

## THEY DUG FOR LIBERTY.

An old and trusted turnkey was dismissed from service at the Folsom State Prison yesterday, and a guard was suspended for two weeks. A special meeting of the State Board of Prison Directors was held at Folsom on Saturday, Messrs. De Pue, Devlin and Bountag being present, and Messrs. Craig and Reddy absent. The report of Warden Aull, which was read and accepted, announced the fact that the dam across the American River near the prison would be completed before high water, and the work on the power-house and canal was progressing favorably.

The principal business of the special meeting of the directors was the making of a thorough investigation of the escape of the four prisoners on the night of August 18th last. These were Matthew Blumer, who was serving a life sentence for murder committed in Yuba county; Charles Geierman, serving a seventeen-year sentence for burglary, and C. H. Kohler and Tom Wilson, serving ten and six years respectively for burglary. The directors called to the witness stand a number of prison officials and guards, and also the four prisoners, who were recently recaptured at Ogden, U. T., and returned to Folsom.

As a result of the investigation the directors decided that Turnkey Paul, who had been a trusted official of the prison for five years, had not shown proper vigilance in examining the cells of the escapes from time to time, and he was therefore ordered dismissed from the service. The order took effect yesterday. Paul offered no defense other than to say that he thought he had been sufficiently vigilant. Guard Gerkner, who had charge of the tiers in which the cells of the escapes were located, was found guilty of a similar offense to that of Paul and was suspended from duty for two weeks.

The four prisoners recently recaptured were taken before the directors and pleaded guilty to an attempt at escaping. It was ordered that each man except Blumer should lose his credits, Blumer being a life prisoner. Geierman lost three and one-half years of credits. During the investigation Prisoner Kohler made a full confession to the directors, and told the exact story of how the escape was planned and carried out.

The confession of prisoner Kohler so astonished the directors that they pronounced the escape the most remarkable in the history of California. The story in substance was as follows: The plan of escape was first proposed a year ago. All four of the convicts being Germans, it was agreed to stand together in case they reached the outside of the prison walls, and to proceed at once to Europe. Convicts Bohler and Blumer were inmates of cell No. 20, Geierman and Wilson were in cell No. 63, in a different tier, five or six cells distant from No. 20. Blumer and Kohler commenced their work on the 11th day of last December, ten months ago. They

first cut a hole into the granite floor of cell No. 20, using as tools such small drills as they could smuggle into the prison from the quarry where they worked. The convicts are locked up for the night at 9 o'clock, and at 10 the order is given for "lights out," and a guard makes a round of the cells. During that hour was the only time the two convicts could proceed with their work. So tedious and slow was their labor that the hole in the floor of the cell was not completed until March 17th. When the aperture was completed they found a four-foot space between the floor and the ground. Their next move was to work their way toward cell 63, in which the other two men were confined. There was an up-hill slope, and under cell 63 there was only a space of a few inches. In running their tunnel toward cell 63 the prisoners were compelled to cut through a double wall of granite.

In the meantime the inmates of cell 63 had cut a hole in their floor, and thus the four prisoners were in a position to work together. They then began work on a shaft from under cell 20, six feet downward, using an old bar and a large chisel. The earth dug from the shaft was poked in sacks and carried out of the hole to the space beneath the cell floor.

There was a very small hole in the granite slab loosened from the floor of cell 20, not over half an inch in diameter, and through this very small aperture the prisoners at work in the shaft below received enough fresh air to barely keep them alive. In the six-foot shaft the air was so foul that the candle light by which they worked was frequently extinguished. The men could only work in the shaft a few minutes at a time, being compelled to crawl back to the small hole for fresh air.

After digging the shaft the convicts commenced work upon a tunnel to the outside wall of the prison, a work that required nearly three months. The air was so foul in the tunnel that all four of the men fainted half a dozen times, making remarkable efforts in getting out and recovering. Their fingers bled profusely at the nails from the hard work and their bodies were badly bruised. Kohler became extremely ill from the foul air and went to the prison physician for medicine on several occasions. When their tunnel reached the outside wall they found themselves beside a solid granite bank of nine feet. They were therefore compelled to sink another shaft downward five or six feet to the bottom of the wall. When this was completed they found to their dismay that the granite wall rested on bedrock, which was almost as solid as the granite. After three weeks of hard work they tunneled through the bedrock with two short crowbars. These were smuggled into the prison from the quarry by a most ingenious method. The crowbars were fastened to small pieces of twine and hung suspended from the necks of two of the men, the bars extending down the legs of their

pantaloon or overalls. The men narrowly escaped serious injury by caving banks when they finally reached the outer side of the wall and commenced a shaft upward. On two occasions they were nearly smothered by the caving of the earth.

When the outer ground was finally reached on August 18th, the men made their escape at 9 o'clock at night, with an hour's start of the guard. They crawled over the path leading to the house of the captain of the guard and found themselves in what is known as the lower yard of the prison. With the aid of kindly shadows the four men stole away in the darkness, and by a circuitous route reached a point about a mile below the town of Folsom. There they crossed the American river bridge and started for Roseville, but mistook their way and were soon on the way to Orangedale.

At daybreak they crept into the bushes at the roadside and slept until nightfall. They then started away in the darkness, and reaching a cross-road where the guideboards were fastened far up on a tree, Kohler climbed the tree and read the sign with difficulty. They then took the road to Newcastle, stopping at night in a small ravine, where they ate raw potatoes and sweet corn, the first food they had tasted in forty-eight hours. Wilson found an old pair of overalls near a Chinese cabin, which he washed in a creek nearby, and then put on. The others wore pantaloons made of a blanket each had taken with him when they left the prison, with their gum boots covering the lower parts.

The only money in the party was a \$5 gold piece, which had long been treasured by Geierman. Kohler was sent to a store at a neighboring cross-roads, where he bought a small quantity of flour and bacon and two pairs of overalls, the storekeeper wrapping up three pairs by mistake instead of two. Now that they were enabled to disguise themselves they ventured to travel in the daytime. At meal hours they ate fruits and vegetables. In this way the four convicts plodded onward until they reached Wadsworth, Nev., where one night they stole into a box car. In that conveyance they traveled 400 miles, having nothing to eat but sugar, there being seventy barrels of it in the car.

At a small station in Nevada one night Kohler heard the conductor of the train say to the brakeman that he believed there were tramps in the sugar car and suggested the capture of them at the next stopping place. Kohler also heard the engineer tell the conductor that the train would stop at a water tank a few miles farther on. Kohler awoke his sleeping companions, and, as the train neared the water tank, they jumped out and ran. The conductor saw them, but did not follow.

The four convicts then continued their journey on foot until they reached Ogden. There they found employment for two days, working on a ditch at \$2.25 a day. Wilson