

MY APPRENTICESHIP TO CRIME

An
(To the memory of my
Autobiography

Grace Maria Treadwell.

-by-

ARTHUR HARDING

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My informant CHAPTER 14. Part in the first attempt to enter the house gave Sidney Street Siege. I believe entirely.

One of the raiding party told this fantastic story to the On the 2nd January, 1911, the police were in possession of information which suggested that some of the gang who took part in the Houndsditch shooting were in hiding in a room in Sidney Street, Whitechapel. The scene of the last act in 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 Andard Cornell, by shooting him in this famous pub, where the victim had been lured to his death. gave evidence at the north London A few yards east of the famous London hospital and nearly opposite where General Booth started his Salvation Army Christmas 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. arrest two suspects at 10 The Sidney Street business was a disgrace to the police

chiefs who were in charge of the operation. Men's lives were put in jeopardy through bad planning and police incompetence where made to look ridiculous and held up to ridicule throughout the civilised world. My informant who took part in the first attempt to enter the house gave me the story, which I believe entirely. One of the raiding party told this fantastic story to the Evening Standard in 1966. He was my old enemy, Det. Sgt. J. Stevens, nicknamed "Jew Boy" by the underworld, now ninety years of age. He said, and I quote: "I went to the London hospital and attempted to get a doctor to supply me with a drug so that I could dope the suspects in the house at 100 Sidney Street. While in the house I saw 'Peter the Painter'." He did not explain why they did not arrest him. I expect "Jew Boy" had been dreaming when he told that story to the Evening Standard. Sixty-five years before, he had said that I had been previously convicted four times, when he gave evidence at the North London Sessions in 1902, when I was a boy or fifteen years. Det. Sgt. Jack Stevens, aged ninety-one, died on Christmas Even 1967, so he went to a higher court.

Inside the van, the raiding party of C.I.D. men were addressed by D.D.I. The Story of Sidney Street, 1911. He told This is the true story of the attempt to arrest two suspects at 100 Sidney Street, E.1, which was a three-storey tenement

house let out in rooms to Jewish emigrant families who could only speak Yiddish (which is a mixture of Hebrew and German spoken by Jewish people).

The attempt to evacuate the families from the house by sending in a Yiddish-speaking Jew to explain matters caused a good deal of commotion, which unfortunately alerted the suspects who realised something was on. The families or people were evacuated and the house was empty except for the two suspects who appeared to be asleep. The street door was open, which is common with all these tenements which contained several families.

About 7 a.m. a large furniture van called a pantechnicon drawn by two horses stopped outside 100 Sidney Street. Inside the van were twenty or more armed plain clothes police from the City Police and H Division Metropolitan Police, most of these men were members of the C.I.D. and were getting on in years. Some had families. Uniform police from the City and Metropolitan were drafted into the surrounding streets so that a complete cordon was drawn around the block of houses containing 100 Sidney Street.

Inside the van, the raiding party of C.I.D. men were addressed by D.D.I. F. Wensley, who had assumed command. He told the men that it was proposed to call upon the two suspects to surrender, as the place was surrounded by the police, so as

the suspects might be asleep it was proposed that the raiding party should leave the cover of the furniture van and throw stones at the windows of the house, so as to make the men look out, and then call them to surrender. Wensley made no attempt to knock on the door or the room and question the men. These two suspects were Russians and used to Russian police methods. We did not give them any chance to explain.

This plan did not meet with the approval of the majority of the C.I.D. men and none wanted to be a dead hero. But amongst the party was the C.I.D. man who was D.D.I. Wensley's Sergeant, Det. Sgt. Leason, and he knew well that the "Governor" expected him to show an example. He volunteered for the stone throwing. So, leaving the protection of the van, he started to throw some stones at the windows; immediately shots were fired from the house and the brave Sergeant Leason fell, shot in the chest. Several of his comrades rushed to his aid and he was pulled through the passage of a nearby house and carried over the walls to the London hospital, where immediate medical attention saved his life. Meantime the furniture van was driven away with most of the raiding party inside. So ended the foolish plan to frighten two scared and desperate men to surrender, and that was the only action that the police took to arrest the two suspects. The rest of that day was taken up by men of the

Scots Guards having a little shooting exercise and waiting for the Royal Horse Artillery to arrive with their guns, while Mr. Winston Churchill watched the so-called battle and conferred with the police chiefs.

Not the C.I.D. men to blame for this fiasco, but the man who knew it all, who faced death a dozen times that day, for that is what he wrote in his book when he recorded these events.

Det.Sgt. Leason was the first casualty on that disastrous day; before the day ended others would die, the just and the unjust, because firemen became casualties when they finally put the fire out, all because an incompetent policeman was in charge. Guards from the Tower, guns from Richmond. The whole business sounds like a comic opera.

The two men should have been taken alive to stand trial, if there had been sufficient evidence to justify committal. Many other suspects, men and women, were arrested and committed for trial on the weakest of evidence, in some cases on no evidence at all. Some were even convicted and sentenced to long terms. But the Court or Criminal Appeal would not tolerate this kind of panic justice and quashed every conviction for lack of evidence to justify conviction.

In regard to the legendary character, Peter the painter. No one ever saw him, none would or could swear to his existence, yet the national press made him such a real person.

There were reports from all parts of the world that he had been seen here, there and everywhere. Det. Sgt. Leason was promoted to Inspector and pensioned off. He is on record as saying, "I saw Peter the Painter in a railway carriage in Australia." How he knew "Peter" was a mystery because no photograph was ever proved to be the mysterious unknown "Peter the Painter". Others swore he was poor old Joe Stalin from Russia. The only Peter among the mob that I knew was the least offensive of the gang I remember, he remained in the district and I often saw him many years after these events had been forgotten. He had become an honest man, so I also forgot him.

One fact stands out plain for all to see. D.D.I. F. Wensley arrested and charged everyone he could, had them committed for trial although he was never able to find even a gun that was used on that fatal night in December, 1910. I believe he arrested some ten people; the men and women were all tried and acquitted.

Browne and Kennedy, two vicious killers or P.G. Gutteridge in an Essex lane, were both as dangerous as any of the aliens who took part in the Houndsditch murders. Yet both men were armed when arrested, but good police work took them without anyone getting injured. In August 1966, three C.I.D. men were shot dead within a couple of minutes by three armed men. All three murderers were arrested and sentenced without a shot

being fired or a blow being given in anger.

Yet these two suspects, aliens in a strange land, were allowed to give battle to hundreds of police, some 100 Scots Guards, and only fire ended their resistance.

May I say that this police chief who was responsible for this deplorable affair, which caused the police to be held up to world ridicule and made the country the laughing joke of world opinion, this police chief considered himself worthy of praise for his conduct of the affair. When I was released from Wormwood Scrubs prison in 1903, will remember the man named Spencer who was released from prison at the same time. And as the years rolled by, he came to live at my home in Gibraltar Gardens and between spells of prison he would always return.

One night in company with Spencer and others we walked into a City pub in Bishopsgate, which was frequented by all the riff-raff of Alagate and Whitechapel. We got involved in a brawl with several aliens who had a very bad reputation. Several were injured, resulting in hospital treatment.

This brawl led to a series of affrays in which guns were used and men shot. D.D.I. F. Wensley took charge and we were arrested and charged with several wounding charges. After prolonged court hearings, eight of my friends including myself were committed for trial at the Central Criminal Court. Eventually all of us were convicted and sentenced to terms of penal servitude. My share was nearly five years, 21 months for