

MY APPRENTICESHIP TO CRIME

To the Memory of my
Autobiography

Grace Stella Fredern.

-by-

ARTHUR HARDING

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It must be clearly understood that although Steinie Morrison was wanted by the police for failing to report to the police for being a convict on licence, he had not left Whitechapel nor his lodgings, and even after the murder he continued to use the same restaurant for his meals, where he was arrested.

Steinie Morrison was put on trial at the Central Criminal Court before Mr. Justice Darling for the murder of Leon Beron. There was a strong circumstantial case against Morrison; he had the misfortune to have a judge whose reputation as a wit far exceeded his ability as a lawyer. Morrison was handicapped by lack of funds to brief a good criminal lawyer, he had to be satisfied with a good trier and that is all that could be said of the lawyer, Mr. Edward Abinger.

Morrison was found guilty, not on the evidence against him on the indictment for murder, but on the evidence against him of being a burglar who had been convicted for burglary.

Mr. Justice Darling gave permission for the Crown to prove Morrison guilty of any crime without any proof. The Judge

had summed up in favour of the defence. Every lawyer in previous convictions which Mr. R.D. Muir did with deadly effect; to prove a number of previous convictions or the nature or Morrison's was sufficient to cause any jury to convict him without any further evidence. I believe the Judge, knowing the prosecution had not proved the case, that there was a grave doubt that the case against Morrison had not been proved beyond doubt, deliberately permitted the Crown lawyers to cross-examine the prisoner, knowing that on his past record this revelation would convince the jury that Morrison was guilty. At least, this is what he told me when I saw him in 1920, when he was giving up hope of ever being released.

Ordinary citizens have a greater fear of burglars than any other criminal.

The jury had before them a prisoner who was powerfully built, who looked a dangerous man and who acted like a violent man in the witness box under cross-examination by Mr. Muir of his criminal past, years of penal servitude for burglary. One must remember that in the public memory was the recent massacre of the City policemen by a gang of alien burglars; standing in the dock was Morrison, a foreigner, also a burglar. The so-called battle of Sidney Street was still a topic of conversation. These assassins were so dangerous that the Army had to be called out to shoot them. That jury would have found Morrison guilty of any crime without any proof. The Judge

had summed up in favour of the defence. Every lawyer in court knew that the Crown had not proved their case.

Morrison was sentenced to death, no other verdict was possible after the disgraceful cross-examination.

Morrison was reprieved by the Home Secretary, Winston Churchill.

Sidney Street Siege.

So Steinie Morrison was reprieved and an innocent man was saved from the gallows to serve a life sentence in Parkhurst, where he died in 1921, strangled by a warder who was helping to artificially feed him because he was on hunger strike.

I will write more of Morrison and tell what prison had done to him when I saw him last in 1920.

This tragic story of the Houndsditch murders was set in a sordid street opposite the famous tavern, "The Blind Beggar", in Whitechapel Road, E.1. While I write these words, the Krays and their gang are on trial for the brutal murder of George Cornell, by shooting him in this famous pub, where the victim had been lured to his death.

A few yards east of the famous London hospital and nearly opposite where General Booth started his Salvation Army crusade, on the corner of Mile End Road, Sidney Street became famous all over the world because of an attempt to arrest two or three suspects who were wanted for questioning in connection with the killings in Houndsditch.

The Sidney Street business was a disgrace to the police