

MY APPRENTICESHIP TO CRIME

An
(To the Memory of my
Autobiography

Grace Maria Treadwell.

-by-

ARTHUR HARDING

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CHAPTER 1.

Childhood.

The East End of London where I lived for the early part of my life was the district where I was born. One hundred years ago this block of streets had a score or more public houses or drinking dens, among its inhabitants could be found men and women thieves, burglars, pickpockets, from Cornwall and my mother came to London from Norwich.

My parents were not Londoners by birth; my father came from Cornwall and my mother came to London from Norwich. In fact every description of rogue and vagabond, also many ladies of the town. This district called "The Nichol" had been the centre of organised and serious crime for many years, the result of a street accident when she was knocked down by a run-away milk-cart. She received no compensation for her injuries.

No. 4 Keeves Buildings was a room in a tenement house on the ground floor. This tenement house was one of several owned by a family named Keeves who still own property in Boundary Street.

I was born on the 27th November, 1886, at No. 4, Keeves Buildings, Boundary Street, Bethnal Green, E. I was the fourth child of the family, two infant boys having died before my birth, leaving my sister Harriet the surviving child. Each tenement contained twelve rooms on three floors. In

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These tenements were some 100 years old or more at the end of 1886, and were in the last stages of decay.

Each tenement contained twelve rooms on three floors. In

each floor was one W.C. and one water tap and sink, which was common to the four tenants living on the floor, so that the tenement house had twelve families living in its twelve rooms. There was no garden back or front, only a small yard some 12ft. square for the dustbin. There was also a basement, but no daylight could penetrate the darkness. The basement was supposed to be the wash-house, but was only used by homeless people for a shelter from the cold. Because the landlord would not pay to have the stairs and toilets cleaned, no one would keep the tenement clean, and they became very dirty, also very unhealthy for the people who were forced to live in these hovels. The size of the rooms were some 10ft. square, 7 ft. high, for which a rent of 4/- was paid.

My birth was not a happy event for my parents. Illness had prevented Mother from working, times were hard, food was scarce, unemployment processions and demonstrations were a part of everyday life. My father being an unemployed casual labourer could not contribute any money towards the upkeep of his family, so because of their extreme poverty my parents were forced to apply for Poor Law Relief.

In 1886 there were no maternity benefits, no clinics for help and advice, no free milk, nothing but Poor Law Relief, and that was only granted after extensive inquiries.

The Means Test was very strict; if an applicant possessed any property or article of value which could be sold, then you had to sell it before you could obtain relief. If an applicant applied too often he had to wait until inquiries were made or he and his family would have to enter the poorhouse, commonly known as the workhouse. Poor Law Relief consisted of a few loaves of bread stamped with the parochial stamp so that you could not sell them, a piece of meat, also tickets for groceries, tins of condensed milk. No money for rent was given and the Relief was granted for one week only.

For my entry into the New Jerusalem, my parents had obtained some old cast-off garments; my cot was an old orange box, ideal for the purpose. My sister slept on the floor beside the box in the small room that was our share of the Great British Empire. Within a few days of my birth, Mother had to start work, matchbox-making for the firm of Bryant & May. Mother worked some 16 hours a day making match-boxes at 2½d. a gross; the matchbox had to be labelled, a strip of sandpaper pasted on to strike the match on (this was before the safety match was invented), the boxes being then scattered on the floor of the room to dry before being packed in grosses and carried to the factory some half a mile away. Mother earned 1/6d per day for 16 hours. A deplorable, not fit for human beings to live

The floor being the dry grounds for the wet matchboxes, there was no room to move about for baby or anyone else.

The furniture consisted of an old iron bedstead, a pair of straw mattresses which were ideal breeding grounds for the bugs, etc., which infested the whole tenement, the bed-clothes, walls and broken plaster ceiling. A kitchen table, two Windsor chairs and an old chest of drawers made up the home. This small room was fitted with a large iron stove which was flat on top and contained an oven and a place for boiling a kettle or saucepan, or for frying food.

Beside the fireplace was a large fitted cupboard, for the purpose of storing coal and other fuel for the fire; the upper part of the cupboard was fitted with shelves for storing food, etc., if one had any food left to store. One can understand why child mortality was so high and T.B. so prevalent.

27th November, 1887. One year old.

The second year of my existence began in an atmosphere of misery, want, vice and crime. The East End contained the most poverty-stricken people in Britain and "The Nichol" contained the most vicious of the East End. What chance did little children have to grow up into decent folk? In this same year, the great Cardinal Manning declared: "The state of the houses are deplorable, not fit for human beings to live

in, families living in one room, these things cannot go on. The accumulation of wealth like mountains in the land, the piling up of riches in the possession of classes or individuals cannot go on, if these moral conditions of our people are not healed. No Commonwealth can rest on such foundations." and

The years passed and conditions seemed to get worse. Mother had to make sacks which were harder work than matchboxes, the pay was hardly sufficient to feed the family. The hours of work were so long that it was almost ceaseless toil for my poor crippled mother; it was worse than slavery. place, this 1887. Victoria had reigned for fifty years. and large

The Victorian writers called them fifty glorious years. Were they glorious years for the people living in the filthy slums of our great cities? In London's East End thousands of people were living on the poverty line with one week's wages between them and pauperism. many clashes when the

In Bethnal Green the average age at death was stated to be forty years. led the crowds, some hundreds being badly

My own grandparents died at the age of fifty-seven. In the East End, 55% of children died before the age of five. Mother lost two before the age of three years. Scottish laird,

also In this Jubilee Year of 1887 there were many demonstrations by the unemployed. Money was invested in other foreign lands which should have been invested in our own country so that

our own people should have had factories to work in. It took Communism and two World Wars to make Britain invest in their own land. to six weeks imprisonment, and in addition days.

The riots in Trafalgar Square in 1886 and 1887 were by caused by the unemployed protesting against the wealthy and privileged classes. It was the struggle for a right to share in the social benefits of a wealthy community. Large crowds used Bloody Sunday, 13th November, 1887, was one of the most important days in the political history of London. The authorities had banned Trafalgar Square as a meeting place, this ban being the reason for great resentment, and large numbers of unemployed made their way to the Square to protest against the edict to ban any meeting in the Square. The Government had mobilised thousands of foot and horse mounted police to stop any demonstration or demonstrators from reaching the Square. There were many clashes when the demonstrators attempted to reach the Square, the police severely manhandled the crowds, some hundreds being badly injured and two killed. John Burns, the socialist, who afterwards became a Member of Parliament and R.B. Cunningham Graham, the Scottish laird, also a socialist, led the demonstrators. These two prominent men were arrested and committed for trial at the Old Bailey. At their trial they were defended by Mr. Asquith, who in the

afterwards became Prime Minister.

Both Burns and Cunningham Graham were found guilty and sentenced to six weeks imprisonment.

The ban on meetings in Trafalgar Square was lifted by Mr. Asquith when he became Home Secretary.

In 1888, High Street, Shoreditch, was a market place on the western side, with stalls and side-shows. Large crowds used the market for shopping and drinking in the numerous pubs that flourished all along the High Street right up to Bishopsgate Street.

My father, in order to earn a few shillings, took on a potman's job at a local pub in Shoreditch High Street. The name of the pub was The Jane Shore. Father was paid the princely sum of one shilling a day, seven days a week, hours of work 6 a.m. until 12.30 midnight; this casual work was ideal for Dad, he was able to bring home some food from what was left over at the pub.

The Jane Shore was a famous pub, named after Mistress Jane Shore who was reputed to have lived in Hackney; she was the daughter of a London merchant. She married a goldsmith named William Shore. She became the mistress of Edward IV. After Edward's death she was accused of witchcraft and harlotry, she was forced to surrender her wealth, and after many wanderings was eventually found dead in a ditch in the

place which is now called Shoreditch, 1527. 1st August 1888. The Jane Shore public house was built over the spot or ditch where the body of Jane was found; tradition says. The entrance hall to the pub bars was decorated by large mosaics depicting the various episodes in the legendary life of the unfortunate Mistress Jane Shore. This famous pub stood opposite the old London Music Hall; during the a.m. 1939-45 War it was destroyed by German bombing. In the year 1888 the L.C.C. was created by a Conservative Government. This newly formed governing body of earnest men and women were pledged to abolish the slums, to improve the health and living conditions of the poverty stricken people of London, where the rich got richer and the poor got poorer, where the indifference and inhumanity of the governing classes calls forth the hatred of the people who suffered from the social degradation in which they lived. The L.C.C. spelt the doom of "The Nichol"; within a decade this abomination of slums were to be utterly destroyed, new modern flats were to be built where these wretched hovels stood and the air would be purer. During 1888 the series of murders known as the "Jack the Ripper" murders began on 6th August, 1888. The first victim was Martha Turner, aged 35, who had lived in "The Nichol"; she was found with throat wounds in Whitechapel.

This murder was soon followed on the 31st August, the same
 Anna Nichols, aged 41, Spitalfields. "Annie" Chapman, aged 48,
 Brick Lane. All three were drunkards and prostitutes.
 Throats cut and savagely mutilated. streets of "The Nichol"
 30th September. Elisabeth Stride, aged 45, and Catherine
 Eddoes, aged 43, evening to carry on her business. He would
 All five victims were murdered between 11 p.m. and 4 a.m.
 The bodies of all five victims were mutilated, all the could
 victims were common prostitutes who paraded the Spitalfields
 are and sold themselves for a few pence. ans, in modern slang,
 On 9th November, 1888, in a room in Miller's Court, Dorset
 Street, Spitalfields, the body of Mary Kelly was found. She
 had been brutally murdered and savagely mutilated.

Mary Kelly had been foolish enough to take her murderer
 up to her room, she was "butchered" in the most horrible manner,
 proving her killer had reached the boundary of sanity and
 could be classed absolutely insane. Mary Kelly was buried
 from a pub in High Street, Shoreditch, which stood next to
 St. Leonard's Church, just a few yards from my home in Boundary
 Street, so that in all probability I was present with my
 mother at the funeral, which my mother told me attracted
 large crowds. Spitalfields area every night. Every man seen in
 These murders were of special interest to the women of
 "The Nichol". Many ladies of the town who frequented Liverpool

Street were domiciled in "The Nichol". They were of the same social status as the victims of the "Ripper", although many of these had protection from their "cosh-carriers".

In 1888 nearly every man in some streets of "The Nichol" carried the "cosh", that is, he followed his woman when she went out or an evening to carry on her business. He would follow his woman until she found her prey and led him to some back alley or courtway where the "cosh-carrier" would strike his victim down and rob him of all he possessed.

The saying "he carries the cosh" means, in modern slang, he lives on the immoral earnings of a woman. The cosh was a small iron bar carried up the sleeve and used very effectively in stunning an intended victim.

It is a remarkable fact that the "Ripper" avoided the streets and courts of "The Nichol", which seems to suggest that he knew of the cosh-carrier.

Whoever the murderer was, he knew the district well with all its numerous alleys and courtways; this fact alone means he lived and worked in the district.

At the height of the "Ripper" scare, some 2,000 police drawn from the London divisions in the various stations were on duty in Spitalfields area every night. Every man seen in the streets was a possible suspect if seen in the company of a woman.

27th November, 1888. Two years old.

This was the year of the great dock strike led by John Burns, Tom Mann and Ben Tillett. They were starved and long hours.

This strike caused great distress in "The Nichol", many of the men who lived in "The Nichol" were casual dock labourers. No work - no pay. No money in the kitty to pay strikers. No public assistance, women had to go to the Poor Law for relief. Soup kitchens were opened by charitable organisations and were a real blessing to the mothers and children who were able to get a large jug of soup to warm them. In these constant strikes it was always the women and children who suffered. As usual the investigation took place

Today, 1969, the pattern is still the same, with this difference. The unions are rich, powerful, with great political power, large funds for political purposes, but the women and children are always the losers when a strike is on.

The dockers were striking for a penny an hour more and it can be said they had a good case; to be a docker was regarded as of very low social standard. My parents were

unable. If the dockers could have had continuous employment, so enabling them to take home regular wages life would have been far happier for thousands of dockers and their wives and children; instead these casual dock labourers could not get one day's work a week on many occasions. experience of

So these men were forced to thief or beg to keep those dependent on them from starving. The men hung about street corners outside public houses for long hours. They were starved and degraded, forced by necessity to join the Services; many of them died on the battlefields or the world fighting for the Great Britain which could not provide them with a decent home to live in, or even work to keep a wife and children.

The docks should have been decasualised many years ago. 27th November, 1889. Three years old.

1890. My young sister, Mary, was born. As usual, with every increase in the family, there had to be an appeal to the Poor Law for relief. As usual the investigation took place into ways and means; after the parochial inquiry my parents were informed that I would be placed in the care of the Poor Law authorities. So I was sent to a children's home at Leytonstone, where I stayed for some time. There is no doubt that this was of great benefit to me, for by placing me in an institution I was to receive the care and protection which my parents were unable to give me; it must be remembered that my mother had already lost two children before they had reached childhood. What else could the authorities do? There were five of us in one small room.

So at this early age I had my first experience of

institutional life, which was to be the forerunner of many years of separation from family and friends. I had to learn that to be born in poverty deprived me of my rights and gave the law the power to segregate me from the rest of my fellows.

In 1892 John Burns and Keir Hardie were elected to Parliament. These two socialists were expected to be fighters for the poorer classes and the under-privileged.

The Whigs and Tories had governed the country for generations, nothing had been done to abolish the filthy slums that disgraced all our large cities and towns. No attempt had been made by either to improve the conditions of the people who were living under appalling poverty, the children neglected and half-starved, depending on public charity.

The country was divided between those who had wealth and position and those who had nothing, all the increased wealth which poured into the country from the British possessions abroad were used to build up vast fortunes for individual families to increase the luxury of the richer classes.

The ruling classes were distrustful of the new socialist party, which seemed to be gaining great support among the tradesmen and respectable working classes. The old political parties were afraid that the new socialism would destroy the political system which had been in power for generations.

There was no hope for the people of these slums unless

they provided work for all, work that would earn decent wages, houses fit to live in, where children could have a bed to sleep on and a bath to bathe in. called A Child of the Jago.

The conscience of many thinking people was beginning to be ashamed of the conditions which existed in the East End.

27th November, 1892. Six years old.

During this year I met with a street accident while playing in the street in Boundary Street, where I lived. A cask or butter fell from a passing van and knocked me down, cutting my head. I was taken to hospital with head injuries. For this accident I was awarded £60 compensation, to be paid when I attained the age of twenty-one years.

27th November, 1893. Seven years old.

1894. Demolition of "The Nichol" had begun.

The people who lived in Boundary Street had been warned to find somewhere else to live. The question that troubled the people who lived in "The Nichol" was where could they find other accommodation? None wanted us, everybody regarded the people from "The Nichol" as pariahs, unclean; for a hundred years or more "The Nichol" had been a name to scare people, the haunt of some of the most vicious of the human race. The men convicted of the Netherby Hall murders came from "The Nichol", Rudge, Martin and Baker, who were executed at Carlisle. I can remember the shop where the mother of one of these men

lived, it is on record she never opened the shop again.

A good description of "The Nichol" is to be found in a book written by Arthur Morrison called A Child of the Jago.

In the early years of the 19th century, Charles Dickens gave us a picture of the neighbourhood in his famous novel Oliver Twist.

school Report, 1894: "The condition of young children Owing to the demolition of "The Nichol" to clear the slums for the erection of the new L.C.C. flats, the exodus has been witnessed of a number of families wandering about with all their worldly possessions on hand-carts, old prams stacked high sometimes with small children on top; they wander about trying to find a room to live in, with no resting place but the workhouse.

Surely the memories of these terrible days when there was no room in the inn for them, these memories will have a lasting effect on the young. Young as I was, I experienced all the shame and degradation of feeling we were outcasts.

For myself, I know that the treatment we suffered had a lasting effect, so much so that I have no doubt it was the root cause of my subsequent anti-social behaviour. Today when I read of numbers of gypsies being rounded up and hounded from one district to another, I think of the days when the people of "The Nichol" were evicted from their dwelling places and treated like pariahs.

through the Vicar's loving kindness and care. These were the glorious years the Victorian writers were so loud in their praise of, but these writers were thinking only of the upper classes who had invested their money in

A few yards from Holy Trinity Church stands the Ragged Schools Mission on the corner of Club Row. Many hundreds of

children attended the Mission on Sunday morning and afternoon. Board School Report, 1894: "The condition of young children where we were taught the Christian religion.

The story of the Christian religion and the Infant Christ these small and feeble folk may be found sitting limp and cold on the school benches in all the poorer parts of London. They swell the bills of mortality as want and sickness thin them off or survive to be the needy and enfeebled adults whose burden of helplessness the next generation will have to bear."

27th November, 1894. Eight years old.

1895. In Old Nichol Street stands the Holy Trinity Church; the Vicar was known far and wide as Father Jay. Every weekday at 8 a.m., the children would line up. This Vicar was the founder of the first youth club in West Bethnal Green. Boxing was the favourite sport for which Father Jay's was the attraction.

The strange fact stands out in my memory that none of the boys ever became thieves. I knew of none. Arthur Morrison

dedicated his famous story of A Child of the Jago to Father Jay.

Young as I was, I can remember well this Vicar. Truly he was a man of God, many a lad was saved from a prison life

through the Vicar's loving kindness and care. We children would

Old Nichol Street is still in existence; it runs from Swanfield Street to Boundary Street.

A few yards from Holy Trinity Church stands the Ragged Schools Mission on the corner of Club Row. Many hundreds of children attended the Mission on Sunday morning and afternoon, where we were taught the Christian religion.

The story of the Christian religion and the Infant Christ appealed to the children of "The Nichol" because of the stable where the Infant Christ was born and the poverty of his parents. The Flight to Egypt in the darkness of the night was something they understood. Had not their own parents made a moonlight flight to fresh rooms away from the avaricious landlord, when they were behind with the rent? which there were many in Bethnal

The prize for attending Sunday School was a ticket which entitled the child to a breakfast of bread and milk.

Every weekday at 8 a.m., the children would line up, winter and summer, outside the Ragged School Mission and in the mission hall would sit at long tables and receive large bowls of milk, hot, and plenty of bread. The short service of thanksgiving over, the hungry children would eat and drink their fill of the food.

The Mission Hall where we were entertained and fed was a large hall, the walls decorated with large pictures of the

You see, Governments had learned the lessons of the French Biblical episodes in the story of the Cross. We children would gaze with awe and wonder at the beautiful pictures, which left an indelible memory on our childish minds of the Love of Christ for the little children or "The Nichol".

After breakfast, we who were of school age would go to the Board School next to the Mission and learn our lesson for the day. 27th November, 1895. Nine years old.

During 1895, my parents had received eviction notices to clear out from the Reeves Buildings. No attempt was made to find us other accommodation. At twelve o'clock noon we would leave school and those of us who were lucky enough to have food at home would go home for dinner, but those who had no dinner would go to Father Jay's at Holy Trinity and receive a large portion of jam pudding which helped to keep away the pangs of hunger.

When it is remembered that a penny could buy fish and chips in a fried fish shop, of which there were many in Bethnal Green, yet money was so scarce among the poor that, although food was cheap and abundant, money was so lacking that not even a penny could be spared.

Afternoon school over, we would begin to go around the market places, especially Spitalfield's Market, looking for waste potatoes. My elder sister who was some three years older would hurry home to take the finished matchboxes to the factory, and collect the one and sixpence for the eight gross of boxes made that day. For one blessing we had to be thankful for, food was very cheap, although we did not realise it.

You see, Governments had learned the lessons of the French Revolution; hungry people were dangerous people, they had still to learn that the people would not always be satisfied with, E. bread; they would want cake as well as bread.

From my regular attendance at the Mission Hall, I acquired an extensive knowledge of the Bible.

27th November, 1895. Nine years old.

During 1895, my parents had received eviction notices to clear out from the Keeves Buildings. No attempt was made to find us other accommodation.

Let me try to describe for you what my parents had to suffer in order to find a resting place. My mother, crippled, pregnant and in pain - no pain-killing drugs from the N.H.S., only constant pain from her diseased hip. My father, scarcely able to see, staggering along with my baby sister on a barrow, my eldest sister helping my mother along. Myself, holding on the barrow which contained all our possessions.

These things were our home, they were the things we were expected to fight for - yea, and even die for on the battle-fields of the world.

My parents wandered from district to district, then in the neighbourhood borough of Shoreditch, they rented a room in Drysdale Street, Hoxton. After a few weeks the family were evicted when the landlord discovered there were three young

children. The Bethnal Green part of Brick Lane, some 200 yards

1896. After the family were evicted from Drysdale Street, Mother found a resting place at 37 Bacon Street, Brick Lane, E. This room was larger than most, being an old weaver's room with large windows. Here in this room in January, 1896, my young brother George was born. There were now six in the family and, to make things easier, I drifted away from home. I could fend for myself. So I began to be a street arab.

I roamed the streets, scrounging food, sometimes a little petty thieving from stalls in the market. Sleeping in any odd corner, sometimes on the stairs or blocks of Buildings. I became a real gamin or the East End.

After some weeks of roaming the streets, I found myself in a very verminous condition. My clothes were rags and filthy dirty, I doubt if I had been seen by my parents I would have been recognisable. My poor mother was too ill to trouble, and my father's sight was so bad I doubt if he could have recognised me.

The weather was bitterly cold so I would find a watchman's fire and sometimes he would let me sleep in his hut; some were decent fellows but others were not so decent, and I finally gave up going into a watchman's hut.

Brick Lane, E, runs from Bethnal Green Road to Whitechapel. It is a narrow road about half a mile long with shops each

side. The Bethnal Green part of Brick Lane, some 200 yards or more, has always been a market place, with stalls each side. The market is held every day, including Sunday, when every street in the Lane is crowded with buyers and sellers of every description of good.

The Whitechapel or Osborne Street end of Brick Lane are in the Borough or Stepney. 37 Bacon Street, Brick Lane, was a three-storey tenement, which stood next to a pub. This house was very old, proof the weaver's windows at the top floor where my mother lay ill. The Sarah Gamp type of midwife, who had helped to deliver the baby, was the usual type of woman who performed this duty, being paid a few shillings for her help. They were in great demand, they were not registered or paid by any organisation, and their fee depended upon luck, if the family had someone at work.

The tenement was an exact replica of Keeves Buildings; Bacon Street, like the rest of the streets, bore a very disreputable reputation for every kind of villainy which remains the same for the last seventy years, up to the present day, 1969.

The houses have been demolished by bombing and the demolition workers and the whole district remains a derelict, forsaken area consisting of prefabricated huts, which families are glad to live in 1969.

One night, while I was sleeping in an empty house in the Whitechapel area, I was awakened by two gentlemen who, after several questions, asked me to go with them, which I was willing to do. We went to Stepney Causeway, where I was admitted to Dr. Barnardo's Homes, so that after first aid treatment, which included a good cleansing, I was accepted as in need of care and protection.

On the 26th February, 1896, aged nine, I was accepted into Dr. Barnardo's Homes as a waif and stray in need of care and protection. Enquiries were made at 37 Bacon Street, Brick Lane. When my parents were interviewed, they were found to be so poor, and too ill physically, to look after me and give me the care and protection I needed. They consented to me entering Dr. Barnardo's and becoming a Dr. Barnardo boy.

At this period, 1896, one of the glorious years of Queen Victoria's reign, the streets of London were visited nightly by Dr. Barnardo and some of his helpers, who were looking for some of the hundreds of young children of both sexes who were homeless, without parents, or any relatives who were willing to take care of these waifs and strays.

Dr. Barnardo and his helpers found these helpless waifs sleeping in empty houses, even on roofs of derelict buildings.