

MY APPRENTICESHIP TO CRIME

An
(To the memory of my
Autobiography

Grace Maria Treadwell.

-by-

ARTHUR HARDING

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CHAPTER 6.

Wormwood Scrubs Prison, 1902. He believed in repression, strict separation, cellular confinement and punishment as a

deterrent for crime. His system failed because it was retrogressive.

Wormwood Scrubs Prison was built on scrubland in 1874.

The prison took eight years to build. The convicts who built the prison were brought from the old convict prison, Millbank, on the north bank of the Thames.

Millbank Prison was built 1812-1893 on the left bank of the Thames. Today the Tate Gallery, Thames House and Imperial Chemical House stand on the site of Millbank Prison.

The convicts lived in huts surrounded by a large fence made of long boards; the wall, some 20 ft. high, took four years to build; not one convict escaped. The bricks for building the prison were made from the local soil which is very hard and good clay. The convicts worked very hard and were rewarded by extra rations. The men worked on Sundays for extras.

The prison is built on twenty acres in West London, near to the White City and next to a large hospital.

It took 200 convicts to build the prison; the stonework was

Commissioners informed me that these four convictions would be made and quarried by convicts at Portland convict prison. All the fittings were made in prisons throughout the country.

Wormwood Scrubs prison has accommodation for 1,400 prisoners. The prison is a permanent monument to Sir Edward du Cane, Chairman of the Prison Commission. He believed in repression, strict separation, cellular confinement and punishment as a deterrent for crime. His system failed because it was retrogressive.

The Prisons Act 1865 required juveniles under sixteen to be kept separately and given special treatment; chief care and attention was given to the necessity of keeping juveniles entirely segregated from the old offenders.

On arrival at Wormwood Scrubs we were taken to reception centre. All particulars were recorded. The Prison Commissioners keep a record of everything concerning the prisoner's character, the judge's remarks, the number of previous convictions, conduct in prison, etc. The prison record is only for the prison authorities. The judge who presides at the trial of a person has access to the prison record of the defendant.

So, knowing these facts, the question arises: how did the prison authorities mark my prison record with four previous convictions? Where did they get the documentary evidence?

Many years after, when the Home Office or the Prison

Commissioners informed me that these four convictions would be erased from my record, what caused them to admit the error, or shall we say, deliberate perjury by some person or official at the trial?

Well, the explanation is that in 1908 when I was a witness before the Royal Commission on the Police, the police produced my official record with details of every incident. The police record states on the 4th March, 1902, at the age of fifteen years, sentenced at North London Sessions to 12 months H.L. Simple larceny. No previous convictions.

So there was no doubt that I was falsely credited with four previous convictions at my trial. The only policeman who gave evidence was P.C. Stevens.

The result of having four previous convictions recorded against me, including a sentence of six months imprisonment, meant a large increase in my sentence and my classification as a habitual offender.

The remand in custody without bail, and the magistrate's lack of interest in me. The judge's harsh sentence, the explanation is clear. The court was led to believe I was a confirmed criminal.

After all the formalities had been complied with, I was placed in an empty cell and locked up for the night. So after the turmoil of the day, all my hopes had been crushed, my worst

fears had been realised, and I was again alone in a prison cell with a long prison sentence before me, alone with my thoughts, alone with my grief, afraid of the future.

"For when young lips have drunk of the bitter waters of hate, suspicion and despair, all the love in the world will not wholly take away that knowledge, though it may turn darkened eyes for a while to the light and teach faith where no faith was."

Rudyard Kipling.

The first thing I noticed in the cell was that I had no bed to sleep on. Some eminent Christian with the Love of Christ in his heart had ordained hard work, the treadmill, hard fare, gruel and dry bread. Hard board, a plank of wood to sleep on.

That was reformatory treatment for the poor sinner. The prison rules laid it down that prisoners sentenced to hard labour must sleep without a bed for the first fourteen days of their sentence. To me this was no great hardship. Had I not slept for many years on the floor? Had I not been a wair and stray at the age of nine?

The Rev. Sidney Turner, in charge of the Redhill Reformatory, which was under the auspices of the Philanthropic Society, believed in severely punishing boys by putting them alone for a few days in unheated cells on a bread and water diet, and

also by whipping them with as much solemnity and form as possible, so, I could consider myself fortunate in not being sent to the Redhill Reformatory.

That night I lay on the wooden board thinking of my family. Twelve months seemed so long that I began to wonder if I would ever see them again.

My first contact with the prison warders or Holloway had been a surprise. I found them very decent men carrying out their unpleasant duties in a very humane way. But the warders I had seen in the reception room were a different breed, they were more incisive and domineering in the way they gave an order. So I knew that the way to freedom would be hard and long; I should have to submit to much that was intolerable. To me a sentence of imprisonment was the punishment inflicted by the law of the land. By what right did the Prison Commissioners have, that they should deprive a man of the right to sleep?

On the morning after my arrival in prison, I was taken to the Governor's office. I had to answer to my name and confirm that I had been convicted and sentenced to twelve months hard labour.

All the Governor said, without looking up from his desk: "Behave yourself, obey the rules and regulations and you will earn remission of your sentence." Not a word about my age, no

inquiry if I had been in prison before. The Governor spoke and acted like an automaton, he had no interest in reformation, my opinion he did not know if I was a boy or an adult, and did not care. The many prison governors I served under during my apprenticeship, not one would have won his position in open competition with others, by examination in intelligence tests. Most owed their position to influence and service discipline in ordering punishment to the helpless prisoners in their care, who were not permitted to defend themselves against charges.

During the morning I was unlocked to go for an hour's exercise. On the front part of the exercise ground were some ten or twelve W.C.s with small doors so that the warder had a complete view of the prisoner using the toilet. The prisoners exercising for one hour daily at the same hour every day were able to form regular habits and so avoid the necessity of using the cell utensil.

During the exercise, warders were stationed at intervals all around the exercise ground, facing the men who were paced at three yards distance so preventing talking, which was strictly forbidden; penalty two days bread and water and the loss of three days remission. This punishment was common for any trifling broken rule or breach of regulation.

To be shut up in complete solitude for two days on a diet

of 6 oz. bread and a pint of water. Breakfast, dinner and supper, and the additional loss of three days remission for the crime of talking is British justice. the idwas of Victorian reform After the exercise, we were marched back to our dungeons. The men always walked in a long crocodile movement so many paces apart. prison, lose their reason, but one of the most awful Some time near 11 a.m., the cell door was unlocked and a warder with two other prisoners who were carrying a large sack, appeared outside. The warder handed me a bundle of old rope cut into lengths of ten or 12 inches. over the hall. The night The warder asked me if I had been in prison before, or whether I had ever picked oakum. I said no. The warder took down a card which was on the door, looked at it, and said to me, "This card says you have four previous convictions." their cells This was the first time I had heard that my record was marked with four convictions. The warder then instructed me into the art of oakum picking. the inhuman strain of weeks and months This happened on the morning after my arrival in the prison, so these documents which the Governor had before him must have come from the North London Sessions. It is obvious that these four convictions must have been proved in court, so that they were officially recorded by the Clerk of the Court on the record. rough jackets ready for use; of course, I am speaking of six Picking oakum is a very painful task, the fingers get very

sore, and the very fact that the prisoner has to sit upon a wooden stool for long hours can also become very painful. Like the treadmill, these tasks were the idwas of Victorian reformers. figures for mental deterioration are far higher than

The Home Office did not give figures for the number of men who, while in prison, lose their reason, but one of the most awful sounds a man can listen to in the silence of the night is when a prisoner goes berserk and smashes up his cell and everything in it. His ravings and screams are very disturbing to the other inmates and can be heard all over the hall. The night patrol summons assistance and a number of warders arrive to take the poor demented creature to the padded cells. The screams of the man, the noise of his struggle, the sound of blows, can be heard distinctly by all the prisoners in their cells who begin to shout and make a disturbance, because it appears that the warders are illtreating the man, who has suddenly lost his reason under the inhuman strain of weeks and months of continuous solitude and isolation from his fellows.

I was to hear this kind of disturbance many times in the different convict prisons of Great Britain. Claustrophobia is the medical name for this illness. To cope with these outbreaks, each hall at Wormwood Scrubs prison had many padded cells and straihjackets ready for use; of course, I am speaking of sixty-five years ago. I cannot say this kind of thing

happens today. But the criminals of the early years of this century were far tougher and more inured to hardship and mental strain than the post-war criminals, so I would expect to see that the figures for mental deterioration are far higher than they were in my experience. I have found that the crooks who resort to violence in carrying out their business deals are the types who cannot bear the consequences of prison punishments and soon become victims of instability. I was getting used

to being in prison. Prison Commissioners should have done more to help prisoners adjust to life in prison. Prisoners remain in cells for 22 hours each day. Cellular confinement, mental torture.

After eight weeks I was allowed to write and receive a letter and visit. I wrote a letter to my mother and sister to visit me. I remember the visit because they came on Whitsun Monday. I was told of my mother's fall outside the Sessions House. I was determined not

to let the visit cheer me up, time would soon pass. They told me of the cruel way they were treated at the trial, how they were treated at the trial, that they were barred from entering the court to speak on my behalf because the policeman said no witnesses were allowed in the court. the authorities to

reform the system. All this was a part of the price we had to pay for being poor and friendless, also very ignorant of the law.

When I look back on those first days in prison, I am surprised what a child I was in the knowledge which a boy of

my age in this year (1969) has of the common facts of life among teenagers. Sex and such vices as homosexuality, etc., were practically unknown to me and the lads whom I associated with when I was arrested. We lads were very poor but we treated the aged and infirm, the women and children, with the respect due to them. This cannot be said of the modern young thugs who make the headlines today.

The days began to pass more quickly. I was getting used to being shut up, being segregated from the recidivists was an advantage. So what the Prison Commissioners should have done the system of separate confinement was doing in keeping me away from the evil influence all around.

Unfortunatly my health was suffering from the effects of lack of exercise and fresh air. I was a voracious reader, always asking for educational books. I was determined not to waste the time I had to spend in prison.

The opportunity of working in the carpenter's shop was denied to me by the Governor, who refused my application.

Looking back over the years, I am confident when I state that there was never any attempt made by the authorities to reform any prisoner, young or old.

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congregation, which numbers some 500 or more. No need to emphasise that like all other places in prison talking was strictly forbidden, services were held every morning and twice on Sunday. The congregation entered from several doors at the same time. The men walk along the guarded corridors leading from the different halls into the chapel. The service always opened with a hymn. The congregation join in the service with great enthusiasm, the choir is composed of prisoners who have taken to religion for various reasons; some even take part in Holy Communion and other services of the church. The strange thing about these reformed characters who took part so fervently in the services was that their faith did not seem strong enough to keep them out of prison, because in later years I noticed many of them had fallen by the way. The first morning I went into the chapel I was amazed at the fervour with which the congregation joined in the service. The whole atmosphere of the chapel with which the congregation seemed to be in sympathy, was like a Salvation Army revivalist meeting. I had memories of the Edinburgh Castle, in Limehouse, when I was a Barnardo boy taking part in the same revivalist meeting as I was witnessing in a prison chapel.

The time I spent in Leopold House had taught me the Biblical story so often that, like the alphabet, I could never forget the Christian faith. But I could not join in the service at Wormwood Scrubs, bitterness had entered into me and I felt bitter against the powers that be, against the warders, the prisoners and everything that stood for authority.

What was prison teaching me? When I entered the prison in 1902, I was a fairly intelligent lad, quick in learning, but I was a comparative innocent in my knowledge of wickedness and all the beastliness, filth and downright evil which was prevalent in the prison.

The summer was passing and soon I would be looking forward to my release in January, 1903. A friendly warder advised me to see the doctor about my health because the continuous confinement in the stuffy atmosphere of a prison cell had begun to show in my face, loss of appetite caused me to leave my rations only partly eaten.

Acting on the warder's advice, I saw the M.O. in my cell. The young doctor was astonished to learn that I had been so long confined in the cell; he asked me my age, when I told him that in November I would be sixteen he was surprised. The result of the doctor's examination was that I was allowed to work in the grounds of the prison. I kept this coaling job until my release.

until my release. The summer had passed, soon it would be Christmas. Then 18th January, 1903 - Liberation Day. No oppressed people could have looked forward to the day with a greater hope for better things than I. The question was what was I going to do to right the wrong that had been done to me in the name of the law? For nearly a year I had been shut up in solitary confinement for being ignorant of the law; the law had treated me like a wild animal so, society must not complain if their treatment of me has made me anti-social. During the time I spent in prison I saw the chaplain once; that was after my reception; no attempt was made by any Prisoners Aid Society to help me in any way, nor any help to find employment. No Christian association offered to help me; my civilian clothes were in the last stage of service. I had no money, nothing of value, worse, I had no character and no hope. It seemed I was beyond the pale. On the morning of the 18th January, 1903, I was taken from my cell to the reception room where I changed into my rags, my clothes were so shabby, so worn and creased that rags is the only word for them. Even among the thieves, vagrants and

other villains who were being set free that morning, I was an outcast; my rags made me look like a tramp. The book learning had made me aware of my condition. I had become very sensitive to the stigma and shame of poverty, even these men avoided contact with me as if I had the plague. I was a leper. What feelings of shame and humiliation I felt was concealed, but I would make these men and their like pay dearly for what they did. I left the station because of my scarecrow appearance. I looked as I had served a twelve months sentence I was given a gratuity of ten shillings, a golden half-sovereign. This gratuity of ten shillings would be equal to four days wages on the railways. There were some twenty or more men released that morning; some had friends and relatives waiting to meet them outside the prison gates. So I left Wormwood Scrubs that January morning, spurned and rejected by the riff-raff of the prison, despising myself for being in such a condition of poverty. Outside the gates of the prison I saw a small group of ladies looking towards the gates; they looked at me, at my shabby clothes, my face which had the prison pallor that comes from long confinement. One lady approached me and with pity in her eyes, she looked at me and gave me a ticket for a free breakfast. I thanked her as she gave me a tract. She said to me, "God bless you." The text was in red letters: "I say unto

Ye he that is without sin, let him cast the first stone."

Among the men released that morning was a young man from Brick Lane, he was one of the gang of pickpockets who used Clarks coffee shop in Brick Lane. He was in the same age group as Charles Walker, with whom he associated. *Time, January, 1903.*

While I was walking towards the station he joined up with me. We travelled to Liverpool Street station together, he left me outside the station because of my scarecrow appearance. I looked what I was, a jailbird just released, and as I walked through the crowds of people in the station I was stared at and avoided as if I was a leper or had some contagious disease. The same thing can be seen every week-day outside the gates of Pentonville prison. *doctor looking after his patients.*

These outcasts from the herd can be seen leaving the prison after a period of isolation. *as to the individual who* This chance meeting with Edward Spencer was the beginning of a friendship that was to last for many years and was disastrous to both of us. Throughout these pages, he will make frequent appearances. *good deal of sympathy for the* In certain respects he comes close to Lombroso's description of the habitual type of criminal. He was a confirmed criminal to the end of his life. The reader will have the opportunity of judging this man. *they surrender, the more normal becomes.* I arrived home that January morning like the Prodigal Son.

Mother and the family were waiting to greet me, they had managed to buy me a jacket and trousers, so I got rid of the shabby creased clothes which had branded me that morning as a jailbird. The infliction of bodily pain

The family were still living at this time, January, 1903, at Queen's Buildings, Brick Lane. The question I asked myself, after reviewing the results of the twelve months sentence, is, if the object of punishment was to make me a better law-abiding citizen, then it was a complete failure. No system of punishment can succeed if it depends on fear.

To make reformatory punishment work, you must treat the prisoner like an ordinary human being with consideration for his weaknesses, like a doctor looking after his patients.

If severe punishment is meted out as a deterrent to others, then the punishment is unjust to the individual who has to be the guinea-pig in order to deter others. This was made manifest to everybody in the case of The Great Train Robbery, when the men were sentenced to 30 years imprisonment; these sentences aroused a good deal of sympathy for the convicted men, but the public who sympathised with these men failed to realise that if the convicted men surrender their loot, then their sentences would be reduced to a reasonable size. The more loot they surrender, the more normal becomes their time. So I was back to Brick Lane. For good or

Separate cellular confinement was a system of imprisonment which should have been abolished many years ago, it serves no useful purposes, only undermined the health both physically and mentally of the prisoner." The infliction of bodily pain such as the deprivation of the bed for the first fourteen days of a sentence was an act for which there could be no employed justification, also the thirty days of oakum picking which caused actual pain to the prisoner, was something belonging to the torture chamber and should have been abolished in this so-called modern prison. The first weeks of my liberty were spent helping my sister in her business. The stall was a very prosperous business, but Mother was spending every shilling earned on drink. Drink had become such a strong influence in her life that we were worse off than we were before. There was no home life for us, Mother was taken in for being drunk and disorderly, but this did not stop her frequent bouts of drinking. Soon I began to associate with my old friends, hanging about street corners. There was no possibility of employment. I was sixteen years old, I had no character. The railway refused me as a vanguard, so I tried the recruiting office in Whitehall, at Scotland Yard. I wanted to enlist in the Royal Marines. After a medical examination I was rejected as unfit and advised to go into hospital. So I was back to Brick Lane. For good or

evil, it was ordained that I was to be predestined to live my life in the same area I was born in; it appeared only prison will keep me away.

The whole of "The Nichol" had been demolished; the demolition workers had worked so hard and long that they had no time for a strike or any other pastime. The firm employed large numbers of the local unemployed who considered it a blessing to have a regular job, and they continued on the reconstruction of the Boundary Street Estate.

Most of the families who had lived in "The Nichol" found rooms in the Brick Lane area, so all the whole Brick Lane districts including Spitalfields and Bethnal Green suffered from the invasion of the newcomers from "The Nichol".

The remarkable thing about my early life is that I remained in the same district, was nearly always arrested by the same police officers, always appeared at the same court. The strange thing about crime and criminals is that certain areas of London specialised in certain types of crime. Islington and Kings Cross were always notorious for burglars and house-breakers, also cardsharps and race course thugs.

The Darby Sabins gangs were from Kings Cross. Shoreditch and Hoxton were notorious for their many gangs of pickpockets and counterfeit coin makers, also for receivers of stolen property. In the early years of the 20th century, some of the

most notorious receivers of stolen property lived in Hoxton. The game was being played in Bacon Street, Brick Lane. Men who counted their wealth in thousands. Men like Jonathon Wild who was a blackmailer, receiver of stolen goods and an informer, i.e. agent provocateurs, who could be found all districts, but mostly in Whitechapel, Aldgate and Brick Lane. These districts were also infamous for the number of pimps who lived on the immoral earnings of the vast number of prostitutes who lived in the district.

In South London, we find the eternal breed of con men, tricksters and race track swindlers of every description, also many smash and grab bandits.

So we apprentices to crime had to learn from the masters of the art of pick-pocketing or of stealing a watch from an unsuspecting member of a crowd. Dickens showed us the methods of training young pickpockets in his famous novel of life in "The Nichol" in 1837. Remember Fagin and the "Artful Dodger" initiating Oliver into the art of picking pockets?

When I was released from prison in 1903, I went back to the old environment. I associated with my old friends, soon I was taking part in small cases of robbery. Sometimes I would be seen in the company of the older men learning the tricks of the trade. So it happened that some eleven weeks after my release from Wormwood Scrubs, I was one of a crowd of boys and young men watching a game of piemen, which is a gambling

game. The game was being played in Bacon Street, Brick Lane. One of the crowd of boys who was watching the game was wearing a watch and chain. So, more for a load of mischief, I tried my hand at stealing a watch, but after taking the watch, the lad detected me, so instead of giving him the watch back, I gave it to my friend, a lad named Peake, who walked away with it. The lad knew both of us and began to cry, saying, "Give me my watch." I treated the matter as a joke; we sold the watch for 2/6d., and shared the money.

The lad reported the loss of his watch to the police, giving our names. We were both promptly arrested by the police - C.I.D. this time. I suppose they considered me a good prospect for the future. I suppose they considered me a good prospect for the future. I suppose they considered me a good prospect for the future.

On the 21st April, 1903, we appeared before Mr. Loveland Loveland and were sentenced to, Peake nine months, and myself to 20 months H.L. Mr friend Peake had not been convicted before but had been in reform school for not going to school. Peake was illiterate. In 1895, the Gladstone Committee came to the conclusion after exhaustive investigation into juvenile delinquency, that the ages when the majority of habitual criminals are made, lie between sixteen and twenty-one, the most fatal years are seventeen, eighteen and nineteen.

So Mr. Loveland Loveland, sitting as vice chairman of the