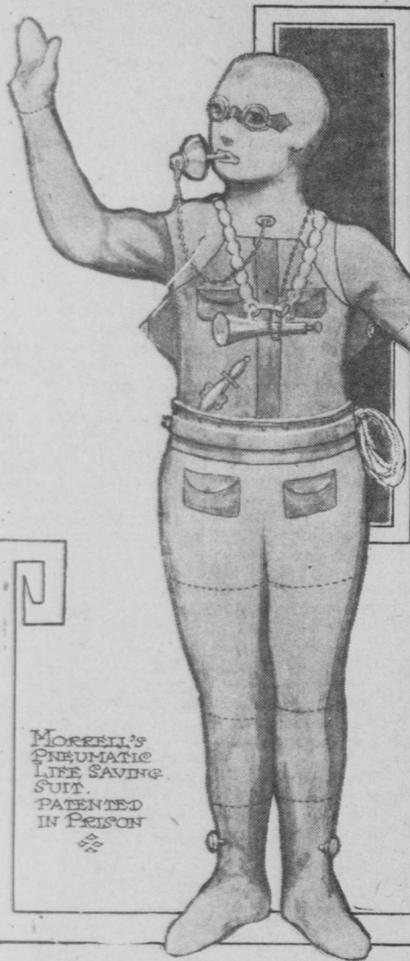


# FIVE YEARS in the SOLITARY in the FROM STRIPES TO UNIFORMS



### How Edward Morrell Saved Himself From Insanity While in the Silent, Darkened Cage by Inventing a Life Saving Device

By Jack Jungmeyer

It is pretty generally conceded that our present day penal institutions are little more than finishing schools for crime. Even the most pronounced optimist is forced to this opinion. Prison officials for the most part admit it without an argument, and the man serving time within the gray walled enclosure, the prisoner himself shrugs his concession to the fact. Whether or not it is possible to create a practical penal system that will operate for unquestionable regeneration in moral delinquents is a moot point and will not be discussed here. The fact remains that at present these systems do not so operate, and that regeneration of the criminal is accomplished only through his own unaided effort; it becomes a matter of pulling one's self from the slough by tugging at one's own boot straps. This unaided fight of an individual to reach a new eminence of existence or to regain the lost former station of respectability is at best a difficult feat. When it is accomplished by the branded creatures of a penitentiary, where the handicaps are almost insurmountable, it becomes a veritable miracle. Much food for thought may be gleaned from an interview with a man who has brought such a miracle to pass. The instance deserves wide publicity.

The story of Edward Morrell, sentenced to a life term in the California state penitentiary at San Quentin for his identification with the famous Sonlag-Evans gang of train robbers and bandits who operated in this state during the early nineties, and recently pardoned by Lieutenant Governor Porter after having served 16 years of his sentence, is the story of a man who tugged mightily at his boot straps.

During the first few years of his imprisonment Morrell was pronounced one of the most desperate incorrigibles that had ever served time at the institution. This unenviable reputation he earned by his constant efforts to escape, his intractability and his alleged complicity in a plot to effect a general jail delivery at Folsom, where he spent the first two years of his incarceration. As a result of his behavior he was thrown into solitary confinement in the incorrigible ward, to remain there the rest of his days.

Five years he spent in this dim, lone cell, absolutely shut off from every human contact—a grim, hopeless convict whom the officials and the other prisoners alike feared. Then came a day when a new warden assumed charge of the prison—a humanitarian of such caliber that he was willing to give the sullen incorrigible another chance. Morrell was released from solitary confinement and permitted to mingle again with his fellow prisoners, to share their work, their sweat and their play; to see the sun again after the years of gloom and to feel the wind that comes beating in across the walls of the yard; to smell the sod and to watch the flowers of the prison garden open to the touch of the spring warmth; to stand sometimes on that spot within the trodden court whence the blue bulk of Tamalpais can be seen across the stone deadline.

Straightway a remarkable change or conduct began to be apparent in the convict. Some quick metamorphosis was beginning to take place. The officers of the yard and the higher officials took note of it. They began presently to look upon him as a man who might be trusted. He was watched for a long period, watched so closely, although he himself was unaware of the surveillance, that his slightest and most insignificant actions were carried in a nightly report to the warden. The reports were satisfactory. By and by the man began to be trusted—more and more, in increasingly important matters. One day the warden called Morrell to his office and offered him the "head trustship" of the prison, the highest position of trust to which a convict may attain. The man accepted. Four years later, on the strength of his conduct during his service as "head trusty," in March of 1908, he was granted an absolute pardon. The turnkey opened the massive lock, the steel door swung back and the man who 16 years earlier had entered to serve his life out in the massive cage walked out into the open.

So much for what it availed this man to pull on his bootstraps. So much for externals. Now for a glimpse at the obscure life in the cell, for the undercurrent of determined striving and right living which made this consummation possible—the miracle of liberty to the life term. I will repeat his story as he told it to me.

"When I received my pardon and was saying goodbye to the boys, one of my fellow prisoners, another life term, said to me, 'How did you ever do it, Ed?' I remember you when you looked like old Robinson Crusoe with your long hair and wild eyes down in tomb 14, doing solitary for life. And now you're going out! Tell me how you did it. I certainly thought you would never see sunlight again."

"That man expressed the general surprise of my prison fellows at my release. Almost to a man they entertained the idea that a struggle toward better manhood was not alone useless, but that was a bitter joke, an absolute waste of energy. To drift along with the currents of least resistance—for the most part brutalizing currents—was the general attitude of the men, especially the men who were in for life; to drift, to plot escapes and to give their intervals of thought to the fashioning of crooks' devices. They used to laugh when they first learned of my determination to think right and to live right in that stagnant life eddy of the prison. 'What's the use' they laughed. And in their cynicism was an indirect result of my struggle to remain sane in the twilight of my exile to the solitary toms.

**BREAKING A MAN'S SPIRIT**

"When a man has been relegated to the bleak emptiness of the isolated donjon, there to remain for the rest of his years, there to remain without change, without hope, without any intercourse with his kind until he dies and is carried out along the road that leads up to the little field of headboards that mark a prisoner's parole, madness begins to leer at him from the cell corners. It becomes the paramount issue to fight it off. Not a few of the so

called incorrigibles succumb to it. I have heard their ravings through the wire. How did you ever do it, Ed? I had to keep my mind busy with wholesome considerations. I began to indulge in regular mental gymnastics. Problems in mechanics, intricate speculative feats in engineering had inventive considerations occupied my time and brought me some measure of solace.

"These speculations began to take a definite trend, and finally a clear cut ambition stood out before me: I would become an inventor.

"Labor with my hands was denied me, to be forever denied. Inventive labors of my mind could not be so restrained. Whether or not they would ever materialize in practical shape, whether or not they would accrue to any benefit more tangible than the solace they brought me, did not matter just then. They would at least keep me busy with something of accumulative interest. This was for a time enough.

"Straightway it came to me that the hope I tried to deny was not dead, for I was not dead. Where before it had expressed itself in attempts to escape, it now exerted itself in another kind of emancipation. It was fashioning a key that might unlock my cell door someday, though the key was not one of iron. Thus the beginning of a new era was ushered into my life.

"I did not permit the fearful handicaps that were against me to daunt. I began to work at my invention. Encouragement that kept dining in my ears. I simply worked on, blindly, patiently. Surely something must happen to give me the chance to put into practical shape and application this device of mine. I was patient with the new pictures. I was patient with the strange patience that comes with life imprisonment. I waited.

"And then, after those horrible years in solitary confinement, I was rewarded. Substantial return was mine for my persistence; hope had not mocked me. I had given the lie to the skeptical laugh and sneer of a man of authority had walked past my cell and looked in, had in some subtle fashion detected the changed attitude I bore toward the scheme of things and had then restored me to comparative liberty among my stripe clad fellows. And the patent office at Washington had very shortly thereafter granted me exclusive right to a useful device the markets of the world had heretofore never held—an invention which I called 'The rubber suit.'"

"Here was one answer to my fellow convicts' query: 'What's the use?' And now, having unlocked the door of my solitary cell, I began to entertain a hope that I might in similar fashion unlock even the outer door of the prison, the last portal to the outer world. It was at this time that the captain of the yard, as he afterward told me, watched me so closely that I did not so much as spit but that he heard of it. I did not, however, at this time know that I was being watched. That right living and thinking, the direction of one's energies into the proper channels, is more potent in unlocking dungeon doors than any material device the convict might attempt to fashion is borne out by the fact of my subsequent pardon; by that of many similar experiences.

**AMBITION'S HANDICAPS**

"A word about the handicaps that tend to discourage a prisoner in applying himself to creative labors of the useful, legitimate sort while in confinement:

"In the first place, the very nature of his habitation is bound to act as a powerful deterrent against ambition and wholesome mental as well as physical life. The little cell to which I was confined for five years is a tomb of 9x4 feet. It is absolutely bare except for the mattress and two blankets spread on the steel floor as bedding. The light of the sun never enters. Gloom pervades until it gets a sort of weight. All thought is at first pressed from the confined man's mind. Then horrible fancies and brutalizing conceptions begin to come. Every vestige of humanity he may have left is strangled. In no manner does the condemned man have any intercourse with his kind. Twice a day the silent guard shoves a can of food through the slot at the bottom of the cell door—at feeding time. This and the whisper of the guard's shoes in his ceaseless patrol is the only evidence the 'solitary' has

ED. MORRELL AT THE TIME OF HIS CAPTURE

that he is in a world of life and kindred beings.

"When a man has gained the fearful distinction of 'incorrigible' he is placed in this solitary confinement to break his spirit. But the perpetual solitude and the gloom that is neither day nor night generally does more than subdue a man. What it does I have seen and heard many a time from those who living close about me. It will not bear writing about. All this is hardly conducive to clear or creative thought. Vengeance and the growth of such savage feds as the average mind can scarcely comprehend are the products that flourish behind these stone walls; weeds that crush out all other mental activity.

"In the second place, I, as 'incorrigible,' was not permitted to have paper, pencil or instrument of any kind that might have assisted me in my efforts, aids which are absolutely necessary to the prosecution of invention. All books were denied me. Materials with which any design might be worked out and made concrete were as inaccessible to me there in the cell as was liberty itself. No slight deterrents these, you will admit. It can scarce be a matter of wonder that no good thing can come from a penal institution which provides no incentive contingencies, than all manner of disordered channels of that illegitimate expression of energy for which the convicted felon has been imprisoned.

"There is very little, if any, assistance in a penitentiary when a convict has not hope for ultimate liberty and, or anything that might accrue to his own and society's lasting benefit. But there is plenty of information and assistance when, instead, he desires to equip himself in all manner of disordered channels of criminal ventures. In this there is no trouble. Reference volumes, bound in striped cloth, are many—a complete encyclopedia of crook knowledge. They are open to any one who shows himself a 'good fellow' among his prison associates.

"No one man or set of men connected with any penal institution can be held to blame for the existence of these conditions; they are the result of our present day inadequate penitentiary system.

"The key that unlocked my prison cell—that is what I call my first patented, perfected and granted while at San Quentin. It is a rubber life saving suit, designed for all manner of emergencies. The first directing impetus toward its conception and creation came as a result of overhearing two guards rehearsing the terrible Valencia disaster outside my cell door. The crying need of something more dependable in such emergencies suggested a profitable line of speculation. This was at the time when I first began to wonder whether there might not be a ray of hope for me in the patent office at Washington; perhaps, not hope for ultimate liberty, but a source of revenue, but hope that I might still in some way have an active part in the destinies of life and of my kind. In the new pride of craft that came with the granting of a patent, on the device, all original promptings were forever allayed in me. The promptings to commit crime now appeared in the light of a 10 cent bribe offered to a man whose daily earning is \$10.

"During the four years of which Morrell served as 'head trusty' at San Quentin he began to encourage other convicts to turn their attention to invention; the life prisoners for the wholesome distraction it would provide. If for nothing else, the limited sentence men for the eventual profit that might attach to it after their release.

**SWITCHING THE TEND OF A CRIMINAL'S ENERGIES**

"There was a young fellow," continues Morrell, "who came to me during my trustyship and asked me for some information he needed to perfect a contrivance which he was secretly working on. I so succeeded in directing that boy's proclivities that he shortly gave over his plan to resume counterfeiting as soon as released, and devoted himself to legitimate channels of effort. He is now, and has been for the past year, a fine patient that not only insure him a substantial living, but provide him with further incentive to an honest life.

"Another case:

"Some years ago a young crook, under 21, was sent to San Quentin from the Ione reform school. He had been pronounced by the officials at Ione a burglar whose regeneration was hopeless. Some months after his transfer to the penitentiary the boy came to me with the request that I give him some assistance in perfecting a safe smashing tool. His device was very ingenious. It had taken no mean quantity of brains to conceive and perfect it. This boy was utilizing his time; he

By Vinny Vincent

With pick and drill and bar 400 convicts at San Quentin strain at the stubborn rock, digging bit by bit the trenches for the foundations of a new cell building to contain 800 additional cells. The structure will be 600 feet long and concrete and iron are the only materials to be used in building it. As the walls mount higher and grow solid under the hands of this striped garbed army of men a structure to stand for generations will evolve.

But even then the builders build better than they know; for, with the completion of that mass of masonry there will be inaugurated at San Quentin one of the most sweeping prison reforms that has been attempted in the United States. The aim is to make the prison the most advanced reformatory to be found from the Pacific to the Atlantic.

At best a penitentiary is a poor place to put a man on the right track. That the law breaker would be no prison at all. That will come with the millennium. But until humankind has reached such a stage of benightedness will have no struggle on with places that have those cursed with peculiarly angled minds which make them criminals can be confined and rendered harmless.

Our prison population is divided roughly into two classes: the criminal and the law breaker. There is a distinction between the two. They are widely different. The criminal is innately vicious; a degenerate. The law breaker is of normal mind, but one who from seeming necessity or on impulse overstepped the bounds.

The law is an artificial barrier erected by the mass to protect itself from the vicious minority, the criminals. Inelastic, it states definitely what is and what is not a crime. The law does not take into account circumstances. That is left to the judge in giving sentence. A man is either guilty or innocent. Because of the very exactness of the statutes it is safe to say that few men have ever been really abiding life.

Businessmen, lawyers, and other professional men have, under the lash of keen competition, broken laws for which they were liable to a term in the penitentiary. That, however, is called criminals, except under the law's definition.

So it is with the majority of our felons. They have committed a breach of law of magnitude sufficient to send them to state prison. That, however, does not argue that they are criminals. Their incarceration is usually traceable to three causes—evil environment, liquor, or nonemployment. Non-employment and drink predominate as the impelling causes for crime. This is true particularly of the first term and consequent exposure of their records has thrown many an "old con" from the workers' ranks back into the destroying maw of our penitentiaries.

It is these, the law breakers, that California is going to save. To that end the prison directors and Warden John Hoyle of San Quentin are formulating plans for a new, far reaching scheme. This reform, in conjunction with the splendid parole system, which saves men every day from returning to crime, is expected materially to reduce the number of felons.

There is nothing sentimental about the movement. The reform is being instituted by hard headed businessmen. Based on the broad psychology of every man, the entire scheme will be built on practical lines. Under the

present arrangement all convicts from "fish" (new comers) to old felons are herded together. It has long been recognized that this is one of the crying evils of the present mode of caring for prisoners. Many times cellmates will be a callow youth of 17 serving a short term and a sneering monster who hates free men with all his depraved mind. It is easy to see what the latter's influence on the boy is. There are nearly half a hundred boys in San Quentin under 20 years of age. They are forming their characters—now.

Degraded to the stripes, believing themselves disgraced for life, it is natural that a fellow feeling should grow up among the prisoners. They are outcasts, a few against the many. The prison officials battle against this sympathy. Once let a law breaker get the idea firmly fixed that the world is down on him and he degenerates into a criminal. Henceforth his hand is against every man.

In time a first termer grows calloused to his position. A dull hate for the law and the people who took from him a portion of his life makes it easy to cast the die for crime. Very few men take punishment philosophically even when it is most deserved. Many times his imagination is fired by stories told by boastful yeggs of the many "tricks" they turned before getting caught. The tales usually being him to believe that the law is an easy thing to beat. Under such delusions many weak youths and young men have left the prison doors with minds made up fully to become part of the underworld and live its life. They usually return to the law in the first step in the reformation from this ill advised way of musing the prisoners is not the only evil attributable to the system. It permeates the very blood. Because of this conglomerate mixing of the better with the worse elements in the penal community, discipline is harder to preserve, morality is shattered, and the health of the prisoners, bodily and morally, is demoralized. Recognizing this and a number of additional reasons not gone into here, the first step in the reformation is the segregation of prisoners.

Three divisions are to be made. The first class is confined to the best behaved and most intelligent prisoners. From their ranks only can a man be paroled. Greater privileges will be allowed them, such as the right to communicate with outsiders, yard liberties, etc. Their labor is planned to be lighter and more congenial, and more time for recreation and consequent liberties are to be given. There the convicts will wear neat uniforms, as will those in the second class. The intermediate division is the clearing house. There the new entries are destined to remain six months. Then, according to their behavior and general deportment, they will be placed either in the first or third class. Less liberties, more work and shorter time for recreation is planned for this division.

The incorrigibles and the worst element of prison population will compose the third section. Hard work is to be their portion. From morning bugle until lock up time at evening it will be labor, incessant. Communication with the outside world will be cut off absolutely. No play time to be allowed; only labor, hard manual drudgery. These will be garbed in the hated stripes. These alone will receive physical punishment for rule broken. These will be sent to the dungeon, when prisoners in the higher grades would be merely reduced to lower ranks.

But for the lowest there will be hope always. Even the one in the black and dirty white barred garment is to

have a chance. By good behavior he can work up to the second division prison.

One would imagine that despair would be depicted only on the face of a man mounting the gallows to death. It is not so. With starting eyes, open wide, face set in tense lines he totters after the chanting priest to the trap. It is not despair, but animal terror that marks his dazed chalky face. For a week his guards and the priest have been keying him up for the last terrible moment. Religion has comforted and has promised him life after death. He believes and has a great unconquerable hope. But in the noisy lute mill, the prison yard, in solitary confinement when a scant six feet is left for exercise, there is found despair; it is the despair of felons who have served previous terms. Many are yet law breakers, not criminals. The reason for their return of monomaniacally alike: "I tried to work, but the police got on to me and told my boss. Then I was fired." The remainder of the downward slide is read every day.

According to the law, these men can not hope for a parole, less for a pardon. Usually they have years before them still before the expiration of their term. Even with the credits for good behavior to shorten the time they will be theirs. It is too late to start again.

Those men are in hell, for they exist in the land of no hope. Despair engraves deep on their gray stone faces it chisels. Here again will reform step in to help. It is planned to make San Quentin a place of hope. Every man is to be given his chance.

To do this it will not be necessary to change the parole law at all. For a man ineligible because of previous convictions will be put into execution; when a convict has proved himself worthy of release and has fulfilled all requirements before he term has expired, he will be granted a parole and a parole will be done only with the sanction of the supreme court and the governor. It is really a commendable plan.

By these means the moral tone of San Quentin will be raised. The better men will not be allowed to associate with the vicious, even at their meals. The health of the penal community now numbering over 1,700 men will be better. Convicts will continue to be men in spite of their degradation, and some criminals might learn to abide by the law. In any event, the law breakers, potential criminals, will have the chance to learn that the law can not be beaten for long, and San Quentin, the tomb of the living dead, will become an assistance and not a destroyer of man's moral fiber.

These changes, however, will not make San Quentin any more attractive than it is now. Life there is grim and as colorless as the gray walls that surround the carcasses of the men who are broken by an enthusiast merely that he may be reformed there.

the convict's energies in the right channels and you make a desirable, dependable citizen of him in ninety cases out of a hundred."

In speaking of the present administration at San Quentin, Morrell has this to say: "Warden Hoyle is an exceptionally wide awake and competent official. He is striving with all his power for better conditions, to bring about that condition of affairs which will insure society not alone harmless but positively reclaimed citizens in its released prisoners. He has shown himself at once capable and broadly sympathetic; a warden in whom prisoners can have confidence; an official of whom the state may well be proud. With men of his caliber as officials of reform institutions, the reclamation of moral delinquents would move much more swiftly and surely."



### A Sweeping Prison Reform Which Will Be Inaugurated at San Quentin When the New Cellhouse Is Completed

FIRST CLASS

SECOND CLASS

THIRD CLASS