

# *Letter from Stephen F. Austin to James F. Perry*

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May 10, 1834

Dr BROTHER.

I improve the first moment that I could write to you since I arrived here which was on the 13 Feby — on that day I was locked up in one of the dungeons of this vast building incomunicado, that is I was not allowed to speak to, or communicate with any person whatever except the officer of the guard. I remained in this situation untill yesterday when I was permitted to communicate with persons outside, receive books, writing materials, visits etc and to mix with the other prisoners — there are about 60 of them, all officers except two clergymen (Padres) and all men of good families and respectability confined for political opinions in the revolution of the past year. The occupant of my dungeon before me was a Col. who was banished. General Bustamante former vice-President occupied one in July and August last near mine, as I am informed.

You may have some curiosity to know how I am lodged and what sort of a place an inquisition prison is, about which so many horrid things are said all over the world, and which are no doubt true and probably much worse.

My room is about 16 feet by 13—very high ceiling— two doors, one flush with the outside surface of the wall, the other near the inside surface and within the wall which is about 3 feet thick of large hewn stone— the latter door has an oblong hole large enough to admit a plate—the other is solid, both were always locked and bolted untill yesterday—no windows—a very small skylight in the roof which barely afforded light to read on very clear days when the sun was high, say from 10 to 3 o'clock—quite free from damp except such as would naturally result from the want of a free circulation of air. There are 19 similar dungeons in this range with the difference that some of them are a little larger than mine, tho most are the same size—they are in the interior of this extensive building and the doors open into an oblong patio or open court about 120 by 60 feet which has a varanda or gallery all round it supported by pillars and arches—a fountain of good water from the aqueduct in the centre. This part of the building is one story but is surrounded on every side by other parts of the same building that are two stories and present a solid wall above our range without windows that look into this patio. On two sides of the base of the two story wall before mentioned there are solederos or sunning places which are spaces about 14 feet square (one is much larger) ranged along the back of the dungeons and between them and the before mentioned two story wall— they are separated from each other by high walls—each has a door, locks etc—open above for the sun—they communicate with the patio by arched passages.

When I came in each dungeon had its occupant and all were incomunicado the same as myself. All the doors were locked and bolted no one came into the patio except the sentinel—all was silent—each one was taken out about two hours the middle of the day and put into one of the solederos or sunning places, alone and locked in. In time of the inquisition the prisoners were covered with a kind of sack or over garment with a mask at the top to cover the head and face, so that they could not be known, even by the guard in going through the patio to and from the solederos, nothing of the kind was done with us, we saw each other but could not salute or speak. I am told that in the time of the inquisition there were four other patios or open courts that belonged to the part of the building that was used as a prison—they formerly communicated with each other by obscure passages which are now

closed. The entrance into each from the street was always separate as they still are so that if the friend of a prisoner saw him enter one of the outside doors, he could not from that circumstances form any idea of the patio or part of the building where he was confined. The patio I am in communicates with the street by a narrow dark passage about 150 feet long.

Padre Servando Mier a very distinguished patriot was confined in the same dungeon I am in by the tribunal of the inquisition in its time, and also by the emperor Iturbide. I visited him here in this room in October 1822, he was a member of congress and was arrested the 20 of August with 14 other members. General Morelos the most distinguished of the generals in the beginning of the revolution, was confined in a dungeon near mine in this range from which he was taken to be shot. In short each of these dungeons has some tradition of the sufferings of some victim of the inquisition or of the revolution. Since the Independence this building has been used as a prison for political opinions or offences—no one accused of felonious crimes is confined here. The prisoners are well treated.

The first of April all the prisoners were put in communication except myself and four others we remained shut up until yesterday—our doors are now open from sun rise to 9 o'clock at night—we have the free use of the patio and can visit another extensive range of dungeons in the 2d story of the main building which communicates with this patio by a dark passage and much darker stone staircase. From this range there is a passage onto the asotea or roof of our range of dungeons which is flat so that we can walk over our dungeons and all around our patio and have sufficient room for exercise I was shewn a dungeon in the 2d story where a man from Guatamala was confined by the inquisition 30 years he is now living in a hospital of this city and has given some account of the treatment of prisoners in those days of superstition and despotism

I have received no personal ill treatment from any of the officers or guards who have had charge of me since my first arrest up to this day I received such provisions as I needed them through the guard—they were handed in at the hole in the inside door. When I left Monterey the officer of the guard, Cap Manuel Barragan, told me that he would put no guard over me except my word that I would not attempt to escape nor speak or write to any one without his permission. I gave it of course, for I would have returned to Mexico on the simple order of the Govt my conscience told me that I had committed no crime. I was imprudent in urging the claims of Texas that were confided to me as an agent with more determination and obstinacy than was consistent with my personal security or welfare, but nothing more. I accepted the agency with reluctance, but in good faith and conformed to what I had every right to believe was the general wish of the people so far as the convention expressed that wish. Much good will result to Texas from my sufferings. The state government have been stimulated to apply proper remedies in many things and some of those who would have ruined the country and thrown it into confusion merely from personal feelings and low mean jealousies towards me, are now satisfied and rejoicing and are in favor of peace and quietness, because they think I am suffering—others who were restless and dissatisfied with me and with every thing without knowing why, are more calm and reasonable, and others who were my enemies a year ago, have no doubt had the magnanimity to do me justice— this conduct (if it be true as I am told it is) will do them honor and be remembered to their advantage at some future day when all personal feelings have passed away. My own personal friends (and the mass of the honest and laboring farmers are so) have always been in favor of peace and quietness and opposed to turbulence. They have no doubt blamed me for suffering violent men to involve me as I have been. They have seen that I have permitted myself to be thrown into the mire by others whose sole object was my ruin. I was unsuspecting and acted in good faith—the fact is that when a few persons combine to ruin another who is unsuspecting and acts in good faith and with honest intentions, it is very difficult for him to escape.

Thus it is, that those who a year ago were the most anxious for a state and the most

turbulent, are now for peace—they have in fact adopted my own principles which always have been peace quietness, patience and submission to the laws and no revolutions. If I ever wandered from those principles, it was because the public feeling was so disordered and things were so disjointed that my opposition would have increased the evils and in all probability caused a great deal of confusion. I yielded from this motive, and yielded in good faith, and not to undermine or counteract. Thus my own principles of peace and quietness are now predominant, when had I attempted to have made them prevail by direct opposition to violent measures the reverse would have been the case.

It is very evident that Texas must become a state at some future day and not very distant—all will be in favor of it—the attempt that has been made was premature and totally wrong as to the manner. The particular act that involved me in all this, was the calling of the convention in my absence. I yielded after my return. So far as I am to blame in agreeing to those measures I am ready to be censured—they grew out of the situation of public feelings at the time—it would have been worse than useless for me to have opposed them—the only way I could have done it was to enter into the thing in bad faith so as to defeat and counteract. Such a course I did not think was correct or honorable—on my arrival here I could have put the state question to sleep. If I had done so those who now blame me for an excess of zeal would have been vociferous on the opposite extreme. All those things are mere matters of course—in short it is mankind. The only substantial manner in this business that is worthy of consideration is that much substantial good will result to Texas from my sufferings and I am content—as to office or public employ you know that I have always been averse to it—I am more so now than ever—I am no office hunter nor no demagogue seeking popularity—I have tried in good faith to do all the good I could to everybody—as to enemies and friends—the common acceptance of those words amongst mankind in general conveys to the mind the same idea of change, that the word clouds, does—not so with true personal friends—of these I shall never want. Such men for example as T. F. McKinney. These are the only kind of friends I wish for.

I have no idea when I shall be at liberty. I think that all depends on the report of Almonte, who has been sent to Texas and I presume is now there or on his way back. It is much in my favor that all remains quiet in Texas I was confident that no friend of mine would try to get up an excitement but I feared that my enemies would. Such a thing would have increased my difficulty, for I would have been blamed for it all. My confinement has been very rigid but I am in good health and have borne it with tolerable patience. I had no books the first month, and it was solitary enough—after that I prevailed on the sergeant to go to D. Victor Blanco who sent them—he and Padre Muldoon have been firm and unwavering in their friendship to me in all this business, so has Ramon Musquis and many others in Bexar who have written here in my favor I have never complained of the Vice President Farias—he has been deceived—he has been made to believe, as I am told, that my object was to separate Texas from Mexico and deliver it to the United States of the north, which is absolutely false and without the shadow of foundation besides being a great absurdity. In a moment of irritation I said to the vice President that if the evils of Texas were not remedied the public there would remedy them of themselves, this irritated him very much and my difficulties commenced. The truth is I lost patience and was imprudent and of course to blame, for patience is necessary in such cases. I hope that no friend of mine will blame the vice President or complain of him. I put on one side all considerations of personal safety or consequences to myself and thought only of suffering Texas and the fevered and excited situation of my constituents — had I erred from a want of zeal or industry or diligence in the discharges of my duty as an agent, all would have had cause to censure me and my own conscience would have been the first to do it, for nothing can be more sacred than a public agency. My conscience is at rest — as an agent I did my duty, or, only erred from excess of

zeal to do it — good has resulted even from that error if it was one. I am suffering but the evils of Texas are remedied — this idea consoles me for my misfortunes and enables me to bear them firmly. Remember me to McKinney and show him this letter also H. Austin and if Mason and Hotchkiss are there remember me to them.

Love to Emily and all the family

S. F. Austin

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