

MY APPRENTICESHIP TO CRIME

An
(To the memory of my
Autobiography

Grace Maria Treadwell.

-by-

ARTHUR HARDING

fear of them, only a burning desire to make them pay for the horrible filthy names they had called her. For my part, I decided there and then to put a stop to this terrorism of people in their own homes. I would make them pay dearly for CHAPTER 20. abuse they had used towards my wife, so I went The Two Gangsters, 1931. police station and filed a complaint against both men. This was breaking with tradition. One night near midnight there was a knock on the street door. I looked out of the window and saw two well-known gangsters at the door. I looked at my wife and told her not to worry; I told her to go into the children's room. I went downstairs, opened the street door and asked the two villains what they wanted. You see, I knew these men, they traded on fear, so when they asked for two guid I simply said, "No," and shut the door. My wife opened the window and told them to clear off. They had started banging on the door and my wife told them, "You won't get anything here." Then they foully abused her, using the most filthy language that even I had ever heard used even from the prostitutes of Dorset Street. During this time I had put some clothes on; I rushed out and chased the men up the gardens; they managed to escape in a car or cab. They never had the courage to face me. My wife had followed me to the top of the gardens; she had no

fear of them, only a burning desire to make them pay for the horrible filthy names they had called her. all the idiotic thing. For my part, I decided there and then to put a stop to this terrorism of people in their own homes. I would make them pay dearly for the filthy abuse they had used towards my wife, so I went to Commercial Street police station and filed a complaint against both men. This was breaking with tradition with a vengeance. The C.I.D. were only too willing to apply for warrants for their arrest. the gambling joints, clubs. Some time after, one was arrested on Doncaster race course, brought to London and charged with demanding money with menaces. The other man was arrested in the West End. ten things out. The We had a strong case against the two men and they were committed for trial to the Old Bailey. What was going to happen was anybody's guess. The various interested parties began to be very friendly and their line of argument - or rather, persuasion - may have had some success if it had not been for the outrageous names that they had shouted at my wife, I might have been more friendly disposed towards them. mined to put It is surprising the amount of money that is collected for the defence of well known gangsters when they have been arrested for demanding money, especially when someone like myself has the courage to prosecute them. Every would-be to gangster resents "one of our own" turning to the police for one.

protection. They say it gives the "mugs" encouragement to prosecute. The underworld, which includes all the idiotic fringe which thinks it is policy to associate with gangsters to further their own dubious schemes.

All of these mixed up characters rally round the gangsters. They collect large funds to brief the best lawyers and find witnesses who for a few pounds will be willing to swear anything. For the purpose of raising funds for defence purposes, they visit the dog tracks, race tracks, the gambling joints, clubs where crooked people meet and spend money.

The suggestion is always made to would-be givers that certain head men want a large sum to straighten things out. The clever idea behind this innuendo is that high ranking officers are behind this gang. Like the Chicago scandals of the prohibition days, when political bosses and everyone else was part of the Al Capone organisation.

I was offered large sums of money to alter my evidence, also the witnesses from the Gibraltar Gardens, but although they alternated between bribes and threats, I was determined to put a stop to this demanding money from people like myself who were trying to live decent lives and break away from their past associates.

I knew that if these men were convicted I should have to be on my guard against a frame-up. I have known it to be done.

A parcel of stolen property is made up and left at the victim's house when they know the victim is away from home. An anonymous call is made to the Squad Office at Scotland Yard, that at a certain address they will find some stolen property. The man accused has a very hard job to convince a court that he is innocent.

The day of the trial duly arrived; there were a large number of the gang at the court, several crooked bookmakers and their hangers-on. Even in the court corridors some of the friends of the two men tried to arouse my sympathy, but all to no purpose. Both men were defended by expensive lawyers. I believe it was the original intention to put my character at issue but wiser counsels prevailed. At the end of the first day of the trial I was asked to provide a commentary on the activities of certain of the bookmakers who were taking an active part in the case. I did with disastrous results for the men concerned, for within a year they were out of business.

The two accused men were found guilty of demanding money with menaces. Heavy sentences were passed; the learned Judge took the unprecedented step of issuing a public warning plain for everyone concerned to understand. He said: "Let it be clearly understood that if any person interfere with any witnesses they will be brought here to be dealt with. Even

if they interfere or molest any relative or friends of the witnesses."

This severe warning from the Judge put a stop to any possible trouble, so in a few weeks the police considered the case had closed; but this was not so, I felt myself fit enough to protect my family from any violence.

The end of the case was a great relief to my wife but she had the consolation of connection with my erstwhile criminal association being ended, and that we could look forward to a happier future.

1933. The years passed and I was saving every penny I could to buy a house as far as possible from Bethnal Green. My family had increased to five, so that I had a greater incentive than ever to work harder.

The value of a good wife is beyond reckoning, she encouraged me in every undertaking, making light of every disappointment.

During the 1930s, the new Klondike was discovered in the highways and byways of this New Jerusalem. Gold had doubled in value and it was possible to get as much as two pounds for a sovereign in 1933. Soon after this date the price rose to much more than this, so people began to look out their old trinkets to raise money for necessities.

During this period it was a common sight to see hundreds of