

MY APPRENTICESHIP TO CRIME

An
(To the memory of my
Autobiography

Grace Maria Treadwell.

-by-

ARTHUR HARDING

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CHAPTER 7.

Borstal - 1903-04. In 1903, the Prison Commissioners decided to send all juveniles under the age of 21 years serving a prison sentence of over six months to a convict prison in

After a preliminary court appearance at Worship Street court, which was attended by both our parents, the C.I.D., having warned our parents of the trouble we were in, we were both committed to stand trial at North London Sessions. Peake and I were both aged sixteen years; neither of us had attempted to find employment for the simple reason that we had no character and would have been classed as unemployable.

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. My 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

North London Sessions, was by his harsh sentences on young lads guilty of making habitual criminals of young boys of sixteen years convicted of petty larceny.

Sir Evelyn Ruggles Brise was responsible for the first Borstal system experiment. In 1903, the Prison Commissioners decided to send all juveniles under the age of 21 years serving a prison sentence of over six months to a convict prison in Kent near to the town of Rochester. This prison was to become world famous as the original "Borstal", which gave its name to the system which trains young juvenile delinquents to become better citizens.

When we were sentenced at the Sessions, we were taken to Wormwood Scrubs prison to serve our sentences, as usual we were classed as habitual offenders who would have to serve our sentences in solitary confinement. The card on my door was marked "five previous convictions".

After some three months we were both transferred to Borstal prison, to become the first guinea-pigs in the search for an answer to juvenile delinquency. We, the first to be called Borstal Boys, found the cells had been enlarged to make a more comfortable cell for the newcomers.

Today, 1969, Borstal institutions are all over Great Britain, the system has been improved upon to such an extent that the modern Borstals resemble more like a public school than

a penal institution. Many thousands have passed through the various institutions. Many have been reformed and become good citizens and responsible members of the community.

When we boys arrived in June, 1903, the convicts were still serving their sentences in Borstal convict prison. We were permitted to have more library books, every endeavour was made to encourage the lads to improve their education.

For the backward lads there were schooling facilities for teaching them to read and write. The Governor, a Mr. Western, who was always immaculately dressed, he seemed to wear a different suit every day, he would visit each lad in his cell and talk to him about his future. The Governor was keen to make the new system a success, he continually interviewed every lad, urging them to give of their best to learn a trade so that they would lead useful lives in the community.

The Governor so obviously belonged to a rich class of the élite who had never known what it was like to be hungry, that I resented him. To me, he represented everything that had caused me to suffer, that had caked me like an animal. Nothing would make me admit that I deserved the punishment which had been meted out to me.

I was a rebel against a society that had caused my mother to work sixteen hours a day to save her family from starvation. I was a rebel against a system which shut me up in a cage for

22 hours a day, and treated me like a savage animal, that lived had caused me to lead my blind father around the City restaurants to beg for scraps of food from the rich man's table. intelligent lad. Because I had described myself as a cabinet maker I was asked put in the carpenter's shop, where I was able to learn a good deal from the instructor. parents. early years of his life.

I enjoyed the physical training every day, the exercises had a beneficial effect on my health which had suffered very much from the close confinement of Wormwood Scrubs. went to his As far as I was concerned, the present system could not be a success because the lad spent the best part of 15 hours out of 24 every day locked up in a cell. What was needed was more hard work to fit the lads for employment in the outside world. This should have been the method of training, but owing to the staff difficulties and the needs of security had there were not enough officers to make a longer working day possible. The working day ended practically at 4 p.m. time occupied in security and serving supper brought the end of the day to 5.30 p.m. the death of my old friend Peake, I said some The new Borstal system for the reformation of juvenile offenders had neglected the one dominating influence that her would change our lives from loafers to workers. We were embryo criminals because we could not find employment. an come to my memory Let me tell you what happened to my friend Peake, who was

convicted with me and received nine months. His parents lived a few yards from my home in Chambord Street, Brick Lane. This street had a bad reputation. Peake was not a very intelligent lad, not able to read or write his name. The cards were stacked against him in regard to his personal appearance, but he was blessed with very good parents. the early years of this century.

His parents moved from Chambord Street to a district some two miles away and prepared for the day he would come home. Then when he had finished his sentence, he went to his new home, far removed from the criminal environment of Chambord Street, where he started work in a timber yard. The years passed, he married a nice girl and they had a son to bless the marriage. While at work, he ran a splinter into his hand and died from blood poisoning, leaving a wife and child to the mercy of the world. When this happened, I had been away from Borstal for some time. My reputation was bad through newspaper reports of my activities. The date was about the end of 1906.

On hearing of the death of my old friend Peake, I and some friends went down to his home to pay respects to his family. And as I stood looking down at him in his coffin, his mother said to me, "I would sooner see him in his coffin than be like you." Through the years, those words have often come to my memory and I have wondered if my own mother had wished I had

died when I was a child.

The powers that be had ordained that the unemployed should be so numerous they would be a constant menace to those who were employed. There was no work for us, if there was no work we were compelled to thief in order to live. These were the hard economic facts of life in the early years of this century. These were the main factors that had caused the sixty or more lads who made up the first Borstal to commit thefts and so qualify for a place in the new Borstal.

Of the success or failure of the first Borstal in the years of infancy, this I can say with truth: it was a step in the right direction. For many years, boys under the age of seventeen had suffered by being imprisoned in dark punishment cells, roughly treated, made to pick oakum. The victims of brutal, sadistic homosexuals.

The theft of goods valued at a few pence could bring sentences of imprisonment upon a mere child. Oh, those glorious Victorian years.

This I can say with truth. Of those sixty or seventy juvenile adults, who were at Borstal in 1903-1904, those who came from the criminal districts of the East End, who went back to the same environment on release, all finished up as habitual criminals and in many instances were responsible for their offspring becoming candidates for places in a Borstal.

institution. I could name scores of offenders, who are the offspring of old Borstal boys. Like the sons of old Etonians, their future is planned before they are born.

What did the Prison Commissioners do to help the lads to keep out of prison? Nothing. When I left Borstal in 1904, nothing was done to find me employment. It is true they supplied me with a new suit of clothes, shoes, shirts, etc. These were the first new clothes I had ever possessed. It is true I was offered the chance of going to sea, which did not appeal to me.

The question arises: what good did I derive from my stay in Borstal? To me the Borstal system was nothing more or less than a continuation of the same system, slightly modified, that was carried out at Wormwood Scrubs. Punishment was always to the forefront of the system. I will say this, and time has proved me right; any system which confined young lads for 15 hours a day in small cells, which punished young offenders for talking, by putting them on dietary punishment, such a system must fail because it is founded on fear.

When death and mutilation was the punishment for crime, these fearful deterrents did not stop murder or highway robbery. The Borstal I knew had no prospects of reforming any young offender who had no prospects of reformation himself, from his relatives and friends, unless work was found for him

on release and he had a genuine desire to reform. Similar incidents

Most of the lads I met with in Borstal and knew for many years after were, like myself, products of the slums of the East End; they could not resist the urge to go back to the streets where they were known, where they were born and had lived all their lives; like the moth they were drawn with the irresistibly to their fate.

So it was with me.

Today, 1969, with 22 Borstal institutions in different parts of Great Britain, with the crime rate increasing with leaps and bounds, the Home Secretary and the Prison Commissioners at their wits' end what to do with young persons under 16 years, when really they should understand the reasons why the children are behaving like they do.

The causes of the present increase in juvenile delinquency will be found in the lack of discipline at home. The television programmes, the amount of violence and crime which is broadcast to every home, all for the sake of some commercial interests.

Some months ago, in 1966, there was a programme dealing with the K.K.K., the secret masonic society in the Southern U.S.A. Pictures were shown of the placing of a fiery cross on the doors of Civil Rights workers.

Within two weeks of that programme being shown, several

incidents occurred up and down the country of similar incidents being carried out against Jewish synagogues in London and the suburbs, and thousands of pounds damage caused by fires.

In April 1966, four youths were on trial for firing several synagogues in London.

This was only one of several incidents connected with the fiery cross and places of worship. These programmes just put ideas into the minds of the young and then we punish them for carrying them out. In April 1969, Granada T.V.'s crime series "Big Breadwinner Hog", after complaints about its excessive violence, refused to drop the series. May 1969, two I.T.V. companies, Anglia and Southern, dropped the programme completely. But Granada and other companies screening the show have been ordered by the Independent Television Authority not to do so before "News at Ten". Don't let us have any ideas of what is right or wrong. Let the T.V. Act of 1954, Section 3 (1) (a) decide the issue: "Nothing shall offend against good taste or decency or is likely to encourage or invite to crime."

The permissive minority decides what is good for us and our children. Arthur J. Balfour was Prime Minister and the Boer War had The demands of industry for more and more women in the factory and other places of employment means more and more mothers leave the home for the factory, result children left to

their own pleasures. We cannot have it both ways, the mother's place is the home, not the factory. That is the answer to juvenile delinquency.

On release from Borstal, I went back to Bethnal Green. Where else could I go? I had no prospects, no hope for the future. But I had a supreme confidence in my own cleverness to survive any misfortune.

I believe that most discharged prisoners, when they leave prison and return to their old associations, believe they are so clever that they will never get caught again. This is especially true of men under forty years.

The date of my discharge from Borstal was September, 1904.

The conditions in Bethnal Green and Brick Lane had not changed, if anything they were worse. The Edwardian period had not inaugurated any great changes. Unemployment was rife, poverty was everywhere.

Charles Masterman had arrived in Bethnal Green to carry on social work; he interested himself in the Children's Country Holiday Fund and did a lot for the children.

Laissez-faire was the policy of the Government, which was Conservative. Arthur J. Balfour was Prime Minister and the Boer War had been over since May 1902, when the Treaty of Vereininging ended the War.

Demolition of "The Nichol" by the L.C.C. was completed.

The L.C.C. housing estate built on the ground previously occupied by the slums of "The Nichol" was the first large estate built by the L.C.C. It is called the Boundary Street Estate. Locally called "The Bandstand" because of the magnificent bandstand built in the centre, around which are built the blocks of flats each containing a garden, but no bathrooms. The bandstand serves as a park for people to sit and listen to the music in the summer.

Nearby was the Columbia Buildings, the first endowed sanitary dwellings for the working class, largely endowed by the Baroness Coutts of the banking family of that name, who is reputed to have spent a fortune on the buildings. She also built a huge market enclosure for a fish market; this was a dismal failure. Today, 1969, the whole of this enormous structure has been demolished as slums, which they have been for years. All these buildings were built in the Gothic architecture and looked at from a distance, or from the air, looked like Westminster.

The bandstand, flats and the Columbia Buildings had one thing in common - no bathrooms. They considered it a waste of money to build bathrooms for the great unwashed, as the people of the East End were called.

The erection of the Boundary Street Estate seems to have exhausted the slum clearing plans of the L.C. because Bethnal

Bethnal Green and Brick Lane and the rest of the putrid slums were left to rot and decay, its people to remain ignorant and brutalised by the conditions under which they lived; it seemed only an earthquake could clear the filthy houses from the good earth and give children the right to breathe fresh air and live healthy lives as the Good Lord intended they should.

In 1940, Hitler's demolition workers did the job and the "New Jerusalem" began to take shape from the ruins.

When I arrived home from Borstal in 1904, I was a picture of health, sound in body and mind, 5 ft. 10½ ins., weighing 140 lbs., on the 27th November, 1904, I would be 18 years old.

My family had moved from the flat in Gosset Street, to two rooms in tenement house at Gibraltar Buildings, Gibraltar Gardens, Bethnal Green Road. This was to be my home for the next twenty-eight years, in these Gibraltar Gardens. I propose to give a detailed description of this alley, or cul-de-sac, which contained within its few yards of decaying tenements and small cottages, all the viciousness and evil of the East End. This alley was an L-shaped cul-de-sac with the entrance some six feet wide, in the Bethnal Green Road. On one side was the G.P.O. sorting office, on the other side of the entrance was the vicarage. The local vicar lived in the vicarage with his family, which consisted of his wife and one child. The