. Grease the pans well, and taking out the dough, cover and set the loaf, quickly round it into shape and place it in the pan to rise, preceding the same way with the remainder of the pan, then cover and set the loaf to rise till within about half an inch of the top, when they must be put in the oven.

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It is lined with satin as snowy white. As the dress of a dainty bride.

It suits the man who is tall and thin. And the crowd makes way respectfully.

For the man in the new silk hat.

The college man with his coat of tan May dance with the girls all night.

And may have his pick of the fairest buds For a stroll in the park moonlight.

But they all forget in a flash, you bet, His fame at the ball or bat.

When the conquering hero comes in sight, The man with the new silk hat.

Prosperous, elegant, up-to-date, Right in the latest style.

Of the citizen well to do, Hail to the glory tie.

The man arrayed in the fur-lined coat, Must pocket their pride and step aside For the man in the new silk hat.

THE BAT.

He is of many sorts.

He cannot be mistaken.

He may be two inches in length.

If an Asiatic Kalong he may measure five feet.

He is said to have a marvellous sense of touch.

He inhabits the earth, save where there's perpetual ice.

He is undeniably partial to the tropics and warmer zones.

It is mean to connect him with vampires, of which next to nothing is known.

He (the brown bat) often falls afoul of electric lights.

He (the New York bat) is as red as the hoary bat is gray.

He (the tube-nosed fruit bat) has a price upon his head in this country.

The bat is of the order chiroptera, which means winged animals.

He is the only beast which can really fly.

He is decidedly nocturnal, always flying by night.

Even his greatest admirers do not claim he is intelligent.

He sleeps at night, head down, suspended by his hinder feet.

He is classed with the insect-eaters along with the shrew mice.

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