

MY APPRENTICESHIP TO CRIME

An
(To the memory of my
Autobiography

Grace Maria Treadwell.

-by-

ARTHUR HARDING

will find a motley collection of Irish, West Indians, Pakistanis, Indians, Maltese and other African Commonwealth citizens, all living in the streets and houses that should have been condemned years ago; the schools are filled with the off-

spring of all these CHAPTER 26. The Wardrobe Dealer. the future citizens of East London. In the Brick Lane old clothes market which is held some wardrobe dealers give notice of calling by putting cards through the letterbox. The cards give the householder time to sort things out. The wardrobe dealer is the only person who calls from house to house to give money away. Nearly every caller during the day wants the lady to buy something.

We wardrobe dealers buy from the houses something that the householder no longer needs. We sell those things to people who cannot afford to buy any new clothes for themselves or their children.

If you were to visit the old clothes markets of the East End on a Sunday morning and see the vast number of people sorting out the piles of clothes, you would be surprised at the poverty of some of these people. The Welfare State has not solved all the problems; the Irish emigrants creating the same conditions as their forefathers did in the years of the potato famine have become the poverty-stricken slum dwellers of the filthy dens in which we East Enders spent our childhood.

In the Brick Lane and Stepney parts of the East End you

will find a motley collection of Irish, West Indians, Pakistanis, Indians, Maltese and other African Commonwealth citizens, all living in the streets and houses that should have been condemned years ago; the schools and streets are filled with the offspring of all these migrants, they are the future citizens of East London. In the Brick Lane old clothes market which is held in Cheshire Street, one day only up to 1 p.m. on Sunday, you will find thousands of people of all races. The Asiatics, people are the buyers of men's suits, sewing machines, preferably Singers, bicycles and even antiques for the African markets. All this gear which they buy in the market place is taken away in lorries to the docks. These Asiatics work on the ships as sailors and are thus able to take their goods on board the ships without any export licence or fees.

Among the crowds are thousands of the workers from other parts of London. They come to buy a working suit for a pound, or cheap working shirts. Boots and shoes are also

The women are looking for cheap dresses and underclothes for a few pence, children's clothes are in great demand, also boots and shoes, so the clothes and wardrobe dealers buy from the lady of the house go to clothe those who need them most - that is, the very poor working people of all our great towns and cities, whatever the race or colour or their skin, because poverty knows no barriers or caste distinction.

The other great East End clothes mart lies in Houndsditch, City of London. A few yards from the scene of one of the most brutal killings in the records of the City of London, on the 16th December, 1910. This market is now part of the bonded warehouses of Cutlers Street, Port of London Authority, which is rented to the market tenants.

On weekdays, except Saturdays, the market is open to all wardrobe dealers to come and sell their goods to other dealers.

When I first started hawking, my friend Berry would take me into "The Lane" as it is called and show me how to sell the goods we had bought. A good dealer could earn some two pounds

The buyers are mostly Jewish, who have large wholesale businesses and live at Brighton. They specialise in certain classes of goods. The buyers of men's ware will not buy any other kind of goods, likewise the buyers of "rubbish", which is the trade name for all kinds of ladies' and children's ware, will only buy this class of goods. Boots and shoes are also bought by the buyers who specialise in footwear.

In the 1930s the price paid for a decent part-worn suit at the door would be 7/6d. or 10/- depending on the colour and condition. That suit would be sold for 15/- to a dealer; suits like this are sold to an auction dealer because they are sold by auction in the country market places on market day; the price for such a suit would be 25/-. The dealer makes a

profit or 5/- on every suit, that's allowing 5/- for cleaning and repairs. A dealer in auction suits could sell some fifty or more on a good market stall. All these auction suits are shirts. She went upstairs and brought me down a bundle of from well known City tailors such as Hector Powe, Simpsons, Barkers, etc. They were value for money especially when bought as they had come back from the laundry. I paid the lady and to wear on Sundays and holidays.

The cleaning and repairs were carried out by emigrant Polish Jews, who would work very hard and skilfully to do repairs to a damaged suit.

A good wardrobe dealer can collect four or six suits a day. In the hungry thirties, a good dealer could earn some two pounds or more a day. Today, the same suit would sell for two or three pounds in trade, but the lady of the house would want more than ten shillings for the suit, which she previously was paid.

During the war years I have paid as much as seven pounds for a demob suit, if the colour was right. You see, 26 coupons were required to buy a new suit, so even a demob suit could sell for ten pounds. The Government paid two pounds ten for demobbed suits and we paid up to seven pounds for them from the demobbed service men. The reason was, officers had a better quality suit than the ordinary service man. Another was that the officer sold his demob suit while the ordinary serviceman kept his for work.

I remember some years ago when I was working with Bill

Berry, we were calling at houses in Surbiton in Surrey. I bought some suits at a house and I asked the lady if she had any shirts. She went upstairs and brought me down a bundle of shirts, among which were several dress shirts still folded as they had come back from the laundry. I paid the lady and left. When we had done for the day we took the clothes in the "Lane" and sold them. The day was Friday, so that we had to sell the "rubbish" because the Lane would be closed until Monday.

Gentlemen's dress shirts had a fixed price, a shilling each old or new, they were used for making good quality pocket handkerchiefs and also for French polishing. Dress shirts were always folded up, so we never looked at them, just sold them for a shilling each. Thereby lies the gist of this story.

On the following Sunday morning we were at the stall in Brick Lane when a police officer and a gentleman from Surbiton called at the stall and wanted to know what had happened to the dress shirts I had bought from his wife the previous Friday. The gentleman was very disturbed when he learned we had sold them. The reason was that he had placed a large amount of money inside the folded dress shirts for safety, unknown to his wife. We never got the money back.

It was a lesson to all of us never to keep a secret from your wife. Needless to say, I never called at that house again.

in order to have the police take notice?

Let us hope the gentleman forgave his wife for the loss of his savings.

As a wardrobe dealer I had many little incidents that helped to brighten a dull day.

During this period, the East End was the battleground for the Fascist and Communist gangs or political agitators. Sir Oswald Mosley held big political meetings in Bethnal Green. He was quite pleased to see me, we shook hands and most people seemed to be wearing black shirts. Every night there were disorders round the meetings; the Jews seemed very keen gardeners and very proud of his garden. We had a very nice cup of coffee and a long chat about old times. He had a very big, very old collie dog who looked as old as his master. It was not hard to realise that he was lonely and wanted the crowds went to hear and see were the ravings of men like William Joyce (Lord Haw-Haw). It was in Bethnal Green that William Joyce had his race scarred by a razor slash.

Even today, 1969, the Union Movement still hold their meetings and they have large numbers of supporters in Bethnal Green. Their rivals, the National Socialists, seem to have recruited many of the former speakers of Union Movement.

What surprises me most is the number of police present at these meetings, I have seen as many as four Special Branch men with their notebooks recording every word spoken from the platform. When police are so urgently needed for crime prevention, why do they waste good men writing down a lot of silly speeches which no one takes any notice of? Do they know they encourage the speakers to make inflammatory speeches

in order to have the police take notice?

1939. As a wardrobe dealer I had many little incidents that helped to brighten a dull day.

One day while walking along a road in West Wickham, Kent, I met an old policeman of my early years, Det. Inspector Christopher. He was quite pleased to see me, we shook hands and he took me over his house and garden. He was evidently a very keen gardener and very proud of his garden. We had a very nice cup of coffee and a long chat about old times. He had a very big, very old collie dog who looked as old as his master. It was not hard to realise that he was lonely and wanted someone like myself to talk about old times.

I had the same experience several times. Once at Ashstead, Surrey, I was calling at the houses in a very select part of the town. At one house an elderly gentleman opened the door. I was speaking to him when he said, "You are so-and-so." I was rather surprised because I did not know him. I said he had the advantage of me because I did not know him. He told me he had been a Chief Inspector of H Division and had known me quite well. The remarkable thing about these meetings with retired high-ranking police officers was that they never regarded me with any suspicion. They were always friendly.

Much of the information I gathered from many official sources relating to famous cases, like Houndsditch, Steinie

Morrison and the Sidney Street affair was from police who were there.

For instance, it is on record that the guns found in Sidney Street were never proved to be the guns which were used in Houndsditch for the murder of the three policemen.

At Wallington in Surrey I was always invited into the Chier's house; he always had something for me to buy.

I had one C.I.D. chief who was famous; this man was a good friend to me, he even introduced me to his friends in order to buy their clothes. Yes, there are good and bad in the police force, the same as the legal profession, the Church, and other bodies or men. In one district I worked every month or so, there were three Flying Squad officers in one road. All knew me well, but to their everlasting credit, none ever imparted that information to any of the residents in that road.

at home 1939. During the past months I had been training as an A.R.P. warden, so on the outbreak of war I put on the warden's helmet and prepared for whatever was coming. The wages were three pounds weekly but the Government had declared a moratorium, so the anxiety about mortgage repayment, etc., was allayed by these measures.

nothing On the Saturday morning, September 2nd, 1939, was witnessed all over London something that had never been seen before in Britain, and let us fervently pray may never be seen again.
